

THE SUICIDE REPORTING TOOLKIT

REPORTING SUICIDE RESPONSIBLY

STORYTELLING NOTES

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Set your students the task of writing a news story about a suicide after the bodies of two people were found. Choose the for a news outlet and date of your choice.

The notes below provide an outline of a suicide story that has several ethical pitfalls. Details, such as names, locations, dates etc. have been removed so that you can tailor the content to your own news areas and to a time that fits in with when you're working on this lesson with your students. Other details can be changed if you wish.

This is a news story about *an event* and it is about to go online/be broadcast. Your students are bright, young stars who have been hired to appeal to a younger audience in a competitive news area. They have only been at the news outlet for a couple of weeks so they are keen to impress.

Tell them they are up against a deadline so they don't have time to look through pages of guidelines. Newsroom pressures mean they have to decide what to write by themselves. So they turn to *Responsible Suicide Reporting* to help them.

Start by telling them that they know the kind of story they have to write – an event – and they know how to do that as they have written event stories before. Invite them to look at the notes below and ask them to reflect on what pieces of information they should use to produce an informative, responsible article.

As they write their stories/produce content ask them to consider the rules around stigma, sensationalising, glorifying and gratuitously reporting, and then to apply the six questions of the standard of moderation to ensure their content is ethical and responsible.

They should think what they should include in their stories and what they should exclude from the information below. Is there anything else they need to include? Have they been careful to avoid a roadmap – a set of instructions to vulnerable people on how to take their own lives? Have they avoided stigmatising/glorifying/gratuitous language? Is the tone appropriate? Tell them to check the six questions in the standard of moderation to be sure.

INFORMATION ON THE SUICIDE

- A man and a woman, both aged 22, were found dead in [insert name of woods if you wish] woods near [insert location].
- They were named as [insert male name] and [insert female name], both from [insert name of location above].
- Police found them at 9.35am on [insert date] in a “secluded area” of the woods, which “would have been out of view from anyone”.
- They were found hanging from a branch of the same tree.
- Their relatives contacted the police to report them missing on [insert date prior to the bodies being found]. Their families had not seen them since [insert date prior to the families reporting them missing].
- [insert man’s name] had previously been reported missing in 2016, 2018 and 2019.
- [insert woman’s name] was an art student and [insert man’s name] was a musician and songwriter. Police said they had been in a “loving relationship” but this had ended a few weeks before they died. However, they remained friends and were in close contact.
- They were last seen together on [insert day] afternoon [insert date they were reported missing] buying paint and rope at [insert name of a DIY store] in [insert location].
- They had used spray paint to write the words “Together 4 Ever” next to entwined heart symbols on the trunk of the tree where they were found hanged.
- Police said the woman’s arm appeared to be round the man’s shoulder “as if cradling him”.
- They added that a bottle of alcohol was found on the ground near the tree.
- The family of [insert woman’s name] said on social media that a note was also found in her pocket. It contained the words: “Gone to a better place” and was signed off with the words: “Free at last”.
- A police source, who did not want to be identified, said they died by asphyxiation and there was evidence that both had taken cocaine and cannabis prior to their deaths.
- Pictures of the man and the woman are available from their Facebook and Instagram accounts.