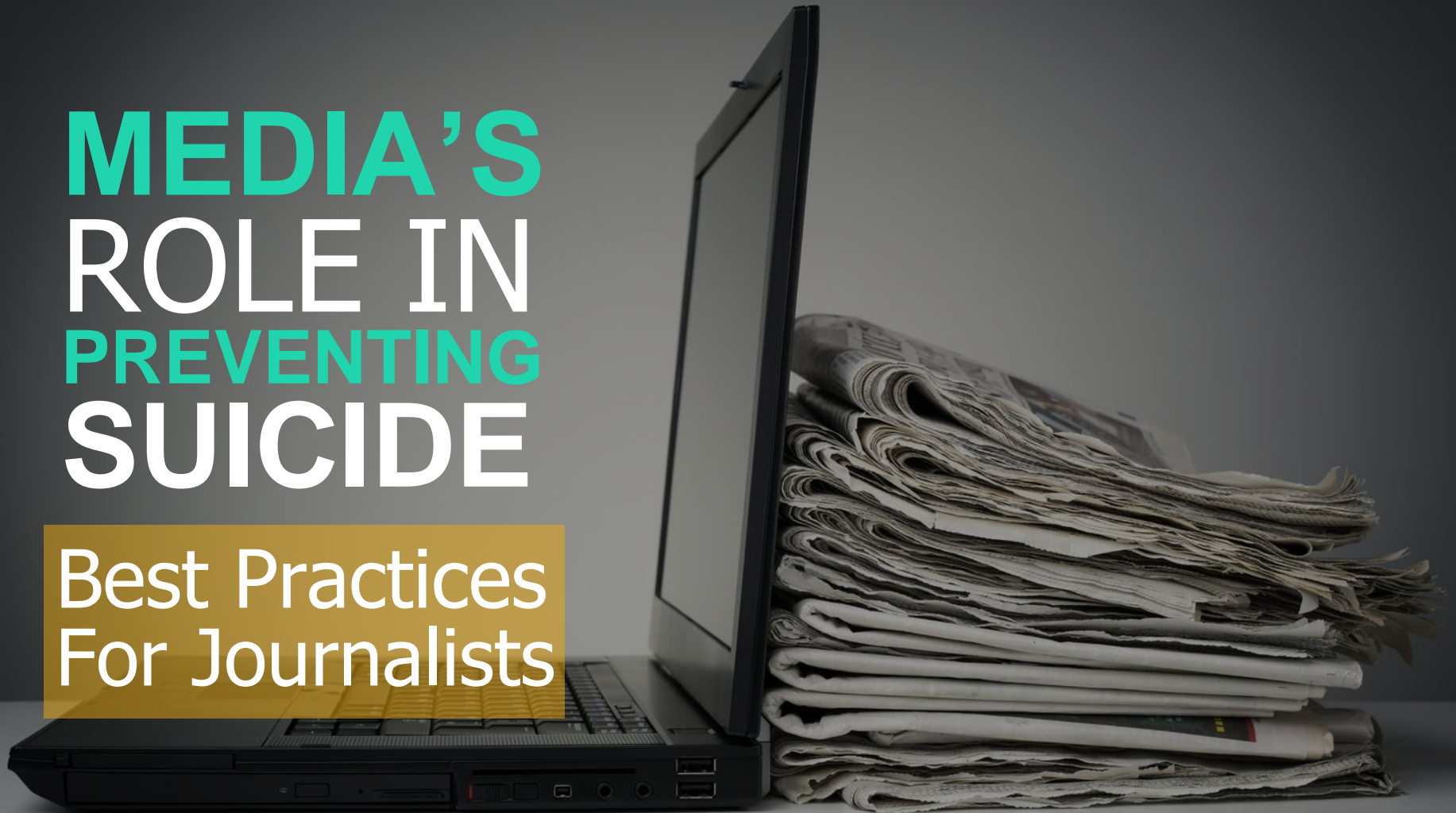


# MEDIA'S ROLE IN PREVENTING SUICIDE

Best Practices  
For Journalists



# ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

There are many different standards and guidelines regarding how journalists or journalistic agencies should conduct their work. Most include the following basic principles:

## Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

## Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

## Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

## Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.



~~RESTRICTION~~

RESPONSIBILITY



# Why does this **MATTER?**

1

Risk of contagion





# MEDIA CONTAGION

Suicide contagion is real

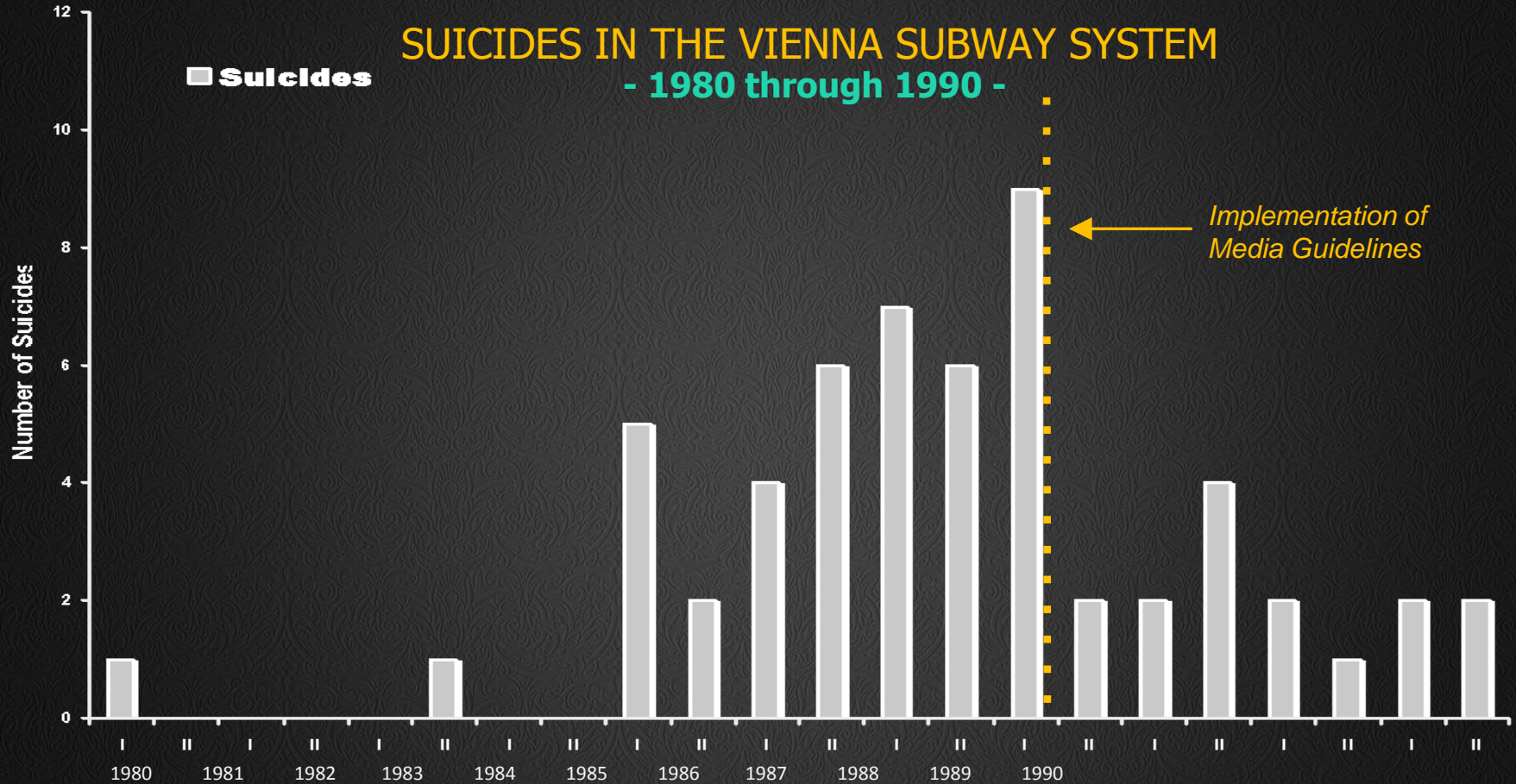
An increase in suicides following media reporting is impacted by:

- Frequency of reports
- Placement of reports
- Language used (graphic, dramatic, headlines)

Prominent examples of contagion:

- Vienna Subway
- Marilyn Monroe

# SUICIDES IN THE VIENNA SUBWAY SYSTEM - 1980 through 1990 -



I indicates the first six months and II the second six months. The media guidelines of the Austrian Association for Suicide Prevention went into effect in June 1987.





# Why does this **MATTER?**

1

Risk of contagion

2

WHO identifies media reporting as  
priority prevention strategy



# WHO IDENTIFIES MEDIA REPORTING as a priority prevention strategy

\*Source: World Health Organization (2015)



Early identification and treatment



Training of health workers



Follow-up care and community support



Restricting access to means



**Responsible media reporting**



Introducing alcohol policies



Researching tech-based solutions





# Recommendations FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

Developed in collaboration with the American Association of Suicidology, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, National Alliance for Mental Illness, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, this document provides guidance on how to report on suicide in a way that is helpful and supportive.

### IMPORTANT POINTS FOR COVER

- More than 30 research studies worldwide have found that the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals increases with the duration and prominence of coverage.
- Risk of additional suicides increases when the article includes graphic headlines or images, and repeated/editorial corrections.
- Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can help encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.

Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices to reduce the risk of contagion and to promote help-seeking. However, the way we cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by providing information that is misleading or harmful. The following are additional information that can be found in the full report.

### INSTEAD OF THIS:

- Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "You're Older, Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").
- Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, giving items, brands, mementos or funeral details.
- Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or other strong terms.
- Describing a suicide as inevitable or "without warning."
- "John Doe left a suicide note saying..."
- Investigating and reporting on suicide similar to reporting on crimes.
- Quoting/interviewing police or first responders about the causes of suicide.
- Referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt."

### AVOID MISINFORMATION AND OFFER HOPE

- Suicide is complex. There are almost always multiple causes, including psychiatric illnesses, that may not have been recognized or treated. However, these illnesses are treatable.
- Refer to research findings that mental disorders and/or substance abuse have been found in 90% of people who have died by suicide.
- Avoid reporting that death by suicide was preceded by a single event, such as a recent job loss, divorce or bad grades. Reporting like this leaves the public with an overly simplistic and misleading understanding of suicide.
- Consider quoting a suicide prevention expert on causes and treatment. Avoid putting expert opinions in a sensationalistic context.
- Use your story to inform readers about the causes of suicide, its warning signs, trends in rates and recent treatment advances.
- Add statement(s) about the many treatment options available, stories of those who overcome a suicidal crisis and resources for help.
- Include up-to-date local/national resources where readers/viewers can find treatment, information and advice that promotes help-seeking.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR ONLINE MEDIA, MESSAGE BOARDS, BLOGGERS & CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

- Bloggers, citizen journalists and public commentators can help reduce risk of contagion with posts or links to treatment services, warning signs and suicide hotlines.
- Include stories of hope and recovery, information on how to overcome suicidal thinking and increase coping skills.
- The potential for online reports, photos/videos and stories to go viral makes it vital that online coverage of suicide follow safe and industry safety recommendations.
- Social networking sites often become memorials to the deceased and should be monitored for hurtful comments and for statements that others are considering suicide. Message board guidelines, policies and procedures could support removal of inappropriate and/or insensitive posts.

MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES AT:  
[www.ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://www.ReportingOnSuicide.org)

### HELPFUL SIDE-BAR FOR STORIES

#### 1 WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

The more of these signs a person shows, the greater the risk. Warning signs are associated with suicide but may not be what causes a suicide.

#### 2 WHAT TO DO

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

- Do not leave the person alone
- Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt
- Call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)
- Take the person to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

### THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

800-273-TALK (8255)

A free, 24/7 service that can provide suicidal persons or those around them with support, information and local resources.





# Why does this **MATTER?**

1

Risk of contagion

2

WHO identifies media reporting as  
priority prevention strategy

3

Scope of the problem





Suicide contagion is **not a US phenomenon** (studies in Austria, Hungary, Germany, Australia, Japan).



**Adolescents** experience greater risk (Gould et al, 2003, Martin & Koo, 1997). 1-5% of teen suicides happen in clusters.



There is a particularly strong effect surrounding suicide **deaths of celebrities.**

This is  
where **YOU**  
come in.







# BEST PRACTICES

for reporting on suicide safely



Avoid an overly  
**SIMPLISTIC**  
EXPLANATION  
for suicide

Suicide is complex and rarely can be attributed to a single cause. Avoid writing that suicide is the result of a common life events like stress, a job loss, divorce or break-up, etc.

Instead, use the opportunity to explain the complexity of suicide.



EUROPE

## Unemployment Is Killing 45,000 People Each Year

f Share

t Tweet

+

By Colleen Curry

February 11, 2015 | 3:06 pm

The number of suicides related to unemployment remains stubbornly high despite the improving economy, according to a study published this week.

Researchers had previously registered a spike in suicides during the global economic crisis that began in 2008, suggesting that financial stress and hardship had contributed to the rise. But *an analysis* published on Tuesday in *The Lancet Psychiatry* by doctors at the University of Zurich in Switzerland estimates that about 5,000 suicides were associated with the crisis, while roughly nine times as many self-inflicted deaths are linked to unemployment each year.

The psychiatrists analyzed the suicide rates and economic statistics of 63 countries from





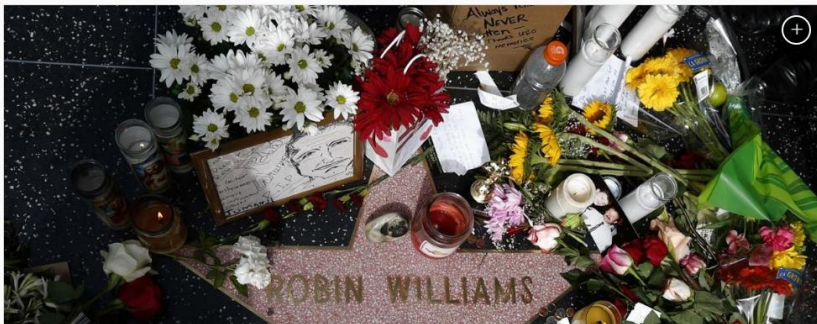
Avoid describing suicide as  
**INEXPLICABLE**  
OR WITHOUT WARNING

Avoid describing that a suicide had *no cause*. This may incorrectly reinforce a false belief that treatment doesn't work and suicide cannot be prevented.

Most people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. *Include suicide warning signs in the sidebar of your article whenever possible.*



# Robin Williams dead at 63: Actor hanged himself with belt, had cuts on his wrist in suicide at home, authorities reveal



“This cannot be made sense of. We’re struggling for answers. We’ll never understand it.”



Avoid **GLORIFYING** or  
**ROMANTICIZING**  
the act of suicide  
or a person who died by suicide

Portraying suicide as a heroic, romantic, or honorable act may encourage vulnerable people to view it more positively or lead them to desire the positive attention garnered by someone who has died by suicide.

Young people are especially vulnerable.

Try to present a balanced story on the person.





Feb 4, 1998

## Double suicide shocks Trinidad

**In local crime news the police say that there is nothing of note to report but in Trinidad and Tobago the nation is reeling from a double suicide that is straight out of "Romeo and Juliet". When two teenaged lovers did not receive the blessing of their parents they decided that life was no longer worth living. The T.T.T.'s Paolo Kernahan reports.**

Seventeen year old Balraj Babulal and fourteen year old Vanessa Beru took their relationship to a new and fatal level. At approximately six thirty this morning a man walking along the Granville Beach came upon the youths suspended by their necks in an arm of the tree. The girl's father on hearing the news went to scene, cut his daughter down, covered her body and returned home. Balraj's dog would remain near to the bodies until chased away by the police. T.T.T. News understands that Vanessa left her home yesterday evening and did not return. At around this time at the Babulal home, according to police reports, Balraj Babulal had just finished reading a letter written to him by Vanessa. Police say that they learned from the family that he was physically distraught over what was contained in the letter. The two were involved in a relationship which the parents on both sides objected to. Investigators say their families were concerned about the relationship because the two of them were still in school. Balraj Babulal was with the Cidrus Civilian Conservation Corps and Vanessa was a student at the Cidrus Composit School. Police say the two were also cousins. At the Beru home today, relatives gathered to comfort the family. The girl's father was too distraught to speak to us on camera. At the home of Balraj Babulal the scene was much the same. The boy's father, however, seemed shocked by the choice his son made.

“Seventeen year old Balraj Babulal and fourteen year old Vanessa Beru took their relationship to a new and fatal level.”



Avoid relaying  
**METHOD**  
**LOCATION**  
**OR DETAILS**  
of the person  
who died by suicide

Do not describe or write the method or location of death (may lead to copycat).

Do not share many personal life details of person who died (may lead to identification).

Instead, limit the details to the facts the audience needs to know.





'Everybody Loves Raymond' star Sawyer Sweeten has taken his own life. The former child star was best known for playing the role of Geoffrey Barone on the TV show from 1996 until it ended in 2005.

on.aol.com

The family of the late [Sawyer Sweeten](#) has spoken out for the first time since the tragic suicide of the 19-year-old former "[Everybody Loves Raymond](#)" star according to a Tuesday, April 28 from [Radar Online](#). Older sister Madylin, who also played Sawyer's television sister on the sitcom stated that Sawyer was more to her than just a brother, to her he was a true friend and confident, and that he will live on in her head forever.

Little sister Maysa Sweeten, 16, shared her painful thoughts revealing that her memories of Sawyer all now hurt, and that as long as she lives she states there will not be "a single day" that she does not think of her brother. As previously reported, TV parents [Ray Romano](#) and [Patricia Heaton](#) spoke about the shock and heartbreak of losing their TV son, calling him a "funny and bright young man"

[Sawyer and Sullivan Sweeten](#) and big sister Madylin starred opposite on the long running comedy sitcom "Everybody Loves Raymond." Sawyer along with Sullivan were just 16-months old when they first begin working on the popular comedy. The twins always sticking closely to one another lived together in shared home in Riverside, California, but were fond of visiting their hometown in Texas on a regular basis. It was sadly during one of these family visits that Sawyer Sweeten so tragically and unexpectedly took his own life on the family's front porch.

[Celebrity news](#) sites have reported that cousin Jaclyn Stines revealed that Sawyer allegedly had a long history of depression. Stines also reveals that the family is very concerned about Sawyer's twin Sullivan during this difficult time of dealing with the death of his twin. Sullivan has not commented on his brother's death at this time A sad story at all turns for the family and friends of Sawyer Sweeten. Rest In Peace Sawyer

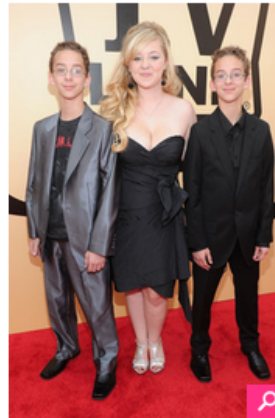


Photo by Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images

## Details a location

"...tragically and unexpectedly took his own life on the family's front porch."



**AVOID**  
portraying suicide as a  
**COMMON**  
or acceptable response  
to life's adversities

Avoid language or data that presents suicide as normal or common phenomena.

Although suicide IS an important public health problem, MOST people who living w/mental illness or facing adversity do not attempt or die by suicide, but instead find treatment or other coping strategies.



“On the wake of yet another tragic murder/suicide that took place in Trincity this weekend...”

# Murder/suicide on the minds of many

...T&T a stressed out nation says Single Fathers Association

Published on Aug 29, 2016, 12:46 pm AST

By [Sue-Ann Wayow](#)

Article

0 Comments

Share:

Facebook

Twitter





## Avoid sensationalizing **HEADLINES**

**INFORM** the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Dead at 27").

### Headlines to **AVOID**:

- "Suicide flourishes in the Nevada desert: Nevada's Suicide Epidemic" (Bellingham Herald, Apr 24, 2012)
- "TJ's Blues: A graphic memoir of teen depression" (Chicago Tribune, May 9, 2012)
- "Where arranged marriages are customary, suicides grow more common" (NYT, June 6, 2012)





# Avoid using STIGMATIZING LANGUAGE



Referring to suicide as “successful,” “unsuccessful” or a “failed attempt.” Using the phrase “committed suicide.”

Use phrases like “died by suicide,” “completed suicide” or “killed him/herself.”



Describing suicide as an “epidemic” or using other strong words like “skyrocketing” or “increasing rapidly.”

Research the best available data and use words like “increase” or “rise.”



Reporting suicide as a crime.

Report suicide as a public health issue.

AP / February 23, 2017, 12:58 PM

# California man drives off highway after girlfriend killed herself at same spot

7 Comments / [f Share](#) / [Tweet](#) / [Stumble](#) / [Email](#)

*Last Updated Feb 23, 2017 4:40 PM EST*

**SAN BERNARDINO, Calif.** -- A man attempted suicide by driving off a winding Southern California mountain road hours after his girlfriend killed herself in the same manner at the same spot, authorities said Thursday.

Investigators determined the two vehicles that went over the side of State Route 18 in San Bernardino County last weekend were related suicide attempts - one of them successful, according to California Highway Patrol Officer Juan Quintero.

The drivers, both from Riverside, were in a romantic relationship, Quintero said. No foul play was suspected in the crashes, which were still being investigated.

“Investigators determined the two vehicles that went over the side of State Route 18 in San Bernardino County last weekend were related suicide attempts - one of them successful...”





## AVOID HARMFUL GRAPHICS

### Avoid depicting or using images of:

- location or method of death
- memorials or funerals
- grieving family and friends

### Images that are better to use:

- School or work photo of the deceased person
- A family portrait
- Logos of suicide crisis helplines

# Suicide a growing concern in T&T



Ad closed by Google

Stop seeing this ad

AdChoices

**Bobie-Lee Dixon**

**Published:** Wednesday, September 12, 2012

If you're having suicidal thoughts or know anyone who is showing suicidal tendencies, who would you call? A confidential hotline maybe? Well, as it stands, there are currently no hotlines in Trinidad and Tobago that offer 24-hour counseling for those considering suicide. T&T Guardian tried contacting Lifeline but calls went unanswered. It was learnt that in 2010, Lifeline— which has been in existence







**DO NOT SHARE**  
the content of a  
**SUICIDE NOTE**

Most suicide notes do not include logical or helpful information and may describe personal details that a vulnerable person may identify with.

Instead, share that a note was found, but exclude further details.

Home > Focus



Share



# ERC director left 3 'suicide notes' before taking his own life

**Katrina Domingo, ABS-CBN News**  
Posted at Nov 17 2016 08:46 PM



ERC Director Francisco "Jun" Villa Jr.

LATEST NEWS MOST READ

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about 2 hours ago

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about 2 hours ago

The reporter extracts quotes from each of the three notes including personal details of the person and the method of death.





# AVOID QUOTING police or first responders

For causes of suicide, seek information or advice from suicide prevention experts.

Be mindful when paraphrasing or interpreting quotes. Avoid putting expert opinions in a sensationalistic context.



# PROVIDE RESOURCES

whenever possible

Include local, updated, and credible resources in your article.

Include a crisis phone number or service if available. If not, include emergency services information.

If possible, highlight that treatment works and list a local treatment resource.



## Other considerations:

1. **Sources:** Choose sources carefully. Respect grieving family/friends. Avoid publishing sources that don't provide helpful context.
2. **Data:** Data can be tricky. Always use current/relevant/accurate data. Avoid overstating the problem of suicide (may lead to normalization).
3. **Context:** Providing context will help illustrate the complexity of suicide. It's not unsolvable, but many factors contribute to someone choosing to end their life.
4. **Research:** Carefully report research. Avoid sensationalizing research findings.
5. **Value to society:** We know the number and frequency of suicide reports can lead to contagion. Ask yourself if the story you want to tell is newsworthy. Will the story help someone who may be struggling?

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt and a dark tie, is smiling and looking upwards and to the right. She is holding a microphone with a logo that reads "KSCP-TV 8 NEWS". The background is a dark, out-of-focus landscape with a mountain range under a cloudy sky.

**STORIES DONE RIGHT**



**U.S. News & World Report HEALTH**

Home Hospitals Doctors Health Insurance Nursing Homes Diets Health & Wellness

**5 mg** For adults with type 2 diabetes, in addition to diet and exercise ...from your body when it has more than it needs

**Important Safety** Do not take FARUGA if you are allergic to drugs in the FARUGA family. Symptoms of an allergic reaction to FARUGA include:

## When Service Members Need Mental Health Help

No matter how strong you are, stress can take a toll.



For service members battling PTSD, seeking help is one of the first steps on the road to recovery.

By Lisa Epstein | Nov. 5, 2014 | 10:14 a.m. EST

**Baghdad in 2007:** Ryan Rigdon, then 24, held his life in his hands, but it was all in a day's work. As a Navy senior explosive ordnance disposalman, his job was using robotic technology to disarm roadside bombs. He had volunteered, received extensive training and was deployed to Iraq right after the U.S. military surge.

"The first day I was there working we had seven roadside bombs we had to take care of," Rigdon says. He and his team cleared post-blast sites where soldiers had been killed. One memorable night, Rigdon left his truck to collect evidence and unexpectedly came upon a live explosive device in some

## Title

-Avoided using suicide in title

## Language

-Rates have been rising, did not sensationalize it by saying epidemic; used "took his life" in the Graham's story

## Data

-Used credible source (Dept of Defense Suicide Event report), did not glamorize or over-state, and clearly set out what is known

## Action oriented

-here's what the Dept of Defense has done including places to call, text, chat, get referrals

## Personal but real, not sensationalized

-Graham's story includes loss of son to bomb and loss of son to suicide.

## Ends positive and provides hope

-Today things are really good.