

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MEDIA REPORTING ON SUICIDE

~Reducing the risk of contagion~

The Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention, within the Executive Office of the Governor, would like to provide you with guidelines for enhancing reporting of suicide as a phenomenon and suicide events in your community

Recently a number of news outlets have reported on the suicide of a nineteen year old male in Florida which took place live on a webcam. The death of Abraham Briggs reminds us that we need to take all suicide threats seriously. The Office of Suicide Prevention acknowledges the courage of the individuals who notified law enforcement of the impending tragedy. Sadly, by the time authorities were able to reach Mr. Briggs, a death that could have been prevented became a reality. Our office extends our sympathy to the family and friends of Abraham during this difficult time.

Research demonstrates that coverage of suicide can either increase the risk of suicide contagion (imitative deaths) or provide an opportunity to educate the public in a responsible manner about mental illnesses and suicide, and keep the risk of copycat suicides to a minimum.

When writing about suicide, here are some critical things to consider:

- Sensational coverage of suicide should be avoided, especially when involving a suicide. Avoid showing pictures of the deceased, the scene of the suicide or the method used.
- Avoid graphic descriptions of the suicide or method.
- Take care not to glorify suicide victims and to limit the expressions of community or public memorials or services.
- Remember to be sympathetic to the family in your reporting.
- Refrain from oversimplified explanations of why someone would take their own life. Suicide is a very complex issue and is rarely the result of one incident; acknowledging that suicide is the result of a combination of factors is helpful.
- Untreated depression can lead to suicide, so information about resources to deal with depression should be provided. Depression is treatable and this point should be publicized.
- If the deceased suffered from a mental illness, this should be acknowledged.

- It is a good and welcome gesture to publicize the warning signs of suicidal behavior, as well as community resources such as hotlines, support groups, and mental health centers. Make sure information is current and up to date.

We also encourage you to review the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's (SPRC) "At a Glance: Safe Reporting on Suicide" found at http://www.sprc.org/library/at_a_glance.pdf which offers recommendations for serving as an effective media spokesperson and how to generate media coverage to create awareness for suicide prevention.

The majority of people who make statements about suicide and/or exhibit signs of suicidal ideation are suffering greatly and don't know how to cope. The fact that thousands of people watched this young man suffer and take his life is horrifying. Every one of us needs to reach out to those we come in contact with who are distressed to offer them help and hope. We can all play a part in saving lives of those who are suffering by learning the warning signs and where to refer people for appropriate care.

The American Association of Suicidology convened an expert panel that created an easy phrase to remember the warning signs of suicide: IS PATH WARM?

- I Ideation (talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself)
- S Substance Abuse (increased alcohol or drug use)

- P Purposelessness (no reason for living; no sense of purpose)
- A Anxiety (anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep/sleeping all the time)
- T Trapped (feeling trapped - like there's no way out)
- H Hopelessness

- W Withdrawal (withdrawing from friends, family and society)
- A Anger (rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge)
- R Recklessness (doing risky activities, seemingly without thinking)
- M Mood Changes (dramatic mood changes)

If you notice someone who is exhibiting these warning signs, do not leave them alone and do not dismiss their behavior. Stay with them and help connect them with resources. You can find out about resources in your area by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK. You can also find more information at www.HelpPromoteHope.com

If you have any questions or would like additional information and resources, please do not hesitate to contact Erin MacInnes with the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention at (850) 922-0498 or Erin.MacInnes@myflorida.com.

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