



## 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 and help-seeking. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 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 suggestions to provide stigma-free and inclusive language.



### Consider the following helpful tips

- **Report suicide as a public health issue.** The public health approach is widely regarded as the approach that is most likely to produce significant and sustained reductions in suicide.
- **Include help-seeking resources.** Always share notable hotline and treatment resources. Promote the Veterans/Military Crisis Line (VCL/MCL), a free, confidential resource that provides Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) support for all Service members, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, all veterans, and their families.
- **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- **Use objective, precise language.** The use of outdated terms and phrases can further promote stigma, spread myths, and diminish suicide prevention progress. Avoid phrases like “committed suicide.” Phrases like “killed him or herself” or “died by suicide” are objective ways to describe suicide death.
- **Ask an expert.** Validate your facts with suicide prevention and mental health experts.

### Know the important facts about covering suicide

1. 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.
2. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration, and prominence of coverage.
3. 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.
4. Responsible reporting can reduce additional suicide risk.
5. How the media reports suicide can positively influence help-seeking when communications incorporate messages of hope and recovery.

### Remember these general best practices.

- Avoid details that sensationalize suicide in the headline or story.
- Don't share the details of a suicide note. Mention there is a note and it is under review.
- Keep information general about the person.
- Give context by describing risk and protective factors for suicide.
- Never describe suicide as a common response to personal hardship.

### References

1. Reporting on Suicide. (n.d.). <https://reportingonsuicide.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ROS-001-One-Page-1.13.pdf>
2. How to talk safely about suicide. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2024, February 2). <https://afsp.org/how-to-talk-safely-about-suicide/>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, November 2). Risk and protective factors. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>