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**0800567567**

DIARY DATES : DEPRESSION AND  
ANXIETY GROUP MEETING: LAST TUES  
OF EVERY MONTH SMS Robin for  
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**No one is obliged to speak  
and everything said is  
confidential.**

## JULY 2016 NEWSLETTER

### BE AWARE OF WHAT YOU SAY

How we say things and how we use examples is so important. In topics such as suicide and mental illness people many times say things flippantly without thinking. We were all guilty of this and sometimes still are. But suicide and mental illness are not funny nor a laughing matter. They devastate, destroy and leave many powerless, hopeless and helpless. Below are three articles that highlight the importance of language and how we express ourselves.

Lori

#### Self Awareness

Become aware of  
what you say, who  
you say it to, and  
how you say it

The Power of Words by Stacey  
Freedenthal, PhD, LCSW

Most people in the suicide prevention community are passionate about using language that does not stigmatize those who die by or attempt suicide, or their loved ones. Unfortunately, this language is different from the terms that ordinary folks commonly use.

**“Committed Suicide” vs. “Died by Suicide”** It is not at all uncommon to hear someone say, or to read in a news account, that someone commits suicide. This is a pervasive term. Yet the word “commits” often has negative connotations. Think of what else the word “commits” is used for. Somebody commits murder. Or commits rape. Or commits robbery. What is the common denominator? The word “commits” in combination with a noun often signifies a crime or another act of wrongdoing, such as “adultery.” A person who attempts suicide or dies by suicide is experiencing deep emotional pain, hopelessness, or mental illness – or

all of the above. Such pain does not make someone a criminal. But the word “commits” makes suicide sound like a crime. For this reason, in this blog I will use the term “died by suicide,” a neutral, factual term.

**“Completed Suicide”** Some suicide prevention activists use the term “completed suicide” instead of “committed suicide.” This term is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it is not a phrase that comes naturally. If I say “he completed suicide” to somebody outside the suicide-prevention community, they are not likely to understand instinctually. And when they do understand, they are not likely to use the term themselves, because they want to be understood by others. The other problem with the term “completed suicide” is that “complete” typically is associated with success. “I completed a project.” “She completed graduate school.” “Now I am complete.” Suicide is not a project to be completed. From a suicide prevention standpoint, I would much rather this undertaking remain unfinished, a quality that usually is undesirable, but not in this case. Rather than “she completed suicide,” it is fitting to say, **“She died by suicide.”**

“Successful Attempt” and “Failed Attempt” I often will hear people say “she attempted suicide and failed” or “it was a successful suicide.” Again, connotations are important. Success typically is good. Failure typically is bad. From a suicide prevention standpoint, in this case “success” is profoundly bad, and “failure” is a gift. We certainly do not want someone who survives a suicide attempt to then feel like a failure. For this reason, I avoid the terms related to success and failure. Instead, **I will say somebody survived an attempt**, or died by suicide. Alternatively, I sometimes refer to a nonfatal suicide attempt.

Sensitivity to Language All in all, the key is to be sensitive about what we say and about any other meanings our words might have. If you are not

active in the suicide prevention community, you might view these guidelines as another form of political correctness. Perhaps they are. Sometimes, political correctness is good, especially when it helps, in whatever ways possible, vulnerable people and those who love them.

## DON'T GO THERE

Words that could be deemed inappropriate if used gratuitously or pejoratively

- |              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| ■ Lunatic    | ■ Nuts    |
| ■ Nutcase    | ■ Nutjob  |
| ■ Crazy      | ■ Mental  |
| ■ Whacko     | ■ Psycho  |
| ■ Insane     | ■ Bonkers |
| ■ Loony      | ■ Schizo  |
| ■ Cracked up |           |

### We Need to Stop Making Light of Suicide

The other day, while in Target I overheard two young women in the bathing suit department. One held up a bathing suit and jokingly showed it to the other, asking “How about this one?” The other girl responded “I’d kill myself if I had to wear that.”

The following day I was in Kohl’s camp shopping for my daughters. A frazzled mother was talking aloud to herself as she passed me, her toddler in tow. “Did I get a gift receipt? I can’t remember if I did. Damn it! I’d like to just shoot myself today.”

Both moments felt like a sucker punch and momentarily took my breath away.

We are so flippant in our language. I am certain I was once guilty of it too. It’s so easy to make light of suicide — until it touches your life or the life of someone you love. And then, you quickly discover, there’s not a single funny thing about suicide. Survivors of suicide loss spend much of our days dodging triggers. We sit down to watch a

television show only to have a joke made about suicide. We deal with the drug commercials that lump suicidal thoughts and actions right next to hives and rashes, when discussing possible side effects; as if they are even close to being on par with one another. We try to tune into election coverage only to hear words like “political suicide” tossed about.

Yeah, here’s the thing — if you can wake up in the morning, kiss your loved ones, walk outdoors and breathe in the fresh air, then there is no “suicide” in the demise of your political career.

We survivors are everywhere. And there is nothing funny about the loss we are learning to live with. So how about we stop treating it like a punch line or a reasonable response to a moment of frustration. How about we treat it like the serious and painful issue that it is; an issue that [claims another life every 12.8 minutes](#) in this country and shatters the world of those left behind. The triggers are abundant, we dodge them all day long. But that places the burden on us. And quite frankly, our shoulders can only take so much before our knees buckle. So please, take ownership of your words. Because I’m fairly certain a missing receipt or an ill-fitting bathing suit is not something you would seriously end your life over.

And if they were, I promise you, it would be no laughing matter. (Deborah Greene).

### Why I Don't Say My Son 'Committed' Suicide

The news spread quickly. Two youth from the local high school had died over the weekend. “They committed suicide” were the words I heard to explain the tragic loss of two young people, who had their entire lives ahead of them.

It is common to hear those two words together — commit and suicide. I cringe when I hear it. **They**

**didn’t commit a crime. They died by suicide.**

I am a survivor of suicide loss. After my son’s death, I was helpless to respond to the painful words that were spoken in hushed tones around me. “It was a selfish act.” “Didn’t you see the signs?” “Are they in heaven?” “I wonder what went wrong in the family.” I was unable to formulate responses to these false beliefs. I didn’t even know they were false. I just knew they held me hostage under a grief so powerful I could hardly breathe.

In short bursts of time when I could focus, I read. Books like [“I’m Not Sick, I Don’t Need Help,”](#) [“The Burden of Sympathy – how families cope with mental illness,”](#) or [“Man’s Search for Meaning,”](#) helped me understand the suffering my son endured was so deep that he would take his own life.

“[Schizophrenia](#) with delusional behaviors,” the doctor had said. Ryan was diagnosed with mental illness nine months before he died. In hindsight, I had seen signs, but I didn’t know they were signs of mental illness. I never even considered mental illness was real. I just hoped he’d outgrow the anxiety, fear and worry that had insinuated themselves into his psyche. Sleeping too much, not wanting to go to school, avoiding social situations, becoming more isolated and failing grades were what I had dismissed as “normal” adolescence.

I am not alone. Sadly, I hear stories of other parents who thought their child would outgrow these behaviours, too. When behaviours such as these change someone’s personality, it could signal a growing mental illness.

I stopped really seeing my son because I thought I knew him by heart. I dismissed his complaints and his tears. I didn’t reach out to help him find his way because I was lost too.

Parents cannot look inside a child's head to see what dark thoughts may be present, thoughts of worthlessness, of being a burden or thoughts of death. These are thoughts they can't shake. Too ashamed to speak them aloud, our children suffer. To share these with another person they fear judgment, advice giving and not being taken seriously, or worse, feeling weak and powerless.

Without knowledge of mental illness as an actual brain illness, they languish. Without treatment, the illness can worsen over time and become a full blown chronic illness that is more difficult to treat or results in suicide. [90 percent of people who die by suicide had a diagnosable mental illness.](#)

All too often the "s-word" strikes fear in our hearts — fear of the act itself, fear of the unknown or fear of getting too close because suicide might be contagious.

We must remove the shame and stigma from mental illness and suicide, as well as the judgment youth often fear from talking about their feelings and seeking help. We must do a better job to help them share the darkness in their emotions so that parents, teachers and others can support the [1 in 5 who will be diagnosed with mental illness](#) at some point in their lives. We must listen with our hearts even if we quake with inadequacy when we hear the pain of our child or student. We need to know of their suffering in order to move toward evaluation and treatment, if need be. Talking is only the first step.

We have to remove the shame if we want to reduce and eventually prevent suicide in our time. We need to practice using the words *suicide* and *mental illness* so they roll off our tongues as easily as *bubble gum* and *dish soap*. We need to face our fear that asking questions about suicide will give our loved ones the idea this could be an option.

With understanding comes a responsibility to educate others to effect change in the words we use when referring to someone with depression, anxiety or any other mental illness. We can increase our understanding of mental illness, suicide and open the dialogue. We can stop blaming the families or blaming the ones who took their lives. There is no blame in suicide.

Those students did not commit a crime. My son did not commit a crime. They believed the only way to end the pain was to end their lives. They died because they didn't have the words to express the deep psychological/biological pain, which was not a sign of weakness but of brain illness.

I didn't understand then, but I do now.

These truths eluded me for a long time. **Sometimes truth has to hold the darkness before it can shine the light.** (*Desiree Woodland*)



#### Fix You - COLDPLAY

When you try your best, but you don't  
succeed  
When you get what you want, but not what  
you need  
When you feel so tired, but you can't sleep  
Stuck in reverse  
And the tears come streaming down your  
face  
When you lose something you can't replace  
When you love someone, but it goes to waste  
Could it be worse?  
  
Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you  
  
And high up above or down below  
When you're too in love to let it go  
But if you never try you'll never know  
Just what you're worth  
  
Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you  
  
Tears stream down your face  
When you lose something you cannot replace  
Tears stream down your face and I  
Tears stream down your face  
I promise you I will learn from my mistakes  
Tears stream down your face and I  
  
Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl-o25K6B-E>