

Press reporting on suicide

Information for the public

About this leaflet

This leaflet is produced by IPSO (the Independent Press Standards Organisation), the independent regulator of newspapers, magazines and digital news in the UK.

It is intended for people affected by suicide and its reporting, such as bereaved families and friends, and the organisations who support them.

This leaflet explains the rules the press should follow when reporting on suicide. If you are affected, it can help you decide if you want to speak to the press or not.

It also includes information about the support IPSO offers, and gives details of other useful organisations.

The main points:

- Suicide is a serious public health issue. It is in the public interest that journalists report on stories involving suicide accurately and responsibly.
- The Editors' Code of Practice, the rules of IPSO regulation, does not allow excessive reporting of the details of the method of suicide.
- To ensure justice is carried out fairly and openly, journalists and the public can attend inquests. Reports about inquests must accurately reflect what is heard.
- Journalists must approach bereaved families and friends sensitively. It is your choice if you wish to speak to them.

We are here to provide advice and support if you have any concerns about a published article or the behaviour of a journalist.

How we can help

We protect individual rights and uphold high standards of journalism under the Editors' Code of Practice (the Code).

You can see the full Code here: www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/

How you can contact us:

Website: www.ipso.co.uk

Email: inquiries@ipso.co.uk

Or by calling **0300 123 2220**

We can help you if you need advice about published material or the behaviour of journalists and can offer support with urgent harassment issues.

In an emergency, after hours or at the weekend, you can also contact us using our emergency 24-hour advice service on **07799 903929**.

We take complaints about articles or journalists' behaviour which may have breached the Code, which you can do through our website: www.ipso.co.uk/complain/complaints-form

Why the press reports on suicide

It is in the public interest that the press is free to report on important societal issues, such as suicide.

By responsibly reporting on suicide, the press can:

- Raise awareness of a significant public health issue.
- Encourage people to seek help and signpost sources of support.
- Help prevent suicide and save lives.

Journalists must take special care in reporting on suicide. We work with expert organisations to produce guidance for journalists, to ensure their reporting is as responsible as possible.

What are the rules the press must follow when reporting on suicide?

Journalists must follow the Code carefully when reporting on an inquest.

Journalists can:

- Report on the death, as it is a matter of public record.
- Accurately report on anything which is said during an inquest. It is not common for content from suicide notes or similar messages left by a person who has died to be read out at inquests. But if they are read out, journalists may report this.
- Sympathetically and discreetly approach members of the public, including bereaved family and friends, to ask if you would like to be interviewed.

Journalists cannot:

- Include “excessive detail” about a method of suicide. This is to limit the possibility of copy-cat acts.
- Harass members of the public. If you ask a journalist to leave you alone, they must.

We provide guidance and training for journalists on how to report on this subject.

Court reporting

If you have been affected by suicide, you may find yourself coming into contact with the court system for the first time.

This is because an inquest or inquiry may be held to help a coroner (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or procurator fiscal (in Scotland) investigate the cause of a sudden or unexplained death.

Because an inquest is a public hearing, journalists have a legal right to attend. They may report on what has happened. They report on inquests to make sure that a death is not kept secret; to prevent speculation or rumour about the circumstances of a death; and to raise awareness and to campaign.

Social media

Journalists are allowed to use social media and memorial sites when researching and writing stories. However, they must do so carefully, particularly when working on sensitive content, to ensure they do not breach the Code.

Journalists can:

- Approach bereaved family and friends via social media, to make sure they are reporting accurate information about the person who has died.
- Publish information that is publicly available on social media sites, including photos of the person who has died, and comments from family and friends paying tribute.
- Publish information from the social media account of the person who has died, if the account has no privacy restrictions and the information is not private.

In most cases, journalists cannot:

- Publish information which is protected by privacy settings on social media and is not in the public domain.
- Publish information which might intrude into someone's grief or shock. This comes under Clause 4 of the Editors' Code. All complaints are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

If you are worried about how journalists have used information from social media, you might find it helpful to read our advice on the topic. You can also call us for advice on [0300 123 2220](tel:03001232220).

Talking to the press

It is up to you if you would like to speak to the press about the death of a loved one.

Some people find speaking out a helpful way to pay tribute to the person who has died. Others hope to use media coverage to raise awareness and to campaign to stop the same thing from happening again. Some of the most powerful advocates for change are those with personal experience.

Speaking out can also be very challenging. While most journalists will be sensitive and want to report on suicide sensitively, it may have unexpected consequences. For example, it could stir up painful emotions, or may result in other people contacting you about your experience. We encourage you to think carefully beforehand.

Before you speak to the press, you may want to:

- Write a tribute yourself and provide a picture to make available to journalists. This may help you to direct future inquiries, rather than answering individual questions yourself.
- Appoint someone you trust to deal with all inquiries from journalists on your behalf. You may like to set up an automatic email and voicemail message with their details.

Talking to the press

Being interviewed

If you are approached for an interview and agree to do it, you may want to ask:

- Who is the journalist you are speaking to and for which publication? While no story will be the same, this may help you get an idea of the format and style it may take.
- Where would you like the interview to take place? You may want to choose somewhere private where you feel safe. You may also like to be accompanied by a friend or family member.
- Whether you would be able to see how your story looks before it is published. If this is important to you, you should find out in advance if this is possible. Be aware journalists do not have to do this.

Remember that a journalist may take notes or record what you say in order to accurately report your story. You may also like to record or take notes, or ask for the questions in advance.

Concerns about the press

Some people who have been bereaved may find it difficult to deal with media interest. If you have concerns about how your story is being or has been covered, including the behaviour of journalists, we are here to help.

We operate a 24-hour emergency anti-harassment helpline. Please contact **0300 123 22 20** during office hours, or **07799 903 929** if calling out of hours.

We can give you advice about what to do next or about making a complaint.

The interview process

Before agreeing to an interview, you should also be aware that a journalist may or may not use the information you have provided. They do not have to include everything you have said, provided that the overall article is not distorted or misleading.

It is normal to be nervous. Remember that you have the right to support and to ask for regular breaks throughout the interview. You can end an interview at any point. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

After an interview

After an interview, it may be helpful to have someone to talk to, for example, a trusted friend or family member, in case it stirs up strong emotions.

Being interviewed is only part of the publication process. It is also worth considering:

- The person who interviewed you may not be involved in all the stages of a story's publication. They may not be able to tell you when it will be published or what the headline will be.
- Depending on the publication, your story may be shared across different platforms, both in print and online. If a publication belongs to a larger publishing group, a story may be carried in its sister publications.
- Your story may also be reported on by other publications once it is published.

If you think you need extra support, we have listed organisations who can offer help at the end of this leaflet.

Useful organisations

Several national charities and organisations provide support for people affected by suicide, work to raise awareness, and campaign for suicide prevention.

CALM (*Campaign Against Living Miserably*) delivers support services, national campaigns and community-building. It works to challenge stereotypes and stigma preventing people talking about suicide.

Website: www.thecalmzone.net National Helpline: 0800 58 58 58

Cruse is a bereavement charity. It supports people through its website, national helpline, group and individual services. It also campaigns to make sure bereaved people get a voice. Its work includes specialised services for those bereaved by suicide.

Website: www.cruse.org.uk National Helpline: 0808 808 1677

INQUEST is a charity that works to provide expertise on “state-related deaths” to bereaved people. This includes expert advice and assistance on all aspects of investigation and inquest processes, including the rights of bereaved people.

Website: www.inquest.org.uk

PAPYRUS (*Prevention of Young Suicide*) is dedicated to suicide prevention, mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people. Alongside its campaigning and policy recommendations, it provides advice and guidance for those in need.

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org National Helpline: 0800 068 41 41

Useful organisations

Samaritans is a national charity that provides 24/7 support for those at risk of suicide, as well as working to make suicide prevention a priority for parliamentarians and policy-makers. Website: www.samaritans.org National Helpline: 116 123

The Support After Suicide Partnership is a UK network of suicide bereavement organisations and people with lived experience. Website: <https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/>

SOBS (*Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide*) offers peer-led support to adults affected by suicide through a National Support line, email, local support groups and online forums. Website: <https://uksobs.org/> National Helpline: 0300 111 5065

Suicide&Co is a charity supporting individuals bereaved by suicide and aims to open up the conversation around suicide-related grief. It offers up to 12 free sessions of specialised suicide bereavement counselling for individuals in England and Wales. Website: www.suicideandco.org Helpline: 0800 054 8400

The Delicate Mind supports racialised and working-class communities through workshops, research, training and advocacy services. Website: www.thedelicatemind.org.uk

Winston’s Wish helps children, teenagers and young adults navigate grief through on-demand services, support, and counselling. It also provides support for parents, carers, school staff and healthcare professionals. Website: www.winstonswish.org/ National Helpline: 0808 020 021

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