

# Recommendations

## for Blogging on Suicide



### What's Inside

- Introduction
- Blog Strategy
- Writing Safe Content
- Monitoring Your Blog's Comments
- Talking with the media
- Personal Safety and Privacy
- References

# INTRODUCTION

Suicide is an important public health issue, and those who blog on the topic share diverse perspectives, backgrounds and experiences that can help those who are struggling. However, it's important to note that readers' attitudes and behaviors can be influenced by what and how you write about suicide, mental health, crisis, and suicidal ideation-- both negatively and positively. The following recommendations are meant to assist bloggers in blogging about suicide safely, and ultimately maximize the effectiveness of the bloggers' efforts and reduce the risk of harmful effects of unsafe messaging on suicide.

For a full list of references used in the development of this document, go to page 12.

The following best practices for blogging on suicide are a project of Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and were developed with the guidance and expertise of an international advisory panel of experts and bloggers. Our gratitude and appreciation go out to the contributing members:

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# BLOG STRATEGY

Readers benefit from blog posts that have a purpose and are well thought out. Ask yourself before publishing your blog posts:



## WHAT'S THE GOAL OF THIS BLOG POST?

When blogging about suicide, it's important to set a goal. This goal will help outline your story and assist in evaluating the effectiveness of your message. Some examples of goals include:

- Raise awareness about the problem of suicide.
- Help someone who is struggling or suicidal.
- Educate a specific audience.
- Help someone who is coping with suicide loss.



## WHO ARE MY READERS?

Typically, a blog will have a target audience who have vested interest in the blog's content. Know your audience before you get started, and keep them in mind as you write your story. Keep in mind that some of your readers may be vulnerable. Avoid overwhelming your audience with too much information, data, and content.

- Who will likely read this post?
- Am I using appropriate language for this audience?
- Will my audience understand what I'm saying?



## DO I WANT TO INFORM MY READERS, GET THEM DO SOMETHING, OR BOTH?

As a blogger, you have the opportunity to use your platform to educate your audience and/or inspire action. What can you teach or encourage your audience to do? You can ask your readers to:

- Reach out for help if/when they need it.
- Learn something (ex. warning signs and risk factors of suicide).
- Support a specific cause or campaign.
- Donate to suicide prevention.



## DID MY BLOG POST GET THE RESULTS I EXPECTED?

Monitor the response your blog post receives. If you haven't yet, be sure to set up a way to receive feedback from your readers.

- Does your blog have a rating feature?
- Do you allow comments for feedback?
- Could you ask your readers to provide a review of your blog posts?

## BLOG CONTRIBUTORS

Oftentimes, blog contributors (those who contribute to a blog they do not own) do not have full control over the final story, image(s), or title that gets published. However, there are steps guest bloggers can take to ensure the original intentions and safety of the blog post remains intact.

**Open a Dialogue.** Engage editorial staff in the conversation on safe messaging. The editorial staff may not know about safe messaging surrounding the topic of suicide. Share a copy of the Recommendations for Blogging on Suicide via email or hard copy and follow up with them to be sure they understand the importance of safe messaging.

**Be Proactive.** Suggest appropriate, non-sensationalistic titles and examples of non-graphic images when you submit your blog post to the editor. Request that any title changes or image selections be run by you or a suicide prevention and/or media guidelines expert before publication.



# WRITING SAFE CONTENT

Certain content related to suicide can have harmful or even fatal effects on vulnerable individuals who may be contemplating suicide themselves. By drafting quality content, and following the recommendations outlined in this section, bloggers can help reduce the risk of suicide and avoid spreading stigmatizing, counterproductive, or harmful messages.

## TOP SAFETY CONCERNS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Here are a few examples of some of the biggest safety concerns we see and what you can do to correct them. If you are short on time, these nine recommendations should take priority when blogging about suicide.

- 1** **Avoid:** Showing or describing suicide methods or locations in your post.  
**Instead:** Only mention that the person died by suicide and leave it at that.
- 2** **Avoid:** Sharing the contents of a suicide note.  
**Instead:** Share that a note was found, but exclude further details.
- 3** **Avoid:** Referring to suicide as “successful,” “unsuccessful,” or a “failed attempt.”  
**Instead:** Describe as “died by suicide,” “completed,” or “killed him/herself.”
- 4** **Avoid:** Describing suicide as an “epidemic” or using other strong words like “skyrocketing” or “increasing rapidly.”  
**Instead:** Research the best available data and use words like “increase” or “rise”.
- 5** **Avoid:** Spreading negative stereotypes, myths, or stigma related to mental illnesses or suicidal persons.  
**Instead:** Do your research. Know what stereotypes are out there and the myths that surround suicide and the people who die by suicide.\*
- 6** **Avoid:** Oversimplifying causes or trying to pinpoint a single reason or cause of suicide.  
**Instead:** Include a statement about the complexity of suicide and that more commonly, many factors contribute to a person ending their life.
- 7** **Avoid:** Normalizing suicidal behavior by presenting it as common or acceptable.  
**Instead:** Emphasize that suicide is not a normal reaction to common mental health issues or daily stressors and that prevention and recovery are both possible.
- 8** **Avoid:** Talking about suicide as a crime.  
**Instead:** Make it clear that suicide is a public health issue.
- 9** **Avoid:** Including personal details of the person who has died by suicide. Individuals who may already be struggling with suicidal thoughts may attempt to identify or connect with the person in the story and have an increased risk for copycat suicide.  
**Instead:** Use the person’s story to talk about prevention, coping, and how to seek help. Include details that may help put the suicide into context like observed warning signs, previous suicide attempts or threats, or if they had other mental health issues or a substance abuse problem. Including information on helpseeking and positive outcomes/recovery or providing messages of hope is helpful.

\*Refer to [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/suicide-prevention/myths.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/myths.pdf) for a list of common myths about suicide.

## OTHER IMPORTANT CONTENT SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Before publishing your blog post, ask yourself the following questions:

### 1 AM I SENDING A HELPFUL AND POSITIVE MESSAGE?

Set a positive tone for your blog post. Positive messages like suicide is preventable, help is available, and treatment works should be easily understood by your readers.



### 2 DID I PROVIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES FOR MY READERS?

Any time you are talking about suicide it's extremely important to provide helpful suicide prevention resources for your readers. Some readers may be in distress and having easy access to suicide prevention and mental health resources will give them the opportunity to seek help. It's recommended to provide an emergency resource such as a suicide prevention hotline phone number, the phone number for emergency services in your region or country, and/or a digital form of support like text, email or another online resource. You can also provide links to mental health and suicide prevention information. Be sure to check the validity of your sources and that the link you provide are working. If you know of other mental health resources like local clinics or community resources, include the contact information for those as well.

### 3 DID I INFORM MY READERS OF DIFFERENT WAYS THEY CAN REDUCE THEIR OWN RISK OF SUICIDE?

When possible, provide protective factors or a link to the protective factors of suicide. Protective factors are different characteristics that make it less likely an individual will think about, consider or die by suicide. Protective factors include:

- Having access to medical care and support for both mental and physical health.
- Building and maintaining important connections and relationships (friendships, connections to family members, and community support).
- Keeping abreast of how you manage and deal with problems, negative stress, loss, or other adversities.

### 4 DID I INFORM MY READERS OF THE WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE?

Every individual should know the warning signs of suicide. Each time you write a blog post about suicide, it is necessary to include the warning signs somewhere in the post like at the end or in the margins of the webpage. At the very least, provide a link where readers can see them.



## 5 DID I INFORM READERS OF HOW TO OVERCOME SUICIDAL THINKING AND THAT A SUICIDAL CRISIS WILL LIKELY PASS?

By providing a short list of coping skills, you may be helping a reader who is vulnerable or contemplating suicide. Consider including a link to or placing the following directly in your blog post.

### **Get out for a while:**

- Go for a walk, jog or bike ride
- Go to the movies
- Visit somewhere new, like a coffee shop or museum or park you've never been

### **Be creative:**

- Draw something simple
- Make a nice meal
- Write a short story

### **Soothe your senses:**

- Meditate or do yoga
- Take a hot shower
- Listen to your favorite songs

### **Relax:**

- Look at the clouds
- Read a book, magazine or blog post
- Take a nap



## WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

Someone who is thinking about suicide usually exhibits one or more signs in what they say or do. It is important to pay attention to warning signs as some may be subtle. Take any warning sign seriously. These include:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious and/or agitated
- Engaging in reckless behavior
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

## 6 IS MY TITLE APPROPRIATE?

Be mindful when writing the headline or title for your blog post. Avoid using sensationalistic terms or phrases. Do not use graphic words or refer to a method of suicide in the title. Also avoid titles that speculate on circumstances of a person's life or attempt to name a single cause.



## 7 IS WHAT I WROTE ACCURATE?

- Double check all statistics and facts in your blog for accuracy.
- Take special precaution when using data to avoid overstating the problem of suicide or perpetuating the notion that suicide is an unsolvable problem.
- Suicide is not an epidemic therefore do not use the word "epidemic" to describe suicide. Instead, describe suicide as a top global health issue that must be diligently addressed.
- Make sure your links work and lead to credible sources. Usually government or university sources are acceptable. If you're unsure, contact a suicide prevention or mental health professional. Suggested sources include the World Health Organization ([www.WHO.org](http://www.WHO.org)), The International Association for Suicide Prevention ([www.iasp.info](http://www.iasp.info)), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- USA stats ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)).
- If you decide data is necessary to your blog post strategy, be sure to use current data. Outdated information is unhelpful and may inaccurately depict the current situation.

## 8 ARE THE IMAGES I USED SAFE?

When choosing imagery for your blog post, avoid selecting cliché, emotional images or graphic depictions of violence or self-harm. Do NOT select images that depict methods or locations of suicide. If you do not have control over the images of the blog you write for, send the editing staff a note and let them know which types of images they should avoid. Avoid posting pictures of the person who died by suicide.

## 9 AM I USING APPROPRIATE, SAFE LANGUAGE?

Make sure you are using common language that your readers will understand-- especially if you have a clinical or medical background (and your readers do not). Avoid using medical or professional terminology (medicalspeak) and harsh, derogatory, demeaning or insensitive language. Several phrases should be avoided in an effort to change attitudes and beliefs about suicide. Those include:

- Avoid using "Committed suicide." Instead, use "died by suicide," "killed him/herself," or "completed suicide."
- Avoid referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful," or "failed attempt." Instead, just say "completed," "died by suicide," or "survived an attempt."

# 10 DID I AVOID USING TRIGGERING CONTENT?

Triggering content that may cause an individual to recall traumatic experiences resulting in unsettling reactions including anxiety, distress, or grief. Those with mental illnesses may be at higher risk than those without. Triggering content can also influence negative imitative behavior. If including graphic details is vital to your story, at the very least, include a Trigger Warning. **Although trigger warnings can be helpful, they do not eliminate the risk to readers.**

## Possible triggering content related to suicide includes but is not limited to:

- Graphic images of self-harm or suicide (typically involving bodily harm)
- Image or description of suicide method(s)
- Description of self-harm or death



### It's safest to avoid triggering content whenever possible.

If you decide to share something graphic or use descriptive language because you believe it's necessary to your story, include a trigger warning at the beginning of your post so readers can make an informed decision that best suits their well being. Always keep in mind that adding a trigger warning does not decrease the potential harm of the rest of the content in the blog post. Think about if you need to adjust the content in your blog before posting.



### Example of Trigger Warning notification:

"TRIGGER WARNING- This article or section, or pages it links to, contains graphic images and information about suicide which may be upsetting to some people."

**Tip:** Use a bold font or different color to distinguish the trigger warning from other text.

**Tip:** Check the hyperlinks in your blog post to be sure the content outside of your post are not potentially harmful.

**Tip:** Include a hyperlink or information for a suicide prevention helpline in your trigger warning that is available to your target audience's location. If your audience is global, include the following list: [http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis\\_Centres/](http://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/)



## MESSAGING ABOUT SUICIDE ON SOCIAL MEDIA TOO?

Check out the EIC's Social Media Guidelines (<http://www.eiconline.org/teamup/wp-content/files/teamup-mental-health-social-media-guidelines.pdf>)

## SUICIDE RELATED TOPICS TO...



### ...BLOG ABOUT

- Stories that analyze and correct problem news coverage
- Personal experiences with hopeful and positive outcomes
- Others' stories of hope and recovery
- Stories that demonstrate positive impact for an individual, group, or organization (suicides prevented)
- Stories that promote community suicide prevention resources and helplines
- Stories on new research or promising treatments
- Stories of encouragement for seeking help



### ...BE CAREFUL ABOUT

- News reports or stories of a suicide death, cluster, or rare method of suicide
- Celebrity suicides. Youth are highly influenced by celebrity status and may copy the actions of a celebrity)—**a good story to report on would be a celebrity who recovered from an ideation or an attempt**
- Stories of rumored suicides
- Stories that attempt to connect suicide to a single cause (like cyberbullying) because suicide is rarely connected to one absolute reason or cause



# MONITORING YOUR BLOG COMMENTS

It is important to moderate user comments to ensure the content remains safe for all readers of your blog. If you do not have control of the comment section of the blog you write for, consider sharing these tips with your editorial staff or person in charge.



## CHECK COMMENTS REGULARLY

If you have time (or staff) dedicated to monitoring comments, check the comments section regularly. Base how often to check on the volume and frequency of comments you receive. If you don't have time (or staff), but would still like to allow comments and feedback, use a disclaimer and let people know that the comment section is not monitored 24/7. Include a helpline phone number or link to a suicide prevention service in the disclaimer. You may also provide a contact form or other method for readers to report inappropriate or worrisome content.



## STEER CONVERSATION BACK ON TOPIC

Sometimes comment threads can get off topic or shift focus on subjects unrelated to the post. If you'd like to keep comments on topic, send a personal message to your commenters and let them know what kind of feedback or discussion you'd like to see or hear.



## CHOOSE A COMMENT THREAD FORMAT THAT WORKS BEST FOR YOUR BLOG

Depending on your type of blog and the platform you are using, you may have the option to select the style and layout of your comment section or thread. Choose one that suits your needs and your capacity to monitor it.



## TAKE ACTION AGAINST UNSAFE, DEROGATORY, RUDE OR DISCRIMINATORY COMMENTS

Ideally, your comment section is a platform for civil discourse, reflection, and feedback to your blog post. Unfortunately, some people will abuse this space for their own personal reasons. **One way to handle ill-natured comments is to develop a Terms of Use for your comment section. Make it simple and straightforward.**

For example, *"Profanity, racism, or discrimination of any kind will NOT be tolerated in this comment thread. Please also refrain from sharing graphic details (like*

*violence or self-harm) of your own personal experiences. Anyone who does not follow these Terms of Use will have their comment removed and may be blocked from this comment thread."*

This way, if someone breaks the rules of conduct, you will have the Terms of Use to justify removing an inappropriate comment. **Craft a generic response to use when commenters break the Terms of Use.**



## AVOID ARGUING IN THE COMMENTS SECTION

Try to avoid arguing in the comments section with someone who has violated your Terms of Use. If someone has violated the terms of the comment section, you can provide a warning or simply delete their comment and block the user. You can also provide your personal email address if they'd like to discuss their issue in private.

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## DON'T IGNORE SUICIDE THREATS

If you are uncomfortable handling suicide threats or helping someone in an emotional crisis, provide a more in depth disclaimer that makes it clear that your comment section will not be monitored 24/7. Then, provide the phone number or link to a helpline or emergency services for your area. If you are comfortable responding, there are steps you can take to help a person in suicidal distress. Refer to the “Responding to Suicidal Content” section of this document.

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## RESPONDING TO SUICIDAL COMMENTS

Key phrases or words that signal someone may be in suicidal crisis.

### DIRECT STATEMENTS:

- “I want to die.”
- “Nobody cares about me. I want to end it all.”
- “I’m going to kill myself.”
- “I have a gun and I want to die.”

### VAGUE OR INDIRECT COMMENTS:

- “I’m done.”
- “I don’t think I can do it anymore.”
- “No one would even notice if I were gone.”

### WHAT TO DO:

- Reach out as directly as possible. Reassure the person that help is available.
- Ask if they’d like to connect with a trained supporter. If yes, give them the number or link to a helpline in your area. Provide local information whenever possible. Be sure the information you provide is current and the service is up and running.
- Follow up with the person or ask them to follow up with you.

## TALKING WITH THE MEDIA

There are a few general guidelines for speaking with media on the topic of suicide and suicidality. If you are contacted by the media to comment or provide your story, use this opportunity to educate reporters about suicide and how they can safely share your contribution.



### IF YOU'RE ASKED TO SPEAK ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL STORY:

- Be sure the content of your blog post is appropriate for a larger, more general audience. Only share the details that are.
- Share hopeful insights gained from personal experience, how treatment can work, and that prevention is possible.
- Ask the journalist interviewing you to include suicide prevention and crisis support resources when they publish or broadcast the piece.
- Follow the same recommendations outlined in the Writing Safe Content section when speaking with members of the media.
- Inform the person interviewing you of the Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide ([reportingonsuicide.org](http://reportingonsuicide.org)). This is a resource specific to media and how they can reduce risk by reporting safely on suicide. Don't assume members of the media will already know them.
- Bear in mind that once you have shared your story with the media, you are not likely to have editorial control of it. Come to an agreement at the outset of sharing your story.



### IF YOU'RE ASKED FOR GENERAL SUICIDE INFORMATION:

- Before speaking or providing comment to the media, ask yourself if you're the right person to speak about suicide. It's best practice to have a credentialed expert answer questions from media. Suicide is a complex topic, and suicide experts might be better positioned to answer tough questions. If you aren't certain about the correct answer to a question, do not make it up. Incorrect information is not helpful. Refer the reporter to get more information from a suicide prevention expert.
- Ask to review any quotes you provided and be sure they are in the correct context.
- If you think you misspoke and the piece hasn't been published yet, double check with the editor and make any necessary improvements.
- Give journalists a copy of the Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide or send them the link to [reportingonsuicide.org](http://reportingonsuicide.org).

## PERSONAL SAFETY AND PRIVACY

It's important to think about your own safety and wellbeing when sharing sensitive information online.

- Only disclose the personal details you feel comfortable letting others know about.
- If there are people in your life who do not know about your personal story, and reading your story may negatively affect their thoughts, feelings or attitudes toward you, consider disclosing this information privately to them before publishing to a wider audience.
- Think about other people involved in your story and be sensitive to their needs. Bereaved family members and friends may not be ready or willing to open up about the death of a loved one. Ask how they feel before publishing your story. Consider sharing your story with them first before publishing.
- When covering someone else's story, always get permission from the appropriate parties before publishing.

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