

TIPSHEET

CRITICAL INCIDENT COMMUNICATION

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONDING TO A DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY

These are general guidelines, and each situation is unique. It's essential to consider the specific needs and vulnerabilities of those you're communicating with and to seek professional guidance when needed.

Ensure you're considering privacy and confidentiality, using person-first language, focusing on facts, and providing resources for support.

Do's

Express empathy: Communicate your sympathy for the situation. This can show respect and understanding.

Be respectful and sensitive: This includes understanding cultural, religious, and personal beliefs.

Use person-first language: This reminds others that you are talking about a human being, not just an incident. Say "a person who died" rather than "the deceased."

Be straightforward and factual: Be clear and concise in providing information, without speculation or presumption.

Validate feelings: Acknowledge the emotional responses of those affected.

Listen: Make space for people to share their feelings if they want to, without feeling pressured to respond or to "fix" their pain.

Don'ts

Avoid graphic details: Refrain from sharing details about the incident that aren't necessary for communication.

Don't assume feelings: Each person's grief is unique. Don't make assumptions about how someone should feel or react.

Don't rush the healing process: Healing from such a traumatic event takes time. Be patient and avoid pushing people to "move on".

Avoid cliches or insensitive phrases: Phrases like "Everything happens for a reason" or "At least they're in a better place now" can be more hurtful than comforting.

Don't speculate or gossip: Stick to the facts and avoid sharing unconfirmed information or speculations.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE TO USE AND AVOID FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT.

The goal is to provide comfort and to communicate empathetically and respectfully. Avoid platitudes or insensitive remarks that can inadvertently cause more pain or discomfort. Always tailor your language to respect the individual's unique experience and any other special considerations such as age.

1

DEATH/SERIOUS INJURY



EXAMPLES TO USE:

Group Communication:

"We regret to inform you of a tragic incident that resulted in death."

"We extend our deepest sympathies to all those affected."

"Our thoughts are with the individual's family and friends at this difficult time."

"Support services are available to those affected by this tragedy."

Individual Communication:

"I'm very sorry to hear about what happened."

"Is there anything I can do to support you during this difficult time?"

"We are saddened by the loss and are here for you."

"This is truly a tragedy, and we're all feeling the weight of it."



EXAMPLES TO AVOID:

Group Communication:

"It was a preventable tragedy."

"This is a harsh reality of our line of work."

"Details about the incident are still sketchy."

Individual Communication:

"At least he/she lived a long life, many people die young."

"He/She is in a better place."

"He/She brought this on himself/herself."

"Everything happens for a reason."

"I know how you feel."

2 SERIOUS INJURY SPECIFIC



EXAMPLES TO USE:

Group Communication:

"We're all wishing for a swift recovery."

"Our thoughts are with him/her during this challenging time."

Individual Communication:

"If you need anything during this time, please let us know."



EXAMPLES TO AVOID:

"It could have been worse."

"At least it wasn't fatal."

"He/She will bounce back in no time."

"I know a person who had the same injury and they are fine now."

3 ALLEGATIONS OR CONFIRMATION OF SERIOUS MISCONDUCT AND/OR ABUSE

When discussing allegations or confirmations of serious misconduct or abuse, it's essential to maintain respect and confidentiality, avoid victim-blaming or perpetrator-shaming, and be sensitive to the feelings and perceptions of all parties involved.



EXAMPLES TO USE:

"These are serious allegations, and they are being addressed appropriately."

"We are aware of the matters and they are not for further discussion. We are taking matters very seriously and this is being addressed appropriately."

"The safety and wellbeing of all involved parties are our utmost priority."

"We are committed to addressing all allegations seriously and responsibly."

"An investigation is underway to establish the facts surrounding the reported incident."

"We are taking all necessary measures to ensure a thorough and fair process."

"We ask for your patience and understanding as we navigate through this situation."



EXAMPLES TO AVOID:

"Let's not jump to conclusions until we know more."

"This sort of thing happens all the time in our industry."

"We believe there's always two sides to every story."

"I can't believe he/she would do something like that."

"It doesn't sound like it was that bad."



4

CONFIRMATION OF SERIOUS MISCONDUCT AND/OR ABUSE



EXAMPLES TO USE:

"The findings from the investigation have confirmed misconduct, and appropriate actions will be taken."

"We deeply regret that this incident occurred. Steps have been taken to ensure it doesn't happen again."

"We respect and support the courage it took for the individual to come forward."

"Following a comprehensive investigation, we have found the allegations to be substantiated."

"Appropriate action is being taken to address this serious violation of our codes of conduct."

"Our commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful environment remains unwavering."

"We are working to provide necessary support and resources to those affected."

"Our priority is now to provide support and resources to all affected parties."



EXAMPLES TO AVOID:

"I knew something like this was bound to happen."

"He/She has always been a problem."

"The victim should have spoken up sooner."

"Why didn't anyone see the signs?"

"We had hoped these allegations would prove untrue."

"This is a black mark on our organisation."

"These things should never occur in our community, but unfortunately, they did."

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR DISCUSSING SUICIDE

Language in reference to suicide:



USE

Took their own life.
Ended their own life.

Non-fatal or make an attempt on
his/her own life.

Concerning rates of suicide.

Refrain from using the term
suicide out of context.



AVOID

Successful suicide.
Committed suicide.
Commit suicide.

Unsuccessful suicide.
Failed suicide.
Suicide bid.

Suicide epidemic.

Political suicide.
Suicide mission.

**Preferred terminology
when referring to
someone who is grieving
the loss of someone who
took their own life:**

- Bereaved by suicide.
- They have lost someone to suicide.
- They are coping with losing someone to suicide.



Do's:

Use appropriate language: Use terms like “ended their own life” instead of phrases like “committed suicide” which carries criminal or sinful connotations.

Promote awareness of mental health resources/ promote help-seeking behaviour: Always include information on where to find support and encourage individuals to do so.

Recognise that suicide affects everyone differently: Respect each individual's experience and understand that reactions can vary widely.

Don'ts:

Don't romanticise or sensationalise suicide: Avoid portraying suicide as a heroic or romantic act. For example, memorials and commemorations are not usually recommended when someone has taken their own life.

Don't oversimplify the causes of suicide: Suicide is often the result of a complex interplay of factors and should not be attributed to a single cause or event.

Avoid blaming or shaming the person: Phrases like “How could they do this to us?” can reinforce stigma and make it harder for those struggling with suicidal thoughts to reach out for help.

Don't speculate about the “warning signs” or “missed signs”: It's easy to fall into the trap of retrospectively attributing a person's behaviours as warnings. Doing so can increase guilt and blame among those left behind.

Avoid providing specific or graphic details: Similar to discussing other serious incidents, refrain from describing the method or location of the suicide, as this can trigger others or potentially lead to suicide contagion.

Use caution when providing members with a platform to speak or present to others: While it is critical to allow people to grieve, it is important that people in an emotional state do not unintentionally cause harm or distress by discussing the above points.



EXAMPLES TO USE:

Group Communication:

“We are deeply saddened to report the loss of a member of our community to suicide.”

“This is a time for us to come together and support one another.”

“Help is available, and we encourage anyone who needs to, to reach out.”

Individual Communication:

“I can't imagine how difficult this must be for you.”

“It's important to remember that we're not alone. There are resources and people who want to help.”

“It's a heartbreaking situation, and it's okay to feel confused and upset.”

“I'm here for you and willing to listen if you want to talk.”



EXAMPLES TO AVOID:

Group Communication:

“He/She chose to end his/her life.”

“It was a shocking act.”

“The reasons behind his/her decision remain unclear.”

Individual Communication:

“He/She took the easy way out.”

“Didn't you see this coming?”

“Why didn't he/she think about how this would affect others?”

“He/She seemed so happy, are you sure it was suicide?”

“They were being selfish.”

DISCLAIMER THE INFORMATION IN THIS PUBLICATION IS GENERAL IN NATURE AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE MEDICAL, LEGAL OR PROFESSIONAL ADVICE (INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH ADVICE). SPORTWEST IS NOT LIABLE TO USERS FOR ANY LOSS RESULTING FROM THE USE OF THIS PUBLICATION AND ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION OR YOUR RELIANCE ON IT. SPORTWEST RECOMMENDS USERS SEEK INDEPENDENT ADVICE AS NECESSARY. SEE [HERE](#) FOR THE FULL SPORTWEST MENTAL HEALTH PUBLICATION DISCLAIMER.

In an Emergency Dial 000

For support call Lifeline 13 11 14

or visit [True Sport – Community Links](#) for more services.