

Mindframe advice for media when reporting suicide

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With speculation in some media this morning that US Actor Robin Williams has taken his own life, Australian media professionals are reminded to be cautious and responsible when covering the death.

With the story obviously in the public interest and receiving ongoing coverage, it's important the media continue to report responsibly given that repeated and sustained coverage can increase the risk to those that are vulnerable or distressed.

Suicide is a complex issue and sensationalist or inaccurate reporting of this subject can impact on vulnerable members of the community.

- A [guide](#) to safe reporting of suicide is available [here](#).
- Adding [help seeking information](#) to your stories can provide somewhere for people who may be impacted by the coverage to find professional support. A list of 24-hour crisis lines can be found [here](#).
- Australian [media industry codes and standards](#) on the issue of reporting suicide can be found [here](#).
- Covering suicide can be traumatic. [Self-care resources](#) are available to journalists from the DART Centre for Journalism & Trauma [here](#).

QUICK TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS WHEN REPORTING SUICIDE:

WHAT ABOUT CELEBRITY SUICIDE?

Celebrity suicides are newsworthy and will almost always be reported. Coverage of suicide by a celebrity can glamourise and normalise suicide, with research showing it can prompt imitation by vulnerable people.

Given the potential impact of the story, ensure the death has not been reported as a suicide until confirmed by official sources. This may help reduce speculation, which can be harmful and hard to manage.

To minimise risk, ensure the story does not glamourise suicide or provide specific details about the method or location of death. Instead consider focusing on the wastefulness of the death, its impact on family and friends, general risk factors for suicide and help-seeking options for people who may be vulnerable.

Be mindful that reports about the death may come up in other contexts (a second celebrity death) or around a significant date (movie release, anniversary etc.). Care should be taken each time the death is reported or referred to.







National 24/7 Crisis Services

- Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
www.kidshelp.com.au
- MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78
www.mensline.org.au

- ✓ Add two crisis services to any story about suicide.
- ✓ Match service information to the story (e.g. age, gender, background).
- ✓ Provide direct links to services in online content.




Minimise details about method and location

Studies have shown that explicit or technical descriptions and images of methods or locations used for suicide have been linked to increased rates of suicide. Some recommendations are provided below.

Issue 	Options to Consider 
Reporting explicit detail about method has been linked to increases in both use of that method and overall suicide rates.	 If it is important to mention the method, discuss in general terms only. <i>e.g. Use 'cocktail of drugs' instead of detailing the type and quantity of medications taken.</i>
Reporting uncommon or new methods of suicide can lead to imitation as well as a lasting impact on rates.	 Remove specific details about new or unusual methods of suicide and references to ways further information can be obtained about these methods. <i>e.g. online.</i>
Describing locations of suicide may promote these to vulnerable people and increase the frequency of attempts at these sites.	 If it is important to refer to a location, describe this in general terms only. <i>e.g. Use 'at a nearby park' instead of detailing the exact location.</i> In advocacy stories (e.g. around safety at a specific site) limit the number of times the location is described in detail or mentioned in each report.
Images or footage that depicts the method or location of a suicide can lead to imitation by vulnerable people.	 Avoid the use of detailed or dramatic photographs or footage. <i>e.g. Images of people standing on ledges or of implements used in a suicide attempt.</i>

Consider the language you use

Certain ways of describing suicide can alienate members of the community or inadvertently contribute to suicide being presented as glamorous or an option for dealing with problems. Some suggestions are provided below.

Issue 	Problematic 	Preferred 
Language that presents suicide as a desired outcome.	'successful suicide', 'unsuccessful suicide'	'took their own life', 'ended their own life', 'died by suicide'
Phrases that associate suicide with 'crime' or 'sin'	'committed suicide', 'commit suicide'	'died by suicide', 'took their own life'
Language that glamorises a suicide attempt	'failed suicide', 'suicide bid'	'made an attempt on his life', 'suicide attempt', 'non-fatal attempt'
Phrases that sensationalise suicide	'suicide epidemic'	'higher rates', 'increasing rates', 'concerning rates'
Gratuitous use of the term 'suicide' out of context	'suicide mission', 'political suicide', 'suicide pass' (in sport)	refrain from using the term suicide out of context

Further advice can be found by visiting the [Mindframe website](#) or contacting:

- The *Mindframe* project team Tel: 02 4924 6904 (0427 227 503); Email: mindframe@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au; Twitter: [@MindframeMedia](https://twitter.com/MindframeMedia).
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