

The National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide

Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However, the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion or positively by encouraging help-seeking.

Download the PDF (http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/PDF-recommendations-for-reporting-on-suicide_136457.pdf) (2 pages)

Important Points for Covering Suicide

More than 50 research studies worldwide have found that certain types of news coverage can increase the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration and prominence of coverage.

Risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death.

Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.

This table is scrollable by touch on mobile devices.

Instead of This:	Do This:
Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").	Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Dead at 27").
Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials or funerals.	Use school/work or family photo; include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.
Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or other strong terms.	Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use non-sensational words like "rise" or "higher."
Describing a suicide as inexplicable or "without warning."	Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the "Warning Signs" and "What to Do" sidebar (from p. 2) in your article if possible.
"John Doe left a suicide note saying..."	"A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner."
Investigating and reporting on suicide similar to reporting on crimes.	Report on suicide as a public health issue.
Quoting/interviewing police or first responders about the causes of suicide.	Seek advice from suicide prevention experts.
Referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt."	Describe as "died by suicide" or "completed" or "killed him/herself."

Suicide Contagion or "Copycat Suicide" occurs when one or more suicides are reported in a way that contributes to another suicide.

A-65