



Tools for Entertainment and Media



# COMMUNICATION TOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH REPORTING

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Entertainment Industries Council

—Encouraging the Art of Making a Difference



# What is TEAM Up?

Tools for Entertainment and Media

TEAM Up provides resources to news and entertainment industry professionals to depict mental health issues accurately and in a nonstigmatizing way.

# TEAM<sup>Up</sup> Mental Health Reporting Style Guide and Tool Kit

## Style Guide: Reporting Mental Health

*Journalists have a substantial influence on the public's attitudes about mental health. The emphasis a daily newsroom places on breaking news and crises can give people a skewed view of individuals living with mental illness, leading to misperceptions and even discrimination. This style guide notes ways in which newsrooms can present a more accurate picture of mental illness. Use it with your Associated Press Stylebook when you are reporting a story that touches on mental health issues.*

### The Three Questions to Ask When Covering a Mental Health-Related Story

- 1. Is mental illness relevant to the story?** If it is not meaningfully linked to the story, there is no need to mention it.
- 2. What is your source for the mental illness diagnosis?** Don't rely on hearsay. If someone's mental health condition is relevant, make sure your source knows with certainty the person's diagnosis.
- 3. What is the most accurate language to use?** Avoid using derogatory words, and be as specific as possible when describing someone living with a mental illness to help prevent stereotypes.



**TEAM Up (Tools for Entertainment and Media)**  
The TEAM Up project provides resources and assistance to help journalists and the entertainment industry create accurate stories on mental health issues.  
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## INTERVIEW TIPS FOR STORIES TO MENTAL HEALTH OR SUICIDE

A part of the TEAM Up toolkit on covering mental health concerns

To provide a more realistic picture of mental health for the stories that go beyond breaking news. Show how real people living with a mental illness, for instance, by interviewing



## SAMPLE NEWS AND FEATURE STORIES



### MENTAL HEALTH STORY IDEAS

A part of the TEAM Up toolkit on covering mental health concerns

**Child killing:  
Attorneys argue  
mother's sanity**

**Boy's slaying  
suspect  
'hears voices'**

**Home invasion  
jury told about  
angels, demons**

These are recent headlines from California newspapers, involving different people in different cities. In a way, however, they might show the same misleading fragment of the story, leading observers to conclude that those living with a mental illness are, for example, prone to violence. (In fact, statistics show that most people who have a mental illness don't commit crimes; most people who commit crimes don't have a mental illness.)

In other ways, the full picture of mental illness is not shown in news coverage, even when coverage is measured over time. For every incident that gets reported, there are hundreds of hidden details. There are other stories, too, of people with mental health disorders living gratifying lives and accomplishing great things. The story of mental health and mental illness, in other words, is complex and nuanced—and depends on good reporters to tell it.

When possible, try to show the many facets of mental health concerns in a personal way—including perspectives of those living with a mental illness, their family members, and issues as seen from the viewpoint of public policy specialists. Here are a few ideas to illustrate how every reporter on every beat can find and cover the nuanced stories of mental health.

#### FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS

Many people who have a mental illness are able to work, live independently, and have healthy relationships. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 1 in 4 U.S. adults, approximately 5.7 million individuals, experience a mental health disorder in a given year (see [www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about\\_mental\\_illness](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness)). Because people with mental health problems are often stereotyped, hearing directly from (and seeing the faces of) those living with mental illness can encourage early detection and treatment. Allowing those in recovery to speak in their own voices, through an interview with a journalist, can be a powerful way to tell their stories and promote accuracy and understanding.

that someone central to the event and not include? What follow-up, and third-day stories?

are basics to keep in mind while people living with a mental illness. stories to help journalists put the Though these are typical of stories using the names—are fictitious.) eiconline.org/calmhsa.

violence is mental illness unless e has access to that information. as. Be specific in the diagnosis nesses are the same.

as a victim or "suffering" from

ess, say, for example, h schizophrenia" rather than gnoses.

ple, "he's psychotic,"

erage can lead to copycat n how to cover suicides,

living mental illness and eople looking disheveled

sources and help lines.

## Key Messaging Points

- Assessing relevance of mental health status to story
- Using reliable sources for reporting a diagnosis
- Choosing words for accuracy and clarity
- Avoiding reinforcement of stereotypes and stigma
- Using person-first language

# Implementation: Facilitator

AP

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Stylebook

and Briefing on Media Law

2013

Inside this fully revised edition:

- A new entry on illegal immigration/immigrant
- Expanded, updated and consolidated rules on numerals
- Revised and expanded weapons definitions and user-generated content guidance
- New entries for mental illness, husband/wife and embryo vs. fetus, and revised entries for Islamist and underway, plus nearly 100 other updates

AP Stylebook:  
The “Journalist’s Bible”

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Endorsements from  
Media Associations



# Implementation: Facilitator

**Newsroom Briefings  
Already Presented at  
(for example):**

- Riverside Press-Enterprise
- Orange County Register
- San Jose Mercury News
- Contra Costa Times
- Oakland Tribune
- KQED
- Patch  
(NoCal)/AOL/Huffington  
Post



# Implementation: Barriers

Journalists are busy

“If it bleeds, it leads.”

High turnover rate

Mental health not a  
priority

Reporters don't  
control headlines



## Impact

- AP Stylebook entry will be used by nearly every journalist/communicator in the U.S.
- Have trained more than 300 journalists in dozens of newsrooms, with many more to come
- Materials being distributed through NAB and RTDNA to their members
- Spanish Mental Health Reporting Style Guide used by Univision

## Recommendations for Counties

- Make sure the language and framing you use when talking with the media mirrors the Mental Health Reporting Style Guide
- Share the Style Guide and Toolkit with your local media
- Partner with TEAM Up to schedule newsroom briefings for your local media
- Develop relationships with journalists before there is a crisis

# Sustainability Considerations

- Work at management level toward newsroom policy adoption
- Partner with journalist associations to disseminate to their members
- Train students – the next generation of journalists
- Build organizational capacity within the community to work effectively with the media

# TEAM

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## Questions?

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