



# The **Matthew Elvidge** Trust

## **The Matthew Elvidge Trust's submission to IPSO's public consultation to the Editor's Code of Practice**

### **1. The Matthew Elvidge Trust**

The Matthew Elvidge Trust is pleased to make a submission to the public consultation on the Editor's Code of Practice. We feel that this is an important opportunity to strengthen the code and ensure that journalists comply with media guidelines at a time when suicide rates are increasing.

The Trust was formed in 2010 shortly after our son took his own life after a short period of anxiety and depression.

The Trust (through its chair, Hamish Elvidge) has been widely involved in the development of national suicide prevention strategy through its membership of the National Suicide Prevention Advisory Board (chaired by Professor Louis Appleby) and has presented written and oral evidence to the Health and Social Care Select Committee (chaired by Dr Sarah Wollaston) on three occasions as part of its Inquiry into Suicide Prevention from 2016-2019.

The Trust founded and chairs the Support after Suicide Partnership, which is working closely with NHS England (NHSE) to support the implementation of suicide bereavement support services in every area of the country, funded by the NHSE 2019 Long Term Plan.

The Trust was also a founding Co-Chair of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance; is a member of Universities UK Mental Health Advisory Board and founded the Partnership for Schools' Wellbeing run by the National Childrens' Bureau.

### **2. Suicide**

Suicide is a major public health concern and research shows that sensitive reporting of the subject will prevent unnecessary distress to directly affected families, as well as the many thousands of families and individuals, who have had a similar personal experience of suicide in their life.

There are clear links between inappropriate media reporting of suicide and increases in suicide rate (e.g. the 'Wherther' effect).

On the other hand, responsible reporting that focuses on educating the public about suicide, understanding the signs, recognising that suicide is preventable, telling stories about people seeking help and the support that is available will reduce suicide rates (e.g. 'Papageno effect').



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Reporters should always seek to help the general public understand more about the devastating impact this type of death can have on peoples' lives, and the support that is available to help the bereaved cope with their loss, start to recover and build some sense of hope for the future.

Reporting should always consider the bereaved family first and think about the impact of the report or article on their emotional wellbeing and mental health. This would include removing any unnecessary reference to reason, method and location and include signposting to support that is available for those impacted.

Reporters should always remember that any article about suicide could impact anyone who has had a similar experience... in many cases many years ago.

Above everything, reporters and photographers should avoid any action that intrudes on peoples' privacy.... and always '*stand in the shoes of those bereaved*' before they write any article.'

## **3. Recommendations to strengthen and improve the code**

### **3.1 Clause 5 – removing the word 'excessive'**

**We recommend that Clause 5 be changed to remove the word 'excessive' in relation to the level of detail of the method used.**

We consider this to be important to ensure that there is minimum risk of imitational suicides.

There is clear evidence of the link between inappropriate reporting of method and imitational suicides.

### **3.2 Clause 5 - New methods**

**We recommend that a new clause be added which states that 'no details of method should reported in any circumstances where there are new, novel, unusual or highly lethal methods of suicide involved'.**

There is clear evidence of a close link between reporting new, novel, unusual or highly lethal methods of suicide and an increase in suicides globally. This is especially the case when linked to the reporting of celebrity suicides.



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## **3.3. – Clause 5 – Sources of support**

**We recommend that a new clause be introduced, which requires every journalist to include signposting to support that is available to anyone who may be affected by a report.**

An example set of wording could be:

*'If you have been affected by this article or by a personal experience of suicide, and would like details of organisations in the UK, who offer advice and support, please visit the Support after Suicide Partnership at [www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk). If you feel at risk and would like to speak to someone now, please call Samaritans free on 116 123. They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year'.*

## **3.4 Celebrity Reporting**

**We recommend that that a new clause be added relating to reporting of celebrity deaths.**

There is strong evidence that the reporting of celebrity deaths increases the number of suicides in the weeks and months afterwards and so we would recommend that additional restriction be made on:

- The reporting of suicide method and particularly in headlines
- The number of times a story can be repeated
- Speculation over the reason for or cause of a suicide, which can lead to people who are in a similar situation taking the same action
- Over-sensational reporting of the death

**Hamish Elvidge**  
**Chair, The Matthew Elvidge Trust**  
**March 27th 2020**