

Responding to suicide and self-harm content on social media – appropriate language when talking about suicide and self-harm



This Quick Reference Guide highlights that the language we use when talking about suicide and self-harm can have a very powerful impact. This includes the words we choose when posting on social media. It should be remembered that behind any commentary on suicide, suspected suicide or self-harm, there are real people, people who have died, people who are bereaved, or people who might be quite vulnerable themselves. The **THINK** acronym was created to help people to be kinder when posting on social media. It suggests that before posting something to ask:

- T** Is it true?
- H** Is it helpful?
- I** Is it inspiring?
- N** Is it necessary?
- K** Is it kind?



Posting on social media following a suspected suicide to help prevent further deaths

Be mindful of how you talk about suicide or suspected suicide on social media. Care should always be taken when describing a death as 'by suicide'. It may take time for the exact cause of any particular death to be properly established. The facts and circumstances may not be known or understood, especially in the early days after a death. Take the lead from the person who is affected as to how they describe the death.

Using language that glorifies or sensationalises suicide may increase risk among some vulnerable individuals in the community. Others may over-identify with the person who has died as they may be going through a similar experience. This might put them at risk too.



Use of imagery

In addition to use of language, care should also be taken regarding the type of imagery used when posting messages on social media, in particular, any images that might cause emotional distress. Other considerations are the way in which the balance of power between the help seeker and the person providing support is portrayed.



For further information

Like all language, the language we use in relation to suicide and self-harm is constantly changing. If you are in any doubt about using certain words or phrases, it is best to avoid using them. Everyone of us can start by being more aware of the language we use and becoming a champion for bringing about change.

To learn more, see:

Information on language and suicide [→](#). Information from the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention highlighting the importance of using sensitive and non-stigmatising language.

#chatsafe for Parents and Carers – Ireland Edition 2 [→](#). Developed by Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, Australia.

Safe language and using appropriate imagery [→](#). Information and resources from Roses in the Ocean (Australia).