

communicating responsibly about suicide on social media



It is important to talk responsibly about suicide on social media because the information you share reaches many people at once.

Many people who are at risk or are vulnerable may be negatively affected by exposure to suicide-related content. Choosing safe messaging can reduce the negative impact and even positively contribute towards suicide prevention. Here are some guidelines for talking safely about suicide on social media:

1. Think about the impact of your post on people

Before you post anything related to suicide, take some time to think about -

a. Why do you want to share this post? Do you want to raise awareness about suicide? Are you looking for support? Do you want to honour the memory of someone you lost to suicide?

b. How will this post affect other people (e.g., those at risk of suicide, families or friends bereaved by suicide, or a person who attempted suicide)? Will it cause distress in them or help them feel supported?

c. Is there a different way to communicate the information you want to share, so that it is safer or more helpful to someone who reads or watches it?

d. Who will have access to this post? If your account is not 'private', anyone can access the content you post. You might receive a mix of positive and negative responses to your post.

e. How will sharing this post make you feel?

2. Promote help-seeking by providing accurate information about support services

It is important to provide information or add a link to a support service such as a suicide prevention helpline, so that viewers of your post know where to seek help if they feel distressed.

3. Include a trigger warning

You should consider providing a content/trigger warning (For example: "TW: This post contains content about suicide") in your post to alert other users that the post may contain distressing content. It will help the other users to make a decision about whether or not they want to read your post.

4. Only post information that is accurate and verifiable

Avoid sharing information that you are unsure of. Avoid reducing suicide to a single cause (e.g., loss of job, failed exam, breakup, etc.).

Suicide is a result of a complex set of factors, so you should refrain from speculating the cause of the suicide. You should also be careful and ensure accuracy before sharing any links to an external source of information. Share only trusted sources which provide

verified and evidence-based information from health research organizations.

5. Provide information that reduces stigma and busts common myths and misconceptions

It is important to highlight that suicides are preventable and there is help available. You could also share correct facts about common myths (for e.g., fact-talking about suicide does not lead to or encourage suicide)

6. Don't provide detailed information about the location or methods of suicide

Images or content that depict a method or location of suicide must be avoided. It can be upsetting to those who are grieving and may lead to copycat suicides* by other people who are at-risk. This is especially true when talking about the death by suicide of a known public figure and extreme caution should be taken while talking about such instances.

** Copycat suicide refers to imitation of an act of suicide by another person.*

7. Share hopeful stories and narratives about overcoming suicidal thoughts or feelings:

It is helpful to emphasize parts of your or someone else's experience that demonstrate the importance of seeking early help and support. You could talk about people or activities that helped you/someone else cope with suicidal thoughts and feelings.

8. Ensure that the privacy of the person you are referring to is maintained

Ask for permission before sharing any information about another person. If you are sharing about someone who has died by suicide, it is important to be sensitive to the feelings of those who are grieving (such as family members) and ensure you do not violate their privacy.

9. Monitor comments on your post

It can be helpful to monitor the activity on your posts and check for any harmful or unsafe content such as images of suicide or means/methods of suicide, suicide notes, etc. If you do come across an unsafe or triggering response, you could:

- a. Hide the user's post, if possible.
- b. Report it to the relevant social media help centre.

10. Use sensitive language

Don't use language which sensationalises, normalises or over-simplifies suicide.

UNHELPFUL LANGUAGE AND CONTENT / DON'TS

Don't say "committed suicide" because it connotes suicide as a crime or a sin.

Don't say "suicide is a solution to problems"

Don't trivialize suicide by using sensational headlines or pictures to attract attention.

Don't place the blame on one event for suicide.

Don't use judgmental phrases such as, coward, selfish, attention seeking, crazy, insane, weak, failure, etc.

Don't provide information about suicide location or method.

Don't use words that describe suicide as desirable, such as relief, at peace, successful, failed attempt, brave, etc.

HELPFUL LANGUAGE AND CONTENT / DO'S

Use terms such as, "died by suicide", "took their own life", "ended their own life" or "attempted suicide".

Include messages of hope and recovery (e.g., post links to videos or stories of people who recovered from suicidal thoughts)

Use simple language which doesn't feel shocking or jarring.

Highlight that suicide is complex and that many factors contribute towards a person taking their own life.

Include information on factors that protect against suicide (e.g., early help seeking, engaging in meaningful relationships) or stories about recovery

Highlight that help is available and add information about support services.

References:

Chatsafe: A young person's guide for communicating safely online about suicide (Orygen)
Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide (SPIRIT)

(Outlive is a suicide prevention programme for young people by Sangath, The Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and Quicksand. Learn more at www.outlive.in.)

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The logo for Outlive, featuring the word "Outlive" in a blue, cursive font with a speech bubble shape around the letter "O".