

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

# Talking About Suicide: A How-To Guide for Content Creators

Content creators, including the media, wield a great deal of power: power to inform, power to influence, power to ignite. There's even a phenomenon called "media-influenced suicide contagion," which can have a profound impact on suicidal behavior.<sup>1</sup>

That's why it's imperative for content creators to be aware of, and sensitive to, how they talk about suicide, as well as how they portray suicide's contributing factors, including mental health.

## Promote Hope and Healing

Talking about suicide respectfully and compassionately is shown to go a long way toward offering hope and healing. As Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) puts it, "being mindful of our language is not just about being politically correct; it's about saving lives."<sup>2</sup>

## Changing the Way Society Addresses the Issues

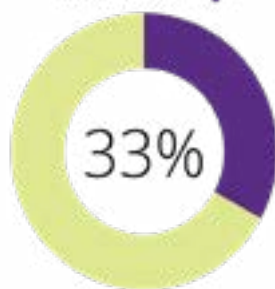
Many people have never been taught how to talk about suicide and mental health issues in ways that are supportive. Even those of us that know better, don't always do better.

When a vulnerable individual struggling with suicidal thoughts sees sensationalized headlines about a celebrity suicide, they start to believe they can do it too. The vulnerable individual then learns the method used, and understands that it works, which increases their likelihood of suicide. This is known as suicide contagion, or "copycat suicide".<sup>3</sup>

## It doesn't make us bad—it makes us human.

So, if you goof and use a stigmatizing phrase, speak up and share why those words were harmful rather than helpful.

In the months following Robin Williams death in 2014, same method suicides increased by <sup>3</sup>



## Changing how we talk about suicide can help stop the stigma.

- DO tell stories of how others were supported during a crisis.
- DON'T share graphic or shocking details. Stick to non-sensational facts.
- DO use neutral, non-judgmental language ("died by suicide" vs. "committed suicide").
- DON'T depict suicide methods or locations. Keeping the information general.
- DO collaborate with local experts like OSPF to provide community and online resources.

## Connect People to Help

The National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) says that for those considering suicide, being exposed to graphic depictions of suicide, detailed explanations of the death, or revealing the method used can change thoughts into action.<sup>3</sup>

It is also important for media to inform communities on the signs of suicide as well as what to do when they discover that a loved one is struggling with suicidal thoughts. These tips can include:

- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal from friends, family and community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Impulsive or reckless behavior
- Giving away prized possessions.

Research shows that in addition to safely reporting on suicide, it is important for the media and other content creators to focus on help-seeking behavior instead.<sup>4</sup> This means talking about hope and recovery and offering relevant resources like these:

**9-8-8**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – Call 24/7

**741741**

Crisis Text Line – Connect with a Crisis Counselor

**838255**

Confidential Texting – for Veterans and Their Families

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, know that there is hope in help. Asking for help is a sign of bravery, not weakness. For help, reach out to any of the resources on this page.

Let's turn talk about suicide and mental health into a hopeful conversation and valuable learning experience.

### References

1. Stanford Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. "TEMPOS: Tool for Evaluating Media Portrayals of Suicide." <https://med.stanford.edu/psychiatry/special-initiatives/mediamh/tempos.html>. Accessed 14 July 2022.
2. CAMH. "Words matter." <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/words-matter-suicide-language-guide.pdf>. Accessed 14 July 2022.
3. NAMI. "Why Suicide Reporting Guidelines Matter." <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/June-2018/Why-Suicide-Reporting-Guidelines-Matter>. Accessed 14 July 2022.
4. ReportingOnSuicide.org. "Best Practices and Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide." <https://reportingonsuicide.org/wp-content/themes/ros2015/assets/images/ROS-001-One-Pager-1.13.pdf>. Accessed 14 July 2022.

### ABOUT

#### OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

**OSPF gives hope to those in crisis, strength to those in the struggle, and comfort to those in grief.** OSPF is a non-profit organization that works tirelessly to help all of Ohio's communities reduce the risk of suicide. Our work includes supporting those impacted by suicide, raising awareness of mental health issues, and coordinating community resources and evidence-based prevention strategies across the state.



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