

## 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?



### 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 
Language that presents suicide as a desired outcome <sup>31</sup>	'successful suicide', 'unsuccessful suicide'	'took their own life', 'ended their own life', 'died by suicide'
Phrases that associate suicide with 'crime' or 'sin' <sup>32</sup>	'committed suicide', 'commit suicide'	'died by suicide', 'took their own life'
Language that glamourises a suicide attempt <sup>33</sup>	'failed suicide', 'suicide bid'	'made an attempt on his life', 'suicide attempt', 'non-fatal attempt'
Phrases that sensationalise suicide <sup>34</sup>	'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

## 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 
Reporting explicit detail about method has been linked to increases in both use of that method and overall suicide rates. <sup>45</sup>	→ 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. <sup>46</sup>	→ 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. <sup>47</sup>	→ 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. <sup>48</sup>	→ 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>

## 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