Ask The Expert

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Topic: Safe Messaging: Suicide Prevention

What is it?

September is Suicide Prevention Month, a great reminder to check in on those around you. Suicide and mental health crisis can impact individuals across all races, ages, gender, sexual orientation, and geographical location. **LiveOn**, a suicide prevention organization, overviews the basics of suicide prevention in their **Playbooks**.

Safe messaging is one tool to promote suicide prevention and awareness. Stigma surrounding suicide has historically made it difficult for people to openly share their experiences or struggles. Employing safe messaging strategies is one way to breakdown that stigma by promoting stories of hope and healing. Safe messaging highlights that there is no specific timeline for healing and helps others feel safe and supported in their mental health struggles.

Why does it matter?

Suicide impacts individuals across the lifespan, it is likely that we all have been impacted by suicide in some capacity. In 2022, the US saw a rate of 14.21 suicides per 100,000 individuals. Suicide rates in males, those who are 85 years and older, American Indians and Alaskan Natives see the highest rates of all groups.

Suicide is preventable, by working to create awareness around suicide and mental health crisis we can help to lower rates of suicide across the country and support those going through challenges.

The way in which we speak and share about mental health can directly impact those around us. By focusing on stories of hope and safe messaging rather than stories of struggle, we can shift the narrative around mental health. Safe messaging allows us to openly share about trials and struggles while promoting that hope and healing is possible.

What can I do?

We can all play a part in Suicide Prevention. During the month of September (really all year round) we can all take actionable steps to promote and share stories of hope, resources, and support those around us through difficult times.

Sharing stories of hope and suicide prevention resources are great ways to encourage those going through challenging times. We do want to ensure we are doing this safely! Which means using safe messaging. When preparing to share within your personal networks, workplaces and social media outlets consider the following guidelines:

The 4 Ms of What to Avoid in Messaging

Methods

Avoid descriptions of methods or locations of suicides.

Minimalizing

Suicide has multiple causes, no one specific event or challenge cause suicide. We want to avoid minimalizing any specific issue or challenge.

Memorializing

Avoid giving positive attention to the way an individual died. Instead, focus on sharing resources and supporting individuals who may be struggling.

Melodramatic Messaging

Avoid dark images, instead use images that are uplifting and inspire hope.

What to Do Instead

- Shifting our language when discussing suicide can help to remove judgement and encourage individuals to share openly.

Avoid	Use Phrases Like
Successful or completed suicide	Died by suicide, took their own life
Unsuccessful or failed suicide	They survived their attempt
Committed suicide	Died by suicide, took their own life
“Bob” is suicidal	“Bob” has had or is having suicidal thoughts

- Sharing facts and openly discussing hope. By sharing that most individuals go on to find help and recover we can encourage those struggling to accept help and support.
- Share resources suicide prevention resources. 988 is the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and is a great place to start for those in crisis.
- Share stories of how you yourself manage your mental health or how you have seen others successfully manage their mental health.

Access Additional Suicide Prevention Resources

Download Now >