

MESSAGING MATTERS

Tips for Safe and Effective Messaging on Suicide Prevention



1. PROVIDE A SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE

- Describe the resources you are offering, and what to expect
If you know someone who is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, get 24/7 free confidential crisis support: Call 650-579-0350 (or 1-800-273-8255) or text "BAY" to 741-741 or visit sanmateocrisis.org for teen crisis services.

For emergencies that need an immediate response, call or text 9-1-1. When contacting 911 during a mental health crisis, request a crisis intervention trained (CIT) officer. To find out how to prepare and what to expect, learn more at smchealth.org/mh911.

2. EDUCATE THE AUDIENCE ABOUT WARNING SIGNS AND RISK FACTORS

- Include information about warning signs and life circumstances that can increase risk (risk factors)
- Visit www.suicideispreventable.org for a list of warning signs

3. AVOID DISCUSSING DETAILS ABOUT THE METHOD OF SUICIDE

- Avoid details that describe the suicide including weapon/method used, the specific location, and the location of the wound

4. EXPLAIN COMPLEXITY OF SUICIDE, AVOID OVERSIMPLIFYING

- Reference the complexity involved in suicide
- Avoid oversimplifying "causes" of suicide or pointing to one event as "the cause" of a suicide attempt or death
- Don't speculate. It's natural to want to answer the "why" involved in a suicide but rarely do we fully
- Understand the reasons behind a suicide

5. FOCUS ON PREVENTION: AVOID SENSATIONAL LANGUAGE AND IMAGES

- Don't use statistics that make suicide seem overly common
- Consider using positive statistics that highlight help-seeking such as number of calls to the local crisis line, or visits to a prevention focused website
- Use hopeful images that show people being supported, avoid images that show people suffering alone

6. HELPFUL RESOURCES

San Mateo County Suicide Prevention Committee - for local experts and resources

www.SMCHHealth.org/SuicidePrevention

Know the Signs - for signs of suicide and resources

www.suicideispreventable.org

Reporting on Suicide - for the news media

www.ReportingOnSuicide.org

Framework for Successful Messaging - for background

www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
& RECOVERY SERVICES



STAR VISTA

SMCHHealth.org/SuicidePrevention

