

MESSAGING MATTERS

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

StanPCollins@gmail.com



“The Greeks told the story of the minotaur, the bull-headed flesh-eating man who lived in the center of the labyrinth. He was a threatening beast, and yet his name was Asterion – Star. I often think of this paradox as I sit with someone with tears in her eyes, searching for some way to deal with a death, a divorce, or a depression. It is a beast, this thing that stirs in the core of her being, but it is also the star of her innermost nature. We have to care for this suffering with extreme reverence so that, in our fear and anger at the beast, we do not overlook the star.”

-Care of the Soul, Thomas Moore



SPRC COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SUICIDE PREVENTION





BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

NATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR IMPROVED MESSAGING

National Strategy *for*
Suicide Prevention

2024

Strategic Direction 1: Community-Based Suicide Prevention

Goal 1: Establish effective, broad-based, collaborative, and sustainable suicide prevention partnerships.

Goal 2: Support upstream comprehensive community-based suicide prevention.

Goal 3: Reduce access to lethal means among people at risk of suicide.

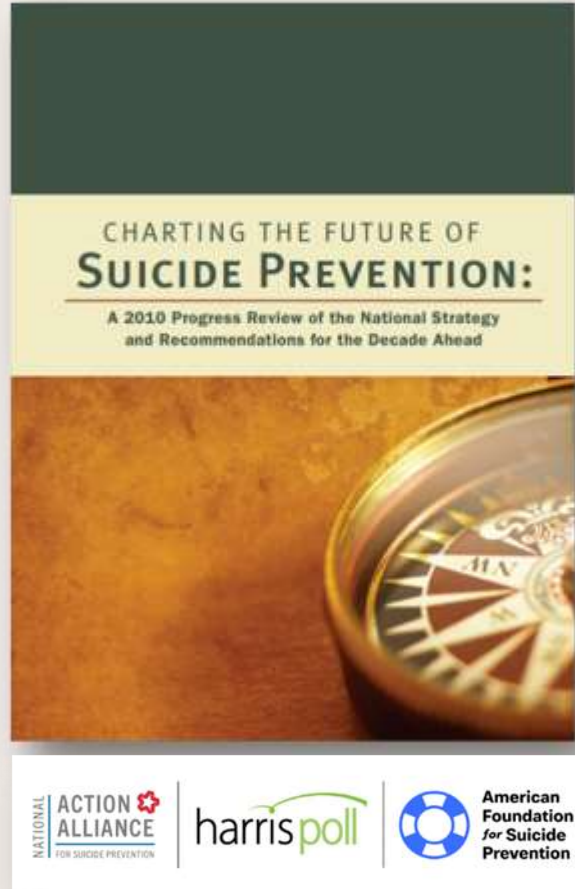
Goal 4: Conduct postvention and support people with suicide-centered lived experience.

Goal 5: Integrate suicide prevention into the culture of the workplace and into other community settings.

Goal 6: Build and sustain suicide prevention infrastructure at the state, tribal, local, and territorial levels.

Goal 7: Implement research-informed suicide prevention communication activities in diverse populations using best practices from communication science.

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF SUICIDE PREVENTION



According to polling conducted by a national health research firm:

- **94%** of Americans believe that many **suicides are preventable** with appropriate research, interventions, and services. (*AFSP / Harris Poll*)
- **94%** would **take action** to help someone close to them who was thinking about suicide. (*AFSP / Harris Poll*)
- **86%** of the population believes that it is **important to invest in suicide prevention**. (*Charting the Future*)

NEED FOR A CHANGE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION MESSAGING

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Expert Panel responses to current messaging:

- Emphasis on problem severity, not prevention
 - Collectively, creating a “negative narrative” about suicide
- Too few stories of hope, recovery, resilience
 - Stories of suicide deaths are common
 - Protective: news stories about coping with adversity without suicidal behavior ⁸
- The field lacks a core message or frame
 - We can be more proactive in shaping the conversation

“We need to get people other than the choir to sing. We need journalist associations, employee assistance programs, chambers of commerce, defense lawyers, pediatricians, family practitioners, and others to get involved. They see people every day that may be at risk and we need them to partake in the conversation.”

-Key Informant (Charting the Future of Suicide Prevention)

SAFE AND EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ECOSYSTEM



“WERTHER” VS. “PAPAGENO” EFFECT



How we communicate about suicide may influence a vulnerable person towards suicidal behavior.

But positive messaging about suicide prevention such as coverage of positive coping in adverse circumstances, or information about resources may have protective effects.

RESEARCH ON THE WERTHER VS PAPAGENO EFFECT

Research

ANZJP

Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychology
1-2
DOI: 10.1177/0004971420958899

© The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists 2020
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
journals.sagepub.com/home/ajp

SAGE

Mark Sinyor^{1,2}, Ulrich S Tran^{3,4}, David Garcia^{5,6,7}, Benedikt Till^{8,9}

Mar



BMJ 2020;368:m575 doi: 10.1136/bmj.m575 (Published 18 March 2020)

Page 1 of 17

Abst
Obj
repr
celeb
Met
mort
and
Janua
2018
Twi
Res
occu
Over
275,
This
514]



RESEARCH

Association between suicide reporting in the media and suicide: systematic review and meta-analysis

OPEN ACCESS

Thomas Niederkrotenthaler *associate professor*^{1,2}, Marlies Braun *postgraduate researcher*^{1,2}, Jane Pirkis *professor*³, Benedikt Till *associate professor*^{1,2}, Steven Stack *professor*⁴, Mark Sinyor *associate professor*^{5,6}, Ulrich S Tran *senior lecturer*^{2,7}, Martin Voracek *professor*^{2,7}, Qijin Cheng *assistant professor*⁸, Florian Arendt *assistant professor*^{2,9}, Sebastian Scherr *assistant professor*¹⁰, Paul S F Yip *professor*¹¹, Matthew J Spittal *associate professor*³

¹Unit Suicide Research and Mental Health Promotion, Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Centre for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna, Kinderspitalgasse 15, A-1090 Vienna, Austria; ²Wiener Werkstaette for Suicide Research, Vienna, Austria; ³Centre for Mental Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia; ⁴Department of Criminology and Department of Psychiatry, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA; ⁵Department of Psychiatry, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto, ON, Canada; ⁶Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada; ⁷Department of Basic Psychological Research and Research Methods, School of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria; ⁸Department of Social Work, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China; ⁹Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria; ¹⁰School for Mass Communication Research, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium; ¹¹Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, and Department of Social Work and Social Administration, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China



International Association

Address: International Association for Suicide Prevention
5221 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington DC

BRIEFING IN CONNECTION WITH

In response to the recent Netflix series '13 Reasons Why', the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) has issued a briefing on the negative impact on young people thinking about suicide.

The Netflix series '13 Reasons Why' is a audio recordings on tapes after she says played a role in her suicide'. The clip in which she

Internationally, there is consis

portrayals of suicide in terms of an increased risk of copycat suicides, especially among young

Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects

Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Martin Voracek, Arno Herberth, Benedikt Till, Markus Strauss, Elmar Etzersdorfer, Brigitte Eisenwort and Gernot Sonneck

Background

Media reporting of suicide has repeatedly been shown to trigger suicidal behaviour. Few studies have investigated the associations between specific media content and suicide rates. Even less is known about the possible preventive effects of suicide-related media content.

Aims

To test the hypotheses that certain media content is associated with an increase in suicide, suggesting a so-called Werther effect, and that other content is associated with a decrease in suicide, conceptualised as a Papageno effect. Further, to identify classes of media articles with similar reporting profiles and to test for associations between these classes and suicide.

Method

Content analysis and latent class analysis (LCA) of 497 suicide-related print media reports published in Austria between 1 January and 30 June 2005. Ecological study to identify associations between media item content and short-term changes in suicide rates.

Results

Repetitive reporting of the same suicide and the reporting of suicide myths were positively associated with suicide rates. Coverage of individual suicidal ideation not accompanied by suicidal behaviour was negatively associated with suicide rates. The LCA yielded four classes of media reports, of which the mastery of crisis class (articles on individuals who adopted coping strategies other than suicidal behaviour in adverse circumstances) was negatively associated with suicide, whereas the expert opinion class and the epidemiological facts class were positively associated with suicide.

Conclusions

The impact of suicide reporting may not be restricted to harmful effects; rather, coverage of positive coping in adverse circumstances, as covered in media items about suicidal ideation, may have protective effects.

Declaration of interest

None.

PAPAGENO VS. WERTHER

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

- Increased help-seeking
- More awareness of resources, warning signs
- De-stigmatization of mental illness and suicide

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- Imitative behavior
- Reinforcing problem behaviors
- Inaccurate and/or stigmatizing perceptions
- Stereotypes
- Negative “narratives”
- Omitting critical information

RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE

USE

- Died by/of Suicide
- Took their own life
- Attempted suicide
- Activating




Avoid

- Committed / completed suicide
- Successful or unsuccessful (attempts)
- Triggering

FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL MESSAGING



What is the *Framework*?

-  Strategy +
-  Positive Narrative +
-  Guidelines +
-  Safety +



STRATEGY

Start with Strategy



What is your strategy for reducing suicide?

How does messaging fit into your efforts?

Decide “why” before “how”

Message Development Frameworks

1.	Set the CONTEXT
2.	WHY message?
3.	WHO to influence?
4.	To DO what?
5.	WHAT to say?
6.	HOW to reach them?
7.	SO WHAT?

**“How”
decision is
here**

**1. Analyze your
situation**

**2. Identify and
understand your audience**

**3. Develop your
message**

**4. Create/implement
your strategy**

5. Evaluate your plan



SAFETY



- Unsafe messages can influence vulnerable people to imitate risky behaviors
- All messages on suicide and prevention should be filtered through a “safety lens”

Provide a
Resource

Providing a suicide prevention resource is one of the most important components when messaging about suicide or suicide prevention.



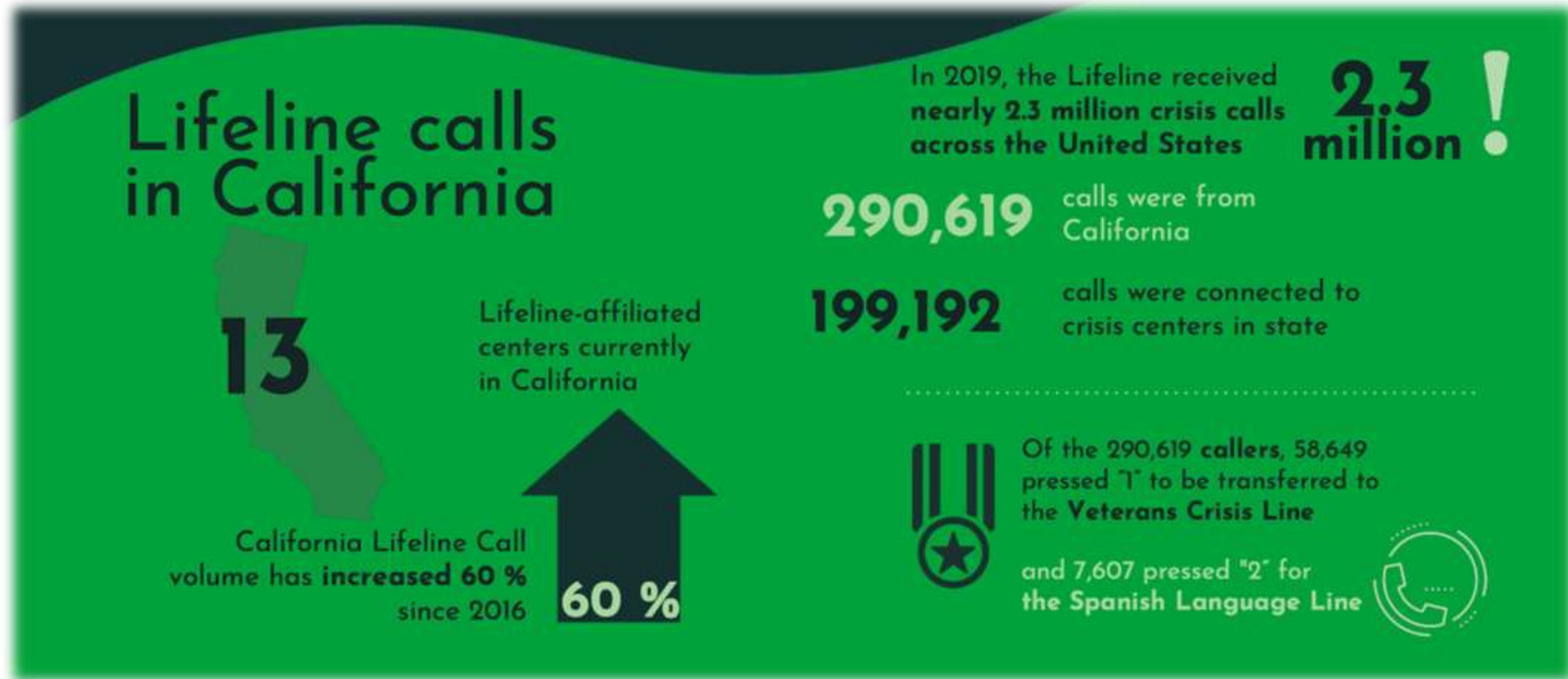
CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Text HELLO to 741741

Free, 24/7, Confidential

Text Ayuda or Hola for Spanish

Example



- Normalizing of help-seeking
- Promotion of resource

**What happens
when you call
988?**

**Never
Bother**

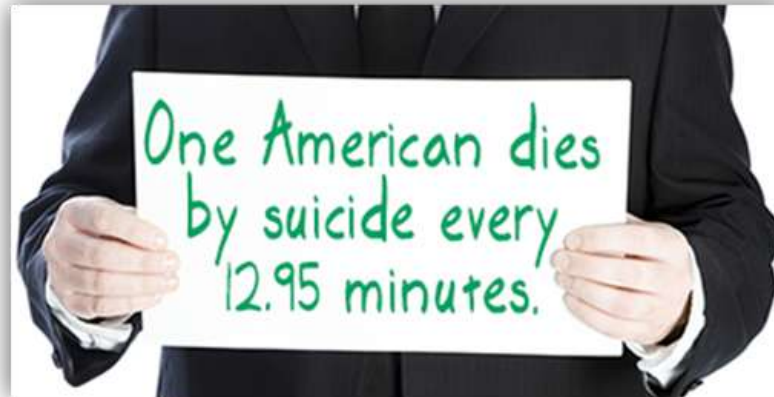


Addressing Fears Related to Seeking Help

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/82CK894OWXM](https://youtu.be/82CK894OWXM)

Avoid “Normalizing” Statements

- Don't normalize suicide by presenting it as a common event (e.g., epidemic, skyrocketing)
- Most people who consider suicide do not act on those thoughts.
- Presenting suicide as common may unintentionally remove a protective bias against suicide.



**EVERY 40
SECONDS
SOMEONE IN
THE WORLD
DIES BY
SUICIDE.**

Examples



- Undefined audiences and goals
- No call to action
- Oversimplification of causes
- Language



Avoid Describing Methods

Avoid sharing details about how the suicide was carried out such as specific details about weapon or means used, location of wound, or the location of the incident.

Grim details of Robin Williams' death released by investigators

Rashaan Salaam, Heisman Trophy winner and former Chicago Bear, committed suicide with gunshot to head

Examples



- Images of means/methods
- Focus on severity, no prevention message
- Language

What “causes”
suicide?



Rather than offering single reasons for suicide (breakup, job loss, etc.), frame suicide as a complex issue influenced by multiple factors.

Avoid
Oversimplifying
“Causes”

Oversimplification of suicide can mislead people to believe that it is a normal response to fairly common life circumstances.



Robin Williams, depression and the complex causes of suicide

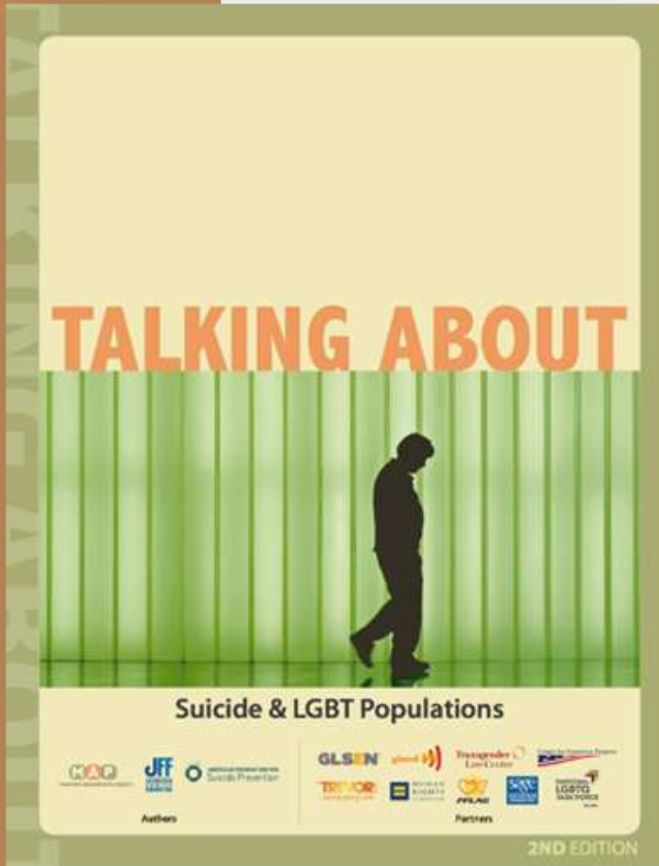
While many people who kill themselves have been experi

Was Junior Seau's Suicide Caused By Head Trauma?

Was Seau's death the result of a brain injury or mental health? Like 25

HEALTH

Robin Williams's Widow Points to Dementia as a Suicide Cause



Suicidal behaviors in LGBT populations appear to be related to “minority stress”, which stems from the cultural and social prejudice attached to minority sexual orientation and gender identity. This stress includes individual experiences of *prejudice or discrimination, such as family rejection, harassment, bullying, violence, and victimization*. These negative outcomes, rather than minority sexual orientation or gender identity per se, appear to be the key risk factors for LGBT suicidal ideation and behavior.”

Talking About Suicide and LGBT Populations

LGBTQ2S YOUTH SUICIDE

LGBTQ2S YOUTH ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE

to mental health concerns, and face increased risk of physical & sexual exploitation, substance use & suicide.



SUICIDE - 2ND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGES 10 - 24)

TRANSPHOBIA IS DANGEROUS AND LEADS TO SUICIDE TRANSPHOBIA KILLS

The TransPULSE study (2010) investigated the health needs of trans people across Ontario, and they found:

77% SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE

45% ATTEMPTED SUICIDE



LGBTQ2S YOUTH = 14X THE RISK OF SUICIDE THAN STRAIGHT CISGENDER YOUTH

WHY ARE LGBTQ2S PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK?

STIGMA
DISCRIMINATION
REJECTION
VIOLENCE
TRAUMA
PREJUDICE

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS ARE KEY TO MENTAL HEALTH



Youth who identify with and are connected to the LGBTQ2S community have significantly less internalized homophobia than youth who are not connected to their community. Family acceptance of LGBTQ2S adolescents is associated with good mental and physical health in LGBTQ2S youth.



RISK OF SUICIDE DECREASES BY

93%



WITH STRONG FAMILY SUPPORT

Written by Dr. Alex Abramovich (2016) [LGBTQ2S Suicide](#) © 2016. Mental health challenges and substance use, and suicidal ideation and behavior. [Mental and physical health: a review of the literature on the mental and physical health of transgender and gender-diverse youth.](#) [The TransPULSE Study: Facts about Suicide](#). [Trans, M. Ryan, S. Alley, L. & B. Kelly, N. \(2010\) Health of Transgender People in Toronto: A Report prepared for Children and Society of Toronto and Gender Health Services.](#) [Healthcare \(2010\) Ryan, S., Alley, L., & Kelly, N. \(2010\). \[Who are trans people in Ontario?\]\(#\) \[Toronto: TransPULSE Institute.\]\(#\) \[Report for CSO.\]\(#\)](#)

#ENDYOUTHHOMELESSNESS

WELSHING & CO. GROUP INC.

TORONTO

TD

519

519

- Positive: highlights protective factors (supportive environments, family support) and risk factors
- Focus on severity and misuse of data
- No resource



GUIDELINES AND TOOLKITS

Guidelines



An initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide

Guidance to help content creators craft stories about hope, and healing—aimed at saving lives and restoring



Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by a range of factors, rather than by a single event.

Show that help is available.

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

Depiction Recommendations

Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.

With suicide on messaging and people with experience.

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

Use nonjudgmental language.

Social Media

SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

GET HELP LEARN GET INVOLVED PROVIDERS & PROFESSIONALS

1-800-273-8255 **CHAT**
En Español | For Deaf & Hard of Hearing

Support on Social Media

For over 10 years, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has worked with social media platforms and digital communities to establish recommended best practices in suicide prevention for social and digital media.

Safety Processes on Social Media

If you are worried about someone on social media, you can contact safety teams, who will reach out to connect the user with the help they need. *Note: Tumblr no longer directly responds to reports of suicide or self-harm.

Facebook Twitter Instagram Snapchat YouTube Periscope

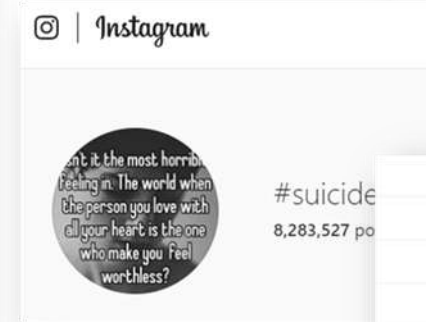
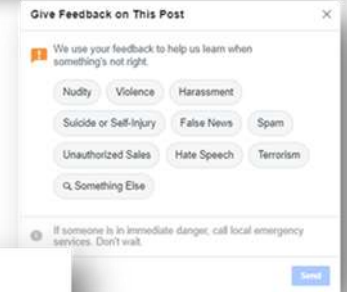
Facebook

The Lifeline has worked with Facebook to develop their supportive community tools, which include resources, messages for you to use, and directly contacting Facebook.

[Report Suicidal Content](#) [From Reporting to Supporting](#)

Support on Social Media

- Safety Processes on Social Media
- Download the Social Media Toolkit
- How to Engage on Social Media
- [Contact Us](#)



“Reporting on suicide, like reporting on sexual abuse, is one of the areas in which we favor not saying all that we know.

However, in some versions, we also gave out more information about the method of death than required. If police, prosecutors or family members announce publicly that a suicide was by pills, hanging, gunshot or other means, let’s keep such details to a minimum and not make it the lead of our stories on the deaths.”

- John Daniszewski, AP Vice President for Standards

“How and When We Report on Suicide”

ReportingOnSuicide.org

reporting on suicide

Recommendations

Online Media

Examples

Find an Expert

Research

About

Other Languages

reporting
on suicide

Best Practices and Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide

Media Plays an Important Role in Preventing Suicide

1. Over 100 studies worldwide have found that risk of contagion is real and responsible reporting can reduce the risk of additional suicides.
2. Research indicates duration, frequency, and prominence are the most influential factors that increase risk of suicide contagion.
3. Covering suicide carefully can change perceptions, dispel myths and inform the public on the complexities of the issue.
4. Media reports can result in help-seeking when they include helpful resources and messages of hope and recovery.

Partner Organizations

These recommendations were established using a consensus model developed by SAVE. The process was led by SAVE and included leading national and international suicide prevention, public health and communication's experts, news organizations, reporters, journalism schools and internet safety experts. Collaborating organizations include:

American Association of Suicidology • American Foundation for Suicide Prevention • American Psychoanalytic Association • Annenberg Public Policy Center • Associated Press Managing Editors • Canterbury Suicide Project • University of Otago, Christchurch, New Zealand • Centers for Disease Control and Prevention • Crisis Text Line • Columbia University Department of Psychiatry • ConnectSafety.org • International Association for Suicide Prevention Task Force on Media and Suicide • Medical University of Vienna • National Alliance on Mental Illness • National Institute of Mental Health • National Press Photographers Association • The Net Safety Collaborative • National Suicide Prevention Lifeline • New York State Psychiatric Institute • The Poynter Institute • Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration • Suicide Awareness Voices of Education • Suicide Prevention Resource Center • Vibrant Emotional Health

Recommendations: Following these recommendations can assist in safe reporting on suicide.

AVOID...

- ✗ Describing or depicting the method and location of the suicide.
- ✗ Sharing the content of a suicide note.
- ✗ Describing personal details about

INSTEAD...

- ✓ Report the death as a suicide; keep information about the location general.
- ✓ Report that a note was found and is under review.
- ✓ Avoid information about the person's identity

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 in English

See in Other Languages



Save.org and **Cisco** have joined forces to **support journalists and content creators** to reduce the risk of suicide contagion that happens when reporting best practices are not followed. In fact one study found that there was a **13% increase in deaths following reporting on celebrity suicides**.

Verify

Copy and paste your article here

Suicide reporting guidelines

Disclaimer 1 This tool cannot detect implicit blame, so please ensure that you avoid inadvertently **implicitly placing blame on a single factor**.

Disclaimer 2 Excluding the method of suicide is the single most impactful way to reduce suicide's contagion effect; please ensure your article **omits implicit and explicit text and images** regarding the suicide method.

1. Exclude suicide method



2. Use appropriate language



3. Avoid blame



4. Include Education and Help



reportingonsuicide.cisco.com/



WORKING WITH MEDIA AS ALLIES

- “US” vs. “THEM”
- Have a Plan
- Simplify the Process
- Help *Them* Help You
- Be Gracious (and humble)

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Made up of members of the Media Sub-Committee, with additional support from advisory team members

Provide reminders about reporting recommendations as events unfold

Monitoring for news and entertainment media pieces about suicide and suicide prevention

Review submissions, determine level of response (if any)

Coordination of response to media outlet

Purpose:

- Active engagement of news media to promote safe messaging and recommendations for reporting on suicide.

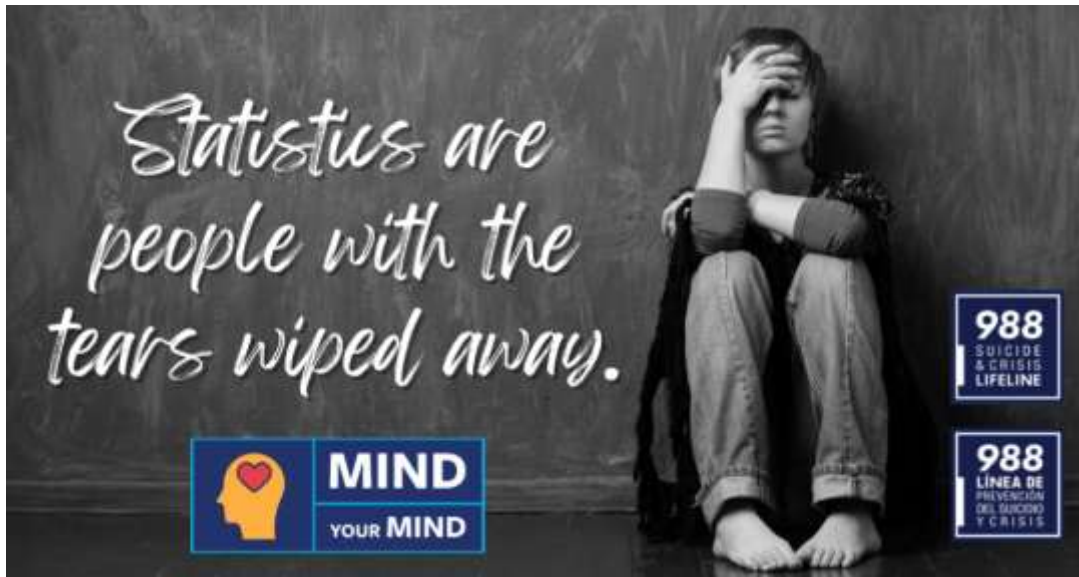
Goals:

- Promote recommendations for reporting on suicide and suicide prevention to local media
- Coordinate trainings and activities to engage diverse voice in suicide prevention

Prevention



Prevention examples



Prevention examples



Prevention examples



Believing Survivors is Suicide Prevention

by Lauren Aguillon | Sep 26, 2024 | Blog



Not everything that prevents suicide must be about suicide prevention

**What happens
when you call
988?**

**Never
Bother**



Addressing Fears Related to Seeking Help

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/82CK894OWXM](https://youtu.be/82CK894OWXM)

Intervention

Screening vs. Assessment

“What MOST school personnel actually conduct is a screening rather than a comprehensive risk assessment. It is important to know which is being conducted and most important is that schools have a consistent policy on how to proceed....

Many schools prefer to refer outside of school for the comprehensive assessment to determine risk AFTER conducting a brief screening. This allows the outside providers to determine if hospitalization and/or further treatment are warranted.”

-Terri A. Erbacher, Ph. D.

What is Safety Planning?

The purpose of the Safety Planning Intervention is to provide people who have experienced a suicidal crisis with a specific set of coping strategies and resources to use in order to decrease the risk of suicidal behavior.

suicidesafetyplan.com/



Counseling on Lethal Means

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Explain that reducing access to lethal means is an evidence-based strategy for suicide prevention.
- Explain how reducing access to lethal means can prevent suicide.
- Identify clients for whom lethal means counseling is appropriate.
- Describe strategies for raising the topic of lethal means, and feel more comfortable and competent applying these strategies with clients.
- Advise clients on specific off-site and in-home secure storage options for firearms and strategies to limit access to dangerous medications.
- Work with your clients and their families to develop a specific plan to reduce access to lethal means and follow up on the plan over time.



<https://zerosuicidetraining.edc.org/enrol/index.php?id=20>

Postvention

Communicating with the School Students, Staff and the Community

Possible Scenarios

- Option 1: Death has been ruled a suicide
- Option 2: Cause is unconfirmed (ask that rumors not be spread)
- Option 3: Family has requested cause of death not be disclosed
 - Addressing rumors of suicide
 - Since the subject of suicide has been raised...it's complex but mental illnesses such as depression are usually the cause



CREATING CHANGE

YOUTH | SCHOOLS | COMMUNITIES

YOUTH CREATING CHANGE:

Youth Creating Change is a non-profit organization (501 c3) dedicated to placing young people's voices and creativity at the center of suicide prevention and mental health programming. Our mission is to educate young people about mental health, suicide prevention, and other critical health and social justice issues through the creation of art and film projects; to facilitate healing and belonging through creative expression; and to support schools and communities through curriculums, trainings, and awareness activities in creating safe spaces where young people feel seen, heard, and supported in reaching out for help.

[YOUTHCREATINGCHANGE.ORG](https://youthcreatingchange.org)

SUBMISSION CATEGORIES

(30-second and 60-second PSAs accepted)



Suicide
Prevention



Mental
Health



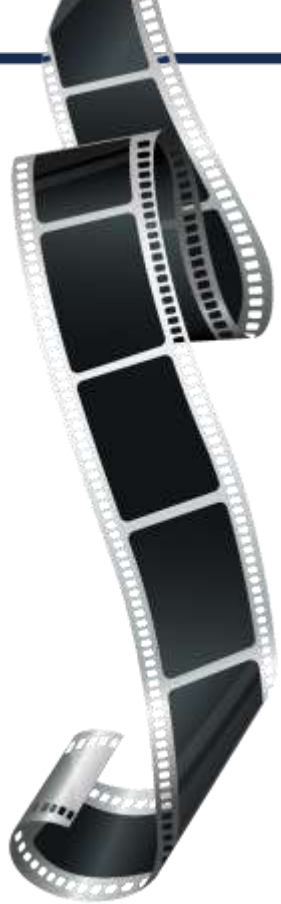
Through the Lens
of Culture



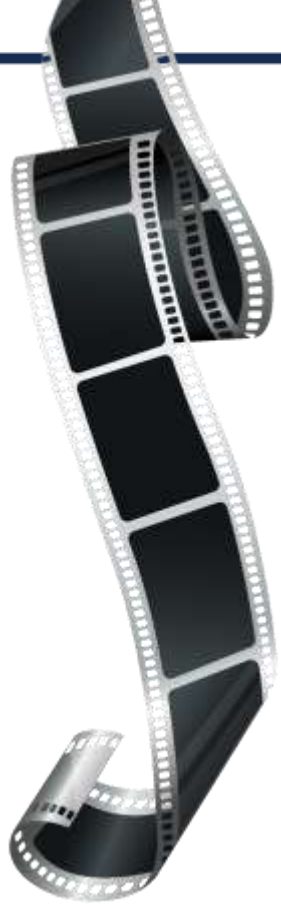
Walk in Our
Shoes



Animated
Short



YOUTH CREATING CHANGE



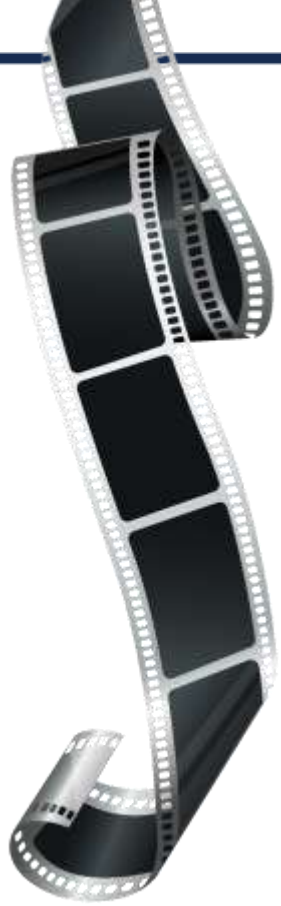
“REACHING OUT”



<https://vimeo.com/331095316>



YOUTH CREATING CHANGE



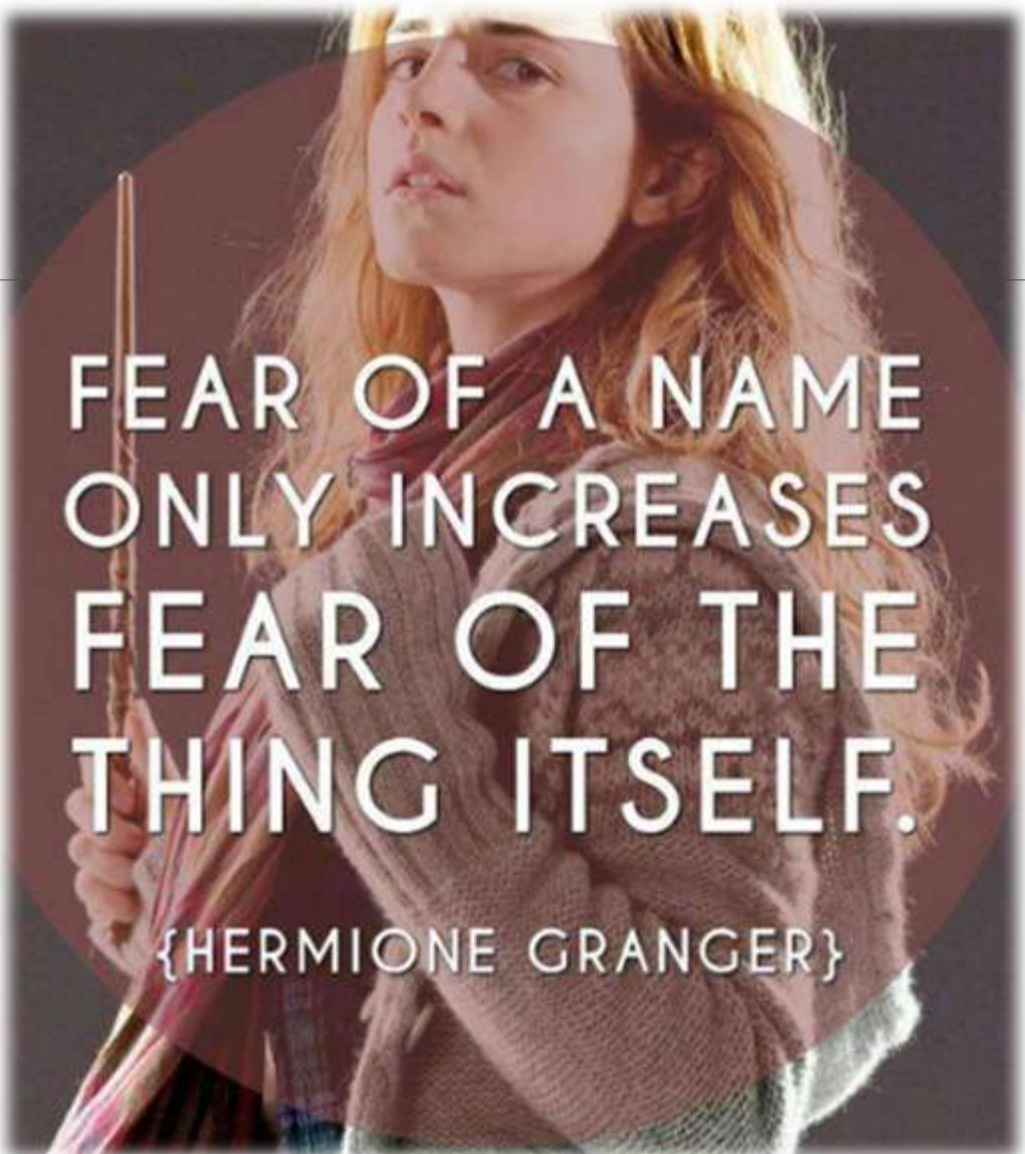
“THIS ISN'T THE END”



vimeo.com/208747236



YOUTH CREATING CHANGE

A circular image of Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series. She is shown from the chest up, wearing a brown knitted sweater and a red scarf. She has long, wavy blonde hair and is looking upwards and to the left with a serious expression. She is holding a closed, colorful umbrella. The background is dark. The quote is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

FEAR OF A NAME
ONLY INCREASES
FEAR OF THE
THING ITSELF.

{HERMIONE GRANGER}

Thank you for attending!
StanPCollins@gmail.com



CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Text HELLO to 741741

Free, 24/7, Confidential