So You Want To Talk About Suicide?

Best Practices For Messaging Safely on Suicide

Reidenberg 2016. No reproduction or duplication permitted.
TIPS FOR TALKING
WITH THE MEDIA

When media contacts you

Reaching out to media
Help prevent \textbf{CONTAGION}

Avoid the following...

- Presenting a \textit{simplistic} explanation
- \textbf{Glorifying} suicide or a person who died by suicide
- Focusing on a particular \textit{person}
- Reporting an \textit{unbalanced} picture
- Trying to explain the \textit{unexplainable}
- \textbf{Normalizing} suicide
- Relaying \textit{details} of the suicide
- \textbf{Sensational} Coverage
- \textbf{Repetitive} and \textit{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.
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

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

By Natalie O’Neill Thursday, Sep 10 2009

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...
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