

Media and social media

Suicide Response Resources

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

School leadership, wellbeing staff or Emergency Response Teams should ensure discussion and reporting about suicide is approached with care to limit the risk of social transmission of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. This is also known as suicide contagion and is the process 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

Following clear guidelines is key to successful interactions with the media

Appoint a media liaison person

Choose 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 actions in response to the suicide

For example, "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, which may not get reported in the aftermath of the suicide.

Don't glamorise the victim or the suicide itself

This can make suicide appear attractive to other at-risk people and contribute to social transmission of suicidal thoughts and behaviours 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. 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.

Managing the impact of social media

Young people use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat to communicate, so managing the impact of 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 with 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.

Most schools will have an established social media platform. You can use this a way to share help-seeking messages, but we encourage you to turn off the comments field to avoid any unnecessary commentary or unwanted speculation. It is also helpful to think about what other channels the school might have endorsed, such as Old Scholars pages or Parents and Friends pages.

Please note that educators are not expected to monitor social media platforms outside of the formal school channels. Educators may be alerted to unhelpful posts through students, parents or carers. You can support these conversations by referring to the #chatsafe guidelines or using the [eSafety reporting process](#) to have dangerous posts or sites taken down.

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 young people.

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.

For more information on communicating safely online about suicide, visit Orygen's [#chatsafe website](#).

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 (You can find a list of organisations on the [Mental health services and support helplines](#) webpage)
- resources about mental health, mental illness and the causes of suicide.

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 educators are alerted to concerning material 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.

Your Be You Consultant can support you to navigate which agency or resources might be required when managing the impact of social media.

Bibliography

Visit [Media and social media](#) for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

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