Talking About Suicide Online — Responsible Storytelling When Talking About Suicide

Suicide is a public health crisis that affects everyone. Engaging in healthy communication practices when addressing suicide and mental health can positively impact treatment, encourage help-seeking, and strengthen the military community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, unsafe media portrayals are one of the main societal risk factors for suicide. When reporting and blogging about suicide or in your general digital online communication, use these tips to embrace stigma-free and supportive language.

Consider the Following Helpful Tips:

- **Report suicide as a public health issue.** Treating suicide as a public health issue helps reduce suicide rates, promote prevention, support those in crisis, and guide postvention efforts.
- **Include help-seeking resources.** Always share hotline and treatment resources. Promote the Veterans/Military Crisis Line, which is available for Active Duty and Reserve Service members, National Guard members, all veterans, and their families. Nationwide, it can be reached by dialing 988, then pressing 1, or chatting online at veteranscrisisline.net/get-help-now/chat/.
- **Emphasize help and hope.** Stories that emphasize help and hope can help overcome suicidal thinking, encourage coping techniques, and increase help-seeking.
- **Use objective, precise language.** Outdated terms and phrases can further promote stigma, spread myths, and hinder progress in suicide prevention. Avoid saying "committed suicide," as it can imply a criminal act, like committing a crime. Instead, use the term "died by suicide," which is neutral, respectful, and fact-based.
- **Ask an expert.** Validate facts with suicide prevention and mental health experts.

Know the Important Facts About Covering Suicide:

- The risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death.
- The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration, and prominence of coverage.
- Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.
- Responsible reporting can reduce additional suicide risk.
- Media coverage of suicide can encourage help-seeking and promote recovery by highlighting resilience and connecting audiences to available support.

Remember These General Best Practices:

- Avoid details that sensationalize suicide.
- Do not share the contents of a suicide note. Instead, mention that a note was found and is under review.
- Keep information general about the person.
- Give context by describing risk and protective factors for suicide.
- Avoid describing or implying that suicide is a typical or expected response to personal hardship.

References

1. Reporting on Suicide. (no date). https://reportingonsuicide.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ROS-001-One-Pager-1.13.pdf
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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, April 25). Risk and protective factors. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html