

MEDIA REPORTING ON SUICIDE:

Guidelines for News Reporters

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1. **Sensitive Reporting Saves Lives**, by including:
 - Consideration for the feelings of relatives.
 - Avoiding detailed descriptions of suicide methods.
 - Acknowledging the complexities of suicidal behaviour.
 - Providing information about where help and advice can be found.

2. **Avoid Sensational Headlines, Images and Language**:
 - In the aftermath of a suicide, relatives are especially vulnerable and feeling a multitude of different emotions. Consult with the immediate family before publishing any material so as to respect their bereavement and family privacy. Exercise caution in using photographs or video footage.

3. Publishing **details of suicide methods can encourage imitation** due to 'over-identification':
 - There is no necessity to go into the details of how a suicide was carried out, this might cause undue distress to relatives and friends of the deceased.
 - Vulnerable individuals may identify with a person who has died, or with their predisposing circumstances.
 - For example, combining mentioning a debt problem or job loss, and descriptions of an easy-to-imitate suicide method in the same report, could put at greater risk people who are vulnerable as a result of financial stress.

4. **Avoid Speculation**, especially about 'celebrity' suicides:
 - Always check your sources and consult with relatives before publishing speculative comments.

5. **Suicide is a Complex Issue**, often linked to mental illness:
 - Suicide does not occur as a result of a single factor, but often there is a chain of events preceding the ultimate action.

- Avoid giving the impression that suicide is a simple 'solution' to a particular problem because very often it isn't.

6. **Consider Context:**

- Suicides in institutions deserve investigation.
- The public interest is best served if suspicions related to the levels of supervision while in the care of authorities – in hospital, in police custody, in prison or in other institutions – are investigated and lessons are learnt for future precautions.

7. **Challenge 'Myths' about suicide:**

- Journalists are to report facts, and not perpetuate popular misconceptions or myths.
- Emphasize that suicide is preventable.

8. **Censorship or Misinformation about suicide is Unhelpful:**

- Media professionals should not seek to hide facts. The public should be aware of the phenomenon rather than being left ignorant of the warning signs or where to seek help.
- Take the opportunity to educate the public.
- Newsrooms should encourage debate among staff, and develop their own policies on suicide coverage.

9. **Put people in touch** with suicide prevention agencies:

- Newsrooms should ensure that they have up-to-date contact details of support organisations that can provide advice or counselling.

10. Journalists are vulnerable too: **Support Colleagues:**

- Suicide may bring heavy emotions on anyone. A willingness to share concerns and provide support should be a feature of professional relationships in the workplace, especially when colleagues experience emotional difficulties.

[Talking Smart – Words to Heal – Not Hurt]

Words to avoid	Why	Preferred term
Committed suicide	Associating with crime or sin was decriminalized in 1961	'died by suicide' or 'took their own life'
Successful suicide; completed suicide	Inadvertently presenting as a 'desired outcome'	'died by suicide' or 'took their own life'
Deliberate self-harm	Use of 'deliberate' implies conscious choice	'self-harm'
Suicide epidemic	Sensationalising suicide	'Increasing rates'

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References:

<https://igm.org.mt/resources/reporting-suicide-guidelines-for-journalists-from-journalists/>

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/>

https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf

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