

Suicide Response Resources

Media and social media

Youth suicide can attract media and social media attention, especially if there's been more than one suicide at a learning community.

Discussion and reporting about suicide needs to be approached with care to limit the risk of suicide contagion; where one suicide within a school, community or geographic area increases the likelihood that other young people will attempt suicide.

Working with the media

During the stressful time that follows a suicide, it's often difficult for schools to know whether to respond to media requests and how to liaise with the media. Refusing to speak to the media won't prevent coverage of suicide. Instead, you can use the media's request for information as an opportunity to influence the story and encourage responsible reporting.

Planning ahead and following clear guidelines is key to successful interactions with the media

Appoint a media liaison person. Choose only one person to make sure the school delivers a clear and consistent message to the media.

Contact your education department or the equivalent body before speaking to the media. It's also important to speak with the young person's family before giving a statement to the media to ensure their wishes are respected.

Deliver clear and consistent messages about the school's response to the suicide like "We will be offering ongoing grief counselling for young people and staff" and "We will be hosting an information session for families and the community about suicide prevention next week. Mental health professionals will be on hand to answer questions".

Don't oversimplify the cause of suicide. Suicide is never the result of a single factor or event. Although one event may appear to have triggered the suicide, it's unlikely to be explained by this alone. Most people who die by suicide have a history of difficulties that may not get reported in the aftermath of the suicide.

Don't glamorise the victim or the suicide itself as it can make suicide appear attractive to other at-risk people and contribute to suicide contagion by suggesting that society is honouring the suicidal behaviour rather than mourning the person's death. Try not to highlight community expressions of grief like memorials.

Manage the visual aspects of the story. Don't allow television cameras or reporters onto school grounds. Tell the media not to include pictures of the death scene or distressed mourners, and don't share photos of the young person or their peers.

Don't give details of the method of suicide. While it's important to be clear and consistent when you're presenting information about suicide, giving a detailed description of where or how a person took their life can promote imitation by other at-risk people.

Highlight the responsible way to report mental illness and suicide. Draw attention to the complex nature of suicide and encourage reporters to raise awareness of the risk factors and warning signs of suicide as well as provide practical advice on how to help a suicidal person. Provide relevant contact information for Lifeline and Kids Helpline, and direct reporters to Mindframe's [Reporting suicide and mental illness](#), a resource especially for media professionals.

Refer reporters to Be You if the scope of media requests is outside your area of expertise. We can provide expert comment.

Managing social media

Young people use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat to communicate, so managing social media is an important part of the school's safe response to suicide.

Young people are likely to turn to social media after a suicide for a variety of reasons. They might send news about the death (accurate and rumoured), post messages (appropriate and inappropriate), call for impromptu gatherings and create virtual memorials. Social media is an effective way for young people to connect to and support each other, but messages can quickly reach a huge number of people and have a negative impact if they're not managed appropriately.

While schools can't control social media posts and conversations that take place outside school hours and away from the school, there are opportunities for schools to work in collaboration with young people to encourage them to share accurate and helpful information to minimise risk.

Talk to young people about cyber safety

Remind young people about the possible risks of social media. Talk about how comments can become public without their permission, that online memorials can attract negative and hurtful comments and that anything that talks about suicide in a positive way can be harmful to other students.

Integrate cyber safety into the school's wellbeing curriculum. This will equip young people to think critically about the effects of messages and images they post online.

Promote health and wellbeing resources for young people

Talk to young people about:

- where they can go for help at school
- external mental health services
- crisis services (such as Kids Helpline and Lifeline)
- organisations that promote positive mental health and wellbeing (such as **headspace** and ReachOut)
- resources about mental health, mental illness and the causes of suicide.

Create school social media pages

Think about creating a school account that can become a platform for communication in the event of a suicide.

Research shows that if schools establish a presence on social media before a crisis occurs they're better able to reach parents and community members in the event of an emergency. Assess the culture of the school community to figure out which social media platforms to use — and remember that the popularity and usability of these platforms changes rapidly.

Discuss memorial pages

Memorial pages are a common way for young people to pay tribute to deceased friends.

Most memorial pages will have an administrator — a friend or family member who manages the page. If the page is administered by students, offer to help to ensure the young person's life is memorialised appropriately and safely.

When you're talking about the memorial page with a young person, discuss the impact that the site may have on other young people.

Encourage them to:

- avoid posting any details about the death
- include messages about where young people can get help
- take care not to give the impression that suicide was a positive outcome for the young person
- remove comments that are offensive, rude or disrespectful to the deceased or other young people
- report any concerning comments to a nominated staff member.

Dealing with concerning material

Social media can have a positive effect on young people but distressing material can have the opposite effect.

If concerning material is posted on social media platforms, arrange for an appropriate member of staff like a wellbeing coordinator to meet with friends of the deceased. Make sure young people know who they can contact if they're concerned about messages they see on social media platforms.

Concerning messages may include:

- rumours
- information about upcoming or impromptu gatherings
- messages that suggest the suicide was a positive outcome for the young person
- messages that bully or victimise other young people
- comments indicating other young people may themselves be at risk (such as "I am going to join you soon" or "I can't take life without you").

If school staff become aware of concerning posts:

- speak directly with the young people who have posted inappropriate comments
- dispel rumours
- contact emergency services or families when comments indicate risk to a person's safety
- report offensive material. Most social media platforms allow you to report offensive material and request that the content be removed (although this can take some time)
- guide young people to report offensive material if they wish to report it themselves.

As part of this process, reassure young people that school staff are only interested in supporting a healthy response to their friend's death, not in interfering with their communication.

With delivery partners



Funded by



Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information.