

A microphone on a stand is positioned on the right side of the frame. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a public event or gathering. The overall tone is somber and focused.

# So You Want To Talk About Suicide?

**Best Practices For  
Messaging Safely  
on Suicide**



# TIPS FOR TALKING WITH THE MEDIA

When media contacts you

Reaching out to media



# Help prevent CONTAGION

Avoid the following...

Presenting a ***simplistic*** explanation

***Glorifying*** suicide or a person who died by suicide

Focusing on a particular ***person***

Reporting an ***unbalanced*** picture

Trying to explain the ***unexplainable***

***Normalizing*** suicide

Relaying ***details*** of the suicide

***Sensational*** Coverage

***Repetitive*** and ***excessive*** reports

# What you should know upfront

Reporters have an agenda.

Reporters are on a tight deadline.

Reporters might know more than you do about a story.

Not every reporter is ethical or follows the best practices.

Reporters know that you are going to say more than they can use.

Know that reporters are going to use some of what you tell them and not attribute it to you.

Reporters are usually not trying to win an award, but they do want to keep their job.

They will want to come to you, often for B-roll visuals.

Your surroundings say a lot about you.

# PART ONE

## When media contacts you



Understand that your  
roles are different.  
Their role is to report.  
Your role is to help  
them.

Tip: Stay focused on  
your job.



Know that you get one  
soundbite, not an  
elevator speech.

Tip: Prepare a 5-10  
second soundbite  
before they arrive





A call from a media outlet can happen at any time.

Tip: Be prepared and have a media plan in place. Know who will speak with the media (including survivors).



Have a strategy for  
your one key message.

Tip: Think carefully  
about their story and  
your message and  
develop a soundbite  
from there.



A close-up photograph of a yellow file folder. A red rectangular stamp with the word "CONFIDENTIAL" in bold, capital letters is prominently displayed on the top flap of the folder. The folder is slightly open, revealing a light blue document inside. The background is a solid red color.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Be mindful of your surroundings if reporters are videotaping in your office.

Tip: Put away confidential documents.

It is ok to share emotions.  
Be ready for your emotions  
and your reactions to come  
out (during or after the  
interview). Remember there  
is pain involved in all suicide  
stories.

Tip: Be authentic.





Ask reporters to include the warning signs of suicide and at least one suicide prevention website and one crisis resource and one community resource.

Tip: Have these ready and hand them to reporter.



Educate the media about the media guidelines and help them understand how to use them.

Tip: Hand them a copy.





Have a backup plan. If you aren't available, or have to cancel, give a referral to someone you know and trust.

Tip: Be prepared.



Speak normally. Use terms that are understandable to most. Avoid stating information, data or research that you are not sure about.

Tip: Talk about what you know.





Some stories or reports may present an opportunity to educate or help someone who may be struggling.

Tip: Try to include a message of hope in your interview.

## PART TWO

# Reaching out to media



It's okay to shop stories among networks.

Tip: Find someone you can trust to tell your story. You don't have to wait for them to come to you.



Don't expect to always get your story on air (no matter how compelling it might be). Don't be surprised if it does not run or gets bumped.

Tip: Understand that what is important to you may not be to others.





Data creates intrigue.

Tip: Make sure you have the right data. Cite your sources so the reporter can verify.



Know that the media will want to find additional information for their story and that you have no control over that.

Tip: Suggest credible sources for additional story content.



# Legends of the Fall

Text Size: A A A

In Miami's jungle of condo towers, 16 people have jumped to their deaths.

By **Natalie O'Neill** Thursday, Sep 10 2009

[Comments \(10\)](#)

**Fred and Ceil Feldman** sat down for coffee and toast inside their snug beachside condo just before 8 a.m. From their kitchen table, on the sixth floor, the elderly couple gazed in comfortable silence at the ocean. Life hadn't yet begun to buzz at Sands Pointe Condominium. Only white lounge chairs occupied the pool deck outside their door. Even the palm trees below, with their downturned fronds, looked sleepy.

Then there was a strange and heavy thump.

Fred set his mug down and stood up. "I thought a picture had fallen off the wall," he remembers.

Through the glass door, he caught a glimpse of a figure on his patio. It looked like a woman lying down. He walked closer and found a fair-skinned, 89-pound brunette face-down and limp. She wore pajamas with matching slippers. Near her head, blood formed a puddle on the cool concrete. Fred knew immediately: She was dead.

Her name was Khinna, and she had fallen from the sky. Or, more precisely, she had taken a dose of morphine, stood on a lawn chair, and jumped from her 24th-floor balcony. She was a 61-year-old terminal



Kyle T. Webster



Some media will try to sensationalize your story.

Tip: Don't be surprised at the final piece.

Some media will want the story to have a sense of controversy to the topic.

Tip: Present them your facts.







Your story is time limited in terms of relevance but will live on digitally or in print. Recognize that the facts might change over time.

Tip: Be careful on what you are telling the media.



You may not get the reporter that you want.

Tip: Use the opportunity to help them see the importance in your story.

Political issues related to mental health and suicide are complicated for media stories.

Tip: Do your part to keep them separate when pitching your story idea.







Be prepared for viewer's response to the story.

Tip: Set boundaries for yourself and remember everyone has a right to their opinion.

# Practice Session!

# THANK YOU !

[dreidenberg@save.org](mailto:dreidenberg@save.org)