

Talking about suicide



Discussing suicide can be challenging for anyone but it can be made a little easier when we know the right words to use. People with lived experience of suicide, including those bereaved, report that some language used to describe suicide is stigmatising and causes distress. For example, suicide is no longer a crime in many countries around the world, including Australia. Using the words 'committed' suicide implies that it is a criminal act, which it is not.



Here is a simple guide for using non-stigmatising language:

Stigmatising language	Appropriate language
Committed suicide	Died by suicide
Successful suicide	Suicided
Completed suicide	Ended his/her life Took his/her own life
Failed attempt at suicide	Non-fatal attempt at suicide
Unsuccessful suicide	Attempted to end his/her life

Talking about mental health and mental illness

Mental health and mental illness are not the same thing

Mental illness is a diagnosable illness/disorder that can be defined as a health condition that changes a person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviour and that causes the person distress and difficulty in functioning. Diagnosis of mental illness is made by a qualified medical health practitioner using clinical criteria. There are range of mental illnesses, with anxiety and depression most commonly affecting Australians.

Mental health describes our state of mental health, without illness/disorder. Like our physical health, our mental health can change over time. We can be healthy, fit and thriving (positive mental health) or unhealthy, not coping and languishing (poor mental health or mental ill health).

Just as it is no longer appropriate to describe someone with a physical disability as 'handicapped' or 'disabled', it is also disrespectful (and possibly harmful) to label a person as their mental illness. Language that is more respectful can make a world of difference in reducing stigma and unnecessary distress.

Here is a simple guide for using non-stigmatising language:

Stigmatising language	Appropriate language
He/she is crazy, psycho, insane, a lunatic	He/she has a mental health condition (or diagnosis) He/she is experiencing mental health problems
He/she is paranoid/schizophrenic	He/she has (name of mental illness)
He/she is anorexic	He/she has anorexia nervosa
He/she is depressed	He/she has depression
Sufferer	Person experiencing mental illness
Addict or substance abuser	He/she has a substance use disorder He/she has a lived experience of substance use
Mentally ill	He/she has a mental health condition (or diagnosis) A person with mental illness

Many people living with mental illness also experience positive mental health. Conversely, people with poor mental health may not have a diagnosable mental illness.

To find out more information and how you can improve your mental health, please visit us at superfriend.com.au