

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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A Joint Statement from Suicide Prevention National Public-Private Partners to Reporters Covering Recent Deaths by Suicide

The Action Alliance reminds news outlets to use best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide – to enhance accuracy of reporting and to reduce risk of suicide contagion.

In the wake of recent news about deaths by suicide by a second Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student and the father of one of the children killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(Action Alliance\)](#) reminds its media partners that the way suicide is reported [impacts suicidal behavior](#). The concept of suicide contagion is supported by research and refers to the phenomenon of indirect exposure (via news stories or other channels) to suicide or suicidal behaviors that then influence suicidal behaviors in others. In contrast, [research](#) also demonstrates that when the media tells stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, coverage can reduce suicidal behavior.

News media plays a key role in suicide prevention.

We urge all members of the media (writers, producers, editors, etc.) to carefully consider whether or not coverage is necessary. A [famous case](#) out of Vienna, Austria showed highly publicized media reports of subway suicides linked to a rise in suicides. However, when the news media enacted a policy and stopped reporting, there was a decrease of suicides on the rails demonstrating how heightened media coverage can cause contagion or “copycat” suicide and how media practices impact suicidal behavior.

For reporters who do decide to cover stories about the recent deaths by suicide or other related stories about suicide, we encourage adherence to best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide (see [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#)).

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance), the nation’s public-private partnership for suicide prevention, requests that all news outlets consider the following key elements of safe and accurate reporting on suicide, such as:

- **Include up-to-date resources where readers/viewers can find treatment, information, and advice that promotes help-seeking**, such as:
 - Disaster Distress Helpline: 800-985-5990 (Provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters, like mass shootings)
 - Crisis Text Line: 741741 (Provides free, 24/7 crisis support)

- National Military Survivor Helpline: 800-959-TAPS (8277) (Provides free 24/7 support offering resources and guidance about postvention, grief, and peer-to-peer support)
- **Promote stories and resources about hope and actions everybody can take to help others who are struggling.** Research shows that sharing stories of hope can help protect vulnerable people from suicide risk.
 - [Strength After](http://strengthafterdisaster.org) (strengthafterdisaster.org) (A storytelling website that provides a hub to share stories of hope and recovery encompassing all types of natural and human-caused disasters)
 - [Bethe1To](http://bethe1to.org) (bethe1to.org) (A website offering guidance about how the public can take actions to make an impact in someone's life)
- **Avoid misinformation.** Suicide is complex. There are almost always multiple causes, including (but not limited to) mental illness that may not have been recognized or treated. However, it's important to note in your article that these illnesses *are* treatable.
- **Avoid reporting that death by suicide was preceded by a single event**, such as a recent job loss, divorce or relationship breakup, traumatic event, or bad grades. Reporting like this leaves the public with an overly simplistic and misleading understanding of suicide.
- **Use careful language** and do not refer to suicide as “successful” or a “failed attempt.” Instead describe as “died by suicide,” or “killed him/herself” (instead of “committed suicide”).

Just as there is no single cause that leads to suicide, there is no single prevention effort that will reduce suicide rates in the U.S. A comprehensive approach that engages systems, community supports, and individuals is necessary to save lives. While the field of suicide prevention has made strides, the nation must prioritize and bring to scale efforts that can help to:

- **Enhance public awareness of suicide and the role the public can play in saving lives.** According to newly released [national public perception data](#), Americans overwhelmingly (94 percent) believe that suicide can be prevented, and 78 percent are interested in learning how they might be able to play a role in helping someone who may be suicidal but that more information and guidance on how to help is needed. Everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide and suicide attempts. Family members, friends, colleagues, faith community members, and clinicians all play an important role in recognizing when someone is at risk or in crisis, and in connecting that person to help. More must be done to heighten public awareness about suicide, the role the public plays in preventing suicide, and the resources that are available to those who are struggling.
- **Transform community-based suicide prevention efforts.** Community-based efforts to implement effective suicide prevention strategies are key to reducing the rate of suicide nationwide. While health care systems have a role to play, so do schools, workplaces, faith communities, neighborhoods, and other non-clinical settings.

Additionally, more postvention activities – those which reduce risk and promote healing after a suicide death – are also key to suicide prevention efforts. This includes proactively reaching those exposed to a suicide to offer a variety of resources including

trauma care, mental health treatment, peer to peer and spiritual support.

- **Reduce access to lethal means.**

Reducing access to lethal means among those at risk for suicide has been shown to be an effective method of preventing suicide. A number of studies have indicated that when means are made less available or less lethal, suicide rates by that method decline, and frequently suicide rates overall decline. For example, putting time and space between an individual in crisis and a firearm, has the potential to save lives as a suicidal crisis is often time-limited. These strategies focus on keeping someone safe by separating a person at increased risk from lethal means.

Resources for News Media:

- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#)
- [Suicide Reporting Recommendations](#)

Resources for Schools/Educators:

- [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [Anniversaries of Traumatic Events: Guidance for Educators](#)

Resources for Suicide Loss Survivors:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's [Resources for Loss Survivors](#)

General Resources:

- U.S. Health and Human Services' [about suicide contagion](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Preventing Suicide: a technical package of policy, programs and practices](#)
- The Center for Complicated Grief's [overview grief and responding to loss](#)

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The media statement was informed by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's Media Messaging Workgroup, a workgroup consisting of leading private and public sector suicide prevention organizations committed to promoting accurate and prevention-oriented messaging to the public and news media.

FOR NEWS MEDIA PARTNERS:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, more suicides can be prevented. We urge all members of the media working on these stories to refer to the [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) for best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide (such as including the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK \[8255\]](#)). For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to www.lifelineforattempt survivors.org. A key priority of the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* is recognizing journalists for safe and responsible reporting of suicide and suicide prevention. We encourage journalists to consider applying for the [SAVE Award for Excellence in Reporting On Suicide](#).

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) is the public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) provides funding to [EDC](#) to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance which was launched in 2010. Learn more at actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).