Know the Signs is a statewide suicide prevention social marketing campaign with the overarching goal to increase Californians’ capacity to prevent suicide by encouraging individuals to know the signs, find the words to talk to someone they are concerned about, and to reach out to resources.

SuicideIsPreventable.org (public)
ElSuicidioEsPrevenible.org (public)
Background and History
National and State Guidance for Improved Messaging

GOAL 7: INCREASE USE OF BEST PRACTICES FOR REPORTING OF SUICIDE AND PROMOTE HEALTHY USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Desired Outcome ✅ Reduce events referred to as “suicide clusters,” when multiple suicides occur within a particular time period or location, especially among youth.

Short-term Target 🔄 By 2025, all counties are conducting activities to increase awareness of best practices for reporting suicide to local media partners. Activities could include offering informational sessions, posting information online, and holding informational sessions.

Objective 7b Increase awareness of best practices for reporting on suicides by collaborating with journalism associations and organizations to disseminate information and resources to journalism and media partners.

Striving for Zero: California’s Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention 2020-2025
According to polling conducted by a national health research firm:

- **94%** of Americans believe that many *suicides are preventable* with appropriate research, interventions, and services. *(AFSP / Harris Poll)*

- **94%** would **take action** to help someone close to them who was thinking about suicide. *(AFSP / Harris Poll)*

- **86%** of the population believes that it is **important to invest in suicide prevention**. *(Charting the Future)*
Need for a change in suicide prevention messaging

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
Expert Panel responses to current messaging:

• Emphasis on problem severity, not prevention
  • Collectively, creating a “negative narrative” about suicide

• Too few stories of hope, recovery, resilience
  • Stories of suicide deaths are common
  • Protective: news stories about coping with adversity without suicidal behavior

• The field lacks a core message or frame

We can be more proactive in shaping the conversation
The cultural theory and model of suicide

Culturally Specific Suicide Risk:

• Cultural Sanctions:
  • Acceptability of suicide as an option
  • Shame associated with life events
• Idioms of distress:
  • The way suicide is expressed
  • Chosen methods or means for attempting suicide
• Minority Stress:
  • Acculturation, discrimination, social disadvantages
• Social discord:
  • Conflict, lack of integration
  • Alienation from family, community or friends

“We need to get people other than the choir to sing. We need journalist associations, employee assistance programs, chambers of commerce, defense lawyers, pediatricians, family practitioners, and others to get involved. They see people every day that may be at risk and we need them to partake in the conversation.”

-Key Informant (Charting the Future of Suicide Prevention)
How we communicate about suicide may influence a vulnerable person towards suicidal behavior. But positive messaging about suicide prevention such as coverage of positive coping in adverse circumstances, or information about resources may have protective effects.

“Werther” vs. “Papageno” Effect
Framework for Successful Messaging

Papageno vs. Werther

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

• Increased help-seeking
• More awareness of resources, warning signs
• De-stigmatization of mental illness and suicide

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

• Imitative behavior
• Reinforcing problem behaviors
• Inaccurate and/or stigmatizing perceptions
• Stereotypes
• Negative “narratives”
• Omitting critical information

www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org
Framework for Successful Messaging

Four considerations when developing messages:

1. Strategy
2. Safety
3. Positive narrative
4. Guidelines

www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org
Strategy
Start with Strategy

• What is your strategy for reducing suicide?
• How does messaging fit into your efforts?
• Decide “why” before “how”
## Message Development Frameworks

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Set the CONTEXT</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>WHY message?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>WHO to influence?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>To DO what?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>WHAT to say?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>HOW to reach them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>SO WHAT?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Analyze your situation
2. Identify and understand your audience
3. Develop your message
4. Create/implement your strategy
5. Evaluate your plan

“How” decision is here
Safe and Effective Messaging
“Reporting on suicide, like reporting on sexual abuse, is one of the areas in which we favor not saying all that we know. However, in some versions, we also gave out more information about the method of death than required. If police, prosecutors or family members announce publicly that a suicide was by pills, hanging, gunshot or other means, let’s keep such details to a minimum and not make it the lead of our stories on the deaths.”

- John Daniszewski, AP Vice President for Standards

“How and When We Report on Suicide”
Recommended Language

USE
Died by suicide
Attempted suicide

DON’T USE
• Committed suicide
• “Successful” or “Unsuccessful” attempts
Unsafe messages can influence vulnerable people to imitate risky behaviors.
Providing a suicide prevention resource is one of the most important components when messaging about suicide or suicide prevention.
Examples

- Normalizing of help-seeking
- Promotion of resource
Avoid “Normalizing” Statements

• Don’t normalize suicide by presenting it as a common event (e.g., epidemic, skyrocketing)
• Most people who consider suicide do not act on those thoughts.
• Presenting suicide as common may unintentionally remove a protective bias against suicide.
Examples

- Undefined audiences and goals
- No call to action
- Oversimplification of causes
- Language
Examples

- Focus on severity of problem, not on prevention
- No call to action
- Dark images and colors
- Language and use of data
Avoid describing methods.

Avoid sharing details about how the suicide was carried out such as specific details about weapon or means used, location of wound, or the location of the incident.

Grim details of Robin Williams' death released by investigators

Rashaan Salaam, Heisman Trophy winner and former Chicago Bear, committed suicide with gunshot to head.
Examples

• Images of means/methods
• Focus on severity, no prevention message
• Language
What “causes” suicide?
Avoid Oversimplifying “Causes”

Rather than offering single reasons for suicide (breakup, job loss, etc.), frame suicide as a complex issue influenced by multiple factors.

Oversimplification of suicide can mislead people to believe that it is a normal response to fairly common life circumstances.
Suicidal behaviors in LGBT populations appear to be related to “minority stress”, which stems from the cultural and social prejudice attached to minority sexual orientation and gender identity. This stress includes individual experiences of *prejudice or discrimination, such as family rejection, harassment, bullying, violence, and victimization*. These negative outcomes, rather than minority sexual orientation or gender identity per se, appear to be the key risk factors for LGBT suicidal ideation and behavior.”

*Talk About Suicide and LGBT Populations*
• Positive: highlights protective factors (supportive environments, family support) and risk factors
• Focus on severity and misuse of data
• No resource
Positive Narrative
Positive Narrative

- Counter the “negative narrative”
- In every message: Help the public to envision prevention.
- Highlight resources
What we know about successful prevention
Stories of people who were helped/
Your own story
Concrete actions people can take
Program successes
Examples

- Action Oriented
- Prevention Focused
- Gives option for support
Framework for Successful Messaging

For more successful messages: Use all 4 elements:

• **Strategy**: Define goals, audiences & actions, integrate with other efforts, etc.

• **Safety**: Avoid “don’ts”

• **Positive narrative**: Stories of coping & resiliency; programmatic successes; actions audience can take; available resources & services, etc.

• **Guidelines**: Use message-specific best practices

[www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org](http://www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org)
Review
What’s most important to focus on?

• If you only do ONE thing, include the crisis line number
• When possible, educate about warning signs
• Avoid details about method
• Quote experts
• These are recommendations (not guidelines, not rules, not standards)
Working with Media as Partners

- “US” vs. “THEM”
- Have a Plan
- Simplify the Process
- Help Them Help You
- Be Gracious
Tips for Success

• Always provide the Recommendations—email and hard copy
• Don’t accept every opportunity that arises
• Stand up for telephone interviews
• Use the reporter’s name during broadcasts
• YOUR TIPS?
Support on Social Media

For over 10 years, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has worked with social media platforms and digital communities to establish recommended best practices in suicide prevention for social and digital media.

Safety Processes on Social Media

If you are worried about someone on social media, you can contact safety teams, who will reach out to connect the user with the help they need. *Note: Tumblr no longer directly responds to reports of suicide or self-harm.

Facebook

The Lifeline has worked with Facebook to develop their supportive community tools, which include resources, messages for you to use, and directly contacting Facebook.

Report Suicidal Content

From Reporting to Supporting
Resources
“A much better job needs to be done in the public health and suicide prevention community in terms of tailoring messages for specific audience segments.”

-Key Informant (Charting the Future of Suicide Prevention)
**Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide**

Suicide is a public health issue. **Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However, the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion, or positively by encouraging help-seeking.**

**BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE**

Media plays an important role in preventing suicide. The following recommendations can assist in safe reporting on suicide.

| AVOID... | INSTEAD...
<table>
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<tr>
<td>Describing or depicting the method and location of the suicide.</td>
<td>Report the death as a suicide, keep information about the location general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing the content of a suicide note.</td>
<td>Report that a note was found and is under review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing personal details about the suicide.</td>
<td>Keep information about the person general.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**

These recommendations were established using a consensus model developed by SAFTE. The process was led by SAFTE and included leading national and international suicide prevention, public health and communications experts, new organizations, reporters, journalism schools and internet safety experts. Collaborating organizations include:

- American Association of Suicideology
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- American Psychiatric Association
- Anenberg Public Policy Center
- Associated Press Managing Editors
- Center for Suicide Prevetion
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- Crisis Text Line
- Columbia University Department of Psychiatry
- Connecticut.org
- International Association for Suicide Prevention Task Force on Media and Suicide
- Medical University of Vienna
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Institute of Mental Health
- National Press Photographers Association
- The New York State Psychiatric Institute
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
- Vibrant Emotional Health
Guidelines

Channels

Populations

Messengers

And more...
Save.org and Cisco have joined forces to support journalists and content creators to reduce the risk of suicide contagion that happens when reporting best practices are not followed. In fact, one study found that there was a 13% increase in deaths following reporting on celebrity suicides.

Disclaimer 1: This tool cannot detect implicit blame, so please ensure that you avoid inadvertently implicitly placing blame on a single factor.

Disclaimer 2: Excluding the method of suicide is the single most impactful way to reduce suicide’s contagion effect; please ensure your article omits implicit and explicit text and images regarding the suicide method.

1. Exclude suicide method
2. Use appropriate language
3. Avoid blame
4. Include Education and Help

reportingonsuicide.cisco.com/

Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out
Guidelines

Real Stories
An initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide

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

National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide

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

Show that help is available.

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

Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.

Use nonjudgmental language.

Depiction Recommendations

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

With suicide on messaging and people who experience.

Depiction

Real Stories
An initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Guidance to help content creators craft stories about survival, hope, and healing—aimed at saving lives and restoring.
Know the Signs Materials and Resources

SuicideIsPreventable.org

ElSuicidioEsPrevenible.org
Sign up as a judge for the Directing Change Program to practice your messaging skills:

- As a judge you’ll:
  - Screen and score ten 60-second films
  - All judging is done online
  - Takes about two hours
  - Occurs in Spring 2022

For more information, email: Devin@DirectingChange.org
Thank you for attending!

For questions: info@suicideispreventable.org

To access the toolkit online:
www.suicideispreventable.org/prevention-kit.php

Know the Signs >> Find the Words >> Reach Out

Funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63).