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Paper #1 (Activity)

2-18 Social Role of Mass Media

Handling Sensitive Topics (Activity #1)

**SUMMARY**: Whether you’re just beginning to dive into journalism or you’re a seasoned journalist, sensitive news stories require thoughtfulness and expert advice as you begin to piece together a story. It’s important to distinguish between useful and potentially harmful facts in a story.

In the activity below, you will be able to review sensitive material and outlining a story plan on a sensitive topic.

**SENSITIVE TOPIC:** A sixth teen suicide has been reported at a local school district for the 2017-2018 school year. The school is holding a press conference and vigil/prayer service is being held at a community park. How would you handle the coverage of this story?

**ACTIVITY: Reviewing sensitive material and outlining a story plan…**

Take a look at the resources below before moving forward:

1. [Recommendations for reporting suicide.](http://afsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/recommendations.pdf)
2. [Briefing for the Press on How to Report on Suicide](https://afsp.org/about-suicide/for-journalists/)
3. [Consider the language](http://www.suicidology.org/Resources/Recommendations-for-Reporting-on-Suicide)

Answer the following questions:

1. Will you name the students who have committed suicide in your story? Why or why not?
   1. Will you include how the student took their life? Why would this be a problem? How do researchers and suicide prevention experts (see resources above) explain the problem associated with reporting graphic detail of a person’s suicide?
2. Can you report on a suicide that provides a greater benefit to the public?
   1. Should you include information that helps to identify warning signs and resources available for the community?
3. How is suicide defined (public health issue) and why is that important to understand?
4. What language will you use in your report?
   1. Is it appropriate to use “failed suicide attempt” or “successful suicide?” Explain.
5. What is your focus/goal with presenting a story? What should the reader know?
6. Should a local suicide prevention organization be used as source?

***After answering the questions above, create an outline of how you would cover the press conference and scheduled vigil.***