

Best Practices and Recommendations for reporting on suicide in Vermont

The Media Plays an Important Role in Preventing Suicide

- Over 100 studies worldwide have found that risk of contagion is real and responsible reporting can reduce the risk of additional suicides.
- Research indicates duration, frequency, and prominence are the most influential factors that increase the risk of suicide contagion.
- Covering suicide carefully can change perceptions, dispel myths and inform the public on the complexities of the issue.
- Media reports can increase the number of people seeking help when they include resources and messages of hope and recovery.

Following these recommendations can save lives.

 Describing or depicting the method and location of the suicide.	 Report the death as a suicide; keep information about the location general.
 Sharing the content of a suicide note.	 Report that a note was found and is under review.
 Describing personal details about the person who died.	 Keep information about the person general.
 Presenting suicide as a common or acceptable response to hardship.	 Report that coping skills, support, and treatment work for most people who have thoughts about suicide.
 Oversimplifying or speculating on the reason for the suicide.	 Describe suicide warning signs and risk factors (e.g. mental illness, relationship problems) that give suicide context.
 Sensationalizing details in the headline or story.	 Report on the death using facts and language that are sensitive to a grieving family.
 Glamorizing or romanticizing suicide.	 Provide context and facts to counter perceptions that the suicide was tied to heroism, honor, or loyalty to an individual or group.
 Overstating the problem of suicide by using descriptors like "epidemic" or "skyrocketing."	 Research the best available data and use words like "increase" or "rise."
 Prominent placement of stories related to a suicide death in print or in a newscast.	 Place a print article inside the paper or magazine and later in a newscast.

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- 1. Report Suicide as a Public Health Issue.** Including stories on hope, healing, and recovery may reduce the risk of contagion.
- 2. Include Resources.** Provide information on warning signs of suicide risk as well as hotline and treatment resources. At a minimum, include the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988), CrisisText Line (listed below), and FacingSuicideVT.com.
- 3. Use Appropriate Language.** Certain phrases and words can further stigmatize suicide, spread myths, and undermine suicide prevention objectives. Do not use words such as “committed suicide” or referring to suicide as “successful,” “unsuccessful” or a “failed attempt.” Instead use, “died by suicide” or “killed him/herself.”
- 4. Emphasize Help and Hope.** Stories of recovery through help-seeking and positive coping skills are powerful, especially when they come from people who have experienced suicide risk.
- 5. Ask an Expert.** Interview suicide prevention or mental health experts to validate your facts on suicide risk and mental illness.

Warning Signs of Suicide & What To Do

Warning Signs

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Talking about feeling trapped or 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

What to Do

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs, or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt
- Contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by dialing 988
- Take the person to an emergency room, or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

Learn more at FacingSuicideVT.org

Resources to Include in News Stories

- The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a hotline for individuals in crisis or for those looking to help someone else. For free or confidential support, call or text 988.
- FacingSuicideVT.com is a Vermont website and initiative featuring state and national resources for getting help, giving help to others who may be at risk for suicide, and getting involved in suicide prevention.
- The Crisis Text Line is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To speak with a trained listener, text VT to 741741. It is free, available 24/7, and confidential.
- The Vermont Suicide Prevention Center (VTSPC) serves as a state-wide resource fostering a sustainable approach to suicide prevention in Vermont: <https://vtspc.org/>

FacingSuicideVT.com



AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR
Suicide Prevention



To learn more about Vermont’s work to prevent suicides, please email the Department of Health (ahs.vdhmedia@vermont.gov) or the Department of Mental Health (AHS.DMHCommunications@vermont.gov).