

Media alert

14 April 2022 | Please cascade to all media staff

Understanding the risks of unsafe reporting on youth suicide and bullying

Following a recent increase in reporting related to youth suicide and bullying, it is important to consider the impact this can have on communities. Australian media and communicators have an important role to play in reducing harm to communities when communicating about youth suicide.

Reporting on youth suicide, particularly when linked to bullying, needs to be handled with care and should take into account the complexities involved. This can help prevent public misconceptions and promote help-seeking behaviour.

Speculating around the cause of a youth suicide as the result of a single factor can be harmful as it oversimplifies an extremely complex issue. Although one factor, such as bullying, may be reported as the reason behind a young person taking their own life, it is unlikely to be the sole cause in such incidents.

It is also important to consider the potentially negative impact that frequent, ongoing media coverage of a suicide may have on family, friends and the broader community already mourning such a loss.

Be mindful that individual suicide incidents can increase the likelihood of further suicide attempts or deaths by others within a school, community or region. Young people tend to be more prone to suicide contagion compared to older people. However, safe communication about youth suicide can help reduce this risk of suicide contagion.

Recommendations for reporting about youth suicide and bullying:

- **Consider the context**
Avoid speculating about the cause of death and always place the story in context. Do not imply the death was spontaneous or the result of a single factor or event.
- **Seek expert commentary**
The *Mindframe* [Expert Directory](#) connects media professionals with experienced individuals who can provide commentary relating to suicide to support safe, responsible, contextualised and accurate reporting and communication.
- **Consider postvention messaging**
Mindframe guidelines recommend including information about local services and support for those within the community who may be grieving, following the death of a young person. Resources and information for families and schools for supporting young people through grief such as [ReachOut](#), [headspace](#), and [#chatsafe](#) should also be promoted.
- **Cultural considerations**
Consider cultural factors when selecting images or naming the deceased person. Always seek advice and ask permission from the family before naming or selecting an image of the deceased.
- **Minimise any details about method and location**
Minimising these details can reduce the risk of imitative behaviour.

- **Use safe, sensitive, and non-stigmatising language**

Inaccurate language can present suicide as glamorous or an option for dealing with problems and can be stigmatising for those who are bereaved. Read more about safe and non-stigmatising language: mindframe.org.au/language

- **Always include help-seeking information when discussing suicide**

The inclusion of help-seeking information encourages individuals to seek help and support when it's needed. When discussing youth suicide, it is important to include youth-based services that operate 24/7. *Mindframe* guidelines recommend including at least two services. More: mindframe.org.au/help-seeking

Support for media

For free support when reporting on or communicating publicly about youth suicide call 02 4924 6900, visit mindframe.org.au or email mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au

To report stigmatising content in the media visit <https://www.sane.org/services/stigmawatch/report-a-media-item-to-stigmawatch>

Media self-care

Reporting suicide and mental illness can also impact to the welfare of journalists. To support media professionals *Mindframe*, in consultation with the [DART Centre Asia Pacific](#), has developed journalism self-care resources for media professionals reporting suicide and mental illness. These resources can be found [here](#).

Youth support services/resources

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

headspace: 1800 65 0890

headspace.org.au

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

beyondblue.org.au

ReachOut: reachout.com

Other resources

Head to Health: Mental health portal

headtohealth.gov.au

SANE Australia: Online forums

saneforums.org

Orygen #chatsafe:

Tools and tips for online communication

orygen.org.au/chatsafe