



# Your guide to planning a safe suicide prevention event



**Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou,  
ka ora ai te iwi.**

**With your basket and my basket,  
the people will thrive.**

*This design was created by Tiaki Terekia for the Mental Health Foundation to represent the whakataukī. In its circular form it suggests help for our community and kotahitanga, and is also a bird's eye view of a kete/basket. The design pays homage to Mason Durie's model of Te Whare Tapa Whā.*

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A te reo Māori version of this guide, *Te whakarite i tētahi kaupapa ārai i te matewhakamomori*, is available at: [mentalhealth.org.nz/Guide-to-planning-a-safe-suicide-prevention-event](http://mentalhealth.org.nz/Guide-to-planning-a-safe-suicide-prevention-event)

## Introduction

This resource provides best-practice guidance to help you:

- Organise a suicide prevention event, which ensures the wellbeing and safety of people attending or speaking.
- Speak safely about suicide at a public event.

**We can all play a role in helping reduce the trauma of suicide in the community. However, even with the best of intentions, some events may increase risk of suicide for vulnerable people.**

Your main goal when holding an event should be to uplift, inform and provide hope. Some attendees may be vulnerable, so it's vital they hear messages of hope from you and their community – and know there are services and resources available to support them.

Your event should:

- Build resilience and create a sense of community.
- Speak about suicide prevention and increase knowledge of protective factors.
- Educate people on factors that can increase vulnerability to suicide, and ways to support people in distress.
- Promote help-seeking and ensure people receive effective emotional support.
- Foster feelings of hope, connection and support.
- Develop collaboration and partnerships between support providers and the community.
- Offer free advice and resources.
- Be empowering.

This guide was created following consultation with communities and suicide prevention specialists. It will assist you to plan an event that will help support your community.

## The Four Pou

We've used the four pou below as "pillars" to give you the foundations to run a safe and impactful event.

Using each pou as a guide will help you hold an event that uplifts the community and all those involved.



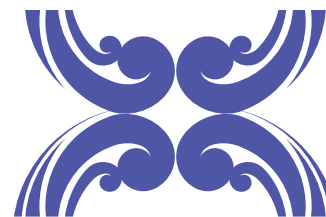
### Why

The purpose of your event



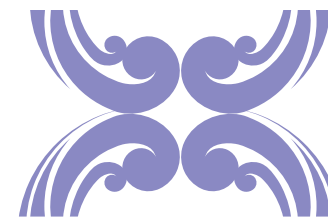
### Who

Everyone involved - organisers, speakers and attendees



### How

Talking safely about suicide



### Where

Planning where your event will be held



## WHY - the purpose of your event

The 'why' should be at the heart of any suicide prevention event or situation where someone will be speaking publicly about suicide.

**Being clear about your event's purpose will inform the rest of your planning and ensure you're prioritising safety from the get-go.**

For example, does your event:

- Support a bereaved community?
- Provide information and tools to support whānau?
- Increase awareness of the support available to people going through tough times?
- Build connections between and knowledge of local support agencies?

You may have more than one reason. List them all here.



Why are you holding this event?

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What do you want attendees or participants to take away from your event? (e.g. awareness, knowledge and/or skills)?

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## WHO - will be involved in your event?

Next, start thinking about who should be involved in your event, and ways to look after them and ensure their safety. 'Who' includes your audience/attendees as well as yourself, other organisers and speakers.

**Suicide is an emotive topic - it's crucial that those attending do not leave with high levels of distress as this can create an increased risk of suicide.**

You'll need to consider who will attend the event as support people to help reduce distress and create a sense of safety and hope.

### Organisers and speakers

As an organiser, you set the standard for the event and the level of safety you provide is critical to its success.

The checklist on **page 9** is just a guide - things to consider will differ depending on the type of event and any speaker(s) you invite. For example, a wānanga at a marae will have different considerations to a speaker in a school or at a public event for the community.



### Safety checklist for your event's organisers/speaker(s)



Do the organiser/speaker(s) understand how to talk about suicide safely? Do they know that messages should be strengths-based and give people hope? (See 'How to talk safely about suicide' on **pg 12**).



Is the organiser/speaker(s) known and respected in your community? Will their experience help them connect with attendees and keep them safe? Do they know not to speak about suicide method(s)?



Does the organiser/speaker(s) have lived experience of suicide? If so, are they ready to speak about their own experience(s)? Ensure they have good support strategies and support people with them on the day.



Remember to always talk about where people can get help - include details about local support networks in handouts or prominently display resources at your event.



If the kōrero about suicide is an open forum for people to share, have you found someone appropriate to lead or facilitate the discussion to ensure everyone's safety?

## Attendees

When thinking about your attendees and their safety, some things to consider are:

- Is the audience there to learn (e.g. professionals wanting to upskill), to talk about their own experiences or simply to kōrero as a community?
- How will you provide support for those present? Will you have:
  - › Counsellors on site and/or pamphlets or printed resources?
  - › Information about local and national mental health services and helplines? Ensure local providers and numbers are tailored to your audience.
  - › Easily identifiable support people (e.g. wearing hi-vis vests)?
  - › A quiet zone for people to have time-out or a place for them to connect with support people?
- If your event is online, you should always provide links to appropriate services and helplines across all your material and communications with attendees.



**What supports will you put in place to ensure the safety of your audience?** (e.g. Mental Health Foundation brochures/three local counsellors stationed around the room).

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## Involve experts

**As an organiser, it is important for everyone's safety that you either inform or involve experts from your community who are trained and available to assist.**

Trusted members of the community, such as kaumātua, elders, cultural leaders or ministers, could also help with organising the event and be there to offer support on the day.

If your event involves a school community, please make contact with the school so they can be aware of the effect this may have on their taura/students.

We recommend you contact or meet key people prior to the event – for example, the local suicide prevention coordinator, pre- and postvention groups or other mental health professionals. These local people may be able to help with planning your event and tailoring the right messages.



**Who in your community will you inform or involve?**

(e.g. suicide prevention coordinator/counsellors/a trusted/respected community elder).

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## HOW - to talk safely about suicide

Talking safely about suicide is critical. Below are some key things to understand when speaking about suicide.

**Using safe language and effective communication will ensure the wellbeing of speakers, organisers and attendees.**

DO	DON'T	WHY
Give people hope. Talk about suicide prevention — remind people that suicide is preventable.	Don't talk about suicide as though it is inevitable.	Suicide is preventable. Hopelessness is a feeling many people who are suicidal or who die by suicide have in common. Work to create hope and talk about suicide prevention for individuals, families, whānau and communities.
Talk about what causes distress — the factors that can be associated with suicide and how to address these.	Don't say all people in a certain group (e.g. people who lost their homes due to natural disasters) are at risk of suicide.	It is impossible to predict who will take their life. We all need to understand the factors that can be associated with suicide. We don't want to normalise suicide — suicide is never inevitable.
Talk about people 'dying by suicide' (e.g. "I had a friend who died by suicide").	Don't use the term 'commit' or 'committed' suicide (e.g. "he attempted to commit suicide").	The word 'commit' increases the stigma around suicide — both for people who have had their own experiences of suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts and for those bereaved by suicide. 'Commit' is generally only used when talking about crime.
Know your stats and only use official suicide data. Say 'higher rates' or 'concerning rates' when referring to statistics.	Don't sensationalise numbers or share, discuss or speculate about increases in suicide for certain groups, areas or professions.	Using sensational language increases hopelessness and removes the focus from suicide prevention. Rumours about suicide clusters, spikes or increases are often false, can increase a sense of hopelessness for people, and can normalise suicide as a response to tough situations.
Remind people that suicide is complex and there is no single cause of suicide.	Don't attribute suicide to a single cause (e.g. bullying, natural disasters, or working in a particular profession).	Suicide is complex, and there is very rarely a single attributable reason why someone takes their own life. Simplifying the causes of suicide both puts more people at risk (if they identify with that cause) and contributes to misunderstandings about how suicide can be prevented.
Remember the person, not their death.	Don't talk about the details of a suicide (including method and location).	Details about someone's death are unnecessary and can be deeply distressing. Talking about the method used or the location can also increase risk for people who may be experiencing suicidality.
Talk about mental health as something we all have, in the same way we all have physical health.	Don't use 'mental health' when you mean 'mental distress' or 'mental illness'.	At any one time at least one in five of us will be experiencing mental distress or illness. We want people to know their mental health and wellbeing is something they can always strengthen and they can live great lives.
Acknowledge suicide loss with humility, sadness and aroha.	Don't portray suicide as a selfish act or focus on how it has harmed people bereaved by suicide.	People react to a suicide in different ways. It's important to remember to avoid talking about the death in a way that increases stigma or implies a sense of shame surrounding suicide. Stigma around suicide often causes people to hide suicidality and avoid seeking support. Those bereaved by suicide may be reluctant to talk about their feelings and get the support they need if there's a focus on shame and blame.
Always mention and provide details for help and support services.	Don't assume people know where and how to access help. Spell it out. Normalise help-seeking as a healthy and wise step to take.	Help-seeking can carry a stigma for some people. Encouraging help-seeking and talking openly about where and how to access support can help remove that stigma, boost team mental health and potentially save lives.

## Promoting your event safely

How are you going to communicate and promote your event?

### Suicide prevention events should leave people with a sense of hope and optimism and avoid causing harm to vulnerable people.

If you're promoting an event, remind people that the subject matter may be distressing and give them the opportunity to opt out before they hear anything further.

Other things to consider:

- If you're promoting your event on social media, have you used the 'how to talk about suicide safely' guide (on **page 12**) to provide details about the event?
- Consider if you're going to invite media to attend on the day. If so, how will you let attendees know, and what guidelines will you set around filming/photography and shared information? (See **page 23** for further information).
- Remember, privacy is important. You'll need to set rules on who the audience can film/post to social media (e.g. just the speaker) or will there be no filming allowed? If the audience is being filmed, you will need their permission to do so.

## Imagery

- It's really important to use hopeful, positive imagery in any promotional material or social media posts (e.g. people supporting each other). Don't use imagery that shows method(s) of suicide, specific locations, helplessness or that perpetuates stereotypes of mental illness as this could trigger or traumatise those attending.

- Avoid using photos of people who've died by suicide in promotional material or at the event itself, as these can be triggering for people who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide.

## Know your statistics

Statistics and data about suicide can be useful to inform your kōrero, but you must ensure the information you're sharing is up-to-date and correct.

The Coronial Services of New Zealand provides data of all suspected suicides annually, including information like regions and ethnicity. Visit [www.tewhaturora.govt.nz/our-health-system/data-and-statistics/suicide-web-tool/](http://www.tewhaturora.govt.nz/our-health-system/data-and-statistics/suicide-web-tool/) and search for annual suicide statistics.





## ✓ Checklist - Safe Communication

- I've read and understood this resource and am using appropriate language (check **page 12**).
- The information I'm providing to promote my event/at my event is factually correct and I'm using official data.
- I've used content warnings on promotional material that communicate the subject of suicide will be discussed at the event e.g. *"This event will discuss suicide and could be distressing for some people."*
- I'm not using distressing or stigmatising imagery, or images that glorify or romanticise suicide.
- I'll avoid making blanket statements (e.g. there is no community help, the health system is broken, there is a suicide epidemic, no one is talking about suicide).
- I've informed relevant local agencies that I'm planning to hold this event. These could include police and council as well as local mental health and suicide prevention support services.



## WHERE - to hold your event

Think about the physical and emotional safety of your attendees when choosing where to hold your event.

**Don't hold a public event at a place of suspected suicide as this can be triggering and cause emotional distress.**

Where will your event be held?

- **Online?** Consider how you'll keep attendees safe and provide information on where to seek help, if needed. Provide a break-out chat room with a support person available. To support safe online conversations, search for *"Tips for supporting someone online"* at **mentalhealth.org.nz**
- **At a marae**, utilising tikanga and kawa as a process of safety? You'll need permission from the local iwi and kaumātua of the area/marae.
- **In an open space**, with no control over who comes and goes? How can you ensure the safety of your audience?
- **At a public location?** If so, do you need permission from your local council to book the space?
- **At a school?** Do you have permission from the school management team? Have you communicated with the school community about the event?

## Also

- Is the location accessible? See the Be Accessible resource [www.belab.co.nz/items/top-tips-events](http://www.belab.co.nz/items/top-tips-events) for tips on how to create an accessible event.
- Do you have a plan B if:
  - › It's outside and the weather is bad?
  - › Your option isn't available or if there is a current rāhui in the area?
- If outside, can you ensure all attendees can hear speakers - do you need sound system equipment?
- Is it a free event? Is there an expectation for koha? Will you fundraise for an organisation working in the suicide prevention space?
- Is it a family-friendly event?



## Planning your event

### Have an agenda

Most events need an agenda to give clarity for speakers and attendees. Your event could include the following:

- **Karakia or a blessing to open** – invite a local kaumātua or spiritual leader to open the kōrero and acknowledge those who have passed.
- **Opening remarks** – the organiser sets out the rules and purpose of the event clearly. This is a good time to speak about hope.
- **Guest speaker** – invite someone to speak who is knowledgeable about suicide prevention and aware of best-practice language on suicide prevention.
- **Q&A** – with a panel of experts or a single person? Is this an open microphone session for all attendees, or small break-out groups (if so, who will manage this and how?) Will you need microphones?
- **Closing remarks** – reaffirm the purpose and the outcomes of your event, talk about the safety of attendees, discuss potential follow-ups (if any).
- **Closing karakia or prayer.**
- **Refreshments** – you could offer attendees the chance to have refreshments and chat with each other afterwards. This will help build community networks.
- **After event support** – what material will attendees leave with e.g. local support service contact details, information about helplines, resources?





## Notes

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### Further information

- Contact your local Te Whatu Ora | Health NZ for Suicide Prevention/ Postvention Coordinator details: [www.tewhatauora.govt.nz](http://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz)
- Search [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz) for information on:
  - › local/national support groups
  - › media guidelines and how to talk to media after a suicide (*Comment or No Comment*)
  - › other helpful suicide prevention resources.

### Helplines

- Need to talk? Free call or text **1737** any time for support from a trained counsellor.
- Lifeline **0800 543 354** (0800 LIFELINE), free text **4357**.
- Youthline **0800 376 633**, free text **234** or email [talk@youthline.co.nz](mailto:talk@youthline.co.nz) or online chat at [youthline.co.nz](http://youthline.co.nz).
- Samaritans **0800 726 666**.
- Asian Family Services helpline **0800 862 342** (Mon-Fri 9am - 8pm).
- Vaka Tautua - free national Pacific helpline **0800 Ola lelei/0800 652 535** (Mon - Fri 8.30am - 5pm).

For more information on organising and speaking at a suicide prevention event visit:

[www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz)                      [www.beyou.edu.au](http://www.beyou.edu.au)  
[www.mindframe.org.au](http://www.mindframe.org.au)      [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)

Support for organising an online event visit:

[www.orygen.org.au/chatsafe](http://www.orygen.org.au/chatsafe)  
[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/download](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/download) for resources to support your suicide prevention event.





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