

Guidelines for Press

The media plays an important part of how the public view student mental health. We have created this guidance to create positive conversations around student mental health and avoid content that may be triggering or distressing to its readers.

Here are our suggestions for press wishing to cover student mental health:

Keeping Conversations Positive

We believe in keeping conversations about mental health safe and supportive. Our goal when engaging with the media is to create a positive, inspirational and motivational impression to share thoughts, reflections and experiences as much as possible.

We understand that the media is there to discuss difficult subjects but we want to ensure that students are not discouraged from seeking help or is disheartened by news they have heard, and therefore we feel that it is most productive to focus on the positives that can come from the negatives, rather than just dwelling on the negatives. We therefore encourage stories that cover positive stories of recovery or, if a particularly difficult subject is being covered, offering signposting to support services.

Safe and non-triggering

We always try to encourage focus on the feelings and psychological aspects of mental health where possible rather than on specific behaviours.

Avoid mentioning difficult or challenging behaviors and describing the physical effects of behaviors. This is because it can be upsetting to read about and can also lead to overlooking underlying mental health difficulties.

For specific difficulties:

- **Eating Disorders:** Please avoid mentioning the number of laxatives taken & specific foodstuffs
- **Self-Harm:** Please refrain from mentioning methods

Avoid using photographs that reflect difficult behaviors, including self-harm or low weight.

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Accurate and informative facts & figures

We discourage using mortality rates as they can lead to a focus that is distressing for sufferers, friends and supporters.

Avoid 'glamourising' mental health difficulties or treatment

Don't 'glamourise' treatment, for example how long someone's was in hospital for etc. It can be easy for people who have not needed to be hospitalised to read descriptions of hospital stays or even reference to someone else needing to be hospitalised and take this as an indication that because they have not been in hospital, they have not been "ill enough".

No numbers

e.g. weights, BMIs, calories. For an individual experiencing eating difficulties, this could tap into the competitive nature of eating difficulties and mention of weight, BMI or calorie consumption number in an article may provide a new target to strive for, which can result in a setback in recovery.

Focusing on weight also infers that the individual has to be a particular weight to classify as struggling with an eating difficulty, which we know is not the case.

Positive and inclusive language

When we speak about mental health, we try to keep our language around mental health positive and inclusive. We talk about mental health as a continuum; we can all move around this continuum, with varying degrees of mental health. This means that everyone's experience of difficulties is different and each person's experience is equally as valid as another's.

We also encourage the following:

- We would encourage you to talk about mental health difficulties, rather than problems, disorders, illnesses or diseases.
- We would also encourage you, when speaking about suicide, to talk about attempting or completing suicide. We might talk about someone attempting to take their own life. We don't use the phrase "committed suicide".

Discouraging students from accessing specific services

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We would discourage demonizing particular universities and services within the institution. Some students may have a negative experience of services which is important to recognize, however we want to avoid putting students off accessing support altogether.

We also want to recognize that everyone's experience of a mental health difficulty is different and individuals will have different experiences of services on their campus.