

Mental Health Promotion and the Media

Building the Capacity of the Mental Health Sector...

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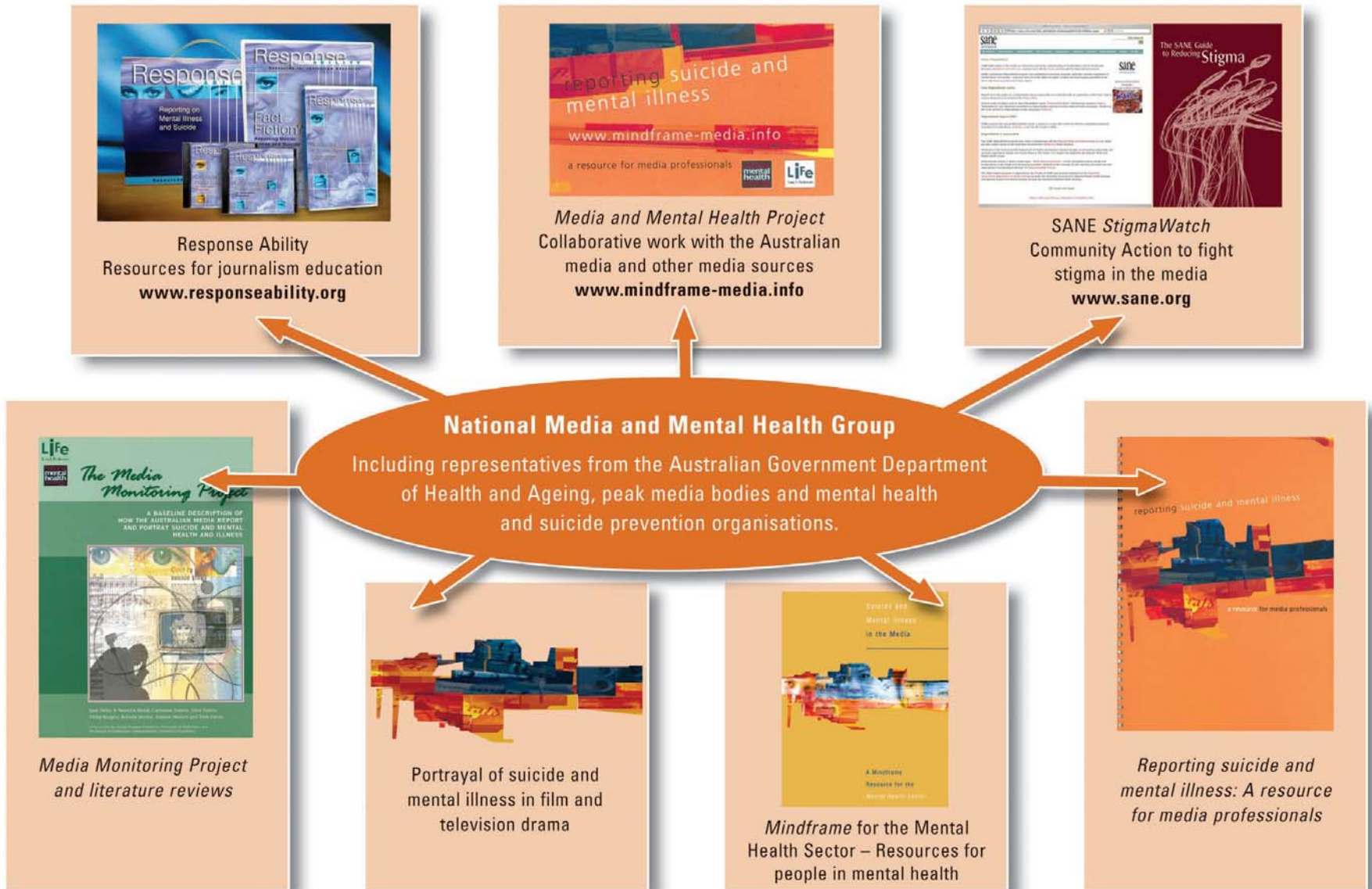


*What are the first things that spring to mind when I ask you to think about **media coverage of mental health issues?***



Mindframe National Media Initiative

Figure 1. Projects under the Australian Government's National Mindframe Initiative.



Why should the media consider the ways they cover mental illness?

- For many people, the media is their primary source of information about mental health issues.
- Research suggests that mental illness tends to be portrayed negatively by the mass media.
- Such reporting may influence community attitudes contributing to negative stereotypes, stigma and discrimination.
- Negative portrayals can impact directly on people living with a mental illness.
- Informed representations of mental illness may promote help-seeking behaviour.



Why should the media consider the ways they cover suicide?

- Research shows that in some cases, reporting of suicide has been linked to increased rates of actual suicide.
- Whilst healthy members of the community are unlikely to be affected, people in despair are often unable to find alternative solutions to their problems.
- People may be influenced by the report, particularly when they identify with the person in the report
- The way in which suicide is reported is significant - responsible reporting may help to reduce rates.



Why involve the mental health sector?

People involved in mental health:

- Are a valuable source of expert information for the media
- Have specialised expertise and/or first hand experience of mental health issues
- Can 'model' principles of best practice reporting e.g. terminology, language
- Can advocate for the principles of responsible reporting



Working with the Media – Issues to Consider

- Consider whether to participate
- Provide expert comment
- Provide help seeking information
- Avoid negative stereotypes
- Use appropriate language
- Involvement of consumers and carers
- Refer journalists to www.mindframe-media.info



Consider whether to participate

- Who is the most appropriate organisation/person to make comment?
- Will the story benefit community understanding and/or promote help seeking? What might be the impact of saying 'no'?

Provide expert comment

- Who are the qualified people in our organisation and what is their area of expertise? Are they familiar with *Mindframe* guidelines?
- Seek opportunities to debunk myths
- Refer on if necessary



Provide help seeking information

- Provide help line numbers e.g. Lifeline

Avoid negative stereotypes

- Encourage inclusion of information that presents a balanced view of the person
- Dispel myths about mental illness and violence and question the relevance of including a persons diagnosis in the article



Use appropriate language – mental illness

- Avoid negative or outdated language (e.g. deranged, mental patient, mad)
- Use positively phrased descriptions
 - eg a person is “being treated for” or “currently experiencing” rather than “suffering from” or “afflicted with” a mental illness.
- Avoid labels e.g. ‘schizophrenic’, ‘anorexic’
- Use simple terms and avoid jargon



Involvement of consumers & carers

- If you are a consumer, seek support from an organisation that can provide media support
- If you are coordinating a consumer/carer spokesperson, support them to make an informed decision about participation
- Ensure access to support during and after the interview
- Check motivations for participation - are there better options for “telling the story”

Refer journalist to *Mindframe*

www.mindframe-media.info

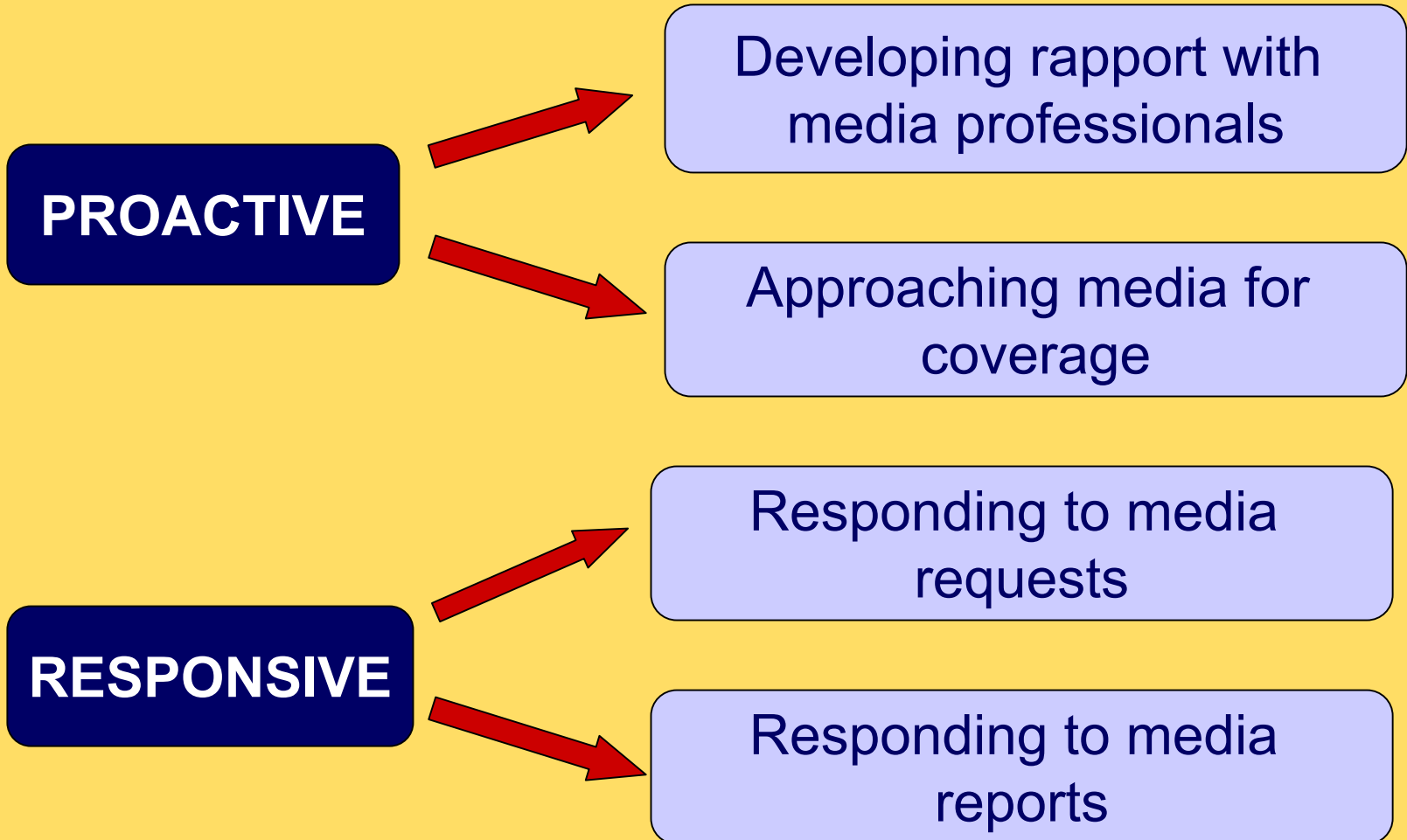


Hypothetical...

A mental health lobby group in a suburb of Western Sydney has recently been notified that their application for a grant to establish a Clubhouse for people with mental illness has been successful. They would like to promote the involvement of more consumers in getting the Clubhouse up and running and would also like to gain further support from the general community. The group have called a meeting to discuss how they will plan a media campaign to generate this interest.



Working with the Media



Planning for Media Contact

- Identify how you will work with the media

Proactively Working with the Media

- Identify media organisations you would like to work with and establish yourself as a reliable contact
- Identify what is newsworthy
- Plan how you will make contact e.g. media release followed up with phone call



Responding to Media Requests

- Find out as much as you can about the story before deciding about participation
- Negotiate time to make a considered response
- Ensure spokespeople are briefed
- Remember stories about adverse events may still provide opportunities for inclusion of helpline numbers.



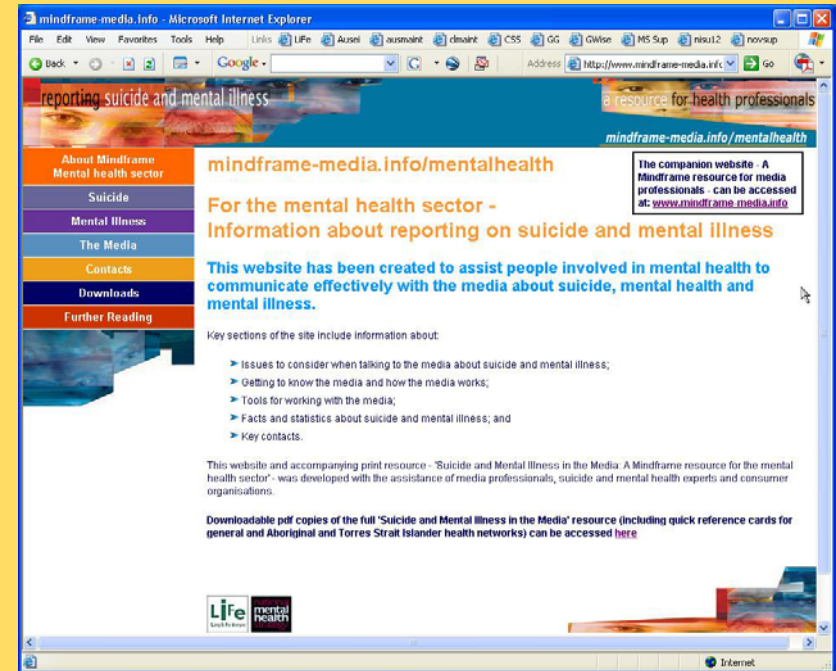
Responding to Media Coverage

- Respond to positive stories as well as those you consider inaccurate or inappropriate
- Suggestions include:
 - Send a report to Stigma Watch at www.sane.org
 - Write a letter to the editor
 - Pitch a positive story about the issue



Resources for the Mental Health Sector

- Resource book, Quick Reference Cards & website: www.mindframe-media.info/mentalhealth
- Facts, stats & useful contacts
- General info and tips for working with the media
- “Issues to consider...”



Take home thoughts from today...

What expertise can we provide for a media story?

Who are our spokespeople?

Do we have a relationship with local media? How might this relationship be fostered?

What opportunities are there to work with the media to promote positive messages about mental health?

**Don't forget to visit
www.mindframe-media.info/mentalhealth**

