



CREATING MESSAGES ABOUT SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mental health experts agree that talking openly about suicide decreases suicidal thoughts and attempts. That's why SAMHSA focused [National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day 2019](#) around the theme of suicide prevention. Discussion brings suicide into the open and provides an opportunity for intervention.



To inform message concepts for Awareness Day 2019, SAMHSA conducted message testing on suicide prevention with national collaborating organizations, suicide prevention organizations, Family Council members, Young Adult Council members, and State Mental Health Program Directors. The following tips emerged that can help you develop your system of care's messaging around this critical issue.

Developing Your Messages

Strong messaging can be a powerful tool for systems of care looking to encourage open discussion about suicide prevention. While there is no perfect way to broach the topic, **messages should be conveyed in ways that support safety, help-seeking, and healing.** This is true whether you're preparing an event for Awareness Day in May or National Suicide Prevention Month in September, developing conversational talking points for youth and young adults, or creating content for social media.

As you create your messages, keep the following considerations top of mind:

- 1. Audience**—Who is your intended audience (e.g., suicide prevention professionals, young adults, family members, individuals recovering from a suicide attempt, individuals who have had thoughts of suicide, etc.)? Do they have any experience discussing suicide prevention? How familiar are they with the topic in general? Are they accustomed to your system of care sharing messages around suicide prevention? (NOTE: If you have multiple audiences, you may want to organize your messages by audience; if you have only one audience, it may be more helpful to organize them by topic.)
- 2. Objectives and Purpose**—What is the purpose of these messages? How will they support your larger social marketing/communications strategy? What is the action that you want your audience to do (e.g., engage in services and supports, increase awareness about suicide prevention among youth, promote the systems of care approach, etc.)?

Developing Your Messages (continued)

3. **Format**—How does your audience prefer to receive information from your system of care (e.g., social media messages, in-person events, online resources, etc.)? How will your messages reflect these preferences?

Testing Your Messages

Social marketers often use the phrase “nothing about us, without us.” The same goes for messaging around suicide prevention: Testing your messages with individuals from your intended audience can ensure that what your system of care is saying around suicide prevention resonates with your audience.

Several examples of those you might ask to review your messages include:

- Young adult and family groups;
- System of care partners including those working in education, juvenile justice, child welfare, faith-based settings;
- Social Marketing Committee members;
- Experts in suicide prevention among children, youth, and young adults; and
- Staff from your system of care.

Once you have identified these individuals, ask them to answer specific questions while reviewing the messages. Examples of such questions could include:

- Based on your experience, what was your reaction to the messages? What would you change to make them more relevant to others?
- How appropriate are the messages for the intended audience, format, and objectives?
- Do the messages use any blaming or shaming language around suicide attempt survivors or those who have died by suicide? Alternatively, do they glorify suicide?
- Which messages would you be most, and least, likely to share with a friend who might be showing warning signs of suicide? Why?
- How do the messages support safety? Help-seeking? Healing?
- What tangible resources and steps do the messages offer to someone considering suicide (e.g., calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)?
- What other changes would you recommend to improve the messages?

Messages that have been tested are meant to give you the confidence to start those difficult conversations, whether on stage, online, or face-to-face with a friend.



For more evidence-based guidelines around suicide prevention messaging, consider:

- The [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#), which offers everything from recommendations on [blogging around suicide](#) to [resources on safe and effective messaging and reporting](#);
- The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's [Framework for Successful Messaging](#); and
- The [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website](#), which offers information including risk factors, warning signs, and [stories of hope and recovery](#).