

After a suicide

Managing media interest

here
for
you

Some people find it helpful and empowering to share their story. For others, dealing with the media is very stressful. Speaking with the media or not is your choice. This guide offers you some helpful tips to make informed decisions about dealing with the media

The law restricts what the media can report about a suspected suicide

Under law in New Zealand, the media have to follow certain restrictions about what they can report if a death appears to have been by suicide. This is to decrease the chance of further suicides.

The media cannot make public the following details.

- The method or suspected method of the death.
- Any detail (like the place of death) that might suggest the method or suspected method of the death.
- A description of the death as a suicide before the coroner has released their findings and stated the death was a suicide (although the death can be described as a suspected suicide before then).

When the media are interested in the story

A suspected suicide death can quickly become public information if the media report the death in such a way that suicide is indicated. Newspapers, TV, internet, radio, magazines, and social media can all play a part in spreading the story. So, a personal family and whānau loss can soon become known about publicly.

Someone from a media organisation could contact you, your family, whānau, friends, acquaintances, and even people you barely know to ask for details about the person's life, comments, or an interview. If they do, it is always up to you or those they ask to decide if you wish to speak to them or not.

However, the media do not always have your best interests in mind. Some people can find journalists persistent, demanding, and manipulative when they are searching for details about a story. Their attention may be intrusive and distressing. They often find inventive ways to discover more information, including staking out homes, hospitals, workplaces, and funerals or tangihanga. They may even use photos from social media or the funeral programme without asking family permission.

Be aware that you might also unexpectedly hear, read, or see something in the media about the person who has died that is extremely upsetting and untrue.

CONTACT

Victim Support

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
enquiries@victimsupport.org.nz
victimsupport.org.nz


Victim Support
Manaaki Tangata



Tips for dealing with media attention

These tips come from those who have experienced how challenging it can be to deal with media interest. Your Support Worker can assist and support you with any of these steps. If you need further assistance please call us on **0800 842 846** to be connected to a Support Worker day or night, on any day. We are here for you.

Consider appointing someone else to deal with the media on your behalf

You can pass all media queries onto this person to deal with as you choose.

Use your voice mail or text messages to filter all your calls

This way you don't accidentally answer a call from someone you don't want to speak to, and can choose to return the call when, and if, you are ready to.

Use social media wisely

Social media can be mis-used. Any information or photos shared openly on social media, messaging apps or text messages can be used by media as public information. Members of the public can make comments on posts that might be insensitive and upsetting. Children and young people should be discouraged from viewing or replying to such comments.



If you decide not to speak to the media:

- You can simply ignore requests. It's okay to tell them you have "no comment" or ask them to direct all queries to police.
- It may be easier to decline to comment by text or email, where this is possible, as journalists can still keep pushing you for an answer if you are talking over the phone.
- Understand that even if you choose not to comment, it may not be possible to stop the media reporting on your case.

If you do decide to speak to the media:

- Decide what information you do want to share with the public and what you *don't* want to share. Where applicable, discuss this as a family or whānau.
- Choose who will speak to media on behalf of your family or whānau. This could be you, another member of your family or whānau, or a trusted friend. Spend time with them first to ensure they know what you want to say. If you decide to speak to the media yourself, give yourself time to carefully think through what you want to say.
- Be careful what is said when emotions are running high. After a suicide loss, it's not uncommon for some family and whānau members to feel very angry or to seek to place blame for what has happened. Be careful about saying things that you might regret.
- Ask reporters for their names, contact details and who they work for. Ask for a copy of the questions they want to ask you *before* they interview you. Make a time to speak to them that suits you and gives you a chance to prepare. Check if the interview is being recorded in case you don't want that.
- Always assume your interview is being recorded. If you are not comfortable with that, tell the journalist before your interview.
- Don't let the media rush you. If you feel pressured, say you will call or message them back or have someone else do that on your behalf. You can also delay an arranged interview.
- There is no such thing as 'off the record'. Media can use anything you say to them at any time. Avoid saying anything in the spur of the moment that you might later regret.



- If you do give an interview, you don't have the right to see what is produced before it's made public. You can ask, but it's over to the media person you are dealing with. Families can feel angry their words have been twisted or misconstrued so planning what you want to say is very important.
- You can choose to be proactive and give interviews with the media at a time they choose such as around upcoming anniversaries or when the family want to highlight an aspect of the case. This way you can get ahead of the media and do it on your own terms.
- Think carefully about which private photos, written documents/messages, audio, or video you may want to give to media. It's very important to know that any of these could also be used by them in the future without your additional permission.
- Ask police to tell you about media releases they are making about the death *before* they release them to the media.
- Incorrect information given to the media by relatives, friends, or others can be infuriating and hurtful. If this happens, you can ask the media to correct any misinformation. Please understand though, sometimes these people pass on information that is factual or considered their opinion.

Media attention may increase again at any time. Use these tips when you need to.

If media pressure is getting too much

Media can be persistent and resourceful. If you have further concerns and questions, talk with the Victim Support Worker assigned to your case. You can call us 24/7 on **0800 842 846** to be connected to a Support Worker.



**Our service is
free, personal,
and confidential**

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