

# National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide

Guidance to help content creators craft stories about survival, hope, and healing—aimed at saving lives and restoring hope

**Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by a range of factors, rather than by a single event.**

Many factors beyond mental health conditions can contribute to suicide, such as relationship, physical health, financial, and legal issues. At the same time, most people experiencing one or even several of these factors will not die by suicide. People who attempt suicide are often acutely distressed or in crisis at that particular moment due to a confluence of factors.

## Depiction Recommendations

**Show that help is available.**

Consider conveying a character choosing to seek help, such as calling or texting crisis hotlines (listed below), reaching out to a mental health professional or a social supports (e.g., family, friends, and acquaintances), or finding new or alternative coping strategies.

**Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide.**

It is important to not normalize suicide or make suicide seem more common than it actually is. Ninety percent of individuals who attempt suicide do not die by suicide; therefore, consider depicting a character who had suicidal thoughts but went on to live. Stories of survival and healing should be woven into scripts about suicide to provide hope and a balanced perspective.

**Connect viewers to resources.**

Highlight help-seeking resources available to viewers through your promotional activities (e.g. public service announcements, social media outreach, online resources):

- > National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)
- > Military/Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-TALK (8255) - Press 1
- > Crisis Text Line: 741741

**Suicide prevention experts and entertainment content creators jointly contributed to these recommendations.**

## Portray everyday characters who can be a lifeline.

Most crises are time-limited so consider depicting a character who kept someone safe or supported someone until that time passes. Emphasize the role that others (e.g. friends, family, neighbors, teammates, colleagues, casual acquaintances, or even strangers) can play in providing support or offering an act of kindness to someone in crisis. These stories help to dispel the myth that only mental health professionals can help. For ideas about how a character could support someone in crisis, see the action steps at [www.bethe1to.com](http://www.bethe1to.com).

## Depict the grieving and healing process of people who lose someone to suicide.

It is estimated that each person who dies by suicide leaves behind 135 people who knew that person. Consider depicting the larger impact of suicide and the bereavement that follow. For characters who lost a loved one to suicide, focus on their grieving and healing process and how those around them (e.g. friends, family, and support groups) offered solace and support.

## Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.

Avoid detailed depictions of suicide methods (e.g. graphic depictions of how someone took their life), as such portrayals have potential to increase imitation or copycat behavior—and could increase suicidal behavior in viewers.

## Consult with suicide prevention messaging experts and people with personal experience.

There are many real-life stories of individuals who have experienced suicidal behaviors or have lost a loved one to suicide who are able and willing to help content creators craft more authentic storylines that viewers can relate to.

# Depiction Recommendations



## Use nonjudgmental language.

Choosing neutral language to refer to a character that has attempted or died by suicide helps reduce the discrimination and stigma often associated with suicide. Use terms such as *died by suicide* or *killed himself/herself* instead of *committed suicide*.

To access updated data and statistics, go to:

[TheActionAlliance.org/Messaging/Entertainment-Messaging/Data](http://TheActionAlliance.org/Messaging/Entertainment-Messaging/Data)



## Contact

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