

FACTSHEET BROADCAST MEDIA

MEDIA GUIDELINES for Reporting Suicide

SAMARITANS

Background

Suicide is often a subject of interest across all media. However, broadcasters face some unique challenges when reporting the issue. For instance, producing high quality, live reporting to camera, when the subject matter is clearly very sensitive and where careful use of language is essential.

Best practice for broadcast reporting of suicide

Story placement and content

- Avoid prominent placement of suicide stories within bulletins, instead try to run stories further down the order of reports. There is considerable evidence that prominently placed stories about suicide are more likely to lead to imitative 'copycat' behaviour by vulnerable people.
- Exercise caution when considering how often to re-run or update a story about suicide within a news cycle as repeat exposure could influence vulnerable people.
- Explicit detail regarding a method of suicide should not be included in any broadcast in order to guard against unduly influencing the behaviour of vulnerable people. For example, never mention how many or which type of tablets a person may have taken, and what they were taken with, in an overdose attempt. Consider whether including any information on the method is at all necessary.
- Be extra vigilant about the use of language when reporting suicide - especially when preparing for a live broadcast. Inappropriate use of language such as 'epidemic' or 'cluster' where a number of suicides are being reported can sensationalise a suicide or attempted suicide.

Story presentation

- Carefully consider the visuals used for broadcast pieces. Pictures, stills or video content of the scene of a suicide are advised against. For example, avoid 'to camera' reports from a cliff top or a stretch of railway track. Repeatedly reporting on visible or clearly identifiable locations, risks drawing attention to these.


- Don't show images of the immediate aftermath of a suicide or suicide attempt. For example, emergency services at the scene of the death.
- Think carefully about the cut-aways or other background footage used to illustrate a news piece or documentary feature in order to avoid over dramatisation. For example, a story about young people who have taken their own lives after using drugs should not have footage of teenagers in an environment that could be interpreted as 'cool' or 'hip' such as a nightclub.
- Video, stills or pictures of a person who has taken their own life should be used with extreme caution. Question if it is really necessary to use an image – especially if it is of a young person. If images are used, seek permission from relatives. Also, avoid using images prominently or repeatedly.
- Avoid any 'reconstruction' of a suicidal event.
- If using music with a radio or television broadcast about suicide think carefully about how the music is selected and used. Emotive music could be interpreted as over dramatising or sensationalising a death.

Additional points to consider

- If approaching bereaved people for interviews, or people who have attempted suicide in the past, bear in mind that they may be vulnerable. People who have tried to take their own life in the past are more likely to make an attempt again in the future. For more information on approaching bereaved family members, see Samaritans' Media Guidelines Factsheet on 'Working with bereaved families in the aftermath of a suicide'.
- Take extra care about how documentaries are promoted. Ensuring that departments or agencies responsible for producing trailers are aware of guidelines on reporting suicide will help prevent over dramatisation when publicising a programme.
- Video and audio content made available online is increasingly a part of the broadcast landscape, so pay special attention to those that feature suicide. It is important that this type of content is treated with the same caution applied to other forms of programming. Extra care should be taken to ensure that extended versions of programmes previously broadcast on the radio are checked to make sure the content complies with *Samaritans and IAS' Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide*.
- Direct viewers and listeners to sources of help such as Samaritans. Providing practical information on where to seek help following a broadcast featuring suicide is always advisable.

For general tips on best practice consult *Samaritans and IAS' Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide* at: www.samaritans.ie/mediaguidelines

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