

SUICIDE CONTENT GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING AND SHARING
OF SUICIDE-RELATED CONTENT



MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA

CONTENT
FORUM





COMMUNICATIONS AND MULTIMEDIA CONTENT FORUM OF MALAYSIA

Guidelines for Reporting and Sharing of Suicide-Related Content

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DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This guideline was developed through a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process led by the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (Content Forum). Recognizing the sensitivity and impact of suicide-related content, the document was shaped through multiple phases of research, drafting, and consultation.

The development process involved:

A. A Dedicated Working Group

The working group brought together representatives from various sectors including media, academia, advocacy, mental health, and government. The core team that contributed to the development of this guideline included Assistant Professor Chan Wen Li, Associate Professor Dr. Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim, Dr. Chern Choong Thum, Dr. Kiranjit Kaur, Dr. Ng Yin Ping, Dr. Ravivarma Rao Panirselvam, Mr. Claudian Navin Stanislaus, Mr. Norman Goh, Ms. Amalia Mohd Suhaimi, Ms. Mediha Mahmood, and Professor Dr. Chan Lai Fong.

Working group members included representatives from Astro, i-Life Suicide Prevention Association of Penang, Malaysian Advertisers Association, Media Prima Group, Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Health, National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health, National Council of Women's Organisations, The Outdoor Advertising Association of Malaysia, Star Media Group Berhad, Star Media Radio Group, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA, and University of Nottingham Malaysia, alongside individuals with lived experience whose contributions ensured the guidelines remained grounded, empathetic, and relevant.

B. Reference to International Guidelines and Best Practices

The development of this guideline was informed by a review of international frameworks and best practices related to suicide reporting and content sharing. These included established guidelines and codes of practice from countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, and Canada, all of which have taken proactive steps in ensuring responsible media and online content practices around suicide. These documents provided valuable insight into the effectiveness of language framing, privacy considerations, and platform-specific recommendations. In adapting these international models, care was taken to ensure the final guideline remained relevant to the Malaysian cultural, legal, and media landscape, while aligning with global standards on ethical communication.

C. Nationwide Public Consultations

To ensure the guideline was reflective of local needs and challenges, public consultations were held nationwide. These sessions involved a wide range of stakeholders including media professionals, content creators, advocacy groups, academics, mental health experts, and members of the public. Input was gathered through both virtual and in-person sessions, as well as written submissions. Participants shared insights on real-world newsroom practices, digital content challenges, cultural sensitivities, and gaps in awareness of suicide-related harms. This participatory approach helped to strengthen the relevance, clarity, and practicality of the guideline.

This document reflects a collective commitment to ethical, compassionate, and responsible communication around suicide-related content. It embodies the shared efforts of professionals from media, academia, government, civil society, and individuals with lived experience; each contributing their unique perspectives to ensure that the guidelines are not only principled, but practical and actionable.

Above all, this guideline is intended to foster a culture of thoughtful and responsible engagement, where sensitive topics are handled with the care they deserve—and where media and online content play a constructive role in suicide prevention, public education, and societal support.

SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION



Importance of Ethical Reporting and Sharing of Suicide-Related Content

Reporting and sharing suicide-related content carry a profound responsibility due to its significant impact on public perception and behaviour. The way suicide is discussed in the media and on social platforms can influence societal attitudes towards mental health and suicide. Ethical and responsible handling of such content is crucial to ensuring that the information disseminated contributes positively to public awareness and safety.

- **Preventing Imitative Suicides**

One of the most critical reasons for ethical reporting is the prevention of imitative suicides, also known as the "Werther Effect." When media coverage of suicide includes detailed descriptions of the method, sensational headlines, or graphic images, it can lead to a rise in similar incidents among vulnerable individuals. By avoiding sensationalism and graphic details, media professionals and social media users can help reduce the risk of these copycat suicides. Responsible reporting involves focusing on the facts without unnecessary embellishment and avoiding the glorification of the act.

- **Promoting Help-Seeking Behaviour**

Ethical reporting also plays a vital role in promoting help-seeking behaviour and has a protective effect known as the "Papageno effect". By including information about warning signs, helplines, and mental health resources, and by emphasizing coping with adversity and paths to survival rather than solely focusing on suicidal behaviours, reports on suicide can serve as a gateway for those in distress to seek the help they need. Highlighting stories of recovery and providing positive messages can encourage individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts to reach out for support. The inclusion of contact information for crisis intervention services and mental health professionals is a simple yet powerful way to provide immediate support to those who might be at risk.

- **Enhancing Public Awareness and Education**

Beyond immediate prevention and intervention, ethical reporting enhances overall public awareness about suicide prevention. Educating the public about the complexity of suicide, the importance of mental health, and the availability of resources can lead to a more informed and compassionate society. This guideline aims to foster a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to suicide and the multifaceted approaches needed to address it. By promoting awareness, media and social media can contribute to destigmatizing mental health issues and encouraging a culture of openness and support.

- **Supporting Media Professionals and Social Media Users**

This guideline is designed to assist both media professionals and social media users in managing suicide-related content responsibly and ethically. Media professionals, including journalists, editors, and broadcasters, have a significant influence on public opinion and behaviour. By adhering to these guidelines, they can ensure that their reporting is both accurate and compassionate. Similarly, social media users, who often share news and personal reflections on their platforms, play a crucial role in shaping online discourse. By following these principles, they can contribute to a safer and more supportive online environment.

SECTION 2 : OBJECTIVES

Practical Guidance Covering a Wide Spectrum of Areas

- I. This guideline provides practical advice on various aspects of suicide reporting and content sharing. They cover a wide spectrum of areas, including language use, headline writing, ethical considerations when interviewing bereaved families, and the use of imagery. The goal is to equip media professionals and social media users with the knowledge and tools they need to handle suicide-related content with the care and responsibility it deserves. These guidelines can also serve as a reference for others involved in content creation.
- II. By adhering to these principles, we can collectively contribute to a more informed, compassionate, and proactive approach to discussing suicide, ultimately aiding in prevention efforts and offering support to those in need.
- III. This guideline serves as a resource for ensuring that the stories we tell and the content we share about suicide are handled with the utmost respect and sensitivity, with the aim of achieving the following objectives:
 - To reduce the risk of imitative suicides through responsible reporting
 - To increase public awareness about suicide prevention, available resources, and alternative coping strategies
 - To provide ethical guidelines for media professionals and social media users when handling suicide-related content

SECTION 3 : GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL PLATFORMS

This section outlines essential principles for creating and sharing content related to suicide. It provides detailed instructions to guide ethical and responsible reporting on suicide-related topics. By following these guidelines, media professionals and content creators can minimize harm, protect the privacy and dignity of individuals, and promote public awareness and suicide prevention. The aim is to encourage balanced and compassionate coverage that fosters greater understanding and contributes to a more informed and supportive society.

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Part A. General Principles

I. Accuracy, Ethical and Sensitivity

- **Ensure Accuracy**

It is crucial to verify all information before publishing to avoid the spread of misinformation. Accurate reporting is fundamental to maintaining public trust and journalistic integrity, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like suicide. This process involves a thorough fact-checking procedure, where journalists must consult multiple reliable sources to confirm the accuracy of the information.

Reliable sources for verifying information include official reports from authorities, verified statements from credible witnesses, and corroborative data from trusted organizations. These sources provide the factual foundation needed for accurate reporting. To strengthen the credibility of the guidelines, all statistics cited should be accompanied by proper references or footnotes to ensure transparency and allow readers to verify the information.

Additionally, editorial discretion is crucial when handling this information to ensure that no harmful aspects, such as distressing details or speculative elements, are inadvertently reported. By carefully selecting and presenting information from these reliable sources, journalists can maintain accuracy while minimizing the risk of causing additional harm or distress. This approach upholds the integrity of the report and ensures that it serves the public interest responsibly.

- **Sensitive Reporting**

Report on suicide with empathy and sensitivity towards the affected families and survivors, acknowledging their grief and avoiding sensationalism. Use respectful language and focus on the deceased's life and contributions rather than the manner of death.

Understand that media coverage can deeply impact those left behind. Sensitive reporting helps reduce the distress of bereaved families and survivors, fostering a supportive environment. Avoid intrusive questions or comments that might exacerbate their pain.

- **Cultural and Religious Sensitivities**

When reporting on suicide, it is important to consider the cultural and religious beliefs surrounding suicide and death. Different communities hold varying perspectives on these topics, making it essential to approach them with respect and empathy. Suicide remains stigmatized in many cultures, which can make open discussions challenging. Content creators should be aware of this stigma and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes or misconceptions.

II. Minimize Harm

- **Avoid Sensationalism**

Refrain from sensationalizing or glamorizing suicide, as this can have harmful consequences. Sensationalism involves the use of dramatic language, vivid imagery, and excessive detail that can capture the audience's attention in a way that is more harmful than informative. It is crucial to avoid any content that could be interpreted as making suicide seem heroic, romantic, or a viable solution to problems. This includes avoiding narratives that portray the deceased in an overly heroic light, describing their death in a way that seems romantic or glorified, or implying that their actions were justified or noble. It is important to present the facts in a straightforward, respectful manner that acknowledges the tragedy without adding unnecessary drama or romanticism.

- **Prevent Imitation**

Be mindful of the risk of copycat suicides, particularly among vulnerable populations such as young people or those with existing mental health issues. When reporting on suicide, it is crucial to avoid providing specific details about the methods used. Detailed descriptions of the methods can serve as a blueprint and inadvertently encourage imitative behaviour among individuals who are already at risk. Instead, focus on the broader context of the incident, such as underlying mental health conditions or the importance of seeking professional help.

III. Respect for Privacy

- **Confidentiality**

Respect the privacy of the deceased and their families by not publishing unnecessary personal details, such as the deceased's name, age, address or any identifying information unless absolutely necessary. Such information is often unnecessary for the public to understand the broader context of the event and can be omitted without compromising the report's integrity.

Avoiding specific personal details minimizes the risk of sensationalizing the story, which can lead to public speculation and unwarranted attention. The media should prioritize the public interest and ethical responsibility to report respectfully and sensitively. By practising this, they are not only protecting the privacy of the family during their grief, but also protecting themselves and their organizations from legal issues while maintaining ethical standards in suicide reporting.

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- **Dignity**

Ensure that all reporting is conducted with the utmost respect for the deceased and their loved ones, maintaining a tone of dignity and compassion. Use sensitive and respectful language that honours the deceased's memory without sensationalizing or trivializing the event. This involves being mindful of the language and tone used throughout the coverage to avoid causing additional distress to grieving families and friends.

Avoid graphic descriptions or details that may be disturbing or unnecessary. Consider the feelings and perspectives of the deceased's loved ones when crafting the report. This includes avoiding speculation about the reasons behind the suicide and refraining from publishing personal details that could invade their privacy. Obtain consent from the family before using any personal stories, quotes, or images, and respect their wishes if they prefer to remain private.

IV. Legal and Ethical Considerations

When reporting on suicide, content creators should not only adhere to ethical guidelines but also remain mindful of relevant legal frameworks. These include laws related to privacy, defamation, and the protection of minors as well as laws governing content both online and offline. Failure to comply may lead to legal consequences, while sensationalized or inappropriate reporting could violate media regulations or community standards.

Ethical, legally compliant reporting not only protects individuals but also fosters public well-being. Content creators are therefore obligated to navigate these complexities responsibly, ensuring their coverage of suicide-related topics respects the law and maintains sensitivity toward affected communities.

V. Addressing Online Challenges in Suicide Coverage

Reporting on suicide in the digital age presents significant challenges, particularly in addressing harmful content, curbing its spread, and collaborating with online service providers to remove sensitive material. Harmful content can rapidly circulate online, potentially impacting vulnerable individuals and perpetuating stigma.

While many platforms have policies for managing harmful content, the consistency and effectiveness of policy enforcement may vary, and delays in the removal process can pose additional challenges. Everyone is encouraged to familiarize themselves with platform-specific reporting mechanisms to help facilitate the timely removal of inappropriate content. Advocating for enhanced transparency and effective content moderation practices can further support efforts to address existing limitations and promote safer digital spaces.

Additionally, references should be made to existing laws such as the Communications and Multimedia Act and the Penal Code, as well as future legislation aimed at addressing harmful online content. These laws serve as critical frameworks to support the moderation and regulation of harmful materials in the digital landscape.

Part B. Method and Location

Avoid Detailed Descriptions

- Detailed descriptions can contribute to imitative behaviour among vulnerable individuals and can give at-risk individuals ideas on how to harm themselves. Excessive details may also trigger vulnerable individuals to identify with the deceased, intensifying their own distress and reinforcing the idea that suicide is an option. Refrain from providing explicit details about the method, image, description, details about the nature, quantity or combination of drugs taken or how they were obtained.

Example: Instead of writing, "The individual committed suicide by hanging themselves in their home," write, "The individual died by suicide."

- Avoid reporting details on the exact location of the suicide (including displaying images of them or naming them) or potential "suicide site" such as a bridge, a tall building, a cliff or a railway station or level crossing, where deaths by suicide or suicide attempts have occurred.

Example: If referring to a location, describe this in general terms only, such as use 'at a nearby park' instead of detailing the exact location. Never use arrow to pinpoint exact locations, and labelling them as "hotspots".

Part C. Understand the Complexity of Suicide

Consider The Multiple Factors

Suicide is always influenced by multiple factors coming together in a person's life. Simplifying the reasons for suicide can make vulnerable individuals with similar situations may identify with the person who died, and potentially increase their suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Example: Avoid highlighting one single event or imply the suicide was the result of a single cause such as loss of a job, relationship breakdown, bereavement in the family, debt problem, and the like.

Part D. Present Current Suicide News Independently

Focus on reporting the current suicide event and avoid making unsubstantiated links when there are none. Do not refer to others who have died recently by using names or photographs or reporting they died at the same location. This can unintentionally link the deaths and can be misleading and distressing to families.

Part E. Include Warning Signs and Resources

All content that discusses suicide or mental health should include helpline information at the end to provide immediate support for individuals who may be affected. Additional information within the report may include information on warning signs of suicide, resources for help, mental health services, and crisis intervention resources. Educating the public on the warning signs of suicide and where to seek help can prevent future tragedies.

Example: "If you or someone you know is struggling, contact Talian HEAL at 15555 or Talian Kasih at 15999 or WhatsApp at 019-261 5999".

Part F. Highlight Prevention and Recovery

Balance reports by including stories of hope, recovery, and effective treatments. Emphasize that help is available and that many people recover from suicidal crises. Positive stories can encourage those in distress to seek help and highlight that recovery is possible.

Example: Share stories of individuals who have successfully sought help and are in recovery.

Part G. Obtain Consent

Media should obtain consent from families when reporting on suicide-related cases; however, it is best to refrain from publishing any accompanying statements to avoid linking the family to the deceased. Additionally, no identifying details of the individual who died by suicide should be disclosed to protect their privacy and dignity.

Always obtain explicit consent from family members before conducting interviews or using personal photos. Respecting their wishes is crucial to ethical journalism. Seeking consent demonstrates respect for the grieving process and the privacy of the family. While it might be newsroom policy to use/pull photos or video from Facebook, Weibo, QZone, Google Images, YouTube, Instagram, X, or Snapchat for a “regular” story, in the case of a suicide, explicit permission should be obtained from the family members so as not to cause further distress.

Example: Ensure documented consent before publishing interviews or images of the deceased.

Part H. Placement

Avoid publishing news on the front pages or homepage of a website. Placing suicide-related stories in a prominent position can result in glamorizing or sensationalizing death by suicide.

Example: In newspapers, stories relating to suicide should be displayed on the inside pages and ideally on the bottom left of the page to avoid prominence. When reporting in broadcasts suicide stories should feature after the second or third break.

Part I. Images

Avoid using graphic images of the deceased or the location of the suicide. Graphic images can be distressing and trigger harmful behaviour among vulnerable individuals. Even altering an image, such as blurring a picture or showing only part of the deceased’s body, remains disrespectful and invasive. Such portrayals can still cause distress to viewers and compound the grief of affected families. Instead, opt for symbolic images that convey hope, support, or raise awareness in a sensitive and respectful manner.

I. Use a diverse range of images

Representation is important. People are more likely to connect with information and support when they can relate and feel welcome. Use a diverse range of images, including:

- Ages and genders
- Cultures and ethnicities
- Relationships (e.g. couples, family groups, friendships, colleagues)
- Body shapes and sizes
- Geographies (e.g. metropolitan, rural or remote)

II. Use images of people who have personal or lived experience only with their knowledge and permission

It is important media include personal stories or comments from people with lived or living experience in communications, and this can often include use of their images. Including a lived experience perspective can:

- Improve community understanding
- Reduce fear, shame and stigma
- Increase understanding of the challenges experienced by someone with lived experience
- Encourage people to seek support early for themselves and others they care about

Images of people who have personal or lived experience should only be used with their knowledge and permission. This includes use of images that may have been shared in other locations such as social media profiles. People should be able to withdraw permission for use of their image. When seeking permission, clear information should be provided about:

- The way the image will be used, including the risks and benefits of their participation
- How, where or for how long the image will be used

III. Use images that model hope or support

Images can support positive or prevention-focused messages in communication. Images that focus on offering or seeking help, for instance, can provide a model to others for how to get through a difficult time. Other images may encourage activities that can reduce risk factors or increase protective factors, such as social connection. Images that model hope and support include:

- Images that depict people's journeys and experiences as a process rather than an end point
- Images that show or encourage resilience
- People in the company of others rather than alone

Images that can encourage people to seek or offer support include:

- People accessing support from relevant and available services
- People receiving support from friends, family or other social connections

IV. Consider images used as they can be helpful or harmful depending on the context

Media and other communicators can play a powerful role in raising awareness of suicide and suicide prevention. Some ways of communicating about suicide, however, have the potential to do harm. To reduce the risk of suicide or self-harm, images included in general communication should avoid showing methods of suicide in any way. This includes:

- Images of specific locations where suicides have occurred
- Illustrations, diagrams or photos of implements that may be used in self-harm or suicide
- Design elements or patterns that could indicate a method of suicide (e.g., patterns that look like rope)
- Details about problematic websites or places where people can access details about methods of suicide
- Images focused on a method of suicide (e.g. tree branch, rope, cliff edge)
- Images focused on locations where suicides could occur (e.g. cliff edges, bridges, tall buildings)



Examples of images that convey support and hope

Part J. Headlines and Leads

I. Non-Sensational Headlines

Ensure headlines are factual and do not sensationalize the event. Avoid dramatic language that can evoke strong emotional reactions. Sensational headlines can lead to imitative behavior and unnecessary distress among readers.

Example: "Community Mourns Loss and Seeks Awareness on Mental Health" instead of "Tragic Suicide Rocks Community."

II. Balanced Reporting

Provide a balanced view of the individual's life and contributions, not just their death. Highlight their achievements and positive aspects of their life. Highlighting the full life of the individual prevents reducing them to their manner of death and provides a more respectful portrayal.

Example: Include achievements, contributions, and positive aspects of the individual's life.

Part K. Narrative

A narrative that emphasizes hope and recovery can help build resilience, and change perceptions towards suicide. Many people who have successfully navigated a suicidal crisis or other challenges are eager to share their coping strategies, hope, and recovery stories with a broader audience.

- **Encourage Open Discussions**

Emphasize that everyone faces challenges, highlight the importance of sharing mental health experiences, and encourage connecting with others for support.

- **Avoid Portraying Individuals as Heroes**

When focusing on one person, avoid making them seem like a hero or miracle case, as this can feel unattainable for those in crisis.

- **Sharing Different Recovery Stories**

Highlight different stories of people living with suicidal thoughts and finding a fulfilling life after a suicide attempt. Featuring multiple people who have navigated crises can help readers and viewers from various backgrounds connect with and relate to different stories.

- **Promote Suicide Prevention Efforts**

Provide national and regional suicide prevention programs and non-governmental organizations support to educate the public about suicide prevention efforts and resources. Every article discussing suicide should include a footnote with helpline information, highlighting their role as a vital lifeline for those in distress. Emphasizing the availability and benefits of these services can encourage help-seeking and connect individuals to the support they need.

- **Evaluate the Framing of the Report**

The overall framing of the content plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's impression. Even when covering difficult or tragic topics, the report should strive to leave the audience with a sense of hope, encouragement, and empowerment. Beyond including helpful resources at the end, ensure that the article concludes on a constructive and positive note, reinforcing that support is available and recovery is possible. A well-framed report can promote the Papageno effect—where responsible coverage helps reduce suicidal thoughts by presenting stories of resilience and overcoming adversity.

Part I. Language

It is important that language about suicide is careful and factual. The inappropriate use of language when describing suicide can have a significant impact on people who have experienced suicide, especially those experiencing emotional distress and/or suicidal crisis.

Instead of saying	Do say	Why
'committed' or 'commit suicide'	'died by suicide' or 'ended his/her/their own life'	To avoid association between suicide and 'crime' or 'sin' that may alienate some people.
'unsuccessful suicide'	'non-fatal' or 'made an attempt on his/her/ their life'	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome or glamourising a suicide attempt.
'successful suicide'	'took their own life', 'died by suicide' or 'ended their own life'	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome.
'suicide epidemic'	'concerning rates of suicide'	To avoid sensationalism and inaccuracy.
'they are in a better place now', 'their suffering has ended'	'suicide attempt' or 'suicide death'	Glamorising suicide can influence vulnerable people to think it is appealing and may lead to contagion.
'mental patient', 'nutter', 'lunatic', 'psycho', 'schizo', 'deranged', 'mad'	A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' mental illness	Certain language sensationalises mental illness and reinforces stigma.
'victim', 'suffering from' or 'affected with' a mental illness	A person is 'being treated for', or 'someone with a mental illness'	Terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness.
'psychotic dog', using 'schizophrenic' to denote duality such as 'schizophrenic economy'	Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or media terminology incorrectly or out of context	Terminology used out of context adds to misunderstanding and trivialises mental illness.
A person is 'a schizophrenic', 'an anorexic'	A person 'has a diagnosis of' or 'is being treated for...'	Labelling a person by their mental illness.
'crazed', 'deranged', 'mad', 'psychotic'	The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic	Descriptions of behaviour that imply existence of mental illness or are inaccurate.
'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution'	Antidepressants, psychiatrists or psychologists, mental health hospital	Colloquialisms about treatment can undermine people's willingness to seek help.

Table 1: Example of appropriate language

Part M. Infographic Content

When it comes to including visual content in news stories about suicide, it is important to consider the reason.

- **Visual Statistics**

When using visual statistics, make sure they come from a trustworthy source. If using trend data within a story be aware that statistical blips in suicide rates may occur from one year to the next. This can be especially true if focusing on the number of suicides in small geography areas. It is best to look at timeframes of three or more years to identify significant patterns, for example increases in suicide rates for particular groups.

- **Problems and Solutions**

Do not use images that over simplify or glorify, such as cartoons. Avoid images of locations including maps that may indicate the place of death.

- **Judgment**

Use judgment when considering using infographics such as tweets and other social media posts.

SECTION 4 : SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Part A. Specific Guidelines for Media Practitioners and Publishers

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While the general guidelines establish a foundation for responsible reporting and sharing of suicide-related content, it is essential to recognize the distinct roles and responsibilities of different content creators. This section provides specific guidance tailored to journalists, influencers, filmmakers, and other content creators, focusing on the unique challenges they encounter and the opportunities they have to approach this sensitive topic responsibly.

I. Interviewing Victims of Tragedy, Witnesses, and Survivors

The most important element, and a cross-cutting component, is proper care and security, which includes ensuring the safety of those being interviewed to avoid re-victimizing them, protecting information, ensuring the safety of colleagues, and maintaining your own personal safety.

Before attempting any interviews, reflect on the story you want to tell:

- Is it necessary to delve into a private tragedy to report on it?
- What will you achieve?
- If your story requires interviewing a victim or survivor?

Once you establish that your story needs to include an interview, here are some recommendations:

a) Identify Yourself as A Journalist

Always introduce yourself as a journalist unless it is unsafe to do so. Do not use information from someone who did not agree to be interviewed for publication. Tell them why you want to talk with them. If they are open to an interview, then proceed. If not, then leave your contact information with them and ask them to contact you anytime if they would like to talk. Bear in mind you cannot use information directly attributed to someone who did not agree to give an interview for publication.

b) Make Time for The Interview

If you are short on time, let the interviewee know and limit yourself to basic questions without going into the details of a traumatic event. Don't limit your questions to asking just about what happened, also ask about the interviewee's well-being such as how they are coping, how the experience of the tragedy affected them, and how they lived through it.

c) Look For an Appropriate Interview Setting

Conduct interviews in a private, quiet, and safe place. Avoid situations where children might overhear the conversation as they might be affected by what they hear.

d) Decide Whether to Record or Take Notes

Ask the interviewee if they are comfortable being recorded. If using a notepad, maintain eye contact. Ensure technical preparations are in place to avoid interruptions. Remember to create a backup. If the testimony is crucial, like the first statement of a witness or survivor who hasn't spoken before, recording is essential; it can serve as judicial evidence or be used by a truth commission for investigation.

e) Prepare The Interviewee

Explain the topics to be covered, the purpose of the interview and what you hope to achieve. This allows the interviewee to prepare emotionally, so they don't feel attacked by questions, do not have different expectations of your work, and have a fair chance of deciding if they can — or want — to speak with you.

f) Yield Control

Inform the interviewee they have control over the interview. They can choose not to answer questions, take breaks, or end the interview if they feel overwhelmed. They may also request you not to reveal potentially risky information.

g) Consider Your Questions

Interviewing someone who has experienced a traumatic event requires empathy and imagining yourself in their situation. Ask questions that invite open answers; this allows the victim to choose their own words. Check if they want a friend or family member present.

h) Make Visual Contact and Be an Attentive Listener

Maintain eye contact and minimize distractions to establish a connection with the interviewee. Focus on four aspects: what the interviewee is telling us, what is happening to them in the re-telling, what is happening around us (if daylight is dimming or you sense the presence of other people) and where the interview is headed.

i) Avoid Questions That Criminalize the Individual

Phrase questions to avoid placing blame. For instance, instead of asking, *"Didn't you feel guilty about how this affected your loved ones?"* ask, *"What kind of support, if any, was available to you during that time?"* or *"Were there any challenges in finding help when you needed it?"* The focus should remain on understanding their experience without suggesting fault, ensuring the interview is empathetic and respectful. Using specific words can make a difference in the interview and in how your interviewee responds.

j) Consider If Revisiting a Traumatic Moment Is Justified

Only delve into specific details about situations if necessary and with the interviewee's consent. Be delicate and allow for breaks. If your investigation doesn't need all those details, it is better to obtain a previous testimony given by the victim and quote it in your work. This kind of interview has to be conducted whenever the victim agrees and whenever it makes sense in the context of the work you are doing.

k) Consider Different Approaches to Understanding Trauma

Use creative methods to understand emotions, like poems, drawings, to avoid making the interviewee relive painful moments. Usually, dreams are so narratively powerful that you do not need to ask questions that could make them relive a traumatic moment.

l) React Calmly If the Person Shows Distress or Weeps

Stay calm and supportive if the interviewee becomes emotional. If an interviewee cries or expresses anger or rage, be aware that they may not want to be filmed with this level of vulnerability. Having the intense emotional reactions being recorded and broadcast or published can contribute to that memory being “locked” in the mind. Always remember the person is much more than what happened to them, or what they felt at the time that it happened. It may sound counter-intuitive to stop recording when a reaction is “newsworthy”, but you might find that what you lose in vision you make up for in the trust you build with your interviewee. Use your discretion as to whether to turn off recording equipment, but always follow an explicit request of the interviewee (remember regaining a sense of control of their life is the first step in return to safety). Ask what they need and offer some water. Do not overreact or push them to continue if they need a break. If the situation begins to get out of control and you feel in danger, subtly look for a way to leave.

m) Consider Resilience as You Conclude Your Interview

Open a space to consider resilience, where they can talk about what is possible, and about the strength of individuals and the importance of the collective struggle, rather than ending on a note of paralyzing sadness or trauma. When concluding an interview, journalists should express gratitude to the interviewee for their trust in sharing painful experiences. Exchange contact information, but avoid making promises you cannot keep or creating unrealistic expectations about the impact of the interview on their pursuit of justice.

n) Analyze All Possible Consequences

Consider the potential risks to the interviewee when publishing sensitive information. Discuss these risks with them and take steps to protect their identity if necessary.

o) Verify The Information

Traumatic events can impact memory. Verify details through thorough reporting and seek corroborating evidence to ensure accuracy. When interviewing, inform interviewee if you plan to conduct additional interviews to support, verify, or counter their testimony. If you interview the accused of having perpetrated the crime or want to include authorities' perspectives, ensure they do not have the final word. Remember, while verifying information is crucial, the primary rule in reporting on these topics is not to re-victimize the victim. They should be given the opportunity to respond to any counter-accusations before publication.

p) Using the Story

Before publishing or broadcasting the interview, allow the interviewee to review the quotes to ensure they are accurately represented. If the interviewee prefers to remain anonymous, let them review how they are described to avoid identification. Explain how and where the interview will be used, including online and on social media, and obtain consent. Inform the interviewee that news priorities may impact the scheduled publication or broadcast, and keep them informed of any changes.

II. Guidelines for Reporting Unusual Circumstances

Research has shown that media coverage on events like mass killings and homicidal bombings can contribute to contagion, leading to copycat behaviour. When such events involve suicide, high profile incidents such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, Aurora and Orlando, highlight the influence that reporting can have on vulnerable individuals. The way these events are framed and presented plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and potentially impacting future behavior. Responsible reporting is essential to minimize harm and prevent further incidents.

- **Reduce Media Attention**

Reduce the media attention on the perpetrators or reporting the perpetrators as models or heroes as other might identify with or be inspired to carry out similar acts.

Example: Instead of portraying the shooter as heroic, a victim, or a tortured soul, include witness statements describing what the shooter did in an objective manner.

- **Avoid Stereotyping**

Always highlight that majority of people who live with a mental health condition are non-violent. Those who carry out mass shootings oftentimes have not been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition, to avoid misunderstanding and prejudice of mental illness.

Example: Refrain from reporting that a mental illness caused the shooting, report that most who live with a mental health condition are non-violent and many factors contribute to a mass shooting.

- **Do Not Oversimplify**

Oversimplification or sensationalism that may inadvertently encourage individuals seeking notoriety.

Example: Do not say, "The deadliest incident since Columbine."

- **Focus on Victims and Community**

Report on victims and how communities and the nation can mobilize to support victims and prevent future shootings.

Example: Instead of speculating on a motive, talk about the victims and their stories. Focus on how the communities can help the survivors, their families – including families of the perpetrators to move forward and encourage people to seek help for themselves or others who might be at increased risk of harmful acts.

- **Show Sensitivity**

Remember that families, including those perpetrators, are deeply affected and traumatized by the incident. Show sensitivity when conducting interviews and reporting.

- **Restrain Imitation**

Use the perpetrator's photo sparingly and avoid putting photos that could encourage copycats.

Example: If using photos of the perpetrator, show only the face of the perpetrator and crop out weapons, uniforms (such as military style clothing) and other visual elements that might inspire others to imitate.

- **Use Appropriate Term**

Only some of the perpetrators may actually be suicidal, and the intent are to murder others. Therefore, it should not be described as a suicide attack or suicide bombing. Referring "homicidal bombings" (instead of "suicide bombings") or "mass killings" (instead of "murder suicide") would be more appropriate.

III. Guidelines for Reporting on Celebrity Suicides

Covering a celebrity suicide can be the job of both specialist and non-specialist journalists depending on the popularity and status of the person who has died. It is vital that the reporting of a celebrity suicide is treated with the same ethical, accurate and responsible reporting as non-celebrity suicides.

Reporting on Suicide

- **Be Responsible**

Do not glorify a celebrity's death as it could imply that society encourages suicide, thereby potentially promoting similar behaviour in others. Continuous coverage of celebrity suicide should be avoided as it can lead to an increase in suicides.

Example: Avoid placing stories on the front page or homepage of a news site, or presented as the lead bulletin.

- **Address the Complex Factors**

Refer to the wider issues associated with suicidal behaviour and highlight there is not one event or factor that leads someone to take their own life. Vulnerable people experiencing similar issues are more likely to over-identify with the deceased when a single reason is given for their death and can increase the likelihood of imitational behaviour.

Example: Refrain a headline that is suggesting a single suspected cause for the death.

- **Limit Details**

Refrain from reporting suicide method or location in detail. When the cause of death is not yet known, it is more appropriate to wait until the cause of death is known and to research the specific circumstances carefully, while also noting the complexity of suicide.

Example: If needed, report the location and method in general terms.

- **Emphasize Achievements**

Focus on the life achievements of the person who has died and its impact on family and friends. Highlight how their death as a preventable tragedy.

- **Focus on Positivity**

Report on celebrities who have managed to overcome their struggles and encourage people who are, or might become, distressed or suicidal to seek help. Stories involving celebrities and their mental health experiences should only be shared with their consent, ensuring their privacy is respected and their agency in how their story is presented is upheld.

Placement in Suicide Reporting

The reporting of a celebrity dying by suicide may receive more prominent news coverage and story placement due to the nature of the deceased and their impact on society. An information box, fact box or sidebar should always accompany any suicide story regarding a celebrity death.

IV. Guidelines for Reporting on Self-Harm

Self-harm is a deliberate act of self-inflicted injury intended to cause physical pain as a means of managing difficult emotions, or as a way of communicating distress to others, but not to result in death. Self-harm and suicide are distinct and separate acts although some people who self-harm are at an increased risk of suicide. Acts of self-harm should always be taken seriously as they can be physically dangerous and may indicate an underlying mental health issue.

- **Minimise Detailed Description of Methods**

If it is important to the story, discuss the method in general terms such as 'self-harm' or 'self-injury'. Explicit depictions of self-harm have been linked to copycat behaviour and methods of self-harm are often similar or the same as methods of suicide.

- **Ensure Accuracy and Balance**

Balanced reporting that provides insight into the realities of self-harm can increase community understanding and reduce the stigma associated with self-harm.

- **Reduce The Prominence of a Story**

Place a story on the inside pages of a newspaper or further down the order of broadcast reports and remove 'self-harm' from headlines. Consider what this may mean for your social media profiles and online stories. Suicide and self-harm are major public health concerns and are therefore very much in the public interest. Both topics are featured in factual television and documentaries. Viewers who are vulnerable can closely identify with the circumstances and characteristics of those who are featured in suicide stories, which can increase the risk of suicide contagion.

- **Take Care Not to Perpetuate Inaccurate Stereotypes**

This includes inaccurate stereotypes such as people self-harm to manipulate others or situations, seek attention, feign suicide, or belong to a subculture as these views can lead to negative community attitudes and stigma.

- **Use Appropriate Language**

Take care not to use colloquialisms or terminology out of context. Referring to self-harm as a 'fad' or 'phase' can minimise the seriousness of the issue. Separate a person from their behaviour, as using labels to describe people as 'cutters' or 'self-harmers' can lead to stigma.

- **Include Help-Seeking Information**

This provides support options for people who may be distressed or prompted to seek help following the story.

V. Guidelines for Reporting on Youth Suicides

It is important for journalists to be aware that young people are a particularly vulnerable audience in relation to media coverage of suicide and self-harm. Young people are at greater risk of suicide contagion and are more likely to be influenced by what they see and hear in the media than other age groups.

- **Avoid Sensational Coverage**

Over-reporting is a major issue with media coverage of suicides by young people. Aim for sensitive reporting that highlights the tragic loss of life without inadvertently romanticising or glorifying a suicide death.

Example: Avoid romanticised language, lots of images of the young person or young people who have died, outpourings of grief and memorials and often intense speculation about possible causes.

- **Refrain from Reporting on Suicide Method**

Do not include details of a suicide method as this can significantly increase the risk of imitational behaviour. Refrain from mentioning known methods of suicide (for example by hanging), but also steer clear of reporting new or novel methods.

Example: Avoid mentioning the known methods of suicide such as hanging as it can generate prolonged awareness of that particular method and reinforce perceptions that it is lethal, effective or easily available.

- **Use the Right Language and Tone**

Language and tone are very important. Refrain from using sensationalised language. Consider carefully whether it is necessary to include comments posted on social media sites, these can sometimes unintentionally romanticise suicidal behaviour.

Example: Refrain from publishing unhelpful comments such as "Heaven's gained another angel" and "You're at peace now."

- **Avoid Epidemic Terminology**

Avoid using terms like 'epidemic' or 'spate' to describe potential increases in suicide rates within specific locations or groups to prevent from additional suicides. Recognize that coincidences can occur, and two or more suicides among individuals with similar background, age, or live in a similar geographic area may not necessarily indicate a connection.

- **Do Not Speculate**

Avoid speculation around the causes of a young person's suicide. Publishing lots of photographs, outpourings of grief or messages about holding people to account for a death, for example directed at bullies, can increase the likelihood of other young people identifying with the person who has died and could lead to suicide contagion.

Example: When suicide is reported, never make direct links about causes as it will oversimplify suicide and this could affect other young people experiencing the same cause who may be feeling hopeless about their situation.

- **Encourage Help and Promote Awareness**

Remind your audience that suicide is preventable and encourage help-seeking behaviour by signposting to sources of support. Highlighting a story of a person seeking help and coming through a difficult time can serve as a powerful testimony to others that this is possible and can have a protective effect. This type of coverage can encourage people to seek help and has been linked to falls in suicide rates. Where possible refer to the wider issues associated with suicide, such as factors that contribute to the act – social, situational, and economic. Encourage conversations about mental health – discussion of such issues can lead to a greater understanding of suicide, including the signs that may indicate a person is struggling to cope and may need help.

VI. Guidelines for Reporting on Mass Killings

A mass killing is when a person kills other individuals, before taking their own life. The murder victim may be someone known to them or a stranger. It includes cases where individuals kill members of their family before taking their own lives, or where an individual murders a number of people in a public place, such as a school, before taking their own life. Additionally, mass killings can occur in the context of war or armed conflict, where large-scale loss of life may result from targeted attacks on civilians.

Mass killings are rare phenomenon but one which can attract an exceptional degree of media attention. The circumstances of these deaths can be dramatic and disturbing, reports should adhere to the general media guidelines. Extreme caution is required, since 'copycat' behaviour also applies to mass killings. Careful consideration should be given to the language used – terms like "terrorism" carry strong negative connotations and may not always be appropriate. Ensuring accurate, sensitive reporting is essential to avoid sensationalism and reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

- **Avoid Sensational Reporting**

When covering the events leading up to or during a mass killing, avoid sensationalizing or dramatizing the details. Research has shown that sensational reporting can contribute to imitative behaviour in others.

- **Be Considerate**

Approach victims, witnesses, and others affected by a mass killing with empathy and sensitivity. Understand that they may be deeply traumatized and may not be ready to speak immediately. If someone volunteers for an interview, ensure they understand the implications of their statements being published.

- **Be Empathetic**

Consider carefully whether reporting from the scene of a mass killing is necessary. Footage of the location may cause distress to relatives and neighbors who are already grappling with the aftermath of such a traumatic event.

- **Avoid Speculation**

When covering rapidly unfolding events, prioritize accuracy and avoid speculation. Clearly distinguish between witness statements and confirmed facts. Avoid speculating about the perpetrator's motives, as this can be extremely distressing for grieving families and potentially influence vulnerable individuals.

- **Use Your Judgement**

Exercise caution when reporting live on mass killing to avoid fuelling panic. Premature or inaccurate estimates of casualties can cause undue stress to families and communities.

VII. Guidelines for Reporting on Suicide in Multifaith Communities

When addressing suicide within multifaith communities, it is crucial to respect and consider the perspectives of all faith traditions. Different religions and spiritual beliefs may offer diverse interpretations of suicide, shaping how individuals and communities process grief, provide support, and navigate recovery. To ensure ethical reporting, avoid assumptions or stereotyping about any faith's stance on suicide. Instead, consult credible sources such as religious leaders, community representatives, or cultural experts to provide accurate and respectful context. This approach fosters greater understanding and sensitivity, regardless of the specific faith involved.

With regards to addressing suicide within faith-based communities, it is important to focus on compassion and support, ensuring that suicide is not framed as a sin but rather understood in the context of mental health and personal struggles. Despite the sensitive nature of suicide, there are circumstances where reporting may be warranted. In such cases, it is essential to consider the following:

Religious Considerations

- **Religious Context**

Acknowledge that the faith strongly discourages suicide, which is seen as a grave sin, and discussing it openly can be challenging due to the cultural and religious taboos. The individuals must be approached with care and respect for religious beliefs, along with compassion and understanding. Avoid using language or framing that could be perceived as condemning or judgmental, recognizing the potential stigma survivors and their families may face within the community.

- **Expert Consultation**

When possible, consult and collaborate with religious scholars, community leaders, and mental health experts who are familiar with each faith's teachings. This ensures the content aligns with both religious values and public health messaging. Highlight efforts by religious institutions promoting mental health support, awareness campaigns, and initiatives that align with suicide prevention strategies.

Community and Family Considerations

- **Sensitivity to Bereavement**

Families of individuals who died by suicide may experience not only grief but also stigma within the community. Reporting should be respectful and empathetic, avoiding language that could exacerbate this stigma. Avoid sensationalizing the event and instead highlight stories of healing, support, and recovery within the community.

- **Cultural Practices**

Be mindful when covering funeral rites and burials, respecting the privacy of the family and the customs of the relevant community. Avoid photographing or publicizing sensitive moments that could be perceived as invasive or disrespectful.

Mental Health Awareness

- **Educate on Mental Health**

Use the opportunity to educate the public about mental health issues, emphasizing that mental illness is a medical condition that requires treatment and support. Reference organizations or professionals that specialize in faith-based mental health practices and suicide prevention. Encourage the use of culturally appropriate mental health services within the community.

- **Destigmatize Mental Illness**

Work towards destigmatizing mental health issues in faith-based communities by providing factual information and dispelling myths, emphasizing that mental illness is not a sign of weak faith, moral failure, or divine punishment. Highlight how the faith's teachings encourage self-care, seeking help, and supporting others in times of hardship, while advocating for a balanced approach that integrates spiritual and professional support.

VIII. Statement Of Death By Officials

Police reports frequently include specific details about the circumstances of death. However, this does not mean that every detail must be automatically reported. Reporting explicit or excessive detail should be carefully considered to protect vulnerable people. Exclusive details provided by others involved with a case, such as police or paramedics at the scene, should be handled with equal care.

- **Avoid Publishing Details of Suicide Methods**

If, for example, the cause of death was an overdose, and details about the drugs used are mentioned at the inquest, please do not name the drug, or refer to quantities. This applies to commonly used methods, such as hanging, and is particularly important with cases involving novel methods of suicide, where any mention of the method could influence an uptake in its use.

- **Never Suggest a Death by Suicide Was Easy**

Do not report a suicide death by describing it as instant, painless, or inevitable. Suggesting that a death by suicide was easy or without pain can increase public perceptions about the effectiveness or lethality of a suicide method and can make death by suicide seem more accessible to vulnerable people. Make clear that suicide is preventable.

- **Do Not Highlight a Single Suspected Cause of Death**

Never highlight particularly in a headline, as it can significantly underplay the complexity of suicidal behaviour. Suicide is extremely complex and most of the time there is not one event or factor that leads someone to take their own life. Oversimplifying suicide increases the likelihood of vulnerable people over-identifying with the deceased, especially if they are experiencing similar issues.

- **Take Extra Care with Witness Comments**

Paramedics and police officers who attended the scene of a suicide may give specific and graphic evidence to the inquest, so apply due caution when covering their statements. If these are taken out of context, it can increase the risk of contagion.

- **Do Not Publish Suicide Notes or Messages**

Do not use substantial or verbatim quotes from suicide notes or messages posted online. Publishing the content of a suicide note can lead to a death being romanticised. For example, a heartfelt apology and testimony of undying love for the family left behind.

- **Exercise Caution with Sensitive Content**

Avoid sharing links to official statements or reports about suicide if they include explicit details about the method, location, or circumstances surrounding the death, as such information can be harmful. Explicit content may trigger distress among vulnerable individuals and increase the risk of imitation or copycat behavior. Even if the information comes from credible sources, it is essential to assess whether sharing it aligns with public safety and mental health considerations. Instead, provide a summary that conveys the necessary information sensitively and focuses on prevention, support services, and available resources. When in doubt, consult mental health professionals or follow guidelines that prioritize safe communication.

IX. Finding Support After Covering Traumatic Events

Covering traumatic events can take a toll on your mental and emotional well-being. It is important to seek support by discussing your experience with trusted friends, family, colleagues, or your editor. They may offer valuable insights from their own experiences or simply provide a compassionate space to listen. Avoid suppressing your emotions, as sharing what you've been through can be an effective way to process and cope with the impact of the event. Remind yourself that you are safe now, and taking care of your well-being is essential for continuing your important work responsibly.

If you are an editor and want to learn how to support your staff in coping with traumatic events, refer to Attachment B.

Part B. Specific Guidelines for Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)

I. Guidelines for Social Media Users

Sharing Content

- **Verify Information**

Ensure the accuracy of content before sharing or reposting. Avoid circulating rumours or unverified information, as these can lead to misinformation and create unnecessary panic within the public. Responsible sharing helps maintain trust and ensures information is reliable and constructive.

Example: Check multiple reliable sources before sharing news about a suicide.

- **Avoid Harmful Speculation**

Do not speculate about the reasons behind the suicide. Speculation can lead to misunderstandings and stigmatization of mental health issues. Acknowledge the complexity and the multitude of factors that contribute to such a tragedy.

Example: Instead of speculating, focus on sharing factual information and resources.

- **Use Content Warnings**

Provide content warnings for potentially distressing content. This prepares viewers for potentially distressing content and allows them to make an informed decision about viewing. Content warnings help prevent distress among individuals who may be sensitive to such content.

Example: "Viewer Discretion may be advised: This post discusses suicide. If you are in need of help or support, please contact a crisis hotline."

- **Be Considerate**

Never publish any suicide notes or final messages from the deceased. Reporting on the details of a suicide note can be distressing for the person's family and friends and increase the risk of vulnerable individuals identifying with the person who died.

Example: Instead of publishing the final notes, educate the public about warning signs of distress and provide links to available support services.

Engaging with Content

- **Be Supportive**

Offer supportive and empathetic comments. Avoid judgmental or stigmatizing language that can cause further distress. Supportive comments can provide comfort to those affected and reduce stigma associated with mental health issues.

Example: "I'm sorry for your loss. If you need support, there are resources available."

- **Direct to Help**

Encourage individuals to seek professional help and share resources for support. Provide information on helplines and mental health services. Directing individuals to professional help can save lives and provide necessary support.

Example: "If you're struggling, please reach out to a mental health professional or contact Talian Kasih at 15999 or WhatsApp 019-261 5999."

- **Do Not Interact**

Livestreaming of self-harm or suicide presents significant risks to both the individual involved and the audience. Such content should not be engaged with or shared under any circumstances, as interaction may unintentionally encourage harmful behaviour.

Example: Instead of sharing or commenting on the livestream, report it to the platform immediately to ensure swift intervention and support.

II. Guidelines for Influencers

Influencers can positively impact awareness, hope, and help-seeking behaviour, and reduce stigma around issues like self-harm and suicide. However, if they share unsafe content, it can harm others, even if their intentions are good. Hence, the information in this section is for influencers and other public figures who are communicating about self-harm and suicide.

- **Be Clear About Your Role**

Your audience may see you as an authority, so it is important to clarify your role. Clearly state you are not a qualified mental health professional and lack expertise in self-harm or suicide prevention (unless you have the necessary education and training).

- **Safely Post About Your Lived Experience**

If you have personal experience with self-harm or suicide and feel comfortable sharing, let your audience know. Make it clear you're sharing your own experience, not giving expert advice. What worked for you might not work for others. Consider adding a disclaimer due to potential social and legal consequences.

- **Be Mindful of Your Audience**

When creating content, be mindful of who your audience is and consider the impact and implications of your posts, including potential negative consequences, for example, self-harm or suicide. Younger people may be more impressionable and impulsive.

- **Post and Share Evidence-Based Information**

When giving advice on self-harm or suicide prevention, only share evidence-based information from credible, reputable organizations backed by scientific research.

- **Manage Expectations**

Your audience may feel closely connected to you and think they are talking directly to you on social media. This can create expectations around when and how you may respond.

To protect yourself, and create a safe space for your audience, you could do the following:

- Set and clearly communicate your boundaries and limitations
- Be clear about whether messages and comments are being moderated and who is managing communications. For example, include a visible disclaimer
- Be clear about whether people can expect a response directly from you or someone on your team. For example, include in content, captions, description boxes, or pinned comments

- **Have A Plan**

If you post about self-harm or suicide, or even if you do not, you may get many messages or comments from people who are struggling. It is helpful to plan ahead on how to respond to these messages or comments.

- **Encourage Help-Seeking**

Provide information about how and where people could receive support and access resources. Promote positive messages like #YouAreNotAlone and avoid using harmful hashtags that may encourage suicide.

- **Consider Consulting with an Expert**

If you are able and willing, you may wish to consult with a mental health professional before, during, and after content creation and communications related to self-harm and suicide.

III. Guidelines for Safe Sharing by Those with Lived Experience

Reflect

Posting about your own self-harm or suicide thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and experiences can make you vulnerable. Before posting perhaps ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I posting?
- What am I hoping to achieve?
- Is this the most effective way to achieve my goal?
- Do I need help?
- If I need help, who is the best person to reach out to? Who is best placed to help me?
- What do I feel comfortable sharing?
- What would I prefer to leave out or keep private?
- Who will see this post? Remember that posts can be permanent and potentially anyone and everyone could see your content.
- What are the consequences of sharing?
- Do the pros outweigh the cons?
- How might my post impact others?
- What will I do if other people send me their stories and ask for help?
- How can I look after myself after I have posted?

Privacy

Only disclose the personal details you feel comfortable letting others know about and leave out any information you would not want everyone you have ever met, or will ever meet, to know about you.

Content Warnings

If your post does include graphic or descriptive content or content that might be distressing to others, you should consider providing a content warning at the beginning of your post or placing the visual content in the comments section or further down the feed, so that readers can make an informed decision about whether or not they want to continue to read or see the post.

Remember to check your post for any unhelpful language, descriptions, images or graphic references to self-harm or suicide and remove them before you publish your post.

Decide If You Will Allow Comments

Before posting content, decide whether to allow comments. If you enable comments, it's crucial to monitor and moderate them regularly. If you're unable to do so, consider turning off comments from the outset.

Think carefully about whether to respond to comments — sometimes, reading a comment without receiving a reply can unintentionally trigger negative reactions. If someone indicates they need help, you can share helpline contact details. For comments that contain unsafe or aggressive content, you may choose to hide or delete them and/or report the user.

Regardless of your decision, ensure that helpline contact details are easily accessible in your post, caption, description box, or comments.

Help, Hope, and Recovery

When posting about your own experiences, emphasise help, hope, and recovery. For example, include:

- Things that stopped you from acting on your thoughts or urges
- The people, places, strategies, and personal strengths that helped you cope
- Things you have achieved
- Experiences of positive help-seeking, for example, talking to a friend or family member
- That recovery is an up and down process and can look different for everyone
- Be mindful that recovery can mean different things to different people
- Messages that encourage help-seeking
- Links to helplines

Reduce The Risk of Negative Effects to Others

To reduce the risk of negative effects to others, exclude or avoid the following:

- Current or previous self-harm or suicide plans or attempts (what, how, when, and where)
- Information about or instructions on how to self-harm or die by suicide
- Information on how to self-harm more severely
- Promoting self-harm or suicide
- Encouraging others to engage in self-harm or die by suicide
- Encouraging others to copy or imitate self-harm or suicide acts
- Providing links to pro-self-harm or pro-suicide websites or communities
- Suicide notes or goodbye messages
- Graphic content depicting self-harm or suicide
- Before and after self-harm or suicide content
- Content depicting self-harm or suicide acts in-progress
- Content depicting a method of self-harm, for example, items used
- Content depicting the location of self-harm or suicide
- Including hashtags that promote self-harm or suicide
- Including emojis that depict methods of self-harm or suicide
- Making other people feel responsible for your safety

Part C: Specific Guidelines for Entertainment & Fiction (Drama, Film, Documentaries, etc)

I. Guidelines on Depictions of Suicide & Self-Harm in Drama & Film

General Considerations When Writing Suicide Storylines

- **Factors Influencing Suicide Risk**

Suicide risk is influenced by a combination of psychological, situational, societal and individual background factors. However, it is essential to emphasize that most people experiencing one or more of these challenges do not die by suicide. Suicide is complex and typically arises from the interaction of multiple factors, making it important to avoid oversimplified narratives which attribute a suicide attempt or death to a single incident. Storylines should aim to reflect this complexity, portraying that individuals who attempt suicide are often in acute distress or crisis due to the confluence of several underlying factors. This nuanced approach fosters a more accurate understanding and avoids reinforcing misconceptions.

- **Encouraging Help-Seeking through Positive Storylines**

Sensitive storylines which depict a character overcoming a crisis and show hopeful recovery will help to encourage people those who may be suffering in silence, to reach out for help. Showing characters taking steps such as contacting crisis hotlines, consulting mental health professionals, or reaching out to social support networks (such as family, friends, and acquaintances) demonstrates the value of seeking assistance. Highlighting new or alternative coping strategies can further reassure individuals who may be silently struggling. These narratives send a powerful message that suicidal feelings are temporary and can be overcome, especially when the character chooses to seek help and embraces the possibility of life.

- **Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide**

It is crucial to avoid normalizing suicide or creating the impression that it is a common outcome. In reality, 90% of individuals who attempt suicide do not die by suicide. To reflect this, consider portraying characters who experience suicidal thoughts but ultimately survive and find a path to healing. Integrating stories of recovery and resilience into scripts offers a more balanced perspective, providing hope and reinforcing the message that support and positive outcomes are possible.

- **Portray everyday characters who can be a lifeline**

Since most crises are temporary, consider depicting characters who provide crucial support to someone until the crisis passes. Highlight the role that everyday people—such as friends, family members, neighbours, teammates, colleagues, or even strangers—can play in offering support or small acts of kindness during difficult moments. These portrayals emphasize that anyone can make a difference, helping to dispel the misconception that only mental health professionals can provide meaningful assistance.

For ideas about how a character could support someone in crisis, see the action steps at www.bethe1to.com.

- **Depict the grieving and healing process of people who lose someone to suicide.**

Research estimates that each person who dies by suicide leaves behind 135 people who knew them. Depicting the broader impact of suicide offers a more comprehensive understanding of the loss and the ripple effects on communities. For characters grieving a loved one lost to suicide, focus on their journey through grief and healing. Highlight how those around them—such as friends, family, and support groups—provide comfort, understanding, and meaningful support. These portrayals can foster empathy, reduce stigma, and emphasize the importance of community in the healing process.

- **Avoiding Misleading Rewards Following Suicide**

It is risky to indicate any ‘reward’ following a suicide death or attempt. This can inadvertently promote the idea of achieving something through death which is not perceived to be possible in life. Examples include storylines depicting separated parents reuniting following a suicide attempt by their child or suggesting people will be held to account for their actions, such as bullies being shamed and made to feel sorry for their behaviour. Similarly, a death by suicide should never be described as a release, setting a person free from their troubles in life, or providing peace. This can romanticise the idea of suicide and could lead to a vulnerable person believing a death by suicide could resolve the problems they face in life.

- **Avoiding Romanticization Through Dramatization**

It is advisable to avoid overly dramatizing a suicide, as this can romanticise or glorify the behaviour and inadvertently promote it to people who may be vulnerable.

- **Vulnerability of Young Audiences**

Young people are a particularly vulnerable audience in relation to the topics of suicide and self-harm. They are more influenced by what they see and hear in the media than other age groups, and their behaviour is often more spontaneous – more emotionally charged. Young people may not fully appreciate or comprehend the permanency of suicide.

Portrayal of suicide methods

- **Minimize Detail of Suicide Methods**

In any portrayal of a suicide or suicide attempt, it is better to give as little detail as possible about the method used. For example, if the character has taken an overdose, it is advisable not to name or show the type or quantity of tablets that have been consumed.

- **Avoid Specifics on Acquisition of Means**

It is also advisable to avoid giving details of how the means of suicide (such as the instrument or drugs) were obtained, for example describing a certain instrument as being easily and cheaply obtained online.

- **Refrain Misleading Portrayals of Suicide**

Research shows that portraying a suicide as easy, quick, peaceful and/or pain-free can influence a person’s decision to make a suicide attempt.

- **Discourage New Methods of Suicide**

Avoid introducing new or uncommon methods of suicide or self-harm into the public consciousness. Evidence shows that such portrayals can result in increases in the use of new methods. It is better to avoid depiction of novel or unusual, or particularly lethal suicide methods.

- **Realism in Recovery from Suicide Attempts**

Care should be taken to avoid portraying a suicide attempt as something that can quickly be recovered from, for example describing a character returning to normal life within hours or days.

Language

The terms and phrases used when describing suicidal behaviour are important, as some terms can perpetuate stigma and discourage people from speaking out and seeking help. Choosing neutral language to refer to a character that has attempted or died by suicide helps reduce the discrimination and stigma often associated with suicide.

Additional Points for Consideration

- It is advisable to consider how a drama storyline which includes suicide or self-harm will be promoted
- Consideration should also be given to any images used in publicity materials. For example, it is not safe to show suicide methods or locations. Avoiding these will help to limit any risk
- It is helpful to signpost viewers to appropriate sources of support, at the end of programmes covering suicide or self-harm, to encourage help-seeking. This could also be included in any publicity materials to promote the storyline
- It can also be helpful to include content warnings at the start of key episodes. While this is not a complete fail-safe, alerting viewers to any suicide and self-harm content allows them to make the choice of whether or not it is suitable for them to watch. Particularly if they have been affected by the issues (such as those who have been bereaved or those who have experienced of suicidal feelings or past attempts)
- Engage with suicide prevention experts and individuals with personal experience to create more authentic and relatable storylines. Many people who have experienced suicidal thoughts or behaviors, or who have lost a loved one to suicide, are willing to share their insights. Their perspectives can help ensure that content is not only accurate but also resonates with audiences in meaningful ways, fostering greater understanding and empathy. Collaborating with these voices can enhance the authenticity of the narrative while promoting responsible and impactful storytelling

SECTION 5 : ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I. Hotlines and Support Services



For a comprehensive list of suicide helplines available in Malaysia, please scan the QR code.

II. List of Experts and Resources

For a database of mental health experts in Malaysia, please visit the Content Forum's website, or you may scan the QR code below.



SECTION 6 : CONCLUSION

Responsible and ethical reporting and sharing of suicide-related content play a critical role in suicide prevention efforts. The way media professionals and content creators handle this sensitive topic can significantly influence public perception and behaviour.

Following these guidelines helps create a more informed community by providing accurate information about suicide, its warning signs, and available resources for those in distress. Educating the public in this manner can dispel myths and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues, making it easier for individuals to seek the help they need.

Moreover, responsible reporting can foster a supportive and empathetic environment. When suicide-related content is handled with care and sensitivity, it shows respect for the deceased and their families, helping to prevent further trauma. This approach also encourages a culture of empathy and understanding, where people feel more comfortable discussing their struggles and seeking support.

By following these guidelines, media professionals and content creators contribute to suicide prevention efforts in several ways. They provide accurate and helpful information, foster a supportive community, reduce the risk of imitative suicides, and encourage individuals in distress to seek assistance.

These efforts collectively help to create a more compassionate and informed society, ultimately aiding in the reduction of suicide rates and the promotion of mental well-being.

ATTACHMENT A

Basic Flowchart: Decision-Making for Reporting on Suicide

A clear and thoughtful decision-making process is essential for ethical reporting on suicide. This comprehensive flowchart guides media professionals through critical considerations to ensure responsible and sensitive handling of suicide-related content.

Step 1: Verification of Information

Question: Is the information verified?

- Yes: If all information is verified through reliable sources, proceed to the next step.
- No: Stop and verify all details to ensure accuracy. Misinformation can cause harm and contribute to public distrust.

Step 2: Detailed Descriptions

Question: Does the report include detailed descriptions of the method used?

- Yes: Remove specific details about the method of suicide. Detailed descriptions can lead to imitative behaviour and increase the risk of copycat suicides.
- No: If there are no detailed descriptions, proceed to the next step.

Step 3: Language Use

Question: Does the report use non-stigmatizing language?

- Yes: If the language used is sensitive and non-stigmatizing, proceed to the next step.
- No: Revise the language to ensure it is respectful and avoids terms that imply judgment or criminality, such as "committed suicide." Preferred terms include "died by suicide."

Step 4: Inclusion of Prevention Resources

Question: Does the report include prevention resources and warning signs?

- Yes: If the report includes information on warning signs of suicide and resources for help, proceed to publish.
- No: Include relevant prevention resources, such as helpline numbers, mental health services, and crisis intervention resources. This ensures the report provides valuable information that can help those in distress.

Basic Flowchart: Decision-Making for Reporting on Suicide

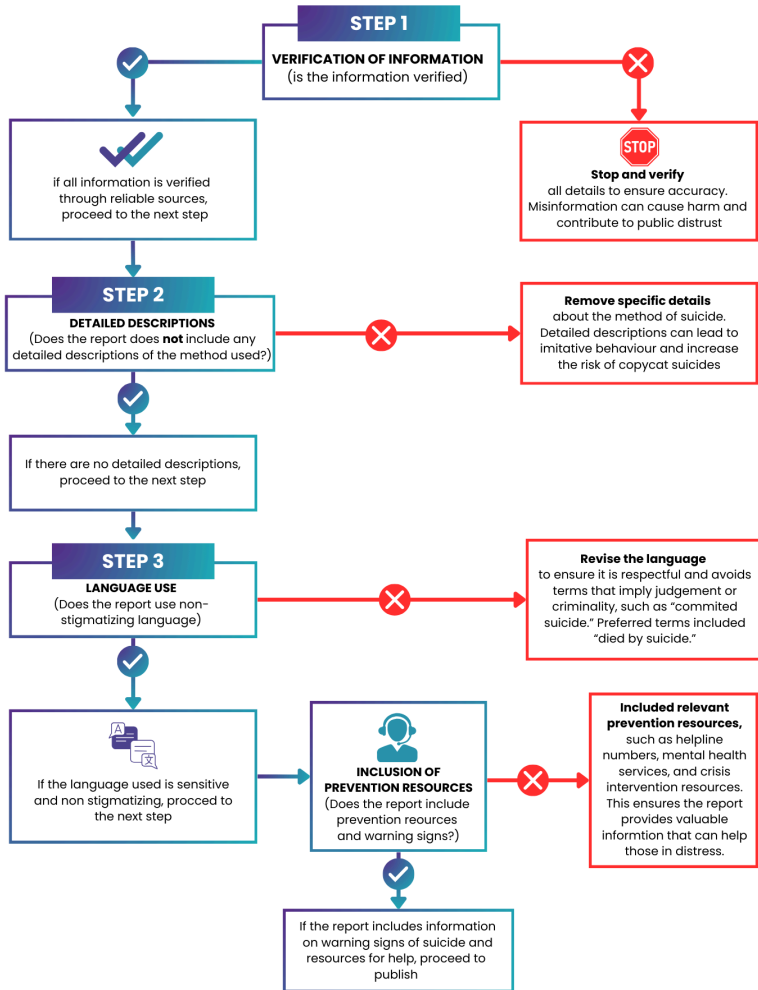


Diagram 1: Basic Flowchart: Decision-Making for Reporting on Suicide

ATTACHMENT B

Staff Care Tips for Managers and Editors of News Personnel Exposed to Traumatic Events



Staff Care Tips for Managers and Editors of News Personnel Exposed to Traumatic Events.

Trauma and the coverage of extreme human distress is a core part of journalism. It can be important and deeply rewarding – but it can also affect us personally. News organizations are no different from other services which respond to trauma in needing to take this seriously, and to prepare and support staff appropriately.

The best way to deal with trauma is good and mutually-caring teamwork and good management – within a wider culture that acknowledges the part trauma plays in news work.

These tips are offered as suggestions to assist healthier journalists and ultimately better journalism. It is important to brief staff before exposure to potentially traumatic material and support them both during an event and after. This is true for both large scale (e.g. natural disasters, war reporting) and 'small' scale (car crashes, court and crime reporting) incidents.

Before an assignment -

- Trauma awareness briefings should be a core element of standard training and management. Awareness of the physical and psychological risks of trauma exposure and how your organisation will deal with it will instil confidence to do the 'tough' jobs – ultimately getting better stories.
- Sit down with the individual or team and talk through the possible emotional risks involved as well as the logistics and purpose of the assignment itself.
- Remind staff that distress from trauma exposure is a normal human reaction and not weakness. It may even inform their reporting. Signs of distress should not be a determinant for the next assignment.
- Acknowledge and show appreciation even before people go. Feeling valued keeps people emotionally balanced and more invested in hard work.
- Organise newsroom to journalist contact before departure for support as well as news gathering.
- For longer assignments reassure that phone calls with home are important - not a perk.
- Ensure you have updated lists of personal emergency contact numbers for those leaving.
- Remember that all those involved in news gathering can be exposed to trauma – not just the front line. Picture and film editors, sound recordists, etc. will be also exposed to potentially traumatic material.

On assignment –

- Maintain regular contact – even a quick phone call to say 'g'day, how's it going'?
- Give words of encouragement and watch criticism – people's sensitivities are heightened when exposed to trauma.
- Remind them of the importance of self care. Healthy eating, exercise and sleep are vital and ensure better journalism. Too much 'self-medication' with alcohol has the opposite effect.
- Encourage staff that if they are feeling distressed not to hide it. Such responses are not abnormal, they're human, and it is neither weak, unprofessional nor career-threatening to acknowledge them.
- Manage contact with others from your organisation – a badly timed phone call will exacerbate stress levels (especially regarding finance!)
- Consider rotation or withdrawal of a highly distressed person, but remember to discuss your reasons with them and do it sensitively.

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- Following longer assignments consider a day or two of 'decompression' – a 'layover' period to readjust from trauma exposure. Ensure that families are aware this is happening.
- Maintain newsroom contact with partners or families.
- Research indicates that car crashes, court reporting and 'small scale' trauma reporting can have as much an impact as the 'big ones'. Be mindful of daily domestic tragedy.

After the job –

It's essential that managers make contact with anyone on their staff who's been through a distressing experience. This is good management anyway, but is especially important in the aftermath of trauma.

- Send somebody to meet and greet those returning from overseas or long absences.
- Acknowledge with thanks, lunch, drinks, public recognition, emails – thank you goes a long way to assist wellbeing, and better work performance.
- Diffuse with those returning from trauma reporting – talk to them about how it was both logistically and emotionally. Don't be afraid to talk emotions – they are normal.
- Encourage staff to maintain support from family, friends and social networks.
- Remind them that any distress is a typical human response following trauma exposure – explain that most feel a lot better in 3-4 weeks. Some not unusual responses are -
 - Sleeplessness
 - Upsetting dreams
 - Intrusive images or thoughts of the event
 - Avoidance of reminders of the trauma or feeling numb
 - Feeling that bad things are about to happen
 - Being jumpy and easily startled
 - Anger
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Feeling 'hyper'
 - Physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, nausea when reminded of a traumatic event
- Offer counselling if they appear overwhelmed or you feel out of your depth.
- **IT IS IMPORTANT** to check in with them again in 3-4 weeks to see if any of these symptoms are still occurring. If they are then refer to a trauma specialist. During this time employ 'watchful waiting' (keeping a quiet eye on them). Any behaviour that is out of character for your staff member is an indicator that all is not well.
- Remember that **you** are also part of the 'ripple effect of trauma'. Notice your own emotions and don't be surprised if you also feel some of the above symptoms or others that seem out of the ordinary. Make sure you apply self care and talk to someone as well.

For further information contact the Dart Centre Australasia – Melbourne, 0419 131 947

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Note: We have cited all referenced resources to the best of our ability and sincerely appreciate all contributions, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, that have informed this document.



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