

Suicide and The Role of The Media

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON SUICIDE



Background

Peer reviewed and published research from around the world over the last 30 years has clearly shown that how the media portrays suicide can have an impact on others. As a result, the World Health Organisation recommends that there be media initiatives and collaborations using evidence-based approaches as being essential components to suicide prevention.

Media reports that sensationalise a suicide or suicidal behaviors, glamorise the topic, present instructions or guidance on suicide methods or locations have been found to increase the risk of suicide contagion and are known as the Werther effect. In contrast, media reports that portray messages of hope, resilience, recovery and mastery over a crisis have been found to reduce the risk of suicide contagion and are known as the Papageno effect.

World Suicide Prevention Day provides an opportunity for media to communicate with the public stories about suicide prevention, specifically how individuals can seek and receive effective help with suicidal thoughts, how they can return to their life after a suicide attempt, and how families recover after the loss of a loved one to suicide. In addition, media can help disseminate live-saving information and messages to those helping others who might be suicidal. Such narratives offer a positive message of hope that can help save lives.

Best practice recommendations were created to assist media in creating such stories as well as in guiding safe reporting on suicide which should always be used when reporting on this topic.

How Can Media Help?

Those working in the media can help by creating new, safe and supportive conversations surrounding suicide. While there are many tragic stories of suicide loss, there are many more stories of survival that can be told by the media. Using the power of the media for good, these stories have the ability to help shape how the next generation sees and understands suicide and suicidal behaviors in a frame of prevention rather than grief and loss.

Key Points



The media has a powerful role in shaping public understanding and can be instrumental in Changing the Narrative on Suicide.



By reporting responsibly, the media can help;

- Reduce stigma
- Promote awareness and understanding
- Encourage open conversations
- Support help-seeking
- Highlight stories of hope and recovery.

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By changing the narrative around the understanding of the facts, warning signs and true nature of suicide and everyone's role in prevention to one of a short term crisis that can be assessed, treated and recovered from, the public can understand both how to help and survive when they or someone they know faces a similar suicidal crisis.

Take Action

The media can encourage everyone to take action. Media can help create opportunities and lead by telling stories in a responsible and safe way, and by telling stories of hope and recovery.

- Follow the WHO best practice for safe reporting guidelines
- Help the public better understand suicide and suicide prevention warning signs
- Give the public credible, reliable information and resources for reaching out to help and how to talk about suicide safely

Resources

The insights and stories of people with a lived experience of suicide can be extremely powerful in helping others understand suicide better and encourage people to reach in to support someone, and for individuals to reach out for help themselves. Many such stories are shared via media, including social media. It is important that the person sharing their story knows how to do so in a way that is safe for them and for those who hear their story.

For resources on how to talk about suicide please see:

- [WHO \(2023\) Preventing suicide: a resource for media professionals.](#)
- [The #chatsafe guidelines for communicating safely online about suicide](#)
- [Samaritans' media guidelines](#)

