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This submission is provided by the Support after Suicide Partnership (SASP), a special interest subgroup of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance. We are a UK-wide hub for organisations and individuals working to support people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide. Our Vision is that *'everyone bereaved or affected by suicide should be offered and receive timely and appropriate support'*. Suicide prevention is a key part of our work, as those who are bereaved by suicide are 65% more likely to attempt suicide, especially without appropriate support.

This submission makes five recommendations for improvement to Clauses 2 and 5 of the Editors' Code of Practice, to minimise the risk of suicide to those who are high risk, thus strengthening the code to ensure more responsible media reporting.

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### **1.1 Summary**

In 2014 there were 6,188 suicides and each death had a traumatic effect on families, friends and colleagues. Each suicide affects 6-60 people which suggests that, every year, another 370,000 people will experience suicide bereavement. Surviving the loss of someone to suicide is not like any other grief: it is absolutely devastating. These people are at 65% higher risk of attempting suicide, with around 9% attempting to take their life. As people bereaved by suicide are often not proactively offered any support, their experience of suicide reporting within the media can have a significant impact on their vulnerability, survival, and recovery.

Currently, clause 2 of the Editors' Code is:

*"i) Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications.*

*ii) Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent. Account will be taken of the complainant's own public disclosures of information.*

*iii) It is unacceptable to photograph individuals, without their consent, in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy."*

Currently, clause 5 of the Editors' Code is:

*"When reporting suicide, to prevent simulative acts care should be taken to avoid excessive detail of the method used, while taking into account the media's right to report legal proceedings<sup>1</sup>."*

This is a good foundation for responsible reporting which should be developed to provide key guidelines for reporting suicide in a way that protects vulnerable people affected by the event. We have outlined some recommendations below that would strengthen the Editors' Code. For each recommendation, we have included a suggested wording in italics.

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<sup>1</sup>IPSO Editors' Code of Practice <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

## Recommendations

### 1.1.1 Clause 2

**Care should be taken not to invade the privacy of those bereaved by the suicide, by including a point that encompasses families of those bereaved by suicide in the guidelines on privacy.**

Bereavement by suicide is unlike any other grief – it is absolutely devastating. In addition to this, feelings of shame and stigma make those bereaved at significantly more risk of attempting suicide themselves. Therefore, privacy is paramount to safeguarding people around the event. We suggest the following wording:

*“Reporting should not infringe on the privacy of family and friends surrounding the suicide of a person. This includes naming prominent members of the family, their local area, or other defining details, while taking into account the media’s right to report events.”*

### 1.1.2 Clause 5

**i) Sources of support should be included whenever a suicide is reported, including signposting to the free resource Help is at Hand, and the Support after Suicide website; [supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk).**

Feelings of isolation and shame prevent people from accessing help. Therefore, the media have an opportunity to play a vital role in encouraging people to seek support. By referencing sources of support with each reporting of a suicide, the media influence their readers to get support, or offer it to those who need it.

Help is at Hand is a free resource, published by Public Health England. It is written for people bereaved by suicide, by people bereaved by suicide. It contains practical and emotional support. There are country-specific versions available across the UK. All resources are available online and to download at [supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk), and HiaH for England is available to order from the website. [Supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk) also has a ‘find local support’ function for finding support services for those bereaved or affected by suicide, across the UK. All reporting should also signpost those in crisis to the Samaritans’ Helpline: 116 123; suggested wording for editors to use at the end of a report are as follows:

*“If you have been affected by suicide or by this report, visit [www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk) for information, support and a downloadable resource, ‘Help is at Hand’ – Public Health England’s guide for those bereaved by suicide. If you are in crisis, call the Samaritans on 116 123.”*

**ii) Reporting should be edited in a way that reduces the stigma around suicide, and does not sensationalise the event.**

Stigma is a major barrier for those seeking support, and it is commonplace that individuals feel isolated and stigmatised by their family, friends, and community. Feelings of being stigmatised is a significant factor in suicidality for those bereaved by suicide.

*“Care should be taken to ensure that reporting does not stigmatise or sensationalise the stigma associated with suicide. Reporting should aim to de-mystify the subject of suicide, thus encouraging others to seek support.”*

**iii) The clause should make clear that use of the term ‘commit’ is unacceptable when reporting on suicide. The term ‘commit’ incorrectly implies a criminal act, yet suicide was decriminalised in the U.K. in 1961.**

*“Reporters should be aware that the term, ‘commit’ is not appropriate in reporting in association with suicide, as it implies a criminal act occurred which is not the case. Instead, acceptable terms such as “took their life” “ended their life” or “killed themselves” should be used.*

**iv) Reporting should be consistent in the terms and detail used.**

Using multiple media platforms, it is vital that reporting is consistent across print, and digital publications. It should be consistent in level of detail, de-stigmatising language, and privacy for the family of the deceased across all platforms, and all media outlets. By updating Clause 5 of the editors’ code to reflect this, those vulnerable to contagion suicides will be better protected.

*“Reporters should ensure that Clause 5 of the Editors’ Code is adhered to across all publishing platforms, especially with regards to consistent reporting in level of detail, de-stigmatising language, and privacy for the family of the deceased.”*