

**CONVERSATIONS
MATTER**
resources for discussing suicide

*Conversations Matter when holding group
discussions about suicide prevention*

NSW GOVERNMENT Health | hunter institute of mental health | Mental Health Commission of New South Wales | conversationsmatter.com.au

*I want to talk about the issue of
suicide and the prevention of
suicide in my community.
What should I know? What can I
say?*

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- Suicide is an important issue for communities to engage with.
- It is important that discussions are helpful, based on accurate information and leave people feeling empowered.
- In general, having a conversation with someone does not increase suicidal behaviour. However, there is very little research looking at broader discussions.

Larger groups can make it harder to understand how individuals are responding to or interpreting the information.

✓ **Tip 1:**
Ensure there is a clear purpose for the discussion

- The way the issue of suicide is discussed is important.
- While conversations can inform and educate people, they may also upset or isolate some individuals in the audience.
- Discussions can also lead some people who are vulnerable to think more about suicide or to consider it as an option.

Just raising awareness of the issue on its own will not necessarily lead to a change in attitudes or behaviour.

So, think about what you want to achieve.

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✓ **Tip 2:**
Think about the format of the discussion

- Where possible, have discussions about issue of suicide and suicide prevention face-to-face so that people's reactions can be observed and support provided.
- If holding a group discussion, it is usually best if people are grouped with others who are similar to them.

Ensure the conversation occurs in a place where the group is going to feel comfortable and safe talking and allow enough time.

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- **Online communication** methods are favoured by some people.
- Consider the details given and the way the conversation is moderated.
- It is best if the discussion is run by someone with experience in suicide prevention.
- Develop strategies to check in with people regularly.

While online may not be the ideal place for conversations, it does provide an opportunity to engage with people talking about the issues and provide accurate information and links.

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✓ **Tip 3:**
Give advanced notice and be clear about expectations

- Give people notice that the issue will be raised and what might be covered.
- While we do not want to discourage people, it is better if they are prepared for the conversation.
- Set ground rules and expectations before the discussion starts and ensure support options are available.

Involve participants in deciding on ground rules.
e.g. Respecting people's opinions and views; keeping what people say in the group confidential; and accepting people are different and may have different experiences.

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- Most group discussions will not be the best place for participants to talk about personal experiences.
- It is important to discuss ground rules for revealing personal details up front.

“Since this is going to be a more general discussion that we want everyone to participate in, it may not be the best place to share distressing or very personal experiences. I am happy to chat to people afterwards...”

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- Research any cultural barriers that may hinder the discussion of suicide in some communities and prepare beforehand.

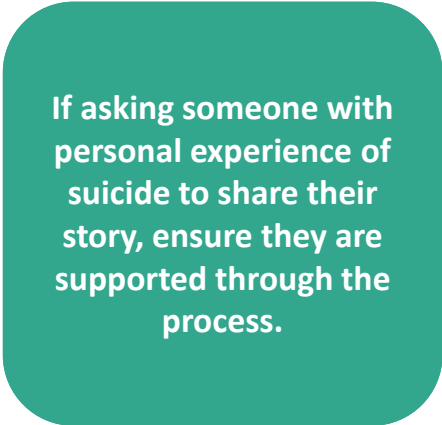
You will need to understand people’s spiritual beliefs and cultural preferences around discussing death and suicide.

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A graphic with a purple speech bubble containing text, set against a background of overlapping colorful shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and blue.

✓ **Tip 4:**
Plan how personal stories are used

- Personal stories can engage, but there is a need to plan how they are best used in presentations.
- They need to be appropriate to the audience (e.g. for their age);
- They are best if they focus on how a person overcame suicidal thinking and the things that assisted them to recover.

A green rounded rectangular box containing text.

If asking someone with personal experience of suicide to share their story, ensure they are supported through the process.

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✓ **Tip 5:**
***Use an experienced facilitator
that is appropriate for the
audience***

- Think about the target group and matching a facilitator to their needs.
- The person leading the discussion should have experience and training in suicide prevention.
- They should have experience in managing challenging comments or strong emotional responses.

**For group sessions
it would be ideal to
have two
facilitators – one to
lead the discussion
and one to manage
responses.**

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- If the discussion is occurring in an Aboriginal community, ensure the presenter is either from the community or has gained approval to proceed.

Consider inviting local mental health professionals or relevant cultural leaders to be part of the discussion.

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✓ **Tip 6:**
***Focus on increasing
knowledge and skills***

- Discuss suicide prevention as part of a broader health or wellbeing discussion.
- Focus on development of knowledge and skills rather than just discussing the extent of the problem.
- Discuss the sorts of things that build resilience in individuals and communities
- Focus on how people can contribute to suicide prevention.

Think about providing follow-up sessions or multiple opportunities to get further information so messages can be reinforced over time.

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✓ Tip 7:
Avoid simplistic explanations of why suicide occurs and be accurate

- Avoid simplistic explanations that suggest suicide might be the result of a single factor or event.
- Place discussions in the context of risk and protective factors.
- Ensure that your discussions **alert** rather than **alarm** the audience.
- It is also important to check accuracy of your information.

Communicating unsubstantiated, sensational or inaccurate information is unhelpful and potentially dangerous to people in the community.

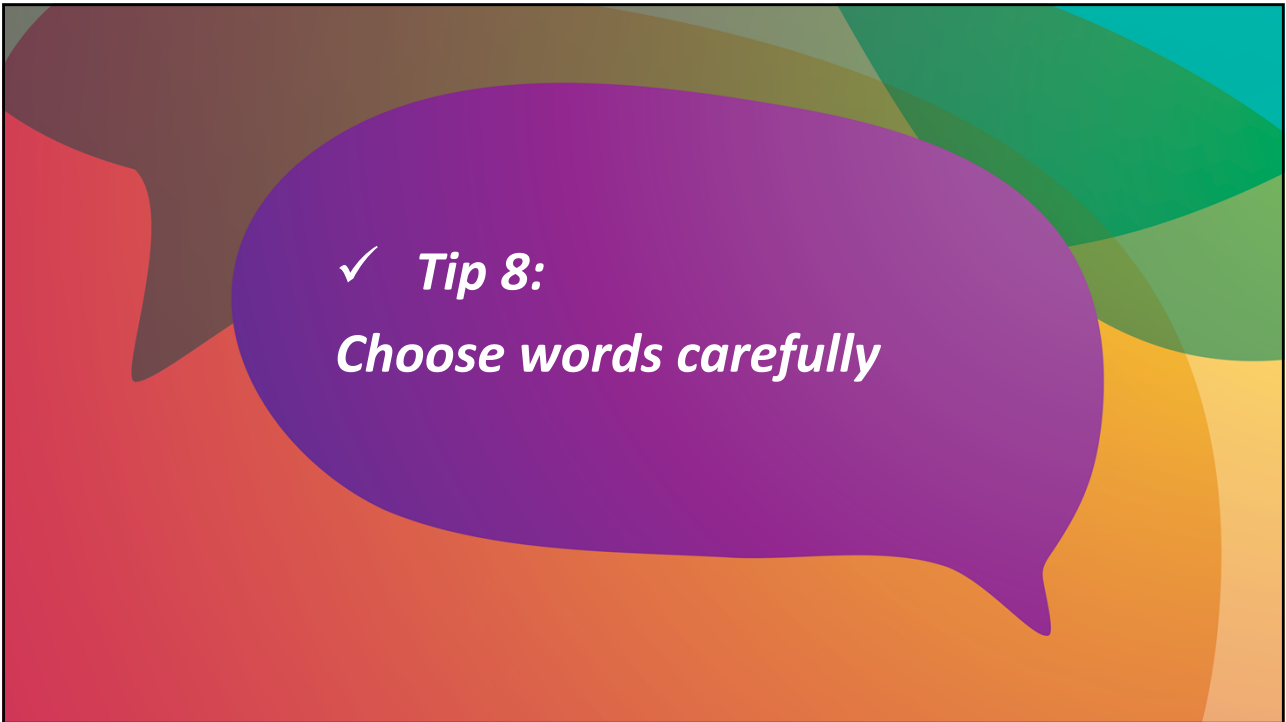
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Think about how you use information and statistics.

- Consider how information may be interpreted by different audiences.
- Statistics can help mobilise some people but may frighten others or reinforce their current thinking about suicide.

Will the statistic used:
Encourage people to pay attention?
Make them think the problem is too big?
Reinforce their thoughts about suicide?

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It is most important to consider the words you use when talking to groups of people.

- Certain ways of talking about suicide can alienate members of the community or contribute to suicide being presented as an option for dealing with problems.
- Avoid judgemental phrases or language which sensationalises suicide.

X Avoid terms like:
“Committed suicide”
“Unsuccessful suicide”
“Suicide epidemic”

✓ Use terms like:
“Died by suicide”
“Took their own life”
“Concerning rates”

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A graphic with a purple speech bubble containing text, set against a background of overlapping colorful shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and blue.


✓ **Tip 9:**
***Limit discussion about
methods of harm***

- Talking in graphic detail about the method of suicide can increase the risk of copying behaviour.
- Conversations that include details about the method or location of a suicide death should be avoided.
- This also means working with people who might be telling their personal story to consider what details may be provided.

Media have codes that suggest the method and location of suicide should be reported in general terms only.

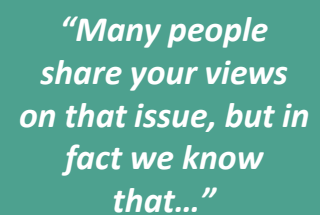
It is generally agreed that the same rules should apply for community conversations.

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A graphic with a purple speech bubble containing the text 'Tip 10: Handle the discussion sensitively'. The background consists of overlapping abstract shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and blue.

✓ **Tip 10:**
Handle the discussion sensitively

- It is important not to push people to talk or when they would prefer not to.
- Facts should be provided that address any myths or misconceptions about suicide that are raised by participants.
- It is important to challenge in a supportive and respectful way.
- Use an optimistic tone, highlighting people's strengths and that suicide is mostly preventable.

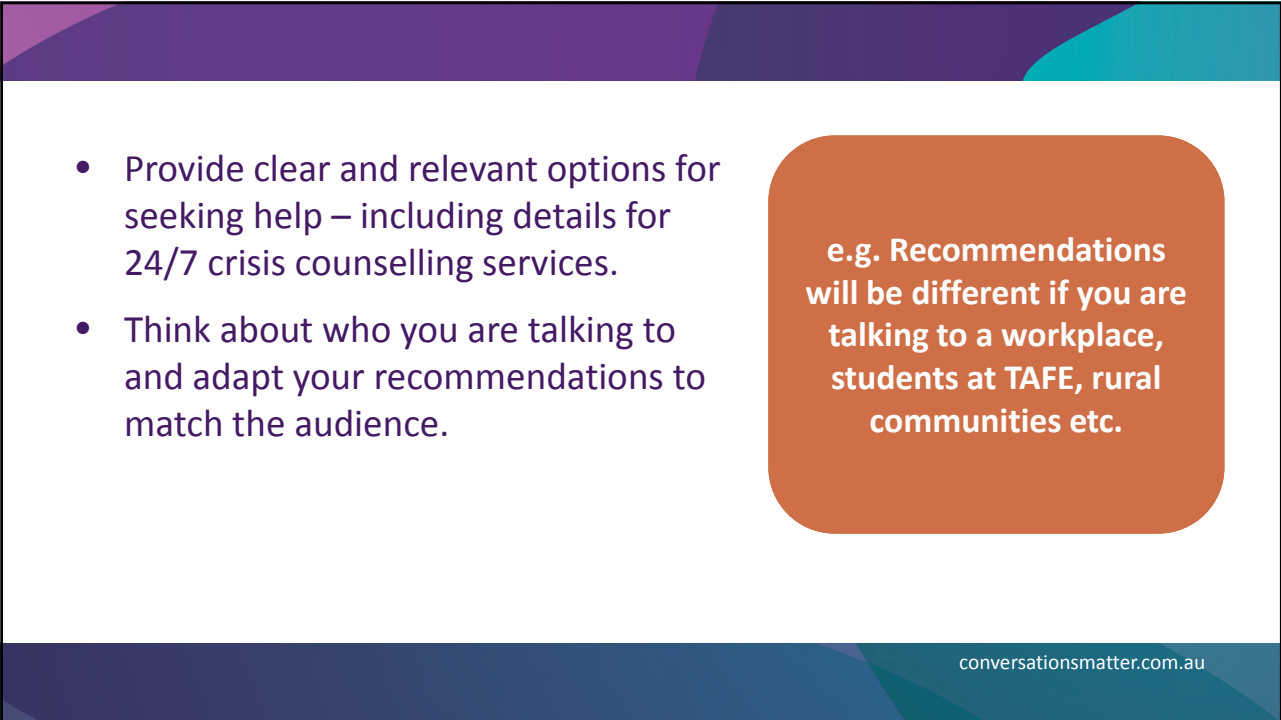
A teal speech bubble containing a quote.


“Many people share your views on that issue, but in fact we know that...”

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A graphic with a purple speech bubble containing the text 'Tip 11: Encourage people to seek help'. The background consists of overlapping abstract shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and brown.

✓ **Tip 11:**
Encourage people to seek help

- 
- A slide with a white background and a purple and teal header. It contains a list of two bullet points and an orange callout box.
- Provide clear and relevant options for seeking help – including details for 24/7 crisis counselling services.
 - Think about who you are talking to and adapt your recommendations to match the audience.

An orange rounded rectangular callout box containing text.

e.g. Recommendations will be different if you are talking to a workplace, students at TAFE, rural communities etc.

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A graphic featuring a large purple speech bubble with a white checkmark and text. The background consists of overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and blue.

✓ **Tip 12:**
***Learn about other resources
and services***

A graphic with two white speech bubbles containing lists of tips. The background is a dark blue and purple abstract design. The text is in a purple font.

Things to remember

- ✓ Ensure there is a clear purpose for the discussion
- ✓ Think about the format of the discussion
- ✓ Give advanced notice and be clear about expectations
- ✓ Plan how personal stories are used
- ✓ Use an experienced facilitator who is appropriate for the audience

- ✓ Focus on increasing knowledge and skills
- ✓ Avoid simplistic explanations about why suicide occurs and be accurate
- ✓ Choose words carefully
- ✓ Limit discussion about methods of harm
- ✓ Handle the discussion sensitively
- ✓ Encourage people to seek help
- ✓ Learn about other resources

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