Whether you are sharing a personal experience, asked to do an interview, or want to promote suicide prevention, what are the best ways to talk to media about suicide?

Suicide is a legitimate issue for the media to cover. It is, however, a complex issue to convey. Although it is important to talk about suicide as individuals and communities, this is not the same as one-way mass communication through the media.

In Australia, the Mindframe National Media Initiative provides comprehensive guidance on media portrayals of mental illness and suicide. The following fact sheet is based on information available via the Mindframe resources.

NOTE: For further information on how media report suicide, see Supporting Fact Sheet: Suicide and the media, available at www.conversationsmatter.com.au

Research has shown that the way suicide is reported in the media is important. While some styles of reporting have been linked to increased rates of suicide, appropriate reporting may be helpful.

You may be wondering how you can interact with media to get a suicide prevention message across or to share your experience. 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. This resource provides some basic information for those who are considering participating in a media story or interview about suicide.

How do I talk to media about suicide or suicide prevention?

Just as media are encouraged to consider accurate, appropriate and sensitive reporting of suicide, you can also prepare yourself for interacting with the media by taking into consideration the following points:

Consider language and context

Certain ways of talking about suicide can alienate members of the community, sensationalise the issue or inadvertently contribute to suicide being presented as glamorous or an option for dealing with problems. People who are vulnerable to or bereaved by suicide can be particularly impacted by language.

Avoid detail of method and location

Detailed descriptions of methods or locations of suicide have been linked in media studies to increased rates of suicide by that method or at the location mentioned. Avoid discussing specific details and, at the very least, only mention them in general terms (see examples on the next page). If your focus is on advocacy, such as reduction or highlighting ‘hotspot’ locations, it can be challenging to manage in your communications. The same level of caution should still be considered. Consider any cultural protocols regarding naming of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has died.
It is perfectly fine to decline an interview. If you’re not sure, you might want to ask yourself some questions to see if you are prepared for the experience:

- If the interview is regarding a death, how much time has passed since the event? Grief and bereavement can make it difficult to collect your thoughts and contribute in a meaningful way. If you don’t feel ready, let the journalist know you wish to delay your response or would rather not be interviewed;
- What are you prepared to share about yourself and your story and what would you like to remain private?
- Do you want your photograph and name (or that of your loved ones) to appear in the newspaper or online, or your face to be shown on television?

When preparing for an interview, one way to become clearer about which parts of your story to tell is to follow these steps:

- **STEP 1:** Write out your story in full
- **STEP 2:** Go back and take out any information that you would not want everyone you have ever met, or will ever meet, to know about you
- **STEP 3:** Take out any references to specific details about method or location of a suicide attempt or death
- **STEP 4:** Highlight those parts of your story that support help-seeking, hope and understanding and identifying risk factors and warning signs.

**Refer media to relevant guidelines**

When discussing suicide in the media, **always** refer journalists to the Mindframe media guidelines at [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

Ask that a 24-hour crisis support service is added to ensure anyone potentially distressed can seek immediate help.

**Examples of 24-hour crisis support services:**
- **Lifeline** 13 11 14
- **Suicide Call Back Service** 1300 65 94 67
- **Kids Helpline** 1800 55 18 00
- **MensLine Australia** 1300 78 99 78

Link media to crisis support contacts for media stories (click the link below):
- [Help-seeking Information for Stories about Suicide](#)

**What if I’m asked to be interviewed?**

When asked to do an interview, you should carefully consider which parts of your personal experience match the type of media you will be working with, the theme of the journalist’s story, the type of audience that you will be speaking to and the impact of your story – on you, your loved ones and the audience.

For example, you could say:

- **“Local lookout”**
- **“Cocktail of drugs”**

**Instead of:**

- **“The Smith Bridge”**
- **“He took 1000mg of (specific medications)”**

Supporting Factsheet: How to talk to media about suicide  conversationsmatter.com.au
How do I prepare for an interview?

Once you are sure you’re ready to work with the media, you will need to prepare. Preparation boosts confidence and the ability to focus on what should be communicated.

Some things to consider include:

- Ask questions: In particular, what topics does the journalist want to talk about and why? This helps to decide what key messages you choose.
- Develop some key messages to communicate during the interview.
- Think about the words you want to use and remember the recommendations for appropriate language.
- Think about the type of media – do the media want short ‘news grabs’ or longer interviews?
- Practice responses at least 2-3 times and avoid ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’.
- Have in mind a few key facts or examples that are relevant to your story.
- Let your family and friends know that you are doing the interview and make sure you have someone you can go to for support afterwards (see ‘Look after yourself’ below).

It is best to participate in an interview or public speaking event if you:

- Are able to manage your feelings and aren’t likely to become angry or upset.
- Have enough time to prepare.
- Are currently well, and believe that becoming involved will not cause you any difficulty.
- Have decided what you will and will not share about yourself and your story.
- Have good support.
- Feel confident about talking to the media about the topic.
- Feel your right to privacy will be respected.
- Are comfortable about the effect your involvement may have on your family or community.

What do I do during the interview?

Regardless of whether the interview is for radio, television or print media, here are some tips to help you get through any type of interview:

- Speak in short, clear sentences containing the key messages.
- Pause before answering each question, and then respond.
- Use plain and straightforward language.
- Use your own words rather than ones the journalist uses - this helps to stay focused on the key messages.
- Avoid over-talking. You do not need to keep the conversation going. Simply answer the question asked and wait for the next one.
- Stay calm at all times, take 2 to 3 breaths and speak slowly. It’s ok if you need to take a break now and then.
- Try to keep messages constructive – remember to focus on help-seeking, hope and resilience. If you are discussing the loss of a loved one, focusing on the loss and wastefulness of the act can be helpful to vulnerable people in your audience.
- Be respectful and polite.
- Nothing is ‘off the record’. Be prepared for anything to be included in the final story.

Tips for handling tricky questions:

- Ask the interviewer to explain any questions you do not understand.
- Instead of saying ‘no comment’, say you are unable to answer their question and tell them why, e.g. “I am not the best person to talk about that.”
- Make general reference to the question and then refer back to one of your key messages.
- Stay calm and polite, but do not answer questions you are not comfortable with.
What happens after the interview?

- Take time to think about how the interview went and what was good or uncomfortable about the experience
- Make some notes about what you would do the same or differently next time you are interviewed
- Create an opportunity to debrief about the interview
- Be aware that there are no guarantees in the media. The story may be much shorter than first planned or than expected despite the length of the interview. This may happen for a number of reasons – it has nothing to do with what you have done or not done.

Look after yourself

Talking about a complex issue such as suicide can be draining.

You may be affected by your experience and need to speak with someone or access support services. Monitor your own responses and seek help if you need it.

Talk to someone you trust, such as a friend or relative, your GP or a counsellor, or you can access one of the following services:

**Lifeline**
24-hour national telephone crisis counselling service – 13 11 14
Online counselling service, further information and service finder – [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Suicide Call Back Service**
24-hour national telephone counselling service for people 18 years and over who are suicidal or bereaved by suicide - 1300 659 467
Online counselling service, grief and loss program and resources about bereavement [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

**StandBy** - Support after Suicide
A 24-hour coordinated community response service to families, friends and communities who have been bereaved through suicide - [www.standbysupport.com.au](http://www.standbysupport.com.au)

**Support After Suicide**
Information and resources and group support for those bereaved by suicide – [www.supportaftersuicide.org.au](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au)

Links to further information

Information within this fact sheet aligns with resources provided to the Australian media on reporting suicide by the Mindframe National Media Initiative:
– [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

You can keep up to date with new developments and activities by registering your interest on the Conversations Matter website in the form at the bottom of the website homepage:

For further information on how media generally report suicide, see the Supporting Fact Sheet: Suicide and the media, available at [www.conversationsmatter.com.au](http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au)

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