



A guide for reporting when a celebrity dies by suicide

When a celebrity dies by suicide it often attracts significant media attention and public interest. While reporting these stories may feel unavoidable, the way they are covered can influence community wellbeing.

Research shows that when a celebrity dies by suicide and the story receives widespread attention, it can be associated with increases in suicide and suicide attempts.

For some people, especially if they identify with the celebrity or aspects of their story, the death may feel more personal and the way the story is reported may have a greater impact on them.

This guide provides practical, evidence-informed steps to assist media professionals in reducing harm and promoting help-seeking. It complements the full *Mindframe* guidelines, which offer detailed recommendations and references.

For more detail on communicating about suicide, including the full suite of *Mindframe* guidelines, and other supporting resources, visit: mindframe.org.au

Increased risk of further suicidal behaviour is seen when:

- Media coverage includes the method or public location of a death or suicide attempt
- There are high volumes of media reporting on a single incident including extensive focus on tributes
- The cause of suicide is simplified to concentrate on a single factor
- Sensationalised or alarmist language is used (for example, 'Celebrity suicide shock', 'Tragic final act', 'The pressures of fame claim another life')
- Portrayals glorify, romanticise, glamourise or present suicide as a solution to life's challenges.



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Understanding the research and context behind this guidance

Werther effect

There is a large body of research showing that when public communication about suicide is problematic, it can be associated with increases in suicide and suicide attempts. This is known as the Werther effect.

Coverage that sensationalises suicide (for example, reporting that is exaggerated, graphic or highly attention grabbing) can amplify emotional intensity or increase identification with the person.

Reporting that romanticises the death through emotive language or imagery can unintentionally glamourise suicide. This includes framing that idealises the individual, portrays the death as understandable or heroic, or suggests it has brought relief. This kind of reporting is often seen when a celebrity dies by suicide.

These studies also show that when coverage of a celebrity's suicide death is prominent, repeated, or includes details of suicide method or public location, it can be associated with increases in suicidal behaviour.

Papageno effect

More recent research shows some types of public communication can have a protective influence and preventive effect. This is known as the Papageno effect.

Sharing stories that focus on people who have navigated suicidal thoughts or a suicidal crisis, with a focus on what has been helpful for them, can have a positive influence by providing knowledge, practical strategies and hope for others who may be going through a challenging experience.

These stories can also offer alternatives to suicide by showing that suicidal distress can be temporary or manageable, and that supports are available.

Including expert commentary and framing suicide as a preventable, tragic loss in these stories can also contribute to reducing harm.

Reporting when a celebrity dies by suicide

What do we mean by “celebrity”?

For this guide, celebrity refers to any prominent person (international, national, regional, local, or platform-based) whose death may attract widespread attention or engagement. This includes actors, musicians, athletes, influencers, and any local public figures whose stories can reach large or highly engaged audiences, whether through traditional media or online communities.

Why does this matter?

Factors that shape what becomes news, such as how close a story feels to an audience, how widely it is shared, and how strongly people connect with the person, can increase risk. A person considered ‘high-profile’ in a small community can have an impact similar in scale to a global celebrity, within that community.

Key guidance when reporting on a celebrity death by suicide

Before reporting, pause and consider

- **Public interest:** Is the story necessary? Does it serve a clear public interest beyond curiosity or entertainment?
- **The facts:** Only report a death as suicide when confirmed by official sources. Avoid speculation because it can cause harm and distress.
- **Existing coverage:** Has there already been extensive coverage? Repeated and high-volume reporting can increase risk of social transmission.
- **Editorial pathways:** Consult your organisation's editorial standards or speak with senior editors before publishing and refer to the [Australian Press Council's standards and advisory guidelines](#).
- **Ethical impacts:** Respect privacy and consent, especially for bereaved families. Apply cultural considerations (for example naming or including images of a deceased person may cause distress in some communities).
- **Community impact:** Think about how the story will affect your audience, locally and nationally and whether it would increase distress or risk.

How to frame the story

- **Place information in context:** Frame suicide as a complex, preventable public health issue, not the result of a single event or cause. Where possible, refer to wider social, structural and community factors that contribute to suicide risk to avoid implying simple or singular causes.
- **Include expert voices:** Where appropriate, include perspectives from suicide prevention experts and people with lived and living experience to provide context and reduce glamorisation.
- **Community impact:** Situate the story within the broader public health context (for example, supports, policy and system issues), rather than focusing solely on the celebrity.
- **Life achievements:** Where relevant, briefly acknowledge the person's life achievements to provide balance and respectfully contextualise the story while avoiding any tone that could glamorise the death.
- **Plan follow-ups:** Consider Papageno-style content that highlights coping strategies, recovery, and help-seeking. These stories can encourage hope and resilience in the community.





Key guidance when reporting on a celebrity death by suicide:

Reducing harm and managing risk:

- **Reducing prominence:** Avoid front-page placement, lead bulletins, or homepage highlights. Avoid using suicide-related push notifications, as they lack context and can increase distress and social transmission risk.
- **Avoid suicide method and public location:** Never include explicit details of suicide method. If necessary, use general terms only rather than specific details. The risk of further suicidal behaviour increases significantly where details of suicide method are included.
- **Limit repeated coverage:** This includes limiting both repeated reporting and use of imagery. Be cautious around anniversaries or related events including memorials.
- **Ensure information is accurate:** Use verified data and expert interpretation. Avoid speculation about causes or motives.
- **Avoid tribute focused coverage:** Avoid or limit highlighting public tributes, vigils or large scale expressions of grief, as this can unintentionally romanticise or glamourise the death. Coverage of these may also reveal or draw attention to the public location of a suicide death, which can increase risk.

[Click here to access the free resource *Mindframe: Quick reference guide for communicating safely about suicide and self-harm data*](#)

Consider the language you use when referring to suicide

Choosing language that reflects and empowers individual experiences, is not sensationalised, is understandable, and is adapted to personal preferences or audience is recommended.

Preferred	Problematic
 Died by suicide; took their own life	 Successful suicide; completed suicide; committed suicide
 Suicide attempt; attempted to end their life	 Unsuccessful suicide; failed suicide bid
 Increased rates of suicide; higher rates of suicide	 Sky-rocketing rates of suicide; suicide epidemic
 A person who attempted or died by suicide; he died by suicide	 Labelling terms associated with suicide methods
 Tragic death, a tragedy	 Set free; finally at peace; can rest at last
 Refraining from using suicide out of context	 Political suicide; suicide pass/ball (in sports); suicide mission
 Content advice; the content includes discussion of suicide	 Trigger warning; triggered

Consider the images you use when referring to suicide

Preferred	Problematic
 Use images that model hope, connection or support	 Memorials, vigils or funerals
 Where portraits are used, choose neutral and respectful images (for example standard head and shoulders portraits)	 Images that depict suicide method or draw attention to public locations
 Use film, television or performance stills sparingly and in ways that do not glamorise the person or the death	 Distressed or stigmatising images (e.g. police booking photographs, images of public breakdowns, intoxication or crisis moments)
 Using images of people only with the appropriate permissions	 Repeated use of the same image across multiple stories

Case study: The death of Robin Williams

A well documented example of the risks associated with reporting a celebrity suicide relates to the media coverage following the death of American actor and comedian Robin Williams in 2014.

Research examining this period found that the volume and style of reporting (including widespread use of explicit details about the suicide method, speculative commentary about contributing factors, and stories that romanticised aspects of his life or final actions) was associated with concerning population level impacts.

Analysis of suicide data in the months after his death showed an estimated 9.85% increase in suicides in the United States, with a particularly marked rise among men of a similar demographic profile.

Australian research has also examined the period following Williams' death. One study found an increase in calls to Lifeline and Beyond Blue in the week after Williams' death. Another study found an 11% increase in suicides in Australia in the five months following his death, with a similar demographic to that reported in the United States.

These findings suggest that while the Australian media largely adhered to

the *Mindframe* best practice guidelines, Australians were likely exposed to overseas reporting that did not follow best practice guidance, particularly via overseas media or social media.

This example highlights several known risks in celebrity suicide reporting:

- Prominent, repeated coverage can increase the likelihood of social transmission of suicide.
- Explicit or detailed reporting of suicide method can contribute to increases in deaths using the same method.
- Speculation about the cause or reason for the death can sensationalise the story and imply that suicide has a single cause explanation, when it is complex and influenced by multiple factors.
- Romanticised, emotive or tribute focused coverage may unintentionally glamourise the death and increase risk of further suicidal behaviour.

This case is now frequently used in international guidance to illustrate how certain reporting practices can contribute to increased suicide risk, and why responsible, contextual, and prevention focused reporting is essential.



One of Robin Williams' many iconic roles was as the voice of Genie in Disney's *Aladdin*.

While well-intentioned, this social media post from the account of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at the time of Williams' death could be considered problematic due to the possible interpretation of suicide as an understandable solution for freeing one's self from particular challenges or experiences. Image: X.com

Other considerations

Social and digital media

- **Headlines and tags:** Avoid sensational terms and keywords related to suicide method or public location. Use hashtags carefully and respectfully, avoiding emotive, personalised or amplifying tags, and do not tag or direct content at family, friends, colleagues or others closely connected to the person who has died.
- **Comments:** Disable or actively moderate comments. Remove harmful comments promptly and provide links to support services.
- **Monitoring:** Track engagement and feedback. Respond quickly to misinformation or distress signals.
- **Posts:** Include help-seeking information in all social media posts related to the story.

Help-seeking

When including help-seeking information, make sure it is:

- Relevant to the audience (e.g. if the story involves a young celebrity, include youth specific services such as Kids Helpline or headspace).
- Inclusive of at least two 24/7 crisis services such as Lifeline (13 11 14) and Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467).
- Offered in a range of formats (e.g. phone, text and online support) recognising that people access help in different ways.
- Linked to online support options if the content is digital.

Always include clear, accessible help-seeking information. For further guidance and resources, refer to the help-seeking page on the [Mindframe portal](#).

Mindframe resources and support

Access the dedicated suite of *Mindframe* resources for media, including self-help information and guidelines for safe reporting on suicide, mental health concerns, and alcohol and other drug concerns here.

For free advice, including real-time support when reporting on suicide, mental health concerns or alcohol and other drug concerns, contact *Mindframe*:

 (02) 4924 6900

 mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au

 mindframe.org.au