



Mental Health Panel Guidelines for a Suicide Prevention Summit

By Sally Spencer-Thomas

Goals of the Panel:

- 1) **INSPIRE HOPE:** The panel's main job is to inspire hope. Suicide bereavement stories move the heart, but those who have lived through suicidal periods, received support, and are now thriving inspire hope and culture change in ways other forms of "awareness-raising" cannot. See tips on storytelling below.
- 2) **CONNECT TO LOCAL RESOURCES:** Additionally, the panel's job is to help connect the construction industry to local mental health resources. Be sure panelists bring marketing collateral and are able to describe what they do to support people who are experiencing a suicidal crisis or mental health challenge.
- 3) **BUILD CONFIDENCE:** Panelists should frame their messages to remove barriers and make accessing mental health services and support easy and appealing.

Who should you invite to participate on the panel?

Ideally, everyone on the panel should have a personal and professional connection to suicide loss, attempt, or what is known as "suicide intensity" (thoughts and feelings).

Having someone from the local crisis center is ideal as attendees are usually very interested in how the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline works, as it is a free 24/7 resource that they can disseminate easily. Other groups to contact include local affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Mental Health America, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the Veterans Administration (psychological services or suicide prevention coordinators), a local mental health center, or the Depression Bipolar Support Alliance. Having at least one group that offers some sort of peer support is very helpful.

If a panelist is a loss survivor, try to avoid messages about "there was nothing we could do," if possible. Encourage them to talk about healing through their grief and lessons they have learned. If panelists have a recovery story from depression, addiction, or another personal crisis, ask that they share what helped them through. Ask them to show emphasis on coping, resiliency, and the benefits of reaching out to peer and/or professional support systems.

The Flow of the Panel

Panelists should sit up on stage at one table with ample microphones. The moderator should be nearby with their own microphone and there should also be additional wireless microphones available to roam the audience for questions.

- Moderator opens with a background on their connection to this topic and reinforce CFMA's commitment (*5 minutes*).
- Each panelist introduces themselves, their professional background, and their personal connection to the issue. If the moderator or panelist has a personal connection, encourage that person to walk through their journey (from downward spiral to turning point to recovery/grief healing) and to emphasize what worked for them (*20 minutes, 5-7 minutes each*).
- Questions from moderator (panelists should take turns – only one or two should answer each question) (*25 minutes*)
 - What should someone do if they are worried that someone might be considering suicide?
 - How can employers support workers who have been impacted by a suicide death?
 - How should companies reintegrate someone back into the workplace after a suicide crisis or significant mental health challenge?
 - What are some first steps companies can take to create a culture of care where support and reassurance are given when people face overwhelming life challenges?
 - How can companies participate in community suicide prevention efforts?
- Questions from the audience (*10 minutes or any remaining time*)

Tips for Safe & Effective Storytelling, Language & Messaging

The following are some tips on safe messaging that can help with telling your story, using approved guidelines for language, what to include/exclude, etc.:

- 1) [Safe Reporting](#)
- 2) The Framework – [Suicide Prevention Messaging](#)
- 3) A series of articles on language and suicide/mental health:
 - [Words Make Worlds: Language and the Culture of Mental Health in the Workplace, Part I: The Science and Social Movement](#)
 - [Words Make Worlds: Language and the Culture of Mental Health in the Workplace, Part II: The Words About Suicide](#)
 - [Words Make Worlds: Language and the Culture of Mental Health in Workplace Wellness, Part III: Words about Mental Health](#)