

## Your audience:

With 1 in 2 people affected by a mental disorder in their lifetime, there's a good chance that many of your readers, viewers or listeners are affected.

Personal stories of mental illness and suicide enrich media reporting and illustrate the real life impact of these issues. The SANE Media Centre can help put you in touch with people who are willing to share their story publicly subject to their availability and your brief.

## Interviewing:

Many people with a mental illness may experience feelings of anxiety and despair as part of their condition. This is important to remember when looking for someone to interview. As medical conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, personality disorder and schizophrenia become better understood by the community, people affected are more willing to share their experience with the media.

When someone dies by suicide, family and friends can experience intense grief, which is often intensified if the person who died had a mental illness. This understandably affects how people are able to cope. Supportive friends and colleagues who acknowledge this grief, listen, and offer support can make a big difference in helping people learn to deal with the loss.

They may also feel angry and disappointed that services have let them down. This may also be the motivation for someone to want to share their story, to raise awareness and advocate for improved services.

Usually people with a mental illness are motivated to share their experience because they want to educate the community and create greater acceptance.

## Things to consider:

- ⌚ Ensure you have 'informed consent': that the interviewee's consent to be interviewed would be the same today as it would be next week. If someone is experiencing an episode of illness such as psychosis or mania, they may later feel differently about being involved or what they choose to share. If interviewing someone affected by suicide, it is important to consider the timing of the interview and consider if further grief or distress could be caused to the interviewee or the community by any potential publicity.
- ⌚ Clearly explain the purpose of the interview and the issues you'd like to cover
- ⌚ Consider providing questions in advance to help the interviewee prepare
- ⌚ Enable a friend or family member to be present
- ⌚ Discuss the use of photos prior to the interview
- ⌚ Be clear on the angle of the story
- ⌚ Wherever possible, allow the person to review the final article and double check their quotes and paraphrasing
- ⌚ Discuss the option of anonymity
- ⌚ Clearly identify which media outlets will be airing or publishing the story if the story will appear in more than one media outlet
- ⌚ If the interviewee is under the age of 18, consent should also be discussed with a parent or guardian – minors are likely to be ignorant of media practices.

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- ⌚ Advise the cameraman, photographer or photo editor to avoid using images which perpetrate inaccurate and outdated stereotypes of mental illness (e.g. use of mirrors to create multiple reflections of an interviewee diagnosed with schizophrenia).
- ⌚ If the interviewee is associated with a mental health organisation consider involving them in the interview process to ensure the interviewee is supported.

## Reporting:

Positive media reporting can have a powerful role to play in demystifying mental illness and raising awareness. This is generally achieved through ensuring the report provides context and remains balanced. Including relevant factual information and, where suitable, expert opinion is advised.

The addition of helpline numbers and sources of further information also has a powerful positive impact on vulnerable people, encouraging them to seek help.

When interviewing someone who has been bereaved by suicide, consider including guidance on how to support those left behind – see SANE Factsheet: *Is someone close to you bereaved by suicide?*

For further information and tips on appropriate media reporting of mental illness or suicide, see SANE Media Factsheet: *Summary of Mindframe guidelines for media reporting of mental illness* or SANE Media Factsheet: *Summary of Mindframe guidelines for media reporting of suicide*.

## The SANE Media Centre

The SANE Media Centre is supported by *Mindframe* to work with, advise and support media professionals to portray mental illness and suicide accurately and responsibly. Contact 03 9682 5933 or visit SANE Media Centre.