

Considerations when reporting and portraying suicide

Journalists

1. Avoid glorifying suicide

Presenting suicide as romantic or heroic can suggest it is a good choice. Minimise tributes like public eulogies, flags at half mast, public memorials. Acknowledge the person's problems, not just their positive aspects.

2. Present suicide as a poor choice

Include suggestions for seeking help, like talking to a friend, family member or professional and contact numbers of services people can call where possible. Stories of people who sought help to overcome their despair are positive. The media resource contains facts, myths and a list of reliable sources to interview.

3. Don't oversimplify

The reasons behind suicide are complex and often the result of a history of problems, rather than just one event.

4. Take particular care when reporting suicides or attempts by celebrities

Young people often see them as idols or heroes.

5. Don't use photographs or visuals

Photographs of a funeral, the deceased person's bedroom, a rope in a noose or the site of the suicide may increase the risk of copycat suicides.

6. Never report 'how-to' descriptions

For example, reporting that a person overdosed may not be harmful, but providing details of the number and type of pills taken could be.

7. People bereaved by suicide are at higher risk

Be aware people you are interviewing could be vulnerable and working through grief and related issues.

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Editors/Sub-editors

1. Consider the effect of the location of the story

Placing a story about suicide on the front page of a paper may increase the risk of copycats.

2. Think carefully about headlines

The word 'suicide' in headlines has been associated with copycat suicides.

3. Consider whether the coverage is repetitive

Prominent and ongoing coverage can promote and maintain a preoccupation with suicide for those at risk and appears to be associated with suicide contagion, particularly if the suicides occurred in the same community.

Phone and online help and information

The Lowdown – online support for depression: www.thelowdown.co.nz, text 5626

Information about depression: www.depression.org.nz, 0800 111 757

Lifeline 0800 111 777

Youthline 0800 376 633 www.youthline.co.nz, text 234

Samaritans 0800 726 666

Psychiatric emergency services (refer to front of local telephone directory)

Emergency department of the local hospital (refer to front of local telephone directory)

Community mental health services (refer to front of local telephone directory)

For more information on helping services, contacts for information on suicide and suicide prevention, refer to the media resource or check the Ministry of Health website address: www.moh.govt.nz/suicideprevention or Suicide Prevention Information New Zealand www.spinz.org.nz