

Managing media interest

After a suicide

Some people find it helpful and empowering to share their story of suicide loss. For others, dealing with the media is very stressful. It is your choice whether you speak with the media. This guide offers helpful tips to make informed decisions about managing media interest.

The law restricts what the media can report about a suspected suicide

Under law in Aotearoa New Zealand, the media have to follow certain restrictions about what they can report if a death appears to have been by suicide. This is to decrease the chance of further suicides.

Under Section 71 of the Coroners Act 2006 (amended 2016), the media cannot make public the following details:

- The method or suspected method of the death.
- Any detail (like the place of death) that might suggest the method or suspected method of the death.
- A description of the death as a suicide before the coroner has released their findings and stated the death was a suicide (although the death can be described as a suspected suicide before then).

When media are interested in the story

A suspected suicide can quickly become public information if the media report the death in such a way that suicide is indicated. Newspapers, TV, websites, radio, magazines, and social media can all play a part in spreading the story. A personal family and whānau loss can quickly become known about publicly.

Someone from a media organisation could contact you, or your family, whānau, friends, acquaintances, and even people you barely know to ask for details about the person's life, comments, or an interview. If this happens, it is always up to you (or others who have been asked) to decide whether to speak with the media.

Be aware that you might also unexpectedly hear, read, or see something in the media about the person who died that is extremely upsetting and untrue.

Tips for dealing with media attention

These tips come from those who have experienced how challenging it can be to deal with media interest.

Consider appointing someone to deal with the media on your behalf

You can pass all media queries onto this person to deal with as you choose.

Use your voice mail or text messages to filter your calls

This way you don't accidentally answer a call from someone you don't want to speak to, and can choose to return the call when, and if, you are ready to.

Use social media wisely

Social media is the most likely way people are going to receive information about the suspected suicide death. Any information or photos shared openly on social media, messaging apps or text messages can be used by the media as public information.

Members of the public can also make comments on posts that might be insensitive and upsetting. If the content is dangerous and breaches the guidelines of the social media platform, you can ask to get it removed. It helps to have a family spokesperson assigned to monitoring this type of information as best as they can. Any post that you publish needs to be actively monitored for offensive comments.



If you decide not to speak to the media:

- You can simply ignore requests. It's okay to tell them you have "no comment" or ask them to direct all queries to police.
- It may be easier to decline to comment by using text or email.
- Understand that even if you choose not to comment, it may not be possible to stop the media reporting on your loss/the death.

If you do decide to speak to the media:

- Decide what information you do want to share with the public and what you *don't* want to share. Where applicable, discuss this as a family or whānau.
- Choose who will speak to the media on behalf of your family or whānau. This could be you, another member of your family or whānau, or a trusted friend. If it is not you, spend time with the designated speaker first to ensure they know what you want to say. If you decide to speak to the media yourself, give yourself time to carefully think through what you want to say.
- Be careful what is said when emotions are running high. After a suicide loss, it's not uncommon for some family and whānau members to feel very angry or to seek to place blame for what has happened. Be careful about saying things that you might regret.
- Ask journalists for their names, contact details and who they work for. You can ask for a copy of the questions ahead of the interview. You don't need to answer them all.
- Make a time to speak to them that suits you and gives you a chance to prepare.
- Always assume your interview is being recorded. If you are not comfortable with that, tell the journalist before your interview.
- Don't let the media rush you. If you feel pressured, say you will call or message them back or have someone else do that on your behalf. You can also delay an arranged interview.
- There is no such thing as 'off the record'. Media can use anything you say to them at any time. Avoid saying anything in the spur of the moment that you might regret later.
- Keep in mind, the reporter doesn't have to show you what is produced before it's made public. You can ask whether they will do this ahead of the interview. Family or whānau might feel angry their words have been misquoted, which makes planning what you want to say very important.



- You can choose to be proactive and give interviews at a time of your choice, such as around an upcoming anniversary, or when you want to highlight an aspect of the case. This way you can get ahead of the media and do it on your own terms.
- Think carefully about what private photos, written documents/messages, audio, or video you may want to give to the media. It's very important to know that any of these items could be used by the media in the future without your additional permission.
- Ask police to tell you about any media releases they are making about the death before they release them to the media.
- Incorrect information given to the media by relatives, friends, or others can be infuriating and hurtful. If this happens, you can ask for any misinformation to be corrected. Please understand though, sometimes people pass on information that is factual or considered their opinion.

Media attention may increase again at any time. Use these tips whenever you need to.

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