

Messaging Matters

Pain Isn't Always Obvious

**KNOW
THE SIGNS**

[Suicide Is Preventable.org](http://SuicideIsPreventable.org)

Elly Stout (Suicide Prevention Resource Center)
and
Stan Collins (Each Mind Matters)



Each Mind Matters is California's Mental Health Movement. We are millions of individuals and thousands of organizations working to advance mental health.



Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out

Know the Signs is a statewide suicide prevention social marketing campaign with the overarching goal to increase Californians' capacity to prevent suicide by encouraging individuals to know the signs, find the words to talk to someone they are concerned about, and to reach out to resources.

KNOW THE SIGNS



50%

Californians were exposed to the Know the Signs campaign that was rated by an expert panel to be **aligned with best practices** and one of the best media campaigns on the subject.

"The results provide further evidence that the **Know the Signs** campaign is making Californians **more confident in their ability to intervene** with someone at risk of suicide."
(RAND Corporation, 2015)



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The views, opinions, and content expressed in this product do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of CMHS, SAMHSA, or HHS.

About SPRC

- Support for states, tribes, campuses, communities, and organizations
- National partnerships, including secretariat support for Action Alliance
- Resources for suicide prevention professionals:
 - *Weekly Spark* newsletter
 - Free online trainings
 - Toolkits, videos, and resources



Visit www.sprc.org

Language Matters

- Died of/by Suicide vs. ~~Committed Suicide~~
- Suicide Death/Attempt vs. ~~Successful/Unsuccessful~~
- Describe Behavior vs. ~~Manipulative/Attention Seeking~~
- Describe Behavior vs. ~~Suicide Gesture/Cry for Help~~
- “Diagnosed with” vs. ~~“she’s a Borderline/Schizophrenic”~~
- “Working with” vs. ~~“Dealing with” Suicidal Patients~~
- “LGBT/gay/transgender” vs. ~~“homosexual” or “transvestite”~~

Source: Ursula Whiteside, Zero Suicide Faculty & Founder of Now Matters Now <http://nowmattersnow.org>

What are the causes of Suicide?

¹ cause 
noun | \ˈkôz\

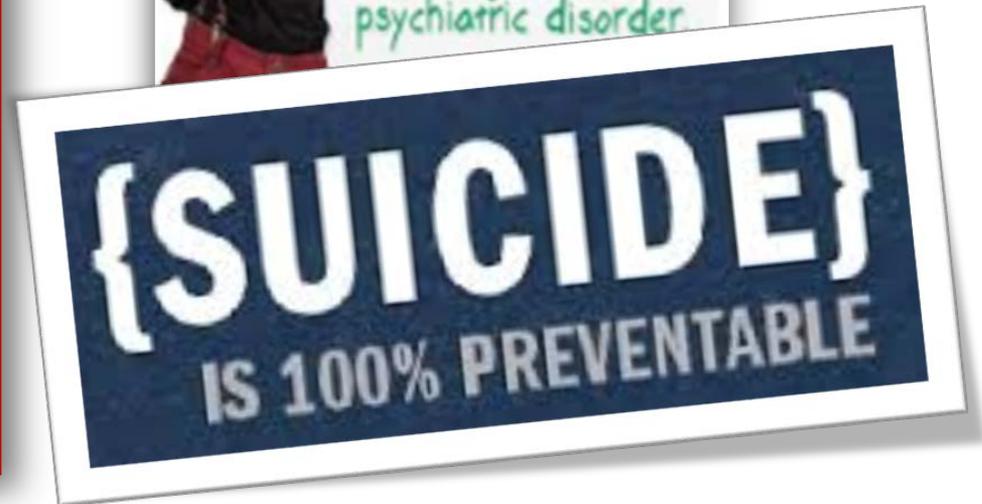
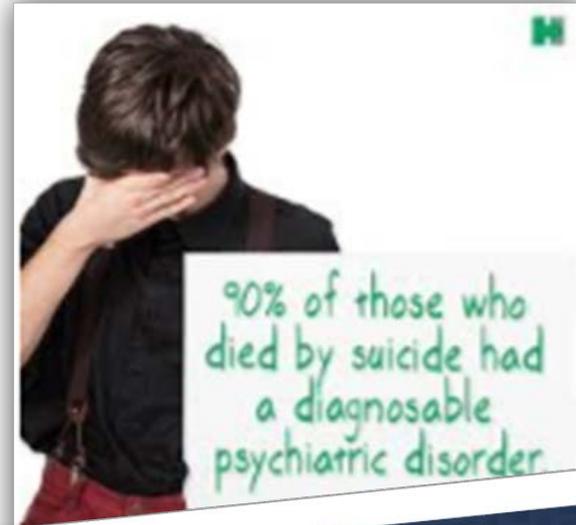
Cause: A reason for an action or a condition

Werther v. Papageno Effects

Certain presentations on the topic of suicide may influence a vulnerable person towards suicidal behavior.

But positive messaging about suicide prevention may have protective effects such as coverage of positive coping in adverse circumstances, or information about resources.

What message do these statements send?



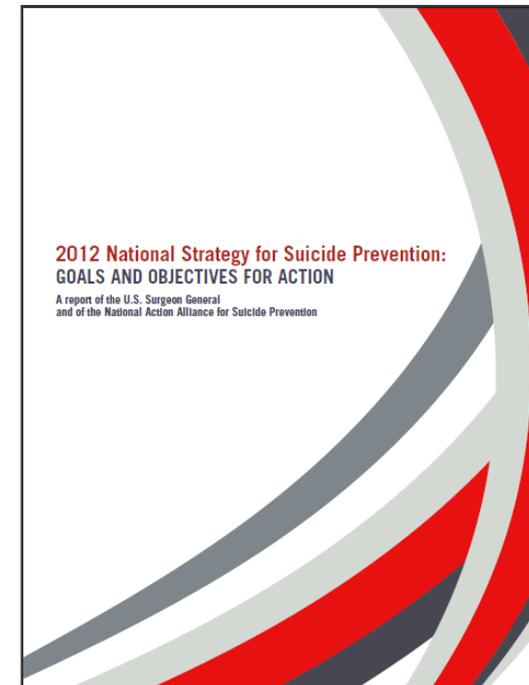
What message do these statements send?



Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

- ✓ **Goal 2:** Implement research-informed communication efforts designed to prevent suicide by changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- ✓ **Goal 4:** Promote responsible media reporting of suicide, accurate portrayals of suicide and mental illnesses in the entertainment industry, and the safety of online content related to suicide.



<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/NSSP>

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Strategic Priority: Changing the Conversation:

“Leverage the media and national leaders to change the national narratives around suicide and suicide prevention to ones that promote hope, connectedness, social support, resilience, treatment and recovery.”



**Media/Entertainment
Outreach**
(Journalists, Writers)



Public Messaging
(Suicide Prevention & Mental
Health Professionals & Other
Messengers)

What is public messaging?

Defined Broadly

- ✓ Any public-facing information
- ✓ Campaigns AND social media, newsletters, event publicity, websites, fundraising materials, etc.

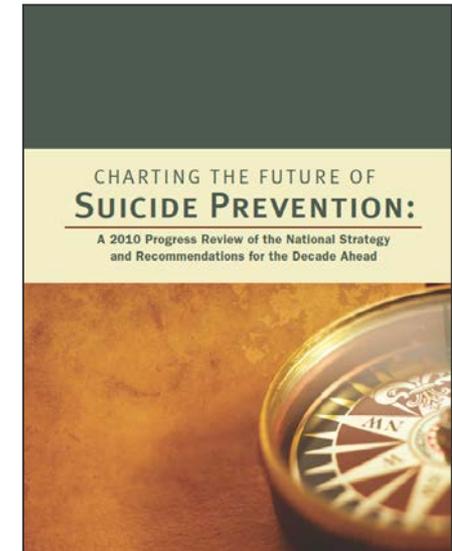
Does **not** include:

- ✓ Private conversations
- ✓ 1-on-1 with individuals in crisis or policy makers
- ✓ Doctor-patient interactions
- ✓ Sharing in support groups
- ✓ Trainings delivered to professional audiences

Need for a change in suicide prevention messaging

Data Sources

- ✓ Research literature
- ✓ *Charting the Future* progress review of 2001 NSSP
- ✓ Public opinion surveys
- ✓ Expert Panel, January 2013
- ✓ Dialogues with diverse stakeholders



Expert panel: Current messaging

- ✓ Emphasis on problem severity, not prevention
 - Collectively, creating a “negative narrative” about suicide

- ✓ Too few stories of hope, recovery, resilience
 - Stories of suicide deaths are common
 - Protective: news stories about coping with adversity without suicidal behavior ⁸

- ✓ The field lacks a core message or frame
 - We can be more proactive in shaping the conversation

Action Alliance

Framework for Successful Messaging

Four considerations when developing messages:

1. Strategy
2. Safety
3. Positive narrative
4. Guidelines



www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org

Start with Strategy



- ✓ Should we use communications?
- ~~✓ We need posters~~
- ✓ Decide “why” before “how”

Features of successful communications campaigns

- ✓ Systematically planned
 - ‘Formative Research’
- ✓ Communications tied to overall strategy
- ✓ Clear audiences and goals
 - Clear call to action
- ✓ Pre-tested
- ✓ Evaluated



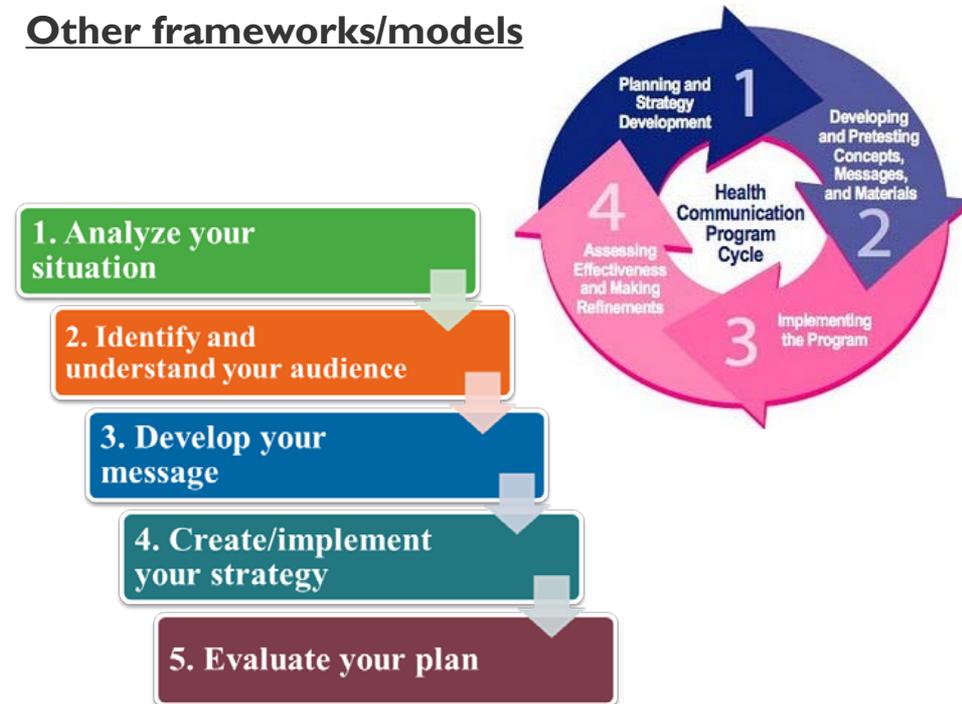
Strategy: Systematic Planning Process

Key Planning Steps: Framework

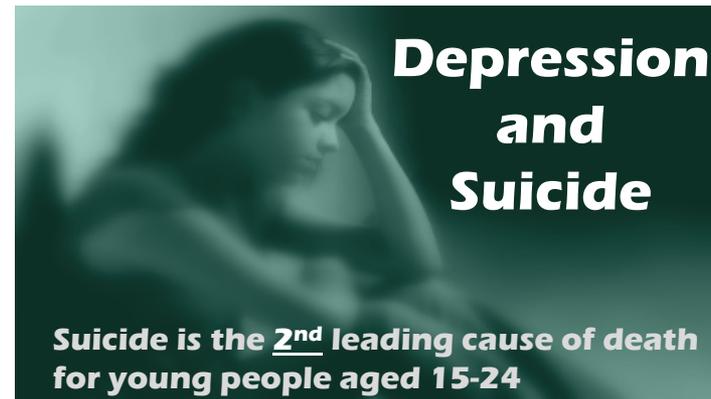
1.	Set the CONTEXT
2.	WHY message?
3.	WHO to influence?
4.	To DO what?
5.	WHAT to say?
6.	HOW to reach them?
7.	SO WHAT?

**“How”
decision
is here**

Other frameworks/models



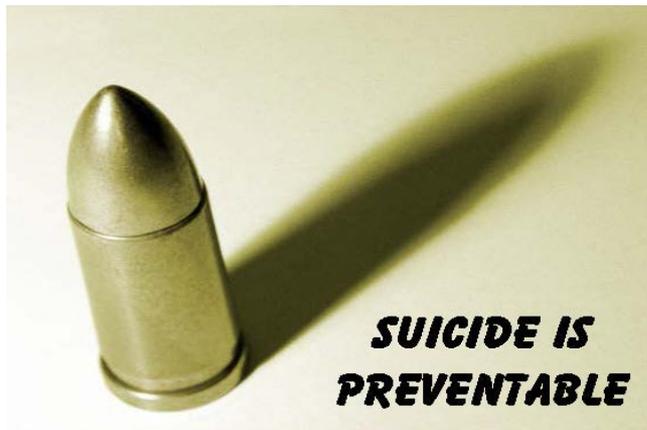
Moving beyond awareness



Note: Not an actual campaign material

Quote from Expert Panel: “It’s time to shift from communicating for awareness to communicating for action.”

Communicating for action



- ✓ Undefined audiences and goals
- ✓ Call to action absent or vague

A better example



Integrating with other efforts



Note: Not an actual campaign material

Often not integrated with programmatic efforts
(e.g., clinical training)

SAFETY

Safety is avoiding content that is unsafe or undermines prevention.



What might cause a message to be “unsafe”?

Considerations for Messaging: Provide a suicide prevention resource

Providing a suicide prevention resource is one of most important components when messaging about suicide or suicide prevention.

Anyone who has suicidal thoughts or is in an emotional crisis can talk to counselors at the National Suicide Prevention hotline, (800) 273-8255 or the San Diego Access & Crisis hotline at (888) 724-7240.



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Considerations for Messaging: Avoid “normalizing” statements

Don't normalize suicide by presenting it as a common event (e.g. epidemic)

Most people who consider suicide do not act on those thoughts.

Presenting suicide as common may unintentionally remove a protective bias against suicide.

**EVERY 40
SECONDS
SOMEONE IN
THE WORLD
DIES BY
SUICIDE.**



Considerations for Messaging: Avoid detailed descriptions of method

- Avoid sharing details about how the suicide was carried out such as specific details about weapon or means used, location of wound, or the location of the incident.

Grim details of Robin Williams' death released by investigators

Rashaan Salaam, Heisman Trophy winner and former Chicago Bear, committed suicide with gunshot to head

Considerations for Messaging:

Avoid over-simplifying the “causes” of suicide, or pointing to a single event as “the cause”

Rather than offering single reasons for suicide (breakup, job loss, etc.), frame suicide as a complex issue influenced by multiple factors.

Oversimplification of suicide can mislead people to believe that it is a normal response to fairly common life circumstances.

Was Junior Seau's Suicide Caused By Head Trauma?

Was Seau's death the result of a brain injury or mental health?

Like 28

Robin Williams, depression and the complex causes of suicide

While many people who kill themselves have been experiencing the extreme distress we might think of as depression, that's not always the case and is rarely the whole explanation

HEALTH

Robin Williams's Widow Points to Dementia as a Suicide Cause

Use Applicable Guidelines



Messengers

Best Practices for
Survivor/Attempt Stories

Goals

Stigma Reduction

Channels

AAS Video
Guidelines

Working with
the Media

Populations

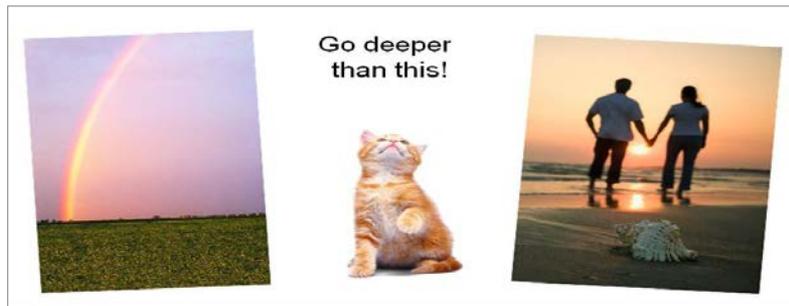
Talking About Suicide &
LGBT Populations

Social Media Guidelines
for MH & Suicide Prevention

And more!

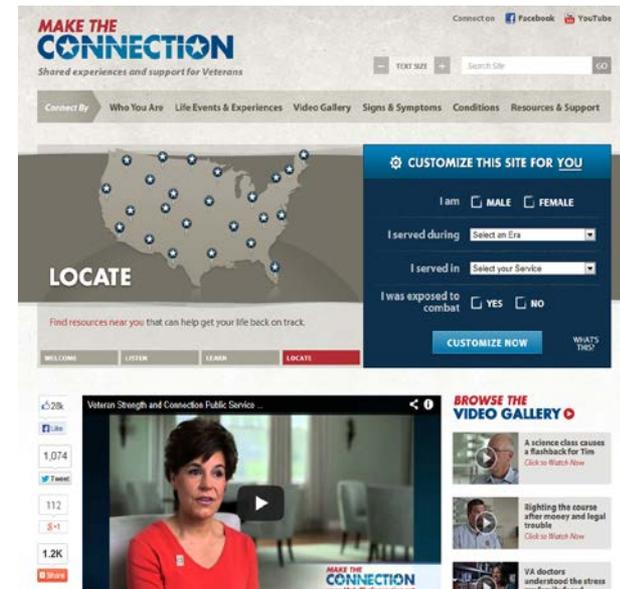
Convey a Positive Narrative

- ✓ Counter the “negative narrative”
- ✓ In every message: help the public to *envision* prevention.



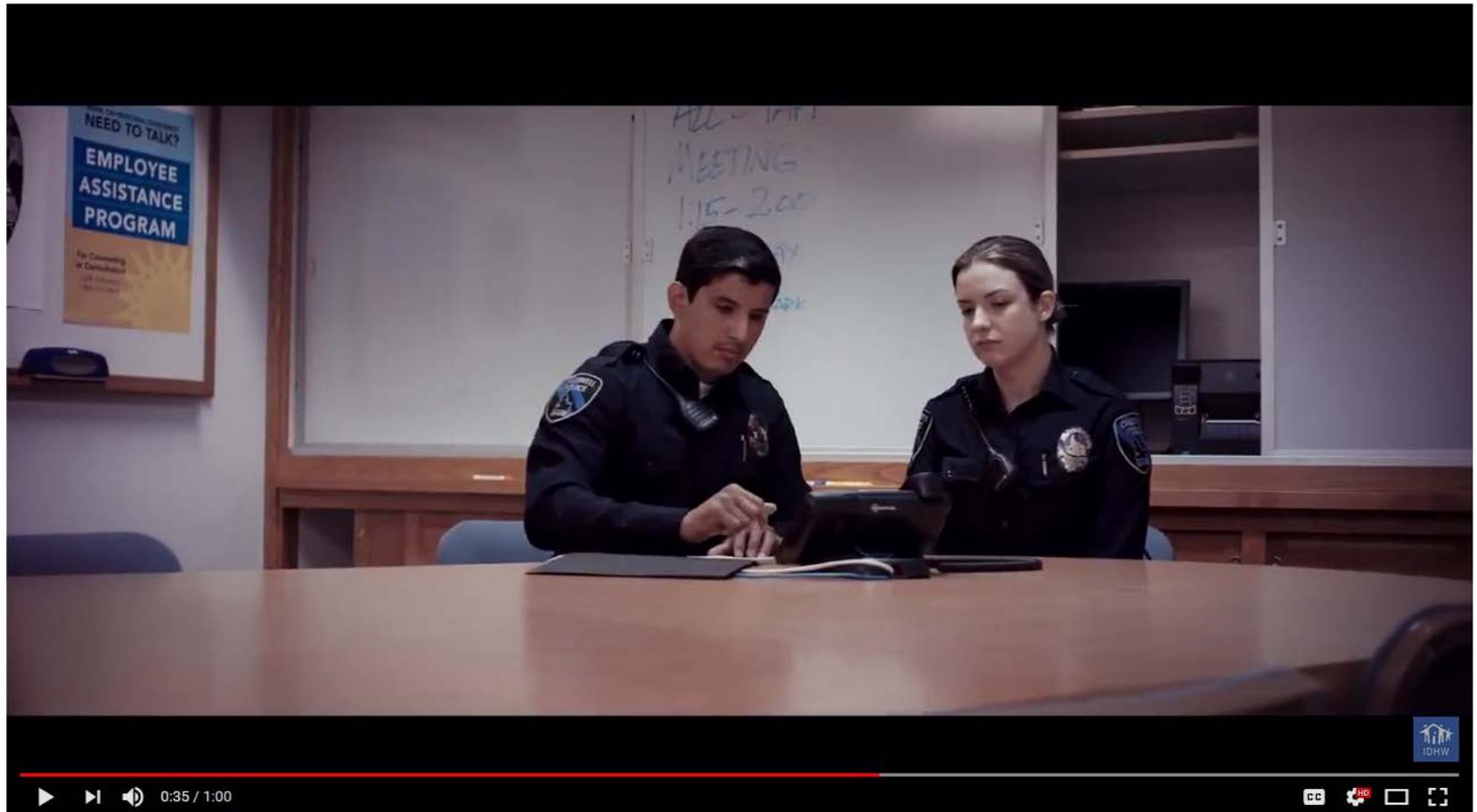
Convey a Positive Narrative

- ✓ What we know about successful prevention
- ✓ Stories of people who were helped/
Your own story
- ✓ Concrete actions people can take
- ✓ Program successes



[“Make the Connection” campaign](#)
US Department of Veterans Affairs

Idaho PSA example



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXySjzRpe6U>

For more successful messages: Use all 4 elements!

- ✓ Strategy: Define goals, audiences & actions, integrate with other efforts, etc.
- ✓ Safety: Avoid “don’ts”
- ✓ Positive narrative: Stories of coping & resiliency; programmatic successes; actions audience can take; available resources & services, etc.
- ✓ Guidelines: Use message-specific best practices



www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org



Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out

Your turn...

FOR THESE AUDIENCES

- Parents of middle school-aged youth
- Homeless female veterans
- Immigrant agricultural workers
- Caregivers of older adults
- EMT first responders

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- Who is your audience?
- What do you want them to do?
- How will you reach them?
- How will you know if you are successful?



MESSAGING MATTERS

Tips for Safe and Effective Messaging on Suicide Prevention

1. PROVIDE A SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE

- Always include a resource such as:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255
 - Crisis Text Line: TEXT "Home" to 741-741
- Describe the resources you are offering, and what to expect

2. EDUCATE THE AUDIENCE ABOUT WARNING SIGNS AND RISK FACTORS

- Include information about warning signs and life circumstances that can increase risk (risk factors)
- Visit suicideispreventable.org for a list of warning signs

3. AVOID DISCUSSING DETAILS ABOUT THE METHOD OF SUICIDE

- Avoid details that describe the suicide including weapon/method used, the specific location, and the location of the wound

4. EXPLAIN COMPLEXITY OF SUICIDE, AVOID OVERSIMPLIFYING

- Reference the complexity involved in suicide
- Avoid oversimplifying "causes" of suicide or pointing to one event as "the cause" of a suicide attempt or death
- Don't speculate. It's natural to want to answer the "why" involved in a suicide but rarely do we fully understand the reasons behind a suicide

5. FOCUS ON PREVENTION: AVOID SENSATIONAL LANGUAGE AND IMAGES

- Don't use statistics that make suicide seem overly common
- Consider using positive statistics that highlight help-seeking such as number of calls to the local crisis line, or visits to a prevention focused website
- Use hopeful images that show people being supported, avoid images that show people suffering alone

6. HELPFUL RESOURCES

Know the Signs - for the public (www.suicideispreventable.org)

Reporting on Suicide - for the news media (www.ReportingOnSuicide.org)

Framework for Successful Messaging, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org)

Each Mind Matters Resource Center- to find and download suicide prevention resources in multiple languages and formats (www.EMMResourceCenter.org)



suicideispreventable.org

Funded by counties through the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63).

Adapted from County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency

Messaging on Suicide Prevention: Review Key Principles

- Provide a suicide prevention resource
- Educate: Discuss warning signs and risk factors
- Create a positive narrative (Use positive images/statistics)
- Avoid over-simplifying
- Avoid information about suicide method
- Avoid “normalizing” statistics



suicideispreventable.org

elsuicidioesprevenible.org

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- MY3 mobile app (my3app.org)
- Training Resource Guide for Suicide Prevention in Primary Care Settings (Train the Trainer)
- Making Headlines: Preparing you to reach out and respond to local media for suicide prevention
- Pathways to Purpose and Hope: A guide to create a sustainable program for survivors of suicide loss
- How to use social media for suicide prevention

The Directing Change Program and Film Contest

Create. Compete.
Direct Change
to Save Lives.
Youth create films to promote social justice in schools and communities.

EachMind MATTERS presents
Directing Change
Program and Film Contest
DirectingChangeCA.org



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LEGISLATURE

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Program & Film Contest
www.DirectingChangeCA.org

Youth Suicide Warning Signs

Talk to a trusted adult or reach out to someone you are concerned about if you observe one or more of these warning signs, especially if the behavior is new, has increased or seems related to a painful event, loss or change:

1. Talking about or making plans for suicide
2. Expressing hopelessness about the future
3. Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
4. Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above.

Specifically, this includes significant:

- Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situations
- Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
- Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
- Recent increased agitation or irritability

If you are concerned about someone, reach out and ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?"

Whatever you're going through, you're not alone. If you're in pain or concerned for someone else, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800.273.8255 (TALK) or text HOPE to 741-741. You can also visit suicideispreventable.org for more information.

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Los Angeles County Films



There is Hope

<https://vimeo.com/258132480>



Behind the Smile

<https://vimeo.com/258653288>



A Fighting Chance

<https://vimeo.com/259420976>

Pain Isn't Always Obvious



Suicide Is Preventable.org

Working *with* Media as Partners in Suicide Prevention

Stan Collins
Stan@SuicideIsPreventable.org



Working WITH Media

- “US” vs. “THEM”
- Have a Plan
- Simplify the Process
- Help *Them* Help You
- Be Gracious

Goals of the Media Engagement Plan

- Promote recommendations reporting on suicide and suicide prevention to local media
- Coordinate activities to engage media in suicide prevention

It's Up to US: Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide (Quick Guide)



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

Provide the media with suggestions on how to report on suicide in ways that will reduce the risk of suicide contagion, and will promote prevention. Here are a few key messages for how you can help the media report on suicide in a safe and responsible manner. Learn more about the Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide at www.reportingonsuicide.org.

1. PROVIDE A SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE

- ▶ Always have suicide prevention resource information on hand, for instance:
 - San Diego Access and Crisis Line: (888) 724-7240
 - Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Resources: Up2SD.org
- ▶ Offer a description of the resources you provide

2. DISCUSS WARNING SIGNS AND RISK FACTORS

- ▶ Discuss more than one warning sign or risk factor for suicide (warning signs on back)
- ▶ Discuss the fact that many risk factors can contribute to suicide

3. AVOID INFORMATION ABOUT SUICIDE METHOD

- ▶ Avoid giving details to the media about how the suicide was carried out
- ▶ Avoid specific details about the weapon that was used

4. FOCUS ON COMPLEXITY OF SUICIDE

- ▶ Make a broad statement about the complexity of suicide.
- ▶ Avoid mentioning only one preceding event; don't over-simplify. There is no easy answer.
- ▶ Avoid speculation – rarely do we ever truly know the causes.

5. AVOID SENSATIONAL LANGUAGE

- ▶ Use objective language (Avoid terms like “crazy” and “psycho”)
- ▶ Use reliable data to describe suicide. Refrain from including statistics that make suicide seem common, normal or acceptable.
- ▶ Maintain a hopeful tone

Up2SD.org
LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO

CHIP
a project facilitated by:
COMMUNITY HEALTH
IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS
making a difference together

**LIVE WELL
SAN DIEGO**

OHHSa
OFFICE OF HEALTH SERVICES
SAN DIEGO COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Provided on behalf of the San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council.

Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out

Speaker's Bureau List



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Office: 619-641-6808
www.optumhealthsandiego.com/accesscrisisline

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www.soslsd.org

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www.sandiegopsychiatricsociety.org

Materials and resources for the media can be found at:

www.Up2SD.org (Under Suicide Prevention Resources)

www.sdchip.org/committee/spc-sub-committees/responsible-reporting-on-suicide.aspx



Provided on behalf of the San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council.

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Strategies Moving Forward

- Public Information Officer Workshops: “Responding to the Media about Suicide”
- One-on-One meetings with media outlets
 - “Buy-in” from local outlets, adoption of protocols
 - Offer trainings to staff on reporting recommendations
 - Strengthen relationship with media outlets
 - NOTE: based on target demographics
- Creation of Media Response Team:
 - Continuing response process for high profile AND additional media content related to suicide (response plan)
- Training to schools of journalism at local colleges/universities

Active/Ongoing Response

1. Members submit recommendation to respond to active/ongoing event
2. Member(s) self-nominate to update “Active Response” template
3. Responding member delivers message to media outlet(s)

Examples: Coronado bridge incidents, I-5 incident, celebrity deaths by suicide



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Thank you!

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