

[Home](#) > [Answers](#) > [Mental Health and Substance Abuse](#) > What does "suicide contagion" mean, and what can be done to prevent it?

What does "suicide contagion" mean, and what can be done to prevent it?

Suicide contagion is the exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors within one's family, one's peer group, or through media reports of suicide and can result in an increase in suicide and suicidal behaviors. Direct and indirect exposure to suicidal behavior has been shown to precede an increase in suicidal behavior in persons at risk for suicide, especially in adolescents and young adults.

The risk for suicide contagion as a result of media reporting can be minimized by factual and concise media reports of suicide. Reports of suicide should not be repetitive, as prolonged exposure can increase the likelihood of suicide contagion. Suicide is the result of many complex factors; therefore media coverage should not report oversimplified explanations such as recent negative life events or acute stressors. Reports should not divulge detailed descriptions of the method used to avoid possible duplication. Reports should not glorify the victim and should not imply that suicide was effective in achieving a personal goal such as gaining media attention. In addition, information such as hotlines or emergency contacts should be provided for those at risk for suicide.

Following exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors within one's family or peer group, suicide risk can be minimized by having family members, friends, peers, and colleagues of the victim evaluated by a mental health professional. Persons deemed at risk for suicide should then be referred for additional mental health services.

Learn More:

- [Suicide Prevention](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml) (National Institutes of Mental Health)
- [Warning Signs of Suicide](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/suicidal-behavior) (MentalHealth.gov)
- [Suicide Prevention Resources for Tribes](http://beta.samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac/resources/suicide-prevention) (SAMHSA)

Posted in: [Mental Health and Substance Abuse](/answers/mental-health-and-substance-abuse/index.html)

Search HHS FAQs by questions or keywords:

Search

HHS Headquarters

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
Toll Free Call Center: 1-877-696-6775