

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT LGBTIQ+ SUICIDE SAFELY

This guide offers communication tools to help you in speaking purposefully and safely about LGBTIQ+ suicide. We know that we can talk about LGBTIQ+ suicide safely and respectfully. In fact, talking about LGBTIQ+ suicide safely can assist someone who is thinking about suicide or feeling suicidal to seek help.

At Switchboard we describe LGBTIQ+ suicide safety as a skill – like any skill, talking about LGBTIQ+ suicide takes learning and practice. The following principles guide our work in LGBTIQ+ suicide prevention and build off best-practice research by Mindframe, the national organisation providing leadership and support on safe communication about suicide.

We have written this fact sheet to give you skills in having what may be life changing conversations.

## Why does speaking about LGBTIQ+ suicide safely matter?

LGBTIQ+ communities are among those populations where living experiences of suicide are highly common. In communities such as ours, it is crucial we can talk about suicide in ways that support our experiences and minimises causing unintentional distress.

There are key principles that assist us in understanding how to talk about suicide safely for LGBTIQ+ communities.



Switchboard Victoria acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

[charlee.org.au](http://charlee.org.au)

Charlee is a project of Switchboard Victoria, which is based on the lands of the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung peoples.

We acknowledge that our work takes place on lands that are under colonial occupation and that sovereignty has never been ceded. We hope to pay our deepest respects to Boon Wurrung elders, past and present, and wish to extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across this Country we know as Australia

## PRINCIPLES

### Intentional language usage

In being intentional about our language use, we can challenge stigma and prejudice around suicide, and encourage people to feel safe to reach out for support when they need it.

Language has an important history in LGBTIQ+ communities. Language has been used as a mechanism for oppression and discrimination, but it has also been reframed by LGBTIQ+ people and communities to come together and reclaim power.

LGBTIQ+ communities are incredibly diverse. We honour our diversity by considering appropriate ways to discuss our identities and our experiences around suicide. We must remember that LGBTIQ+ communities include intersections such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refugees and asylum seekers, culturally and linguistically diverse people and people of different faiths. All these different communities have different understandings of suicide, and each must be approached with intentional nuance.

### Trauma informed

When talking to someone about suicide, a trauma-informed approach will help to understand suicide in a broader context of the person's life and society in general. A significant number of LGBTIQ+ people have experienced trauma in our lives. The impact of this may be lifelong. It can impact on our emotional and social wellbeing, and will often impact on relationships and family dynamics.

Communication about suicide should be open, honest, non-judgemental and compassionate. A trauma informed approach takes into account the individual as a whole person. It allows us a strengths-based framework to consider people as individuals. It helps to support people to feel empowered and in control regarding the choices made about their lives.



It is important not to pathologise LGBTIQ+ people because of our identities. Often, it is not because of our identities that we experience trauma; but instead, trauma can be caused by the ways that systems and organisations discriminate against us.

### Honouring Lived Experience

Living and lived experience of suicide are terms that describe someone who:

- experiences or has experienced thoughts of suicide
- survived a suicide attempt
- has been bereaved through suicide
- is caring for, or has in the past cared for, someone who is in suicidal distress or has been bereaved through suicide.

In our communities, people of lived experience of suicide are often our friends, our housemates, or our colleagues. It is crucial we demonstrate our preparedness to talk about LGBTIQ+ suicide respectfully in every conversation, because we won't always know what another person has experienced.

Where communicating about LGBTIQ+ suicide, it is best practice for to use LGBTIQ+ people as public speakers to represent our communities. We work to centre and support lived experience voices in all aspects of our conversations around suicide. It is also important to consider the intersections that you would like to represent. For instance, if you wish to communicate the experiences of trans and gender diverse people, ensure you invite and involve members of that community.

## SIMPLE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

### Avoid the 'how' and 'where'

One primary consideration when we are speaking about a person's death by suicide or suicide attempt is to avoid speaking about the **method** that they used, and the **location** where their death happened. We also ask you to be mindful to not share any graphic details of a person's suicide.

Sharing these particular details can be distressing to the people within the conversation. If you feel the need to discuss these particular details, you can do this privately with a peer or lived experience worker, counsellor or professional who will be trained to hold this content.

### Language we use when talking about suicide

Talking about suicide has historically been considered a taboo. Many of us still feel uncomfortable talking directly about suicide. This may especially be true in different cultural and linguistically diverse communities.







Many of us have the perception that it is safer to talk about suicide in an indirect way. However, indirect references to suicide can stop people talking about their feelings and accessing appropriate help. Avoid using euphemisms to describe suicide. It takes practice to talk about suicide directly; practice that can help keep someone safe.

Our language choices can also affirm someone's experience of suicidal distress or bereavement by suicide, and support that person to feel that they are less alone. If we do not consider some of these language choices, stigma and discrimination may be reinforced.

We aren't always going to get language right every time, and we know that sometimes it can take time to adjust to using language that is different to what we may be accustomed to. In the past, you may have used different language to talk about suicide and that's OK. We can hold space for our own ability to grow and transform while having generosity for the people we were in the past, before we had this knowledge about language.

Below is a table of preferred language options you can practice.

### Preferred language

 Die by suicide/end one's life/suicide/take one's life	Used instead of the phrase 'commit suicide', 'successful suicide'
 Lived/living experience of suicide	Having experienced suicidal thoughts; survived a suicide attempt; cared for someone through suicidal crisis; or been bereaved by suicide
 Suicidality	Someone's experience of thoughts of suicide, especially when those thoughts are recurring or persistent in nature
 Suicidal/suicidal crisis	Someone seriously contemplating ending their life and/or planning to do so Avoid – 'death wish' or other stigmatising descriptions such as "insane" or "attention seeking behaviour"
 Suicide attempt	A deliberate act of harming oneself with intent to die Avoid – 'failed suicide' and 'unsuccessful suicide' which may frame suicide as a desirable outcome
 High rates / elevated rates / high prevalence	Use instead of the phrase 'suicide epidemic', 'crisis'

# IMPORTANT LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY LANGUAGE



## LGBTIQ+

Lesbian, **G**ay, **B**isexual, **T**rans, **I**ntersex, **Q**ueer, **A**sexual, **P**lus.

The **plus** signifies all those who do not fit into the other categories and acknowledges the white supremacist, colonial, binary ways that sexuality and gender are defined.

## Queer

Queer can define any non-heteronormative gender or sexuality.

This is a term that was used for a long time as a slur against LGBTIQ+ people but then reclaimed by activists in the 70s, (such as at the first Mardi Gras in Australia) and later by Queer Nation – an activist group born out of ACT-UP, a grassroots political activist group founded during the AIDS crisis in the USA that worked to challenge the way that structural homophobia was affecting the lack of support given to people living with HIV, AIDS and HIV research and treatment.

Queer Nation developed out of people who wanted to challenge more than just the AIDS response – they wanted to challenge structural heteronormativity, homo-, bi-, and transphobia in broader society.

## QTIBPoC

Queer, Trans, Intersex, Bla(c)k, People of Colour

## First Nations

Descendants of the original inhabitants of the many different countries, tribes, and language groups that make up the land now called 'Australia'

## Cis/cisgender

When a person's gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth

## Trans/transgender

When a person's gender is different to the sex they were assigned at birth

## Non-binary

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender does not neatly fit onto the male/female gender binary. Non-binary people can see themselves as neither male nor female, both male and female, or separate from the binary gender system all together.

## Sistagirl

Term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe gender diverse people who have a female spirit

## Brothaboy

Term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe gender diverse people who have a male spirit

\* Please note, as yet there is no agreed language for a non-binary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Please reconsider using these terms if you are addressing a non-binary Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

## OFFERING SUPPORT

### Provide help-seeking pathways

When communicating about LGBTIQ+ suicide, it is important to always include referrals to LGBTIQ+ peer-led supportive services such as QLife and Rainbow Door helplines.

For example, for Victorian communities, Rainbow Door is a free specialist LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, BrotherBoys, SisterGirls) helpline providing information, support, and referral to all LGBTIQ+ Victorians, their friends and family. Rainbow Door supports people of all ages and identities with issues that may include suicidal thoughts, family and intimate partner violence (including elder abuse), alcohol and other drugs, relationship issues, sexual assault, social isolation, mental health and wellbeing.

Through advice, referral and support from an experienced LGBTIQ+ peer, Rainbow Door can support LGBTIQ+ people navigate the system to access the supports we need. A short list of some other relevant services are at the end of this document.

### Seek support for yourself

It is important that you are always making sure to seek any support you may need from those around you in a professional or personal context. Make sure to practice your self- and community-care strategies, including reaching out to the people in your life. People within LGBTIQ+ communities are often more likely to seek emotional support from queer friends and family, especially as we consider broader services to not be inclusive.

To help others to help us, it might help to share some simple guidance, like this fact sheet, to steer the conversation away from unhelpful language and outcomes.

You can also connect with mental health professionals such as counsellors, therapists, social workers, psychiatrists and workers on suicide-specific helplines who are trained to provide you with support.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

### 13YARN

**Phone:** 13 92 76

**Website:** <https://www.13yarn.org.au>

13YARN is a free, confidential 24/7 service run by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They provide crisis support, a space to talk, and can explore options for ongoing support.

### Thirilli After Suicide Support

**Phone:** 1800 805 801

**Website:** <https://www.thirrili.com.au>

Thirilli is a 24/7 service. They provide support following an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person's death by suicide or other traumatic incident. They work together with families, communities, local Elders and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure a community response

## SUPPORT SERVICES (CONTINUED)

### QLIFE

**Phone:** 1800 184 527

**Website:** [www.qlife.org.au](http://www.qlife.org.au)

**Hours:** 3pm-Midnight (AEST), 365 days a year

QLIFE is an anonymous, free, national peer-support telephone and web-chat service for LGBTIQ+ and questioning people, their families and communities.

### Rainbow Door (Victoria)

**Phone:** 1800 729 367

**Text:** 0480 017 246

**Email:** [support@rainbowdoor.org.au](mailto:support@rainbowdoor.org.au)

**Website:** [www.rainbowdoor.org.au](http://www.rainbowdoor.org.au)

**Opening hours:** 10am-5pm, 7 days a week

Rainbow Door is a Victorian-based, free LGBTIQ+ helpline. Rainbow Door provides information, support, and referral by trained counsellors and can speak to people about suicidal thoughts, concern for others, or bereavement by suicide.

### Peer Care Connect Warmline

**Phone:** 1800 77 7337

**Website:** <https://rosesintheocean.com.au/sp-peer-care-connect>

Peer Care Connect is a suicide prevention call back service – meaning you leave a message and they will call you back within 48 hours. The Warmline is staffed by Peer Care Companions who all have lived experience of suicide. They can also provide information and referral.

### Suiceline Victoria

**Phone:** 1300 651 251

**Website:** [www.suiceline.org.au](http://www.suiceline.org.au)

Suiceline is available 24/7 for people in Victoria thinking about suicide, concerned about someone else, or bereaved by suicide. They offer phone support, as well as online chat and video counselling.

### Suicide Call Back Service

**Phone:** 1300 659 467

**Website:** [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

Suicide Call Back Service is a 24/7 telephone and online counselling service for anyone affected by suicide.

### Beyond Blue

**Phone:** 1300 224 636

**Website:** <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Beyond Blue is a 24/7, free telephone and webchat counselling service staffed by qualified mental health line counsellors who can support you and speak to you about possible options for ongoing support.

## TRAINING

**Connect** join Switchboard Suicide Prevention mailing list for details about our next [How to Talk About Suicide Safely Webinar](#)

## RESOURCES

**Mindframe** – [A guide for lived experience speakers: Talking about suicide](#)

**Roses in the Ocean** – [Talking about Suicide: A guide to language](#)