

SUICIDE AND ITS PREVENTION

ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN REPORTING A SUICIDE

Why should the story run?

Consider whether the story needs to be run at all, and how many suicide stories you have run in the last month. A succession of stories can promote suicidal behaviour as an acceptable option. Be very careful about making connections to other stories currently running or even implying a connection. Also remember that in Scotland, currently more than 2 people die each day from suicide, most of which go unreported. Also be careful about suggesting reasons as to why someone has taken their own life. It is almost always a series of complex issues.

Language

Check the language you use does not glamorise or sensationalise suicide, or present suicide as a solution to problems – e.g. consider using ‘non-fatal’ not ‘unsuccessful’, ‘increasing rates’ rather than ‘suicide epidemic.’ Used ‘died by suicide’ or ‘experienced depression’ rather than describing the person as a ‘suicide’ or ‘depressive’. Use the term suicide sparingly.

Do not be explicit about the method used and the location

Most members of the media follow a code – written or unwritten – that the method and location of suicide is not described, displayed or photographed. A step-by-step description can prompt some people to act.

Positioning the story

Some evidence suggests a link between prominent placement of suicide stories and copycat suicide. Position the story on the inside pages of a paper, magazine or journal, in the second or third break of TV news, or further down the order of radio reports.

Interviewing the Bereaved

The bereaved are often at risk of suicide themselves. Follow media codes of practice on privacy, grief and trauma when reporting personal tragedy. Be sensitive to friends and family and work colleagues. If a child is involved think very carefully about speaking to their friends as you do not want to put them in a vulnerable position when they will already be feeling very emotionally vulnerable.

Place the story in context

Many people who die by suicide have a mental illness or a drug-related illness. Reporting the underlying causes of suicide can help dispel myths that suicide is not related to a person’s mental state.

Seek expert advice

There are a range of helpful agencies and organisations and acknowledged experts that can help you.

Include helpline contacts

Include phone numbers and contact details for support services. This provides immediate support for those who may have been distressed, or promoted to act, by your story or reporting and are also helpful for people who may wish to or be in a position to support others.

Helpful Helplines include:

Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87 (6pm – 2am)

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 (24 Hours)

Childline 0800 11 11

In Scotland guidelines for the Media on the reporting of suicide by the media have been produced by the NUJ. These are available as a download from the www.chooselife.net website. Or from the NUJ in Glasgow on 0141 248 6648

The Samaritans have also produced Guidelines for the Media www.samaritans.org

(Reference – this text is based on information produced in Australia in support of suicide prevention and the media)