



# Quick reference guide for media reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide

This guide has been developed to support journalists to work in safe and respectful ways when sharing stories about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of suicide.

It aims to empower journalists to deliver stories that are safe for the journalist, the interviewee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and media audiences.

**When done in a safe and respectful way, sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived and living experiences of suicide in the Australian media helps to:**

- Improve understandings about local community needs and provide an avenue for truth-telling
- Reduce loneliness, fear, and shame about suicide
- Encourage others to reach out for help when they need it
- Increase confidence for people to share their stories
- Enable communities to highlight what is needed
- Reduce racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Reduce suicide rates in First Nations communities.



## Social and emotional wellbeing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' social and emotional wellbeing includes connections to culture; Country; spirit, spirituality and ancestors; mind and emotions; body; family and kinship; and community. When these connections are strong, social and emotional wellbeing thrives.

There are many differences in how suicide, social and emotional

wellbeing, and mental health concerns are understood within different communities.

Everymind acknowledges the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This resource provides general advice only. We recommend seeking further specific advice from Elders or community leaders as needed.





## Preparing for a story



### Be respectful

When first engaging with a community or person, always approach the topic sensitively and with respect. It is likely that the person you are talking with has lost a loved one to suicide. The impacts of a suicide are felt by the whole community.



### Understanding and connecting with community

Where possible, spend time in community before developing stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide. What stories do the community want told?



### Cultural guidance

Take time to talk with a community spokesperson. This may be an Elder, cultural leader, or person from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO). They can let you know who you should be talking with, and provide important cultural guidance.



### Be proactive and prevention focused

Don't wait until a death has occurred to report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide. Stories about people surviving a suicidal crisis, what's working in a community, or available supports or services can have a positive or preventative effect.

If a suicide death has occurred, the story's focus should be on acknowledging grief and loss, and making sure people are connected to support in order to reduce the risk of further suicidal behaviour.

Good context and depth of reporting can help to mitigate that risk.

## Preparing for a story (continued)



### Connect

Refrain from identifying a person who has taken their life by suicide as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander until you have connected with family and discussed the issues with community and relevant spokespeople who can provide context.



### Cultural guidance

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide is different to non-Indigenous suicide. For example, there are complex factors that contribute to high rates of suicide in some communities, as outlined in this Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention ([CBPATISIP](#)) [fact sheet](#). Suicide is also different across various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Take time to understand the local context, challenges and strengths.



### Understand cultural protocols

If reporting on a death, take the time to understand cultural protocols such as Sorry Business, or whether you can share the name and image of a person who has died. The family may provide you with permission to share the name or image of a person who has died, but they may also request these details not be shared.



### Refer to media guidelines

Familiarise yourself with guidelines such as [Mindframe](#) and [Good Yarn](#). These resources state that a strengths-based approach may provide alternatives to only focusing on problems or deficits, without denying the challenges being faced.

## Preparing for a story (continued)



### Offer resources to interview subjects

Share the *Mindframe* and CBPATSISP resource [\*A First Nations Guide for Truth-telling about suicide\*](#) with people you are approaching for an interview.



### Prioritise care and accuracy in reporting

Remember, getting the story and process right is more important than telling or publishing a story quickly.

## Sorry business

Sorry Business is an important time of grief and mourning for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Be considerate when setting an interview date as it is important to be mindful of people bereaved

by suicide. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait community in particular, this period often involves attending funerals, cultural events, activities and ceremonies.



## During an interview



### Create a safe space

Create a safe and welcoming environment for interviews. This can include taking time to build rapport and trust before the interview, inviting people to bring a support person or translator (if English is not their first language) or giving people questions in advance so they can feel prepared.



### Be flexible with time

Allow time for the interview so people don't feel rushed. A yarning approach may work best, and can take more time than a more formal interview. A yarning approach involves communicating through a two-way interaction, allowing for flexibility in where the conversation goes, and is focused on establishing trust.



### Build trust

Explaining your story angle, your background as a journalist and who the other interviewees are, can help build trust before you start. Let the interviewee know that they don't have to answer every question.



### Take comments with caution

Be particularly careful with live interviews and talkback. There may be information circulating on social media that is wrong and may lead to identification. Use the dump button on talkback. Ensure interviewees are aware of any restrictions that may apply to on-air discussions.



### Be mindful of bias

Be mindful of your own biases and how they may affect the way you interpret things like body language.

For example, a person may show respect by avoiding eye contact or use silence to carefully consider their response.

## During an interview (continued)



### Ask for identifiers

Be mindful of the language and terminology you use. For example, some people prefer the use of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' over 'Indigenous'. If you're not sure, ask.



### Manage risk

If raised, reassure people that their story about suicide won't increase the audience's risk. If relevant, let them know that certain parts of their story may be excluded (such as specific details about how the suicide happened) because these details can increase the risk of suicide.



### Follow-ups and publishing

At the end of the interview, let the person know if you'll be contacting them for follow-ups and provide them with clear information about when and where the story will run.

## Deaths in custody

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody relate to suicide, take care when discussing how someone took their life.

While it is not recommended, if including discussion of means restriction (such as improving infrastructure or removing access to methods), provide general rather than detailed descriptions of recommendations.

In any stories of means restrictions, avoid using individual cases where someone took their own life using that method; this can help to reduce the likelihood that someone may identify with a specific person who has died and, subsequently, help to reduce the risk of suicidal distress.







## Developing your story



### Aim for balance

Aim for a balanced story. Well-balanced stories on strengths, resilience, and cultural connection have been linked to positive social and emotional wellbeing.



### Don't simplify

Avoid simplistic explanations that suggest suicide is the result of a single factor, or explanations that over-generalise.



### Don't publish details

Remove details of the method or location of a suicide death or attempt.



### Support services

Include help-seeking information, such as [13YARN](#).



### Content advice

Consider using a content advice statement, as well as taking care with classifications and other audience information whenever covering confronting or potentially distressing subject matter. One example of content advice you may include is: *'This story contains discussions of suicide.'*



## *Developing your story (continued)*



### Select the right images

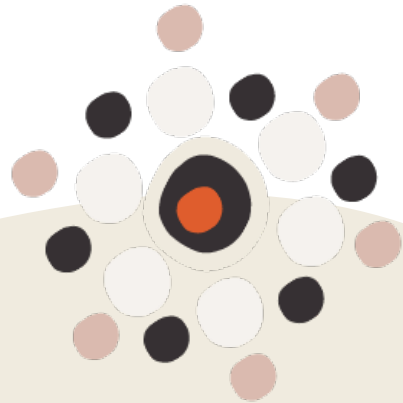
Choose images carefully and use a diverse range of strengths-based images that model hope and social connection. Avoid images or footage of violence or racism as these can be re-traumatising for people.



### Protect minors

Do not use any images of a child, whether attempts have been made to de-identify (blurred, distorted) or not. Publishing photographs, even with faces blurred, carries risk of breaching laws relating to the identification of children, which can be a criminal offence.

Other facts that increase risk that a child will be identifiable include: details about their parents; the child's age and family background; the number of siblings, ages of siblings or whether they were also in the care of family or the state; who the child had been living with and who they were living with at the time of their death.



## Considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists covering suicide

First Nations journalists will often feel a deep sense of responsibility or connection to community.

This is a strength but may also increase the pressure felt to get a story right.

If reporting on a suicide death that you are also grieving, consider working with another journalist or requesting additional support from your organisation for your own social and emotional wellbeing.

## About this resource

This resource was co-created out of a media training program co-designed and delivered by Aboriginal media expert and social justice advocate, Megan Krakouer (Director of the National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project).

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of the 18 Aboriginal community members who participated in this pilot program, sharing their stories and deep knowledge gained through lived and living experience of mental health concerns and/or suicide. The project was led by the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide

Prevention (CBPATISIP), with support from Everymind and Gerry Georgatos, founder of the [National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project](#).

Everymind acknowledges the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This resource provides general advice only. We recommend seeking further specific advice from elders or community leaders as needed.



The Centre of Best Practice in  
**Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander  
Suicide Prevention**

## Taking care of yourself

It is not easy to report on suicide. Ensure you reach out for support if needed, such as your regular healthcare provider, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a 24/7 crisis support service.

Take care of yourself. Have a self-care plan or think about activities that help you maintain your mental health and wellbeing. [The Mindframe/Dart Centre Asia Pacific Self-care tips](#) may be useful.

## First Nations support

**13YARN** 13 92 76 | [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)  
Crisis support for First Nations people (24/7)

**Thirrili** 1800 805 801  
Indigenous suicide postvention service (24/7)

## First Nations resources

**Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention**  
[cbpatsisp.com.au](http://cbpatsisp.com.au)

**National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations**  
[naccho.org.au](http://naccho.org.au)

**Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet**  
[healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

**WellMob**  
[wellmob.org.au](http://wellmob.org.au)

## Other support & resources

**Lifeline** 13 11 14  
Text 0477 13 11 14 (24/7)  
[lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**Suicide Call Back Service**  
1300 659 467  
[suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

**StandBy Support After Suicide**  
1300 727 247 (6am-10pm, 7 days)

**Mensline**  
1300 78 99 78 | [mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)

**QLife** 1800 184 527 | [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)  
LGBTIQ+ service available  
3pm - midnight

**Kids Helpline**  
1800 55 1800 | [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

**Health to Health**  
[headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au)