



National Children's
**MENTAL HEALTH
AWARENESS DAY**

Suicide Prevention: Strategies That Work

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION: BEST PRACTICES

Social media offers organizations the opportunity to communicate directly with young people, as well as families and other key audiences. When it comes to discussing suicide prevention on social media, it's important to exercise caution so that you don't inadvertently send harmful messages that reinforce suicidal thoughts and feelings. To ensure that you communicate your messages effectively and remain sensitive to those struggling with their mental health, we have compiled these best practices.

Messaging do's

- **Do make calls to action clear.** Vague messages such as “let's stop suicide” don't stick with audiences. Offer clear actions that your audience can take toward preventing suicide, such as “call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1–800–273–TALK (8255) if a loved one expresses suicidal thoughts,” or “learn the warning signs of suicide among students at www.sprc.org.”
- **Do share resources and solutions along with suicide statistics.** It can be tempting to simply share messages and statistics around suicide to “raise awareness,” but sharing negative information about the prevalence of suicide with no call to action, information about effective solutions, or resources can paint a hopeless picture about suicide.
- **Do link to reliable sources.** With so many blogs and platforms for people of all backgrounds to share their thoughts, make sure that you're promoting reliable sources of information. Read the full article you're promoting to ensure that the content aligns with your goals and views on suicide.
- **Do include a warning that the content is sensitive.** If you make the choice to link to a story with graphic details, include the phrase [Warning: Sensitive Content] in your message.
- **Do post messages of hope and recovery.** Suicide prevention messages are more effective when focused on hope and recovery rather than the consequences of suicide.

Messaging don'ts

- **Don't oversell the prevalence of suicide.** Avoid language such as “epidemic” that can make it seem suicide is more common than it is. Normalizing suicide can lead to a contagion effect.
- **Don't use the phrase “commit suicide.”** The word “commit” makes suicide seem criminal or like something other than what it is—a health issue. Instead, use terms such as, “died by suicide” or “took their own life.”
- **Don't post about celebrity suicides.** If you share a post about a celebrity suicide, include links to available support such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The suicide of well-known public figures can lead to copycat suicides.



- **Don't mention any positive outcomes from suicide**, such as relief or finding peace.
- **Don't post details of location, method, and motives** when sharing stories of suicide.

Use of images

- **Don't post graphic images of suicide or the location where someone has died by suicide.** Experts agree that can lead to suicide contagion.
- **Avoid images that reinforce stereotypes around mental health.** Images of people looking sad and dejected or angry paint a stereotypical picture. In reality, most people living with mental health issues don't show visible signs.

Establishing policies and guidelines

- **Take all threats of suicide seriously.** If someone posts about considering suicide, reach out to them or report suicidal content. [You can get more information on social media reporting from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.](#)
- **Establish a policy for responding to suicide-related posts.** Work with your organization to develop a standard policy for how you will respond if a social media user posts about suicide on your page or expresses suicidal thoughts.
- **Remember that you can hide sensitive comments.** If there is a comment on your page that may deeply affect others struggling with their mental health, [you can hide it from view.](#)
- **Create standard responses** that can be used to reply to a message that appears to require immediate response to support someone in need of suicide prevention support.

Relevant hashtags

Using relevant hashtags can help you reach a wider audience of social media users to share messages about preventing suicide. Here are some common hashtags being used across social media channels to promote suicide prevention: #mentalhealth, #suicideprevention, #health, #depression, #selfcare, #selflove, #mhchat, #recovery, #mhsm, #endstigma, and #mentalhealthmatters.

Resources

- [Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Framework for Successful Messaging](#)
- [Support for Suicidal Individuals on Social and Digital Media Toolkit](#)
- [How to Use Social Media for Suicide Prevention User Guide](#)
- [Suicide and Social Media: A Tipsheet for Parents and Providers](#)
- [Unsafe Reporting on Suicide Can Cost Lives](#)