

# A guide for lived experience speakers: talking about suicide

The media is an important source of information for the community about mental health issues and plays an important role in influencing the way people think and act towards people who are affected by mental illness and suicide.

Research has shown that the way suicide is discussed in mass media is important to ensure we are protecting individuals in the community at risk. Issues around language, and details of a death have been linked to increased rates of suicide.

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 for a number of problems. *Mindframe* would strongly recommend ensuring that you highlight these things when sharing your story.

## **Things to consider before becoming involved with a story:**

- Does being involved in the story give you an opportunity to help the community to learn and understand about mental illness and services?
- Does your personal experience match what the story is about?
- Have you received advice about becoming involved in the story?
- What impact may it have on you if you become involved in this story?

For many people with a mental illness and their families, stigma can create as much pain and stress as the illness itself.

## Be mindful of language

It is important to consider language as those vulnerable to suicide, or bereaved by suicide, can be particularly impacted by language.

Issue	Problematic	Preferred
Presenting suicide as a desired outcome	✗ 'successful suicide'	✓ 'died by suicide'
Associating suicide with crime or sin	✗ 'committed suicide'	✓ 'took their own life'
Sensationalising suicide	✗ 'suicide epidemic'	✓ 'increasing rates'
Language glamourising a suicide attempt	✗ 'failed suicide' 'suicide bid'	✓ 'suicide attempt' 'non-fatal attempt'
Gratuitous use of the term 'suicide'	✗ 'political suicide' 'suicide mission'	✓ refrain from using the term suicide out of context

## Avoid description and method

It is important to ensure that we avoid discussing explicit details of how someone ended their life or where they ended their life as studies have shown a link in 'copycat' behaviours.

Issue	Options to consider
<p>Reporting explicit detail about method has been linked to increases in use of that method and overall suicide rates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ If it is important to mention method, discuss in general terms e.g. 'mix of drugs' instead of detailing the type and quantity.</li> </ul>
<p>Reporting uncommon or new methods of suicide can lead to imitation as well as a lasting impact on rates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Remove specific details about new or unusual methods of suicide and references to ways further information can be found e.g. online.</li> </ul>
<p>Describing locations of suicide may promote these to vulnerable people and increase frequency of attempts at these sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ If referring to a location, describe this in general terms only e.g. use 'at a nearby park' instead of detailing the exact location.</li> </ul>
<p>Images or footage depicting method or location of a suicide can lead to imitation by vulnerable people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Avoid using detailed or dramatic photographs or footage, e.g. images of people standing on ledges or of implements used in a suicide attempt.</li> </ul>

## Provide support information

Always provide information about relevant services or suggest where people can get support or further information.

## Look after yourself

It is important that you safeguard your wellbeing when sharing your story. Sharing your story may bring up uncomfortable or distressing feelings. These feelings might come up immediately or in following days, weeks or months. *Mindframe* would strongly encourage checking in with yourself and engage in some self-care activities. Self-care can include any intentional acts to help look after your physical, mental and emotional health. This may include; engaging in physical exercise, staying in touch with friends and family, having a good night sleep, or speak with a mental health professional.

- **Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467**
- **Lifeline - 131 114**
- **Beyond Blue - 1300 22 4636**
- **Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800**
- **MensLine Australia - 1300 78 99 78**