

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONSIBLY REPORTING ON SUICIDE

The Defender of the Public presents ten recommendations to respectfully, responsibly report on suicide in audiovisual media.

Given the enquiries made by professionals in the field of communication into how to responsibly report on suicide, the Defender of the Public presents recommendations for responsible media coverage, which works as a summary and as a result of the HYPERLINK "<http://defensadelpublico.gob.ar/guia-para-el-tratamiento-mediatico-responsable-de-la-salud-mental/>" "Guidelines for Responsible Reporting on Mental Health", written by this office alongside media workers and professionals, national associations and organizations in the field of suicide prevention and educators.

Thus, the following ten recommendations are made for responsible reporting.

1- Promote a public health perspective

Put suicide in the Public Health –not Crime- section. Bear in mind that treating these cases as crimes, apart from being inadequate because suicide is not a crime, results in the stigmatization of the victims and their loved ones. For the World Health Organization, it is important to prevent suicide contagion as a result of the harmful behavior that is reported, and it suggests working to foster the preventative effect of correctly reporting on suicide.

2- Aim at accurate reporting

Avoid broadcasting the analysis of suicide cases that are based on personal beliefs and far-fetched interpretations of facts and/or elements associated with those involved. This perspective only leads to simplifying complex facts and their causes, which are never easily identifiable or one-dimensional.

3- Consult specialized sources and give relevant information

Opt for featuring sources that specialize in suicide. This will allow the deactivation of the repetition of myths and simplistic explanations, and the more profound understanding of the problem by the audience. That is why it is convenient to make the most of these voices to contextualize cases and provide the population with preventative information about suicide. Complement reporting on specific cases with making visible and promoting the addresses and telephone numbers of institutions and professionals in the field of suicide treatment; high-risk groups and warning signs of suicide, and guidance for those dealing with people at risk.

4- Respect people's right to privacy

Respect the right of the victim's family to be notified of the incident in private rather than broadcasting it as breaking news. Respect the deceased's privacy and their loved ones' mourning. Take into consideration the psychological impact it may have on their relatives and close relations to find out about it in the media. Reporting on the case should not inflict further suffering to those affected by it.

5- Do not report in a spectacularizing way

It is convenient not to describe the method used, especially in terms of more effectiveness, less agony and/or suffering and speed, for instance, due to the imitation and identification mechanisms that may be triggered in vulnerable groups. Moreover, it is necessary to avoid graphic representations of the actions carried out by the victim, the constant broadcast of pictures and videos of their life, and the use of sound and music for even more dramatic purposes. It is important to keep in mind that this perspective entails a double impact: a negative effect on those close to the victim and on the audience.

6- Avoid references that justify the act

Aim at not portraying suicide as a solution to personal problems. It is convenient to show the person who committed suicide's positive characteristics so as to avoid broadcasting indirect justifications for the act and their stigmatization.

7- Ensure confidentiality

When reporting on suicide attempts, keep confidential the identity and personal information of those involved, since this would add stigmatization for attempting to take their own life to the crisis that the person is going through. It is important to communicate the negative impact that it had on the person's health so as to dissuade suicide contagion.

8- Incorporate the topic into the agenda

Make the most of national and international days to include in the journalistic agenda relevant preventative and reflective information about suicide, for example, September 10th, the World Suicide Prevention Day.

9- Opt for recommended language

- a) Aim at not defining the act in terms of success or failure ("they were successful", "they failed to commit suicide"). Death should not be perceived as triumph.
- b) Avoid generalizations, such as "suicide pandemic", "suicide epidemic", when in fact it refers to cases that involve a fraction of the population.

- c) It is convenient not to use favorable or derogatory terms such as “suicide is a heroic act”, “suicide is a cowardly solution” since both contribute to strengthening clichés and stigmatizations.
- d) Avoid saying that the person “has committed suicide” as its association with the expression “to commit a crime” gives it a criminal sense.

10- Promote respectful reporting on the rights of children and adolescents

Reporting on suicide must respect the rights of children and adolescents stated in the Law of Integral Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (no. 26,061), especially:

- a) The right to the best interests.
- b) The right to personal integrity.
- c) The right to privacy and family life.
- d) The right to dignity.
- e) The right to voice their opinions and be heard.

This recommendation refers to children and adolescents as both the protagonists of suicide and as members of the public of audiovisual communication services.