

Tips for dealing with the media on suicide

We recommend that readers view the well-researched and comprehensive guidelines for safe reporting on suicide available at:

- <http://www.afsp.org/news-events/for-the-media/reporting-on-suicide>
- <http://reportingonsuicide.org>
- http://www.sprc.org/library/at_a_glance.pdf
- <http://www.sprc.org/library/SafeMessagingfinal.pdf>

However, we have integrated tips from the above resources here for a quick reference: These are for administrators or a communications director when reporting on suicide.

Tips for suicide reporting

- Refer to research findings that mental disorders have been found in 90% of people who have died by suicide. This means help is available!
- Avoid reporting that death by suicide was preceded by a single event, such as a recent job loss, divorce or bad grades. Reporting like this leaves the public with an overly simplistic and misleading understanding of suicide, which is a much more complex interaction of a multitude of factors.
- Consider quoting a suicide prevention expert on causes and treatments. Contact experts at www.afsp.org or www.suicidology.org if there are no known local mental health professionals with expertise in suicide prevention.
- Use your story to inform readers about the warning signs of suicide and how students or community members can help someone who may be suffering. Turn the loss into positive education to increase knowledge and awareness of readers or viewers.
- Add statements about the many treatment options available as well as stories of hope and recovery. Help remove the stigma of treatment for depression or other mental illness.
- Include up-to-date local and national resources where readers or viewers can get help and provide information that promotes help-seeking behaviors.
- Do not interview or film on school grounds, if possible. Have a designated space to keep media personnel away from students as much as possible.
- The school principal, superintendent and communications director will determine and assign a designated spokesperson and notify all staff as to who that person is. This team will set up a time and place for media interviews.
- Instruct secretaries/receptionist and other staff to route all incoming media calls to the identified spokesperson. No other personnel should talk to the media.

- Communications director or designee prepares all necessary news releases or fact sheets to be provided to media outlets.
- Communications director or designee should keep records of all media contacts.
- Always include a referral phone number and information about local crisis intervention services as well as websites to visit for further information and resources.
- Emphasize actions that community members can take to prevent suicides.
- Provide information about any local suicide prevention community activities such as *Out of the Darkness* walks organized by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.
- Monitor all social media for inappropriate comments, rumors or information posted by students. These sites can be used to dispel rumors, offer factual information as well as provide resources and education.
- Students can also be enlisted to post positive help seeking information and resources on their own online pages.

What to Avoid

- Avoid detailed descriptions of the suicide, including specifics of the method.
- Avoid romanticizing or sensationalizing someone who has died by suicide. Avoid featuring tributes by friends or relatives.
- Avoid first-person accounts from adolescents about their suicide attempts.
- Avoid glamorizing the suicide as media outlets often seek dramatic stories.
- Avoid oversimplifying the causes of suicides, murder-suicides, or suicide pacts, and avoid presenting them as inexplicable or unavoidable.
- Avoid using the phrases such as a “failed” or “successful” suicide attempt. We do not want to attribute failure to a person who attempted suicide, but lived.
- Avoid giving prominent placement to stories about suicide.
- Avoid describing the location of the suicide or showing pictures of the suicide.

Most importantly, schools should remember to emphasize suicide prevention, removing stigma to encourage seeking help, and how to identify and refer others who may be at risk and providing resources for additional support.