

Safely Talking Toolkit

A guide for safe community discussions on suicide and suicide prevention



Background

In 2016, the Tasmanian Government released the *Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy 2016–2020*. A key priority of the strategy is to ‘support communities to understand and safely talk about suicide and the impact of suicide’.

In implementing this key priority, the [Mental Health Council of Tasmania](#) (MHCT) in partnership with [Everymind](#), has developed the *Tasmanian Communications Charter: A state-based approach to mental health and suicide prevention*. The Tasmanian Communications Charter sets out a contemporary understanding of mental health, mental ill-health and suicide prevention.

The Tasmanian Communications Charter is a precursor to the *Safely Talking toolkit*. The *Safely Talking toolkit* has been developed as a practical guide for people to have safe and effective community discussions about suicide.

The toolkit has been developed under the guiding principles of the Tasmanian Communications Charter and is informed by research into the safe communication of suicide along with contribution from key stakeholders and experts in the area of suicide prevention.

“We can all help to reduce stigma in our communities and support better understanding for people impacted by suicide through learning and sharing the facts about suicide. This toolkit is a practical resource that has been informed by research that can help us have safe conversations in our community about suicide.”

**Debbie Evans, CEO,
Lifeline Tasmania**

24-HOUR NATIONAL CRISIS

SUPPORT SERVICES

- » Lifeline 13 11 14
- » Suicide Call Back Service
1300 659 467
- » Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
- » Mensline Australia 1800 789 978

Contents

The *Safely Talking toolkit* is a practical guide to holding safe discussions about suicide with a range of community audiences.

The toolkit supports communities to talk about suicide, so that we can break down stigma and encourage people to get help early.

How to use the toolkit	4
Preparing a SAFE discussion	6
S. Situation	6
A. Audience considerations	7
F. Follow language and messaging guide	8
E. Encourage help-seeking	10
Are you prepared? Checklist	12
Having the discussion	14
After the discussion	15
Self-Care	16
Resource List	18



For a full list of resources referred to in this toolkit, visit:
www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking

How to use the toolkit

Research into talking about suicide has identified some risks associated with certain discussions. The following information and checklists aim to minimise these risks when talking about suicide with community groups.

The toolkit is for use by local experts, community organisations, schools, workplaces, people with lived experience and individuals in the community. It aims to assist in their delivery of safe community discussions about suicide and suicide prevention. This may include postvention conversations (following a suicide death) however it is important to be aware of the additional considerations for audiences regarding this topic.

Refer to the [Conversations Matter postvention fact sheet](#)

The Toolkit is not a resource for having one on one conversations about suicide with individuals.

The SAFE acronym will help you prepare your discussion. There is also a checklist for self-care, given the sensitive nature of suicide, the self-care checklist is a critical component of the Toolkit and should be utilised by all people involved in the discussion.



When to use the toolkit:

You can use the toolkit when speaking to a range of community groups about suicide and suicide prevention. Some examples where the toolkit may be helpful include:

- » Workplace mental health and wellbeing information sessions
- » Hosting suicide prevention awareness events
- » Raising awareness of suicide prevention at meetings and forums
- » Conversations about suicide prevention in other group settings*

Before you start – have you signed the Tasmanian Communications Charter? The Charter sets out a contemporary understanding of mental health, mental ill-health and suicide prevention. Undertaking the short introductory training on the communications charter is an essential precursor to implementing the safely talking toolkit.

Go to [TasCharter.org](https://tascharter.org) to take the introductory short course



*Note – the Toolkit is not designed for having one on one conversations about suicide. For information about one on one conversations, visit [Conversations Matter](#) or consider gatekeeper training programs such as Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) or SafeTALK, [visit Lifeline Tasmania for more information.](#)

Preparing a SAFE discussion



Situation

Before the conversation, it is important to identify the situation and context. Consider the type of conversation you're having, the community group and their needs.

Review the checklist below to identify the areas you need to consider, click on the links for further information or refer to the resource list at the end of the toolkit.

I AM GOING TO HAVE:

- a conversation about raising awareness on how to prevent suicide
- a conversation after a critical incident has occurred, refer to the [Conversations matter postvention factsheet](#)
- a suicide prevention conversation that may include sharing your lived experience in regards to suicide, refer to [Roses in the Ocean](#) for initial information and training options

THE CONVERSATION WILL BE A:

- Formal talk – check *Mindframe's* guide on speaking publicly about suicide – [Mindframe guidelines](#)
- Informal conversation – Check this resource on group conversations about suicide – [Conversations Matter](#)
- Online discussion – Refer to the ChatSafe guidelines for online conversations – [ChatSafe guidelines](#)



Audience

I will be talking to the following groups:

The following community groups have additional considerations to allow for safe and effective communication about suicide and suicide prevention. If you are speaking to a general group, for example a workplace, you may have a diverse range of community members to consider. Click on the community groups that apply to your discussion or go to www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking to download the audience factsheets.

AUDIENCE FACTSHEETS

- [Young people](#)
- [Older people](#)
- [Men](#)
- [Tasmanian Aboriginal people](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex communities](#)
- [People from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds](#)

“Many Tasmanian communities want to talk about suicide - they know how important it is but are afraid of saying the wrong thing or doing more harm. The Safely Talking Toolkit will be a valuable resource in guiding discussion and in reassuring communities that they can make a positive difference by starting these conversations.”

Julia Gandy, Senior Project Officer, SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY



Follow messages and language guide

CONSISTENT KEY MESSAGES

It is important that the people you are talking to walk away with **clear and consistent messages on suicide prevention**.

The following key messages are highlighted in the Tasmanian Communications Charter and should be included in discussions about suicide and suicide prevention.

- » The reasons for suicide are complex and multifaceted
- » All suicidal behaviour should be taken seriously
- » Suicide is not always connected to mental illness
- » It is important to get help early
- » Safely Talking about suicide and suicide prevention encourages people to talk about their experiences and get help early.

SAFE LANGUAGE

In your discussion about suicide, it is important to use language that is safe. The following language guide provides a practical tool to use when having conversations about suicide.



Consider the language you use

Issue	Problematic	Preferred
Presenting suicide as a desired outcome	✗ 'Successful suicide', 'unsuccessful suicide'	✓ 'died by suicide', 'took their own life'
Associating suicide with crime or sin	✗ 'committed suicide', 'commit suicide'	✓ 'took their own life', 'suicide death'
Sensationalising suicide	✗ 'suicide epidemic'	✓ 'increasing rates', 'higher rates'
Language glamourising a suicide attempt	✗ 'failed suicide', 'suicide bid'	✓ 'suicide attempt', non-fatal attempt'
Gratuitous use of the term 'suicide'	✗ 'political suicide', 'suicide mission'	✓ refrain from using the term suicide out of context





Encourage help-seeking

Research indicates that people are more likely to seek help when information about appropriate services are included in communications about suicide. Encouraging help-seeking in your discussions reduces the stigma associated with getting help and increases awareness of the help available.

24/7 CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES AND LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES

In your discussion, make sure to have options for 24/7 crisis support services available. Refer to the audience fact sheets for recommended services. You can also download and print a support services handout, refer to the resource list at the end of the toolkit or go to www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking

Be sure to include at least two 24/7 crisis numbers in any presentations, handouts or discussion.

For example:

It's important to get help early, if you need support consider calling:

- » Lifeline 13 11 14
- » Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467



SUPPORT PERSON

If you are holding a formal or informal discussion, a support person or co-facilitator should be on hand. A support person offers one-to-one support to anyone who may be impacted during the discussion. A support person can be someone who has experience in managing emotional distress. For example, if speaking at a school, the school counsellor may be an appropriate support person. Make sure the support person is available during and after the discussion.

SUPPORT PERSON SUGGESTIONS

- » Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- » School Counsellor, Psychologist or Social Worker
- » StandBy (Lifeline)
- » Headspace in schools
- » People who are ASIST trained

Should your event have a quiet space?

It is a good idea to consider a quiet space where people can go if they no longer want to be part of the discussion, or if they want to have some time out from the discussion.

Ensure you inform people of the location and purpose of the quiet space at the beginning of your talk.

Are you prepared?

I've signed the Charter! [TasCharter.org](https://tascharter.org)



S. Situation

- I know what type of conversation I'm having and have read the corresponding guides
- If it is a discussion after a known suicide death/attempt, I have consulted the [postvention factsheet](#) and have put appropriate measures in place, including ensuring a clinical support person is available on the day of discussion.



A. Audience considerations

- I know the people I will be talking to and any additional considerations regarding safely talking about suicide to specific community groups



F. Follow language and messaging guide

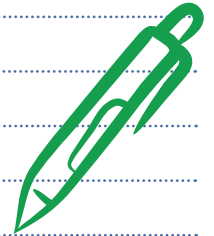
- I have a good understanding of the language I should and shouldn't use
- I have the key messages in mind for use in my discussion



E. Encourage help-seeking

- I have identified appropriate local supports including a support person for the day of discussion I have crisis support numbers and relevant information to handout to the group.

Notes



“It’s vital that we start to think about how we talk about suicide. Words convey ideas, values and beliefs. By removing judgement and stigma from our language and talking more about suicide and the importance of getting help or giving help, lives can literally be saved.”

John Clark, Team Leader Training and Capacity Development Rural Alive and Well.

Having the discussion

On the day of the conversation, consider the following to ensure a safe discussion.

BEGINNING

- Group is aware that you will be talking about suicide, offer the opportunity for people to leave the discussion at any time
- Group is aware of support person and help-seeking options
- Discussion is grounded in key messages

DURING

- Discussions are facilitated safely, refer to [Conversations matter](#)

END

- Refer back to key messages
- Remind group of onsite, online and phone supports and help-seeking options
- Handout relevant resources and crisis numbers
- Talk about self-care, [refer to page 10](#)

Did you know?

For conversations to have an impact, research suggests they should focus on development of knowledge and skills rather than just discussing the extent of the problem or raising awareness of the problem. Messages that can be built on and reinforced over time are more effective than one-off sessions.

When speaking publicly about suicide think about providing follow-up sessions or other opportunities to share information such as resource handouts or email follow ups.

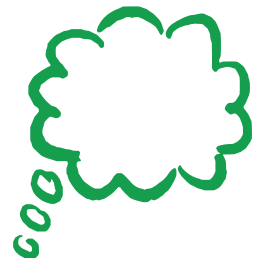
After the discussion

After the conversation there are a few key things to consider.

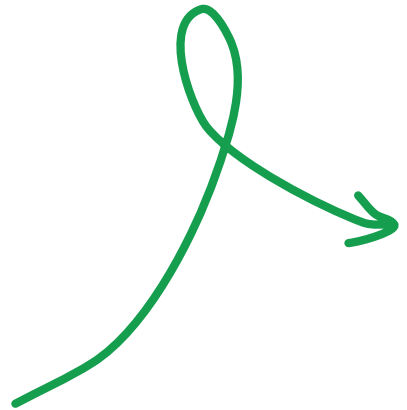
- 1) How can you increase opportunities for the community group to take away the key messages?
- 2) How are you going to practice good self-care and promote ongoing self-care for participants?

Some suggestions to consider include:

- » Sending a follow up email with key messaging, links to information and self-care reminders.
- » Follow up with the support person identified prior to the session, talk about what went well and areas you may wish to improve.
- » Where possible follow up with the person/group who organised the community discussion regarding participant feedback and any actions leading on from the discussion.
- » Practice good self-care in the days following the community discussion. It is important to recognise that even sessions where everything goes to plan may take their toll and practicing good self-care will ensure you can continue to share your story and key messages in future discussions.
- » If there were any adverse outcomes (community member became distressed, you received negative feedback) ensure you give yourself time and space to process this, speak with your support person and identify ways to reduce this occurring in the future.



Self-care



It is important to acknowledge that self-care is different for everyone and can vary depending on social, cultural, economic circumstances.

Self-care is important for both the presenter and the participants. People may benefit from self-care before, during or after the discussion.

There are a range of self-care resources which can be accessed online. Individuals may also develop their own self-care guides relevant to their own needs and preferences. Further information regarding self-care can be found on the Life in Mind website www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au.

Ways to incorporate self-care into your life?

People benefit from self-care activities and actions in different ways. It is important to identify activities and behaviours that will be most beneficial to your own wellbeing.

Here are some examples of activities that might inspire your own.



Physical

- » Make time for activities you enjoy and that help you to relax
- » Monitor and manage your stress in positive ways e.g. meditation, walking
- » Ensure you have enough sleep and rest.



Relationships

- » Spend time with family and friends. Close personal relationships can be especially important during challenging times.
- » Recognise when you need help from others and ask for support. This can be from friends, family, a GP, a psychologist or another health professional.



Work-life balance

- » Try to achieve a balance between your professional role and your personal life, and leave space outside of work for things you enjoy.
- » Get involved and join a group with common interests.



Spirituality

- » If you have spiritual beliefs, take time for regular practice or spend time with others who share your beliefs.

Find self-care activities that work for you and your needs, listen to your own mental and physical health and take time out when you need it.

Resource list

The following resources support the toolkit and will assist in safe discussions. The resources are referred to in the toolkit.

A list of the following resources can also be found at:

www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

- » Conversations Matter postvention factsheet – <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au/professional-resource/core-principles>
- » mindframe guidelines – <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/for-public-speakers>
- » conversations matter group discussions – <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au/resources-community/group-discussions-about-suicide-prevention>
- » Chatsafe guidelines – <https://www.orygen.org.au/Education-Training/Resources-Training/Resources/Free/Guidelines/chatsafe-A-young-person-s-guide-for-communicatin>

AUDIENCE FACTSHEETS

<https://www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking>

- » Young people
- » Older people
- » Men
- » Tasmanian Aboriginal people
- » Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex communities
- » People from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds

SAFE DISCUSSION PREPARATION

- » Checklist – <https://www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking>

HAVING THE DISCUSSION – RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS

- » Conversations Matter – <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au/resources-community/group-discussions-about-suicide-prevention>
- » Download and print crisis information handouts: <https://www.TasCharter.org/Safely-Talking>
 - » Young people
 - » Tasmanian Aboriginal people
 - » Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex communities
 - » People from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
 - » General community group

SELF-CARE

- » Life in Mind – <https://www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au/for-the-sector/self-care>

POSTVENTION SERVICES AND INFORMATION

- » Headspace in schools – <https://headspace.org.au/schools/headspace-in-schools/>
- » Conversations Matter postvention factsheet – <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au/professional-resource/core-principles>
- » Standby – Bereavement support, pathways to care workshops – <https://www.lifeline.org.au/tasmania/standby-support-after-suicide>

SHARING YOUR PERSONAL STORY

- » Our voice in action – lived experience speakers training – <https://rosesintheocean.com.au/our-voice-in-action/>

GATEKEEPER TRAINING

- » Mental Health First Aid course – <https://mhfa.com.au/>
- » Lifeline community training – <https://www.lifeline.org.au/tasmania/community-education-training>
- » Touchpoints – <https://rosesintheocean.com.au/touchpoints/>



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