

Acceptable Definitions/Terminology

Suicide Death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

Suicide attempt: A non-fatal self-directed potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt may or may not result in injury.

Suicidal self-directed violence is behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. There is evidence, whether implicit or explicit, of suicidal intent.

Non-suicidal self-directed violence:

Behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. There is no evidence, whether implicit or explicit, of suicidal intent.

Undetermined self-directed violence.

This is behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. Suicidal intent is unclear based on the available evidence.

Interrupted self-directed violence - by self or by other.

By other - A person takes steps to injure self but is stopped by another person prior to fatal injury. The interruption can occur at any point during the act such as after the initial thought or after onset of behavior.

By self (in other documents may be termed “aborted” suicidal behavior) - A person takes steps to injure self but is stopped by self prior to fatal injury.

[Source: Posner K, Oquendo MA, Gould M, Stanley B, Davies M. Columbia Classification Algorithm of Suicide Assessment (C-CASA): Classification of Suicidal Events in the FDA’s Pediatric Suicidal Risk Analysis of Antidepressants. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2007; 164:1035-1043.]

Other suicidal behavior including preparatory acts.

Acts or preparation towards making a suicide attempt, but before potential for harm has begun. This can include anything beyond a verbalization or thought, such as assembling a method (e.g., buying a gun, collecting pills) or preparing for one’s death by suicide (e.g., writing a suicide note, giving things away). [Posner et al, 2007.]

Unacceptable Terminology

Completed suicide

This terminology implies achieving a desired outcome whereas those involved in the mission of “reducing disease, premature death, and discomfort and disability” (J. Last, Dictionary of Epidemiology 1988) would view this event as undesirable. Alternate term: suicide

Failed attempt

This terminology gives a negative impression of the person’s action, implying an unsuccessful effort aimed at achieving death. Alternate terms: suicide attempt or suicidal self-directed violence.

Nonfatal suicide

This terminology portrays a contradiction. “Suicide” indicates a death while “nonfatal” indicates that no death occurred. Alternate term: suicide attempt.

Parasuicide

Formally used to refer to a person’s self-directed violence whether or not the individual had an intent to die. However, the World Health Organization is now favoring the term suicide attempt. Alternate terms: non-suicidal self-directed violence or suicidal self-directed violence.

Successful suicide

This term also implies achieving a desired outcome whereas those involved in the mission of “reducing disease, premature death, and discomfort and disability” would view this event as undesirable. Alternate term: suicide.

Suicidality

This terminology is often used to refer simultaneously to suicidal thoughts and suicidal behavior. These phenomena are vastly different in occurrence, associated factors, consequences and interventions so should be addressed separately. Alternate terms: suicidal thoughts and suicidal behavior.

Suicidal gesture, manipulative act, suicidal threat

Each of these terms gives a value judgment with a pejorative or negative impression of the person’s intent. They are usually used to describe an episode of nonfatal, self-directed violence. A more objective description of the event is preferable such as non-suicidal self-directed violence or suicidal self-directed violence.