



Your Words Matter: Choosing Words That Support



Your Words Matter is a national campaign that calls for the end of stigmatizing or negative language when addressing mental health. This same approach is integral for suicide prevention. Words hold power and using supportive terms can create connection and encourage individuals to seek support when they need it. Avoiding language that carries stigma is something we all can do to #BeThere for others and plays an important role in suicide prevention.

INSTEAD OF	SAY	WHY
Failed suicide or successful suicide	Suicide attempt or suicide	Suicide is not something to accomplish or fail.
Mental defect or disease	Mental health condition	Defect and disease mean there is something “wrong” or negative about the person.
Irrational behavior	Uncharacteristic behavior	Irrational is dismissive of the person and is often overused to describe differences in points of view and not behavior worthy of more concern.
Suffering from	Diagnosed with	The word suffering can paint someone as a victim.
Committed suicide	Died by suicide	Committed is a negative word that recalls legal or religious overtones.
Mental institution	Treatment facility	Mental institution references outdated treatments of those with mental health issues.

HOW TO HELP

- Avoid using hurtful or negative terms and labels. Encourage/Challenge/Correct others to use the proper terms.
- Create a safe space for sharing and create a feeling of connectedness by using supportive terms and encourage help-seeking behavior by offering information and resources about crisis services such as the Veterans Crisis Line/ Military Crisis Line, and non-crisis services such as Military One Source.
- Share stories of hope and recovery through help-seeking and positive coping skills. Recovery stories can be powerful, especially when they come from trusted individuals such as family, friends, peers in the military, leaders, chaplains, and other sources of support.

Use language that acknowledges the person first and not the condition:

INSTEAD OF	SAY
Suicidal person	A person with suicidal ideation
Mentally ill or crazy	A person with a mental health condition
Addict	A person engaging in substance misuse
Schizo	A person with schizophrenia
Manic-depressive	A person with bi-polar disorder

