



Covering workplace mental health

William Wan, The Washington Post
National Press Foundation





Who am I?

William Wan
Investigative Narrative Reporter
The Washington Post

Former reporter on Health & Science, America desk, Obama Admin, China, National Security, Religion, Education, Local

Also (warning): enthusiastic amateur AI artist :)

How to write
(and think) about
pain?

A white, torn paper-like border runs along the bottom edge of the slide, creating a jagged, irregular shape that separates the text from the dark background.

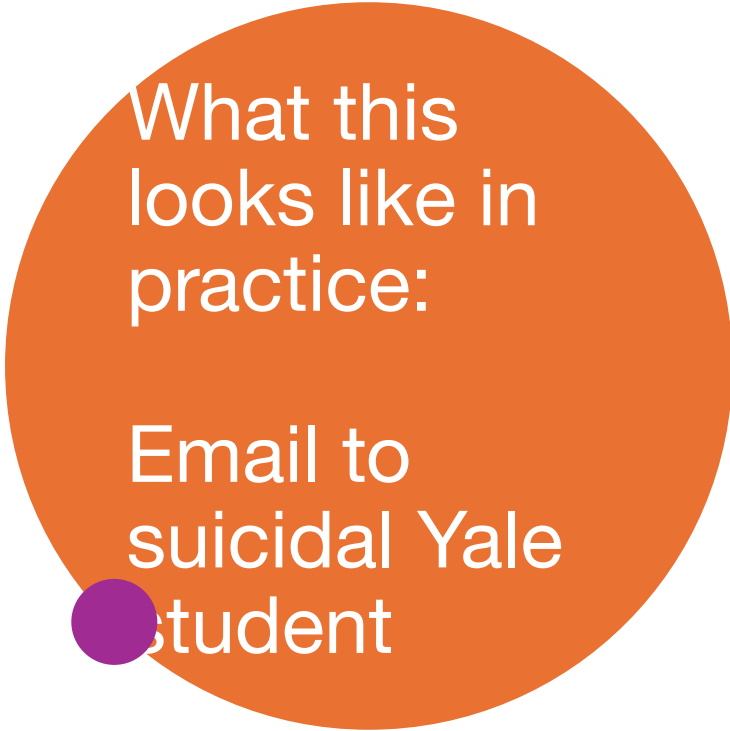
Before you knock or call:

Know why you are asking them to talk to you & why it matters

- Be sure you are not lying to yourself or to them!

There is power in knowing who you are and what your intentions are.





What this
looks like in
practice:

Email to
suicidal Yale
student

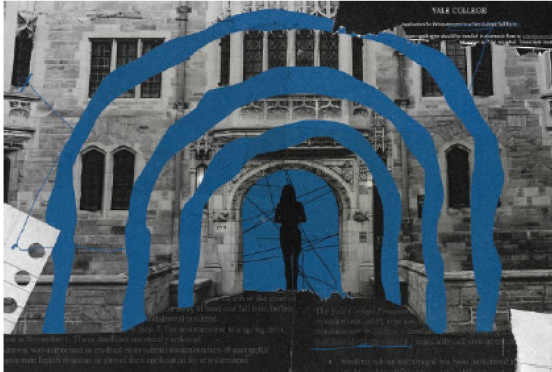
Hi Alicia,

I just wanted to introduce myself. I'm a reporter at the Washington Post that Miriam may have mentioned. I'm writing a story about the mental health challenges faced by students at Yale...the lack of campus mental health resources and the withdrawal policy that makes it hard for many to seek help. I'm trying to reach students who would be willing to share their experiences with me. My hope is to help others at Yale and other campuses know they're not alone, and to shed light on problems in the system.

I know it's a delicate topic that requires trust & sensitivity, and that really matters to me. I don't necessarily need to use people's full names or identify them. My goal is to understand what students are struggling with. I'd grateful for a chance to talk if you're free this weekend or Monday?

'What if Yale finds out?'

Suicidal students are pressured to withdraw from Yale, then have to apply to get back into the university



Students experiencing suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues say Yale University has pressed them to withdraw from the school. (Stan Godlewski for The Washington Post; iStock/Washington Post illustration)

BY WILLIAM WAN

For months, she struggled silently with a sense of worthlessness. She had panic attacks that left her trembling. Nightmares that made her cry.

She'd told only a handful of friends about the sexual assault she endured while she was home the summer after her freshman year. Now, as she finished her sophomore year at Yale University, the trauma finally became unbearable.

On a June day after the 2021 spring semester, the 20-year-old college student swallowed a bottle of pills at her off-campus apartment.

As she slowly woke up at the emergency room in New Haven, Conn., one thought overwhelmed her: "What if Yale finds out?"

'What if Yale finds out?'
Suicidal students are pressured to withdraw from Yale, then have to apply to get back into the university.

<https://wapo.st/3UMX8WR>

First do no harm

- Give them agency and power, where to meet, when is too much, etc.
- Be sensitive, but don't get in your own way.
- Establish relationship where you can ask and they can say no.



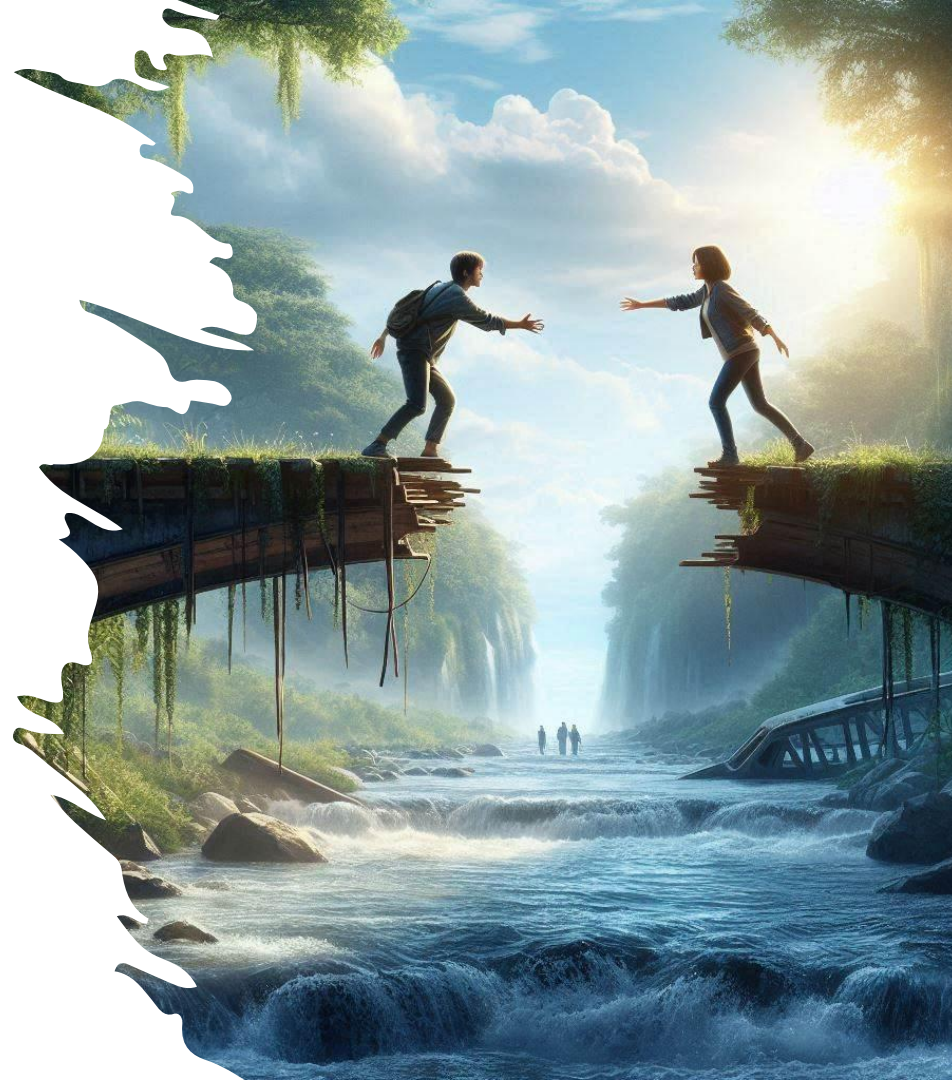
Impact:

- Announcement by president of a new counseling center and added counselors.
- U.S. senator's request for the DOJ & Dept of Education to investigate Yale and other colleges on such practices.
- Class-action lawsuit from Yale students. And a landmark settlement
- Sweeping changes announced by Yale, reversing its policies on every single issue we raised. "This is literally going to save lives," one student texted me.



BUILDING THE BRIDGE:

- Don't try to build artificial bridge. Don't say "I understand." Say "I want to understand"
- Don't be afraid to deeply research them/show interest
- Remember that it's about them, not you



One Last lesson:

- If you want to make a difference, you have to be willing to open your heart.
 - To hurt a little.
-



**Pain has the
power to
change the
world, but it has
the power to
change you as
well.**





*Her suffering was so intense
she spent hours simply
screaming.*

*She taught herself to follow
each scream with a whisper,
“But I’m grateful.”*