



Communication professionals working in suicide prevention: A guide for working with media

This guide has been created to equip people working in the mental health and suicide prevention sector (the sector) with knowledge and resources to:

- Engage with and support media to cover stories about suicide safely and sensitively, for example, when an organisation is being asked to provide comment, submit a piece for publication or is preparing a media release or statement
- Support a spokesperson with a lived or living experience of suicide before, during and after a media engagement or other public facing opportunity.

It is intended to be used by communications professionals as well as organisational and lived and living experience spokespeople and the sector staff who support them.

The way suicide is reported in the media can have powerful impacts on people's lives. Research shows that some types of language

and reporting about suicide can increase distress and contribute to further suicides. However, when stories are shared safely and sensitively, they can help reduce stigma, lower suicide rates, and encourage people to seek help and support.

People working in the sector play a significant role in shaping how suicide is discussed publicly. By supporting media professionals to follow best practice guidelines, they can help ensure stories shared with the community are safe, responsible and prevention focused rather than harmful.

This guide offers key guidance for:

- Talking to the media about suicide
- Supporting those with lived and living experience to engage with the media
- Briefing the media on working with people with lived and living experience of suicide.

For more detail and context, access the full suite of *Mindframe* guidelines, and other supporting resources: [here](#).

Key guidance for talking to the media about suicide

When liaising with media professionals, remember these key points that support them in following best practice guidance for communicating about suicide.

- Check with the journalist what the purpose of the story is and try to gain an understanding of the angle they may be taking. Consider the potential impact and whether your organisation should be involved.
- Keep in mind that stories of hope and recovery can have positive or preventive impacts on audiences, while sensationalist or stigmatising stories may increase distress or discourage help-seeking.
- Provide a knowledgeable spokesperson from your organisation, or link the media to an expert for comment or advice where possible. Consider directing journalists to the [Mindframe Expert Directory](#). Ensure spokespeople have been trained in the *Mindframe* guidelines or have been briefed about key guidance.
- Provide the media with help-seeking information (including treatment and support options) to include in communication.
- Communicate the importance of avoiding description of the method and location of suicide.
- Avoid language that is labelling or stigmatising. Refer journalists to the *Mindframe* guidelines.
- Check your language does not sensationalise suicide in order to draw attention, including in statements around data releases, as this can lead to further stigma and discourage help-seeking.
- Communicate the importance of reporting suicide data accurately and safely. Refer journalists to the [Mindframe: Quick reference guide for communicating safely about suicide and self-harm data](#).
- Ensure your language does not glamorise suicide or present suicide as a solution to life's challenges.
- Refer journalists to the [Images matter](#) guidelines and image library. Highlight that the images used to accompany a piece can have either a positive or negative impact on audiences. Importantly, images should not depict methods or locations of suicide.
- Help journalists with context by providing general information about suicide, including protective factors, risk factors and warning signs.
- Encourage the media to share stories that capture the complexity of suicide and the many different lived experiences surrounding it. Consider linking the media with a lived experience spokesperson who can provide insight from a personal point of view. However, exercise caution when facilitating access to people whose lived or living experience of suicide distress or bereavement is relatively recent.
- If media reporting of suicide is inaccurate or stigmatising, you can report items directly to StigmaWatch using the [online report form](#).
- Everymind staff are available to provide free *Mindframe* advice and support to sector professionals or media when communicating about suicide and can be contacted at: mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au



Key guidance for supporting those with lived and living experience of suicide to engage with the media

Linking media with spokespeople who have lived and living experience of suicide can provide insight, perspective, and stories of hope and recovery.

Research shows that including these voices in public communication can reduce stigma, build understanding, and promote help-seeking and supportive conversations in the community.

Things to remember when working with people to share their lived and living experience of suicide with the media include:

- Gather and share sufficient information with the lived or living experience spokesperson to help them decide whether to participate and whether their story is appropriate for the opportunity. This includes the purpose of the story, what personal information, images or footage will be used, and how the story will be shared.
- Share the [Our stories matter](#) resources with your lived experience spokespeople so that they can prepare to tell their stories safely.
- Ensure lived experience spokespeople connected with your organisation feel ready to share their story safely, that they are prepared to engage with the media, and for any audience responses once their story is in the public domain. For example, this could mean providing or having them complete lived experience speaker training such as that run by [Roses in the Ocean](#).
- Check in on their current wellbeing and if they feel able to speak with media and share their story at the moment.
- Encourage the lived experience spokesperson to make the journalist aware of any topics that are off limits.
- Request that the content is shared back with your organisation and the lived experience spokesperson for review before publication. This gives you both an opportunity to ensure there has been no misunderstanding about the information they have disclosed.
- Check back in with the lived experience spokesperson after the story has gone live to the public, or if the story has been delayed or cancelled. This provides an opportunity to gather their feedback or reactions to the piece, to offer support if needed. You may also need to liaise with the media outlet or journalist to put additional measures in place, for example moderation of comments.
- Be sure to pass on any positive comments you have received about the piece.



Briefing the media on working with people with lived and living experience of suicide

When briefing a journalist or connecting them with a lived or living experience spokesperson, provide them with the *Mindframe* resource [*Sharing our stories: How journalists and other media can support people to share their experiences of suicide*](#).

This useful document includes guidance such as:

- Ensure the journalist provides information to the lived experience spokesperson to allow them to make an informed decision about whether to participate in the story. This includes the angle of the story, approximately how long the interview will take and what information they intend to share (for example, the person's name, photos or videos).
- Suggest to the journalist that they offer to provide questions to the lived experience spokesperson prior to the interview. This allows them to prepare and know what to expect, while recognising some people may prefer a more conversational approach without questions in advance.
- Help the journalist to provide a safe space for lived experience story telling. Confirm the interview format in advance (for example in person, over the phone, or via video), and whether it will be live or pre-recorded. Remind the journalist to foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment. For in-person interviews, the location, privacy, furnishings, and noise levels must all be considered to create a safe, comfortable space for sharing.
- Ensure the journalist understands the importance of respecting the spokesperson's boundaries. This may include asking them if there are any topics that are off-limits, and allowing them to stop if the interview starts to go into territory where they do not feel comfortable.
- Most people with a lived and living experience know their own limits and capacity in telling their story. Brief the journalist about offering support if the spokesperson becomes increasingly distressed during the storytelling process and suggest they offer breaks when discussing difficult topics.
- Ask the journalist to allow the spokesperson to review the story prior to publication, if possible, to ensure there has been no misunderstanding about the information they have shared. People have more positive experiences with the media when they feel they have agency or some ownership over their story.
- Suggest that the journalist checks back in with the spokesperson after the story has gone live to the public. This allows them to gather feedback on the process, any reactions to the piece, and allows them the chance to pass on any positive feedback they have received.



Additional resources

Whenever possible, promote the following *Mindframe* resources to the media:

- [*Reporting suicide and mental ill-health: A Mindframe resource for media professionals*](#)
- [*Our words matter: Guidelines for language use*](#)
- [*Images matter: Mindframe guidelines for image use*](#)
- [*Mindframe images: A royalty-free image library supporting the Images matter guidelines*](#)
- [*Sharing our stories: How journalists and other media can support people to share their experiences of suicide*](#)

***Mindframe* support for communications professionals**

By modelling and promoting *Mindframe* principles in your interactions with media, you can help to make a positive difference for those in our communities who have a lived and living experience of suicide and mental health concerns.

Along with the above resources, Everymind offers free, real time *Mindframe* support for communications staff working in the sector.

Email our team at mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au and a member of our team will get in touch to discuss your needs and provide *Mindframe* support and advice.

More:



mindframe.org.au



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