Safe Messaging Guide: Talking About Suicide

by **TAPS Suicide Pre/Postvention Department**

Fall 2022

Words matter. How we talk about suicide and share stories about related topics has an influence on those around us. The following tips were created as a way to educate on the importance of using safe language, offering stories of hope, and sharing important resources. Taking these steps in our day to day lives will make a difference and can, ultimately, save lives.

Suicide is complex.
Suicide is a multi-factored, complex event that cannot be easily explained with any single answer or theory. Avoid conveying suicide as being based on one factor or attempting to pinpoint a single event or simplistic reason that may have been the cause of suicide.

Use nonjudgmental language.
Refrain from terms that place blame, shame, stigma, or judgment, such as:

- "committed suicide"
- "successful suicide"
- "failed suicide attempt"
- "coward's way out"

As explained in other causes of death, instead, use terms such as "suicide attempt," "died by suicide," or "death by suicide."

Offer stories of hope.
Instead of focusing on graphic or shocking details, highlight stories based on experiences and resources around suicide that focus on awareness, prevention, coping skills, and seeking help.

Provide resources.
Educate and inform audiences that help is available—and it works. Reaching out and talking about suicide can save lives. Always include resources where people can find help, such as:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988
- Veterans Crisis Line and Military Crisis Line: 988 Press 1
- Crisis Text Line: text SHARE to 741741

Survivors of military suicide loss seeking grief support or assistance can call the TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline any time, 24/7, at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

T★A★P★S
3101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201
800-959-TAPS ★ 202-588-TAPS (8277) ★www.taps.org

Safe Messaging Guide: Talking About Suicide

by **TAPS Suicide Pre/Postvention Department**

Fall 2022

Additional Resources for Reporting on Suicide:

- National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide by Action Alliance
- Responsible Media Reporting by SAVE
- Guidelines by Reporting on Suicide
- Reporting on Suicide Prevention by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Free Courses for Reporting on Suicide:

- Journalism & Trauma by Poynter
- Responsible Reporting on Suicide for Journalists by Johns Hopkins University

About TAPS Suicide Prevention and Postvention Department

The TAPS Suicide Prevention and Postvention Department addresses the challenge of suicide in the military, the veteran community, and across the nation. We draw from a powerful combination of clinical expertise, survivor "lived experience," and TAPS own best practices in peer-to-peer grief support to care for those who have lost loved ones to suicide by reducing risk through the life-saving work of the TAPS Suicide Postvention Model. Learn more: taps.org/suicide

About TAPS

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is the leading national organization providing compassionate care and survivor support services for the families of America's fallen military heroes. Since 1994, TAPS has offered support to all those grieving the death of a military loved one through peer-based emotional support, connections with grief and trauma resources, grief seminars and retreats for adults, Good Grief Camps for children, casework assistance, connections to community-based care, online and in-person support groups and the 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline, all at no cost to surviving families. For more information, please visit TAPS.org or call 202.588.TAPS (8277).

3101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201
800-959-TAPS ✯ 202-588-TAPS (8277) ✯www.taps.org