



**Conversations
Matter**

How to talk to media about suicide

Whether you are sharing your lived experience or want to promote suicide prevention, what are the safest ways to talk to the media about suicide?



Whether you are sharing a personal experience, asked to do an interview, or want to promote suicide prevention, what are the best ways to talk to media about suicide?

Suicide is a legitimate public health issue that is covered by the media. It is, however, a complex issue to discuss and the way we communicate about this issue needs to be considered.

The way we communicate with the media about suicide will be different from how we may discuss it as individuals and communities. This guide aims to provide some practical tips on safe ways to discuss this challenging area, to ensure any risks are managed, whilst increasing community understandings of suicide.

In Australia, the national *Mindframe* initiative provides comprehensive guidance on media portrayals of suicide, mental ill-health and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD). This fact sheet is based on resources available on the [Mindframe](#) website.

People who are feeling suicidal may become affected by media reports of suicide, particularly where they identify with the person in the report or where suicide is sensationalised or shown as a way to solve problems. The most effective stories look at social and emotional wellbeing, increase understanding of risk factors and warning signs and promote ways people can find support. The *Mindframe* guidelines recommend highlighting these things when communicating with the media.

How do I talk to media about suicide or suicide prevention?

Just as the media are encouraged to consider accurate, appropriate, and sensitive reporting of suicide, you are also encouraged to do the same. You can safely interact with the media by:

Consider language and context

Certain ways of talking about suicide can alienate members of the community, sensationalise the issue, or inadvertently contribute to suicide being presented as glamorous or an option for dealing with problems. People who are vulnerable to suicide, or bereaved by suicide, can be particularly impacted by language.

References to suicide should not be used out of context (such as ‘career suicide’) as it may offend. It is important to use language that is in line with suggestions for the media (outlined in the table below).

Avoid method and location

- Detailed descriptions of the method and location of suicide have been linked in media studies to increased rates of suicide by that method or at the location mentioned. Avoid discussing specific details and, at the very least, only mention them in general terms (for example: ‘local lookout’ rather than the specific site or ‘medications’ instead of detailing the exact brand or quantities).
- Avoid simplifying the situation or death. Suicide is a complex issue and no one factor leads to someone taking their own life.

- If your focus is on advocacy, such as suicide reduction or highlighting known locations, it can be a challenge to manage in your communications. The same level of caution should be considered.
- Consider any cultural protocols regarding the naming of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has died.
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How should I frame my discussion?

- Suicide is a sensitive and emotional topic for many people. Ensure that your discussions alert rather than alarm the community.
- Check the accuracy of your information and use only reputable sources. Communicating unsubstantiated, sensational or inaccurate information is unhelpful to the community.
- Ensure your language does not sensationalise suicide or suggest there is nothing that can be done.
- Place discussions about suicide in the context of risk factors and other mental health issues can assist in breaking down myths about suicide

Do say	Don't say	Why
‘non-fatal’ or ‘made an attempt on his/her life’	‘unsuccessful suicide’	So as to not normalise or glamorise a suicide attempt
‘took their own life’ or ‘ended their own life’	‘successful suicide’	So as to not present suicide as a desired outcome
‘died by suicide’ or ‘deaths by suicide’	‘committed’ or ‘commit suicide’	So as to avoid the association between suicide and ‘crime’ or ‘sin’
‘concerning rates of suicide’ or ‘number of deaths’	‘suicide epidemic’	To avoid sensationalism and inaccuracy

How should I talk about my own live experience of suicide?

Things to consider before sharing your story:

- Allow the person to talk freely and openly and listen without judging, without offering advice or trying to gloss over their feelings with clichés.
- Does being involved in the story allow you to promote understanding and awareness of suicide?
- Does your personal experience match the purpose and themes of the story?
- Have you received advice about becoming involved in the story?
- What impact may it have on you and your loved ones if you become involved in this story?
- Does this story reinforce stigma and stereotypes? Stigma can create pain and stress for many people and their families.

It is ok to decline an interview. If you are not sure about participating, you may want to reflect on the following:

- Are you able to manage your feelings when participating?
- Do you have enough time to prepare?
- Do you feel well enough to participate?
- Do you know what you do and do not want to share?
- If the interview is regarding a death, how much time has passed? Grief and bereavement can make it difficult to contribute safely. If you don't feel ready, delay your response, or withdraw from the interview.
- Consider if you or your loved ones would like to be identified in this piece, including name and photographs. These details may be published elsewhere once the story is public.

Preparing for an interview

Once you are sure you are ready to work with the media, you will need to prepare. This can help boost your confidence and ability to focus on communicating safely.

Some things to consider:

- Ask about what topics may be covered or what questions the journalist plans to ask. This can help you decide what key messages to share.
- Develop the key messages that you want to communicate.
- How will your interview be communicated? Will it be a longer interview or will it be short 'news grabs'.
- Practice your responses and avoid 'ums' and 'ahs'.
- Prepare some key facts or examples you would like to include.
- Be prepared that nothing is 'off the record'. Be prepared for anything to be included in the final story.
- Make sure your loved ones know that you are being interviewed to ensure you have support available.
- Share the *Mindframe* resources with the media, to ensure they will follow these when reporting.

What parts of my story do I want to tell?

1. Write out your story in full.
2. Go over the story and remove any information you would like to remain private.
3. Remove any references to specific details about the method or location of the suicide attempt or death. Ensure that your language follows the *Mindframe* guidelines.
4. Highlight those parts of your story that support hope, help-seeking, and information that can promote identifying and understanding risk factors and warning signs.

How should I talk about my own live experience of suicide?

How do I tell my story?

Below are some tips on communicating with the media:

- Speak in short, clear sentences containing the key messages .
- Pause before answering each question, and then respond.
- Use plain and straightforward language.
- Use your own words, rather than the ones the media uses.
- Avoid over-talking. Simply answer the question and wait for the next.
- Stay calm and take a break if needed. Take two or three breaths and speak slowly.
- Be respectful and polite.
- Try to keep messages constructive, focusing on help-seeking, hope, and resilience. If you are talking about the loss of a loved one, focus on the loss you have experienced. This can be helpful for vulnerable people in your audience.
- Do not answer any questions you are not comfortable with.
- If you do not understand a question, ask them to explain.
- If you are unable to answer, politely explain that you cannot answer.

After the interview:

- Take time to think about how the interview went and what was good or uncomfortable about the experience.
- Make some notes about what you may do differently next time.
- Talk to someone you trust to debrief with.
- Be aware that there are no guarantees in the media. The story may be much shorter than first planned or than expected despite the length of the interview. This is not a reflection on you.

Look after yourself

- Be kind to yourself. Talking about complex issues like suicide can be draining.
- You may need to speak with someone you trust like a friend or relative, GP or counsellor, or access support services like those below.

Learn about other services and supports

This resource is a basic introduction on how to talk to the media about suicide. Information in this fact sheet aligns with resources provided to the Australian media on communicating about suicide by the national *Mindframe* initiative. There are a range of other services and resources that can assist.

Take a look at the links below or on the Conversations Matter website, for further information – conversationsmatter.org.au

Services and supports

Lifeline

13 11 14 | lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467 | suicidecallbackservice.org.au

StandBy - Support After Suicide

standbysupport.com.au

beyondblue

1300 22 4636 | beyondblue.org.au

Kids Helpline (5-25 years)

1800 55 1800 | kidshelpline.com.au

headspace (12-25 years)

headspace.org.au

MensLine Australia

1300 78 99 78 | mensline.org.au

GriefLine

1300 845 745 | griefline.org.au

QLife

1800 184 527 | qlife.org.au

Useful resources

Life in Mind: National suicide prevention gateway | lifeinmind.org.au

Roses in the Ocean: Australia's leading lived experience of suicide organisation, Roses in the Ocean exists to save lives and to reduce emotional distress and pain | rosesintheocean.com.au

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB): The largest provider of grief and bereavement education in Australia | grief.org.au

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health: Empowering Australians from multicultural backgrounds to embrace mental health and wellbeing
embracementalhealth.org.au

Social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Aboriginal Australia: Online resources and information on cultural concepts of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and service providers | sewbmh.org.au

Suicide Prevention Australia: National peak body for suicide prevention
suicidepreventionaust.org

R U OK?: Suicide prevention charity, encouraging Australians to notice the signs of mental health struggle in friends, family and colleagues | ruok.org.au

For a more comprehensive list of links refer to the 'Supporting information' section at conversationsmatter.org.au



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**Mental Health
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