

Reporting suicide: a quick guide for the media



This resource provides quick advice to support media professionals when reporting suicide

Recommendations for reporting a suicide death

Decide whether to report. Ensure a suicide has been confirmed by official sources to avoid speculation or interfering with investigations. Assess if there is a clear public interest in the story, consult your editorial policies and seek advice from experts.

Reduce prominence. People vulnerable to suicide may be drawn to stories about suicide, so consider placing a story on the inside pages of a newspaper or further down the order of broadcast reports and removing 'suicide' from headlines and search terms.

Modify or remove information that may increase risk.

- Consider whether to use content from a suicide note.
- Limit promotion of public and online memorials.
- Avoid images that may glorify the death in some way.
- Minimise details about method and location of death (*see overleaf*).

Take care interviewing family and friends. Respect people's grief and privacy in the period immediately after a death. Consider delaying interviews as people bereaved by suicide may be vulnerable or at risk of suicide themselves.

Apply cultural considerations. Naming or depicting an image of a person who has died can cause great distress in some communities. Seek advice before using the name or image of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Handle celebrity suicide with care. Coverage of a celebrity suicide can glamourise and normalise suicide. To decrease risk, minimise details about method and location, consider focusing on the wastefulness of the death, and add information about risk factors for suicide and help-seeking options for people who may be affected.

Promote help-seeking

Add 24/7 crisis support to stories:

- **Lifeline 13 11 14** www.lifeline.org.au
 - **Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467**
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
 - **Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800** www.kidshelpline.com.au
 - **MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78** www.mensline.org.au
- ✓ Add two crisis services to any story about suicide.
 - ✓ Match service information (e.g. age, gender, illness).
 - ✓ Provide direct links to services in online content.

Self-care for journalists: If you are affected by a story on suicide consider alerting a manager, talking with someone you trust, or contacting a support service. For more information visit the *Mindframe* website.

Reporting any story about suicide

Minimise details about method and location. If it is important to the story, discuss the method or location in general terms only (e.g. 'a cocktail of drugs' or 'at a nearby park'). Explicit depictions have been linked to increases in the use of that method or location and overall suicide rates.

Place the story in context and ensure accuracy. Take care not to imply that a death was spontaneous or due to a single event as there are usually underlying risk factors. Seek expert advice for comments, accurate interpretation of statistics and assistance placing situations in context.

Choose appropriate language. To avoid causing offence, glamourising or sensationalising suicide consider the following:

| Issue ? | Problematic ✗ | Preferred ✓ |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Presenting suicide as a desired outcome | 'successful suicide' | 'died by suicide' |
| Associating suicide with crime or sin | 'committed suicide' | 'took their own life' |
| Sensationalising suicide | 'suicide epidemic' | 'increasing rates' |



www.mindframe-media.info

Apply recommendations to online content. Consider implementing procedures to manage message boards for posts that may be harmful or from people in crisis.

Present information about suicide in ways that may be helpful:

- Reporting the broader issue of suicide, including policy, practice, research, rates, trends and other areas of public interest.
- Information about risk factors and warning signs, the importance of taking suicidal thoughts seriously and how to seek help.
- Personal stories about people who have overcome suicidal thinking, to promote hope and encourage others to seek help.
- Reports that show the impact of suicidal behaviour on individuals and communities to increase understanding about these experiences.

For expert advice on reporting suicide and mental illness contact:

Mindframe

02 4924 6900

www.mindframe-media.info

@MindframeMedia

SANE Media Centre

03 9682 5933

www.sane.org

@SANEAustralia

This quick guide is supported by more detailed information online.