

RECOMMENDATION FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE RISK

Given that professionals in the field of communication have made inquiries into responsibly reporting on cases associated with the Blue Whale Game, the Defender of the Public offers a number of suggestions to cover the topic in the media. Since adolescents and young adults make up the age group in Argentina at the greatest risk of suicide, according to the Ministry of Health (2011), the Defender of the Public believes it is indispensable for news coverage to reinforce prevention. Given the enquiries made by professionals in the communication field into how to responsibly report on cases associated with the Blue Whale Game, the organization includes in this article a number of recommendations. In turn, it stresses that it is important for reporting on suicide or suicide practices not to lean towards resources that may have a negative impact and/or trigger imitation in this very vulnerable age group. Here are some suggestions for audiovisual media outlets: Question the idea that it is a “game”. It is important to do away with the idea that trivializes a practice that may be deadly. A way to disarticulate this outlook consists in communicating the negative effects that the practice, at different stages, has or may have on people’s mental and physical health. This will help to raise awareness and dissuade possible acts of imitation. Describe the practices and their stages at large, rather than describing the steps and their characteristics in detail. This way, promoting highly instructive reporting is avoided. Avoid spectacularizing outlooks. It is convenient to do away with dramatizations or visual reconstructions of the steps and/or specific aspects of the practices in order to make them more dramatic or catch the audience’s attention through impact. Bear in mind that this outlook activates a trivializing sense and may also work as instructions for vulnerable audiences. Opt for sources that specialize in suicide and how social media works that may inform parents, teachers and other adults in charge of certain red flags and/or preventative procedures. This may deactivate myths and/or simplistic explanations, deepen the audience’s understanding of the issue and provide the population with preventative information. Avoid passing judgment on the causes or motivation for youngsters to play the Blue Whale Game (“they were being bullied”, “they didn’t talk to their family”, “they may have searched for information on how to commit suicide”). This may result in indirectly justifying taking part in said practice or encourage others that might be drawn to going through similar situations. Add to the reporting the analysis of a professional in the field of childhood and adolescence, and health and suicide prevention, among others, in order to emphasize prevention and make the message relevant to the audience. Divulge socially relevant information, such as the Suicide Prevention Lifeline number and organizations that may be contacted by the audience in order to make enquiries or request information in case they are dealing with this issue. Make visible whatever public offices in the field at all levels (the ministries of Health, Justice and Education, among others) are doing in this regard. In addition, divulge judicial actions that may have taken place regarding the cases that have been covered. Keep confidential the identity of the adolescents that participated in this practice in order to avoid social stigmatization and to respect their intimacy, aiming at, for instance, not quoting what they may have said on social media. Include and develop in the news agenda stories about adolescents and young adults that portray them, for example, in situations of positive solution to conflict, incorporating different groups and doing activities in the community. This may help to make visible and foster other practices and ways to deal with different issues.

RECOMMENDATION FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE RISK Given that professionals in the field of communication have made inquiries into responsibly reporting on cases associated with the Blue Whale Game, the Defender of the Public offers a number of suggestions to cover the topic in the media. Since adolescents and young adults make up the age group in Argentina at the greatest risk of suicide, according to the Ministry of Health (2011), the Defender of the Public believes it is indispensable for news coverage to reinforce prevention. Given the enquiries made by professionals in the communication field into how to responsibly report on cases associated with the Blue Whale Game, the organization includes in this article a

number of recommendations. In turn, it stresses that it is important for reporting on suicide or suicide practices not to lean towards resources that may have a negative impact and/or trigger imitation in this very vulnerable age group. Here are some suggestions for audiovisual media outlets: Question the idea that it is a “game”. It is important to do away with the idea that trivializes a practice that may be deadly. A way to disarticulate this outlook consists in communicating the negative effects that the practice, at different stages, has or may have on people’s mental and physical health. This will help to raise awareness and dissuade possible acts of imitation. Describe the practices and their stages at large, rather than describing the steps and their characteristics in detail. This way, promoting highly instructive reporting is avoided. Avoid spectacularizing outlooks. It is convenient to do away with dramatizations or visual reconstructions of the steps and/or specific aspects of the practices in order to make them more dramatic or catch the audience’s attention through impact. Bear in mind that this outlook activates a trivializing sense and may also work as instructions for vulnerable audiences. Opt for sources that specialize in suicide and how social media works that may inform parents, teachers and other adults in charge of certain red flags and/or preventative procedures. This may deactivate myths and/or simplistic explanations, deepen the audience’s understanding of the issue and provide the population with preventative information. Avoid passing judgment on the causes or motivation for youngsters to play the Blue Whale Game (“they were being bullied”, “they didn’t talk to their family”, “they may have searched for information on how to commit suicide”). This may result in indirectly justifying taking part in said practice or encourage others that might be drawn to going through similar situations. Add to the reporting the analysis of a professional in the field of childhood and adolescence, and health and suicide prevention, among others, in order to emphasize prevention and make the message relevant to the audience. Divulge socially relevant information, such as the Suicide Prevention Lifeline number and organizations that may be contacted by the audience in order to make enquiries or request information in case they are dealing with this issue. Make visible whatever public offices in the field at all levels (the ministries of Health, Justice and Education, among others) are doing in this regard. In addition, divulge judicial actions that may have taken place regarding the cases that have been covered. Keep confidential the identity of the adolescents that participated in this practice in order to avoid social stigmatization and to respect their intimacy, aiming at, for instance, not quoting what they may have said on social media. Include and develop in the news agenda stories about adolescents and young adults that portray them, for example, in situations of positive solution to conflict, incorporating different groups and doing activities in the community. This may help to make visible and foster other practices and ways to deal with different issues.