



Key Points

What is it?

The way in which the media covers suicide influences—negatively or positively—the behavior of their viewers or readers. It can contribute to contagion (additional suicides), or it can encourage people to seek help if they need it. Safe reporting is about the media covering suicide in a way that helps to save lives.

Why is this issue important?

Studies show that the frequency and placement of suicide stories, as well as the details, images, and language used in these media reports, can increase the risk of contagion among individuals who are vulnerable and at risk of suicide. In contrast, new research indicates that stories which convey hope by showing mastery over a crisis and recovery can actually reduce the risk of suicide—this is known as the *Papageno effect*. So journalists have a vital role in preventing suicide.

What are the challenges to implementation?

- Journalists may not be aware that how they report on suicide—the language they use, the images they choose, and the placement and frequency of the reports—can possibly lead to suicide contagion or conversely lead to someone getting help.
- A good news story has a catchy headline to attract attention, provides details, and uses dramatic quotes from any source. These standard practices run counter to safe reporting on suicide.
- The media has no control over how people interpret their news stories. Individuals who are vulnerable or at risk of suicide may interpret them differently than intended.
- Suicide prevention advocates who aren't aware of the perspective of journalists or their needs may not provide reporters with the information *they want* and *when* they need it.

How can we overcome those challenges?

- Suicide prevention advocates need to be available to and approachable by journalists, such as responding to their immediate requests for interviews and information on suicide.
- Suicide prevention advocates can proactively seek out journalists, explaining how to report on suicide safely and providing feedback on news reports that don't follow safe guidelines.
- Suicide prevention professionals can provide information to journalism schools and associations so they can train journalists on how to report on suicide safely.
- Since public information officers and other emergency responders may talk to journalists when there is a suicide, they also need to be educated on safe messaging.
- Journalists can spread the word to their colleagues by talking about safe reporting in their newsrooms and developing codes of practice.

"What we need to do is work with journalists to change the entire conversation about suicide so it becomes a story about hope."

Dan Reidenberg, Executive Director,
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