



Reporting on Suicide: Recommendations for the Media

Setting
Media Outlets

Type of Program
Protocols & Guidelines

NSSP Goals Addressed
9.2, 9.3, 9.4

Program Description

Developed by a collaboration of organizations and experts from the field of suicide prevention, *Reporting on Suicide: Recommendations for the Media* provides practical guidelines for reporting on suicide deaths that may reduce the risk of subsequent suicide deaths in the community. Research has shown that graphic, sensationalized, or romanticized descriptions of suicide deaths in the news media can contribute to suicide contagion, popularly referred to as “copycat” suicides. Media reports on suicide can also be a source of misinformation; for example, when suicide is attributed in a single event such as the loss of a job or a relationship, with no mention of underlying factors such as the individual’s depression, substance abuse, or lack of access to treatment for these conditions. In contrast, the responsible coverage of suicide can educate wide audiences about the likely causes of suicide, its warning signs, trends in rates, recent treatment advances, and other ways suicide can be prevented.

Program Objectives

Media outlets that implement the recommendations will:

1. Reduce the type of language that may increase suicide risk.
2. Reflect an understanding of the causes of suicide, its relationship to mental illness, and the effectiveness of treatments.
3. Avoid myths and misunderstandings about suicide.
4. Understand the questions to ask and angles to pursue when reporting suicide deaths.

Program Development

The recommendations found in *Reporting on Suicide* were developed through an expert consensus process that included a review of relevant research. Development of the recommendations was supported by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American Association of Suicidology, and the Annenberg Public Policy Center in collaboration with the Office of the Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Mental Health, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations.

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Costs

Reporting on Suicide is available for free. It can be downloaded from American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website: www.afsp.org/media.

*The content of programs listed in Section II (Expert and Consensus Statements) of the SPRC/AFSP Best Practices Registry address specific goals of the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and have been reviewed by a panel of three suicide prevention experts and found to meet standards of importance, likelihood of meeting objectives, accuracy, safety, congruence with prevailing knowledge, and appropriateness of development process. Programs were not reviewed for evidence of effectiveness. Additional information about the Best Practices Registry can be found at www.sprc.org.

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