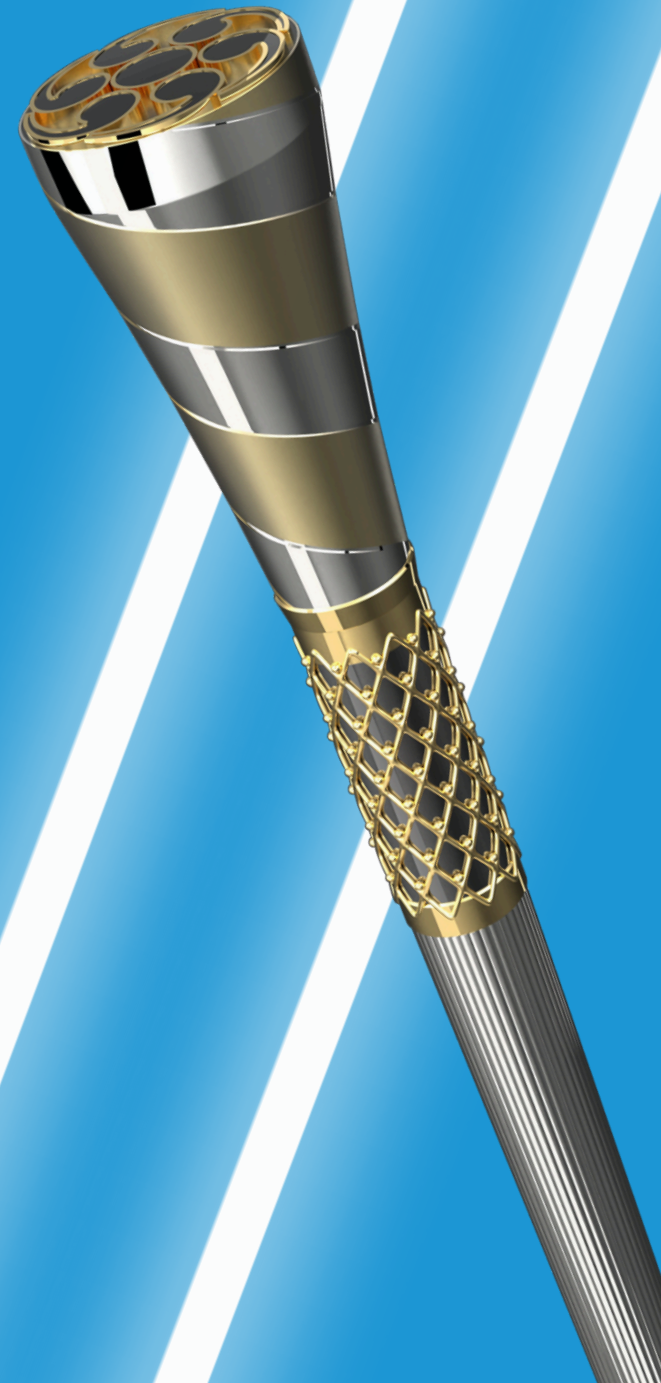


THE BATON
OF HOPE

GUIDE

USING THE RIGHT

Language



TALKING HELPS BUT LET'S GET THE *language right*

It is vital that we encourage more open, thoughtful and supportive conversations around suicide.

The stigma, prejudice and fear that many still experience can prevent people from seeking help, and indeed reaching out to help others too.

Whilst the fear of using the wrong language shouldn't be a barrier to talking about suicide - no one intentionally wants to cause distress - we do need to be aware of the language and phrases we choose in our conversations. Careful use can contribute to more sensitive coverage, disassociating suicide with being a crime, reducing the risk of influencing imitational behaviour or causing distress to bereaved family and friends.

When talking about suicide don't sensationalise, do not describe 'how' someone took their life, or discuss specific details about a suicide attempt.

Always aim to be respectful, sensitive and mindful of the people involved.

Sources

Mindframe: Our words matter: Guidelines for language use



HOW TO KNOW WHAT TO *say*

☒ DON'T SAY	✓ DO SAY	WHY?
Commit(ted) suicide A successful attempt Suicide victim	Died by suicide Took their own life	Avoid association between suicide as a crime or a sin. Avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome.
Non successful suicide Failed suicide attempt	Suicide attempt, non-fatal, or made an attempt on his/her/their life	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome as or glamourising a suicide attempt.
Cry for help Attention seeking Suicide 'tourist' or 'jumper' Too cowardly to go through with it	Suicide attempt, non-fatal, or made an attempt on his/her/their life Person at risk of suicide	To avoid minimising the severity of an individual's desperation to have made an attempt on their life.
'Admits to... depression, mental illness' etc.	Is being treated for...	Avoid suggesting that talking about mental health is something to be ashamed about.
Set free Finally at peace Can rest at last	Tragic death A tragedy.	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome.

HOW TO KNOW WHAT TO *say*

☒ DON'T SAY	✓ DO SAY	WHY?
Suicide 'epidemic', 'wave'	Concerning rates of suicide	To avoid sensationalising and inaccuracy.
'Victim', 'suffering from' or 'affected' with a mental illness	A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with a mental illness'	To avoid terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness.
'You're not going to do something silly are you?'	Always be supportive and take seriously, someone who may be feeling suicidal	To avoid belittling or devaluing feelings. It's always better to address the question by using the word suicide directly.
Don't use closed questions – I assume you've got the support you need	Do use open questions – do you have any support? Can I help you get support?	Closed questions usually close the conversation. Open questions are encouraging and demonstrate you are interested and want to help.

STARTING A CONVERSATION MAY *save a life*

People may not always open up about their thoughts of suicide, so it is important that those around them feel able to reach out and open safe conversations if they are concerned about them.



HOW TO START A *conversation*

“ARE YOU EXPERIENCING THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?”

Asking the direct question & talking about suicide can be a nerve-wracking thing to do, both for the person who is suicidal & for anyone who may be concerned about them.

TRY TO STAY CALM & LISTEN

Hear them out. Whatever the situation, it is making a person think about ending their life. So, it's important to listen & take them seriously.

ASK OPEN QUESTIONS

Give them the chance to talk about what is happening for them & how it is making them feel.

EMPATHETIC LISTENING IS KEY

Show that you're listening by reflecting on what they say, clarifying what they mean & showing you recognise what they are feeling.





DON'T JUDGE

It has taken that person a lot of courage to be open & honest with you. It's important that you take what they say seriously & without judgement.

DON'T MINIMISE THEIR FEELINGS

Avoid platitudes like 'it's just a phase', 'things will pick up', or 'why is that even bothering you?' Take time to imagine what it's like for that person & focus on their feelings & experiences – not your own.

DON'T JUMP IN WITH SOLUTIONS

Allow them to express their problems first. Give them space & time, or, if they feel unable to speak at that time, acknowledge the importance of what they've said & arrange a time to talk. As hard & as painful as it might be to listen, you need to hear their reasons for wanting to die before you can focus on reasons for living.

IT'S ABSOLUTELY OK TO NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY!

You're a human being too & what you're hearing might be terrifying for you as well as the individual. If you don't know what to say, be honest & tell that person. Reassure them that you are glad they told you – this can be far more empowering & genuine than making something up. If you're honest with them, they'll be honest with you.

IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE'S IMMEDIATE SAFETY, *act now*

If you are worried that someone is going to immediately act on their thoughts of suicide or has already taken steps to end their life...

Accompany them to A&E: BUT only if you can do so safely OR...

Call an ambulance: to get you there OR...

Call 999 & ask for the police: give them clear information that you're worried for a person's safety and let them know...

- The person's name (if known)
- Their location
- Description: what they are wearing, colour of hair etc
- Any other concerns such as anything that they have said to you, or anything they have taken.

Please don't think this is going to get someone into trouble, it's really not. The police have the resources to find those who are vulnerable to suicide & get help to them quickly, working alongside other emergency services across the UK.



WHAT IF THEY *won't talk?*

Not everyone will be ready to have a conversation about their mental health and/or suicidal thoughts. But they might be willing to take a 'pause' – to not act upon their feelings until they are ready to talk to someone. Make sure you respect their choice, give them several opportunities to engage in the conversation & make them aware that they can come to you if they do want that conversation in the future.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

After the conversation, make sure you take some time to look after yourself. These conversations can be difficult for all people involved so take time out to relax, practice selfcare & debrief if needed. Use our [Get Help Now online resource](#) to find relevant services available to you.

HELPFUL ORGANISATIONS

We have an extensive list of services that can help you or those in need on our website, in the [Get Help Now section](#).

