

THE CARTER CENTER
Journalism Resource Guide
on Behavioral Health

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Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

The Carter Center Journalism Resource Guide on Mental Health Reporting

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DO IT RIGHT

**WHEN REPORTING ON MENTAL HEALTH,
CONSIDER**

THREE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- 1. IS YOUR REPORTING ACCURATE?**
- 2. DO YOU HAVE HIGH-QUALITY SOURCES?**
- 3. HAVE YOU TOLD THE WHOLE STORY?**

THE FACTS MATTER

GET THEM RIGHT

- 1. HAVE YOU GOTTEN YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT?**
- 2. HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR STATISTICS?**
- 3. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THEM?**

THE STATS MATTER

INCLUSION MATTERS

HIGH-QUALITY SOURCES ARE RELIABLE AND INCLUSIVE

- 1. HAVE YOU CHECKED YOURS FOR BIASES?**
- 2. HAVE YOU GONE BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS?**
- 3. HAVE YOU SPOKEN WITH PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS INSTEAD OF JUST TALKING ABOUT THEM?**

Cultural Humility

In 2020, New York University psychiatrists Helen-Maria Lekas, Kerstin Paul, and Crystal Fuller Lewis wrote an influential paper in which they articulated the notion of “cultural humility” as a highly useful orientation for mental health practitioners serving patients whose racial and ethnic backgrounds were different from their own. They defined it as a stance toward patient care based, in part, on viewing patients themselves as experts, particularly when it came to the social and cultural contexts in which their lives unfold. “Cultural humility means admitting that one does not know and is willing to learn from patients about their experiences, while being aware of one’s own embeddedness in culture(s),” they wrote.²² The formulation applies very well to reporting, too, especially when it comes to reporting among people with mental illness. Don’t tell them what their experiences are like. And don’t say things like “I know how you feel” — because you don’t.

CONTEXT MATTERS

TELLING THE WHOLE STORY

MEANS

- 1. LAYING OUT THE WIDER CONTEXT**
- 2. TELLING MORE THAN A “SINGLE STORY.”**
- 3. CONSIDERING SOLUTIONS**

SOLUTIONS MATTER

BE SMART ABOUT SUICIDE

- Avoid suicide contagion.
- Don't provide a how-to
- Don't post photos or videos of mourners
- Don't put suicide in your headline
- Don't say attempts "succeeded" or "failed."
- Don't say "committed suicide." (Say "died by," etc.)
- Don't sensationalize the statistics.
- Don't forget to list sources of help.

***WATCH ANERI PATTANI'S
"Responsible Reporting on Suicide"***

PROVIDE HELP THAT'S HELPFUL

- Generic lists of sources for finding help are often over-general, outdated, overwhelming, and unhelpful.
- If you're providing sources for help, make sure they're highly specific and top quality.

***DON'T OVERWHELM
THE OVERWHELMED!***