



# **A News Media Guide For Victim Service Providers**

Written By:

**Anne Seymour**

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Anne Seymour

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# About This Guide

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## GUIDE DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT

### Guide Description

A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers features two sections. Section 1 addresses how victim advocates can facilitate sensitive and respectful treatment of crime victims by the news media, effectively advocate for victims in the media, and serve as their liaisons to media professionals. Section 2 is designed to help victim assistance organizations build positive relations with the news media. This guide is coauthored by Anne Seymour and Bonnie Bucqueroux.

### Component of a Larger OVC Public Education Project

The A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers was designed and developed as part of a larger National Public Awareness and Education Campaign project conducted by [Justice Solutions](#) under a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice. Major products of the multi-year project included; a comprehensive National Crime Victims' Rights Week Guide - <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrw/2006/welcome.html>, Mini Kits for Domestic Violence and Homicide commemorative weeks, Check-lists for 12 Professions <http://www.victimtips4professions.com>, and a Nation Public Service Announcement Campaign - <http://www.ovc.gov/publications/infores/psakit/welcome.html>. The project also sponsored a national summit of victim service professionals with interest and expertise regarding public education and awareness of crime victim-related issues.

### One Guide in a Series

The *A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers* is one of a series of guides created under the National Public Awareness and Education Campaign project to educate service providers, journalists, allied professionals and crime victims themselves around issues concerning news coverage of crime with a focus on coverage of crime victims.

The second in the series entitled: *A Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims*, is also available online at: [www.mediacrimevictimguide.com](http://www.mediacrimevictimguide.com).

### Use of this Guide

This guide is designed and written to be multifunctional. It can be used by victim service providers and allied professionals as a reference to guide them in their interaction with the media and in their effort to support and assist crime victims in their dealings with the media. Beyond self-education, this guide can also serve as the basis for the development of customized curriculum for training on an agency, organization, or program-wide basis. Such customized curricula can also be used in the context of larger

educational venues such as schools, training conferences, and other continuing education environments. It might also serve as a source of content for the development of educational publications and materials authored by such professionals and agencies to educate colleagues, victims, the media, or the general public.

### **Linking to this Web Site**

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### **How to Cite this Guide**

Based on the Chicago Manual of Style, for most purposes, this Guide should be cited as follows:

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## **AUTHORS**

### **Anne Seymour**

Anne Seymour is a Consultant to the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization [Justice Solutions](#). She is also the editor of *The Crime Victims Report*, a national journal/newsletter for victim service providers and allied professionals. Her expertise is in criminal and juvenile justice, victimology and crime victim services, media and public relations, research and program evaluation.

Seymour has 25 years experience as a national victim advocate. Beginning in 1984, she was the Director of Public Affairs for the National Office of Mothers Against Drunk

Driving, where she coordinated the successful national media and public awareness campaign that resulted in the passage of the *National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984*. In 1985, she co-founded the National Victim Center (now the National Center for Victims of Crime) in Fort Worth, Texas, where she served as Director of Communications and Resource Development until 1993.

Seymour has written extensively about issues relevant to the news media's coverage of crime and victimization. She is the co-author of the OVC publications, [\*A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers\*](#) and [\*A Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims\*](#) to be published in 2008. She wrote the *Victims' Rights and the Media* brochure, the *Crime Victims and the Media* handbook, and the *Media Relations handbook* for non-profit victim service organizations, along with the "News Media's Coverage of Crime" chapters for the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) "National Agenda for Crime Victims" and the National Victim Assistance Academy training text.

Seymour developed the concept of the National Crime Victims' Rights Week Resource Guide in 1986, and co-authored 20 Guides through 2006. She coordinated the national media strategy for the release of "Rape in America: A Report to the Nation" in 1992, which today remains the most successful media blitz for a single event in the history of the field of victim assistance.

Seymour was instrumental in developing OVC's award-winning "News Media Coverage of Crime and Victimization" videotape in 1999. Following the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, she was the principal author of a guide on how to deal with the news media for victims and survivors of this tragedy. From 2001 to the present, she has served as Project Manager for the OVC "National Public Awareness and Education Campaign" project.

Seymour has also lectured on these issues to most major professional journalism associations, including Delta Sigma Chi, American Press Institute, International Association of Newspaper Ombudsmen, and the Associated Press Managing Editors Association. In addition, she has personally advocated for crime victims in several high profile criminal cases.

Seymour is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Victims' Constitutional Amendment Network; Secretary/Treasurer of the International Association of Reentry; immediate past-Chair of the American Correctional Association Victims & Restorative Justice Committee; past Chair and current member of the American Probation and Parole Association Victim Issues Committee; Founding and Core Faculty Member of the National Victim Assistance Academy; a senior consultant to the National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center; principal consultant to the Center for Sex Offender Management and a member of its National Working Group; training consultant to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; and a member of the faculty of both the National Judicial College and National College of District Attorneys.

She has received numerous honors for her work with crime victims, including the 2007 "Ed Stout Memorial Award for Outstanding Victim Advocacy" from the U.S. Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, and the 1992 Outstanding Service to Crime Victims Award from President Bush.

## **Bonnie Bucqueroux**

Bonnie Bucqueroux recently retired as coordinator of the Victims and the Media Program at Michigan State University. The program seeks to educate journalists of today and tomorrow about how to interview victims of violence and catastrophe without re-victimizing them. She was previously the executive director of Crime Victims for a Just Society and the Michigan Victim Alliance, as well as associate director of the National Center for Community Policing.

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## WEB SITE:

**Functional Design of the Web site:** This web site was designed for the primary purpose of electronically publishing this Guide. Its structure and format were chosen to maximize reader accessibility and ease of use. Its two-fold design also allows readers to use this “e-publication” as a dynamic reference guide through the universally linked navigation that allows access to the entire document regardless of the users chosen entry point. (see, for example, the “Button Bar” in the left margin of each page). The Guide incorporates numerous internal cross-linked references that permit users to easily locate related information, concepts, and references.

In addition, the Guide can also be read in a traditional page-by-page, cover-to-cover fashion by beginning on the first page of the “Preface” and then simply clicking the “Next Page” button that appears at the bottom of each page.

**Search Functions:** The web site includes several tools that allow users to search for key words within the page being viewed, or across the entire web site (see the “Search” button on the button bar at the top of each page).

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## **DISCLAIMER:**

This document was prepared by [Justice Solutions](#) under grant number 2002-VF-GX-K013, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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# A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

## SECTION I:

### Victim Media Advocacy:

*How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

## Preface

### Foreword

Victim advocates and the news media share a common goal of educating the American public about crime and victimization and its impact on individuals and communities. Reliable and trusting relationships among crime victims, victim service providers, and the media can help reach this goal and ensure that crime victims and survivors are treated with dignity and respect by the news media.

Victim assistance organizations and the news media often rely on “the power of the personal story” of crime victims and survivors to relay the often devastating impact that crime has on their lives. When crime victims are provided with guidance and resources to help them speak out, they can become passionate, articulate spokespersons to address victims’ needs, rights, and concerns.

There are two components to this series:

*A Media Guide for Victim Service Providers* features two sections. *Section 1* addresses how victim advocates can facilitate sensitive and respectful treatment of crime victims by the news media, effectively advocate for victims in the media, and serve as their liaisons to media professionals. *Section 2* is designed to help victim assistance organizations build positive relations with the news media. This guide is coauthored by Anne Seymour and Bonnie Bucqueroux.

*A Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims* can help journalists fulfill their unique role in helping people understand and work to improve the ways in which the United States deals with crime and victimization. This guide is also designed to provide the most current, complete, and specific information and advice on reporting on victims and witnesses, as well as their families and friends. In addition, it is intended to explain the role of victim advocates and service providers and explore ways that journalists can work with them effectively to serve the needs of victims in the context of promoting public safety. This guide was written by Bonnie Bucqueroux with support from Anne Seymour.

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organization dedicated to enhancing rights, resources, and respect for victims and communities affected by crime.

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## Introduction

Victim service providers have a key role in educating media professionals about how their coverage of crime, victimization, and individual cases affects victims and survivors, as well as organizations and agencies that serve them. In addition to serving victims as advocates in the aftermath of crime, they can publicly advocate for responsible, sensible media coverage of issues related to victimization and serve as sources for timely, relevant, and accurate data about crime and victimization.

The news media are not “advocates” for crime victims. Journalists are objective observers and reporters of important current issues in society, with crime and victimization among such issues. Over the years, news media professionals have been a driving force in publicizing vital information and trends about public safety. The media—



- Can strongly influence public opinion about issues important to American society.
- Provide a continuing venue to publicize important information about crime and victimization.
- Play a key role in identifying critical issues related to individual, community, and overall public safety.
- Offer opportunities for crime victims and advocates to be both *proactive* and *reactive* sources on coverage of crime and victimization.
- Help victims and survivors who choose to tell their stories to relate the events effectively, which can promote their recovery.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

*How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 1. Crime Victims and Public Awareness

The news media have helped educate the American public about crime, victimization, and its devastating impact on individuals, families, and communities. Whether it's coverage of a high-profile trial or a feature story on one victim's efforts to survive in the aftermath of crime, the news media continually alert people to—

- The scope of and current trends in crime and victimization.
- Victim/offender relationships, including the fact that the majority of offenders know their victims.
- New types of crimes the public should be aware of, such as human trafficking, Internet crimes, and scams.
- The personal nature and impact of crime on *individuals*—people who could be our family members, neighbors, or friends.

For example, the 1992 publication of the landmark *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation* resulted in nearly 113 million people in America who either watched, heard, or read about the report. Its sponsors received more than 150 media inquiries in connection with its publication. Embargoed copies of *Rape in America* were provided in advance to rape crisis centers nationwide, so they were able to offer local angles, victim spokespersons, and experts to address the contents of the report.<sup>1</sup>



Law enforcement and prosecutors often seek media attention to inform the public of increases in specific crimes, encourage witnesses to come forward, and engage the community in crime prevention, victim assistance, and public safety initiatives.

#### a. Policy Development and Implementation

The news media cover politics and public policy development at the national, state, and local levels and often offer political analysis of key bills that promote public safety, victims' rights, and victim services. Often, victims and survivors and victim service

providers are asked to serve as spokespersons for public policy issues. The “power of the personal story” of victims remains a vital and effective tool for both good media relations and strong public awareness campaigns.



The national office of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) credited the news media with helping to create a groundswell of support in 1984 for its “S.O.S.” (Save Our Students) campaign that resulted in the passage of the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984. The ultimate passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 was preceded by endless stories of battered women and rape survivors and their need for expanded services, and each year, the commemoration of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week in April is accompanied by a renewed media focus on victims’ rights, needs, and concerns.

### **b. Funding and Resource Development**

Since many victim assistance organizations rely on private donations for their sustenance, it’s important for community members to be aware of the intrinsic value of victim services and the many resources they offer to a community. Strong media relations result in positive coverage that educates community members about victim services and their ongoing need for financial and volunteer support. In many communities, the news media not only publicize fundraising efforts but also their “parent companies” often support them (e.g., through media companies’ co-sponsorship of fundraising activities or public awareness events).

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<sup>1</sup> Lak Vohra, 1992. *Media Strategies and Accomplishments for Rape in America*, Arlington, VA: National Center for Victims of Crime (formerly the National Victim Center).

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

*How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

## 2. Impact On Your Organization

### How Media Relations Affect an Organization or Agency

There are over 10,000 organizations that assist victims of all types of crime in the United States. In general, two types of organizations and agencies may interact with the news media as advocates for victims and sources for crime-related stories: victim assistance programs within system-based agencies; and community-based and nonprofit organizations. In addition, there are citizen volunteers who provide unpaid assistance to various organizations that serve victims.

#### a. SYSTEM- BASED AGENCIES: Victim Service Providers in Criminal and Juvenile Justice System-Based Agencies



*[Photo Staged with Professional Models]*

Today, victim service providers and victim assistance programs are embedded in agencies that span the entire adult criminal justice spectrum and, in many jurisdictions, in the juvenile justice system as well (“system-based agencies”). Victim service providers serve within agencies in law enforcement, prosecution, courts, probation, parole, jails and institutional corrections, and in nearly all state attorneys general offices. They primarily work with victims who have reported crimes and whose cases are being processed through the criminal or juvenile justice system.

While their job responsibilities vary considerably, many will come in contact with journalists as a duty related to direct victim advocacy. However, there may be necessary constraints on advocates’ interactions with the news media, based on agency policies and protocols, as well as the wishes and needs of victims in individual cases.

## b. CASE COVERAGE: Case Coverage of Individual Victims

System-based victim service providers often struggle with their roles as “advocates” for victims when victims’ wishes directly conflict with what their agency believes is best in a specific case. In some cases, such as when a judge issues a “gag order” during trial and all key players are prevented from speaking publicly about a case, victims who want to speak out may perceive advocates as working “against their interests.” In all cases, victims’ wishes for confidentiality and privacy must be identified and respected.



(Photo Staged with Professional Model)

Most justice agencies have clear policies and procedures for media relations, including who is able to speak to journalists, either as an individual or on behalf of the agency. It is important for advocates to understand how such protocols affect their actions, so that they can explain them to victims who may disagree with specific policies that personally affect them.

Victim service providers are sometimes requested by agency administrators or senior staff to provide information about their programs or to serve as liaisons between journalists and individual victims. More often, they are “team players” in a coordinated media response. For example, many justice agencies have public information officers (PIOs) or media relations programs that rely on all agency staff to be able to respond to journalists on a case-by-case basis. Victim service providers are valuable sources for agency PIOs and administrators because of their knowledge about victims’ rights, needs, and concerns and their personal relationships with victims whom the agency serves.



(Professionally Staged Photo)

Since many law enforcement agencies have PIOs, the International Association of Chiefs of Police sponsors a Public Information Officers Section within its national organization. The section has published a variety of resources relevant to the news media and law enforcement (including victim-related issues), including—

- Model Policy on Police Media Relations  
<http://www.theiacp.org/documents/pdfs/Publications/PoliceMediaRelationsModelPolicy.pdf>
- Police-Media Relations Concept and Issues Paper  
<http://www.theiacp.org/documents/pdfs/Publications/PoliceMediaRelationsModelPolicy.pdf>

The National Information Officers Association (NIOA) represents professional emergency services and public safety information officers and helps its members improve their capacity for effective media relations. Its web site can be accessed at <http://www.nioa.org/>.

### **c. COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: Victim Service Providers in Community-Based and Nonprofit Organizations**

These victim advocacy organizations assist victims of crime *whether or not they report crimes to law enforcement*. However, the role of community-based victim service providers in dealing with the news media may differ considerably from system-based advocates, since they are less constrained by justice agencies' media relations policies and procedures.

Community-based organizations should have clear policies that guide their agency's interactions with the media and how they can best represent victims' interests. Written policies can address—

- Specific personnel within an organization who are (and are *not*) authorized to speak to the media (including citizen volunteers).
- If and how an organization and its staff can represent victims—only upon request and following consultation with the victim—in the media, including ground rules and boundaries for media relations (see Tip #9 of “Guidelines for Media Interviews”).
- How media relations on behalf of a victim will be coordinated with the victim/survivor, relevant justice agencies and professionals, and journalists.
- How victim privacy issues will be addressed.
- How the agency will deal with minor victims (children and adolescents), including privacy protections and communicating with their parents or guardians.
- Information that can be provided to crime victims about their personal interactions with the media (see “Tips for Crime Victims and the Media: Guidelines for Media Interviews” and “Tips for Media Interviews” in Section 1 of this Guide).
- Guidelines about how to document all media contacts.

- Staffing for media relations that provides for 24/7 contact between the news media and an organization.

In addition, community-based advocates are sometimes in a unique position to—

- Serve as personal advocates and spokespersons for victims in the media, and advise victims about their options—and the potential consequences of the choices they make—in dealing with the news media.
- Educate media professionals about the impact of crime on victims and how insensitive media coverage can result in “secondary victimization” that can increase a victim’s trauma.
- Invite journalists to visit and learn more about victim assistance programs in the community, such as crisis response, victim support groups, counseling programs, shelters, etc.

#### **d. Citizen Volunteers**

Some law enforcement agencies, often municipal police and county sheriffs, have created Citizen Advocate groups that help crime victims. Many agencies have citizen volunteers on call who will go to the site of a crime once the situation has stabilized. Their role is to provide personal comfort and care to victims, such as giving them a ride or refilling a needed prescription. It is not uncommon to find crime victims as part of these groups. Many law enforcement agencies also train the groups, sometimes including media training.



While citizen volunteers are seldom given responsibilities for media relations, their close proximity to victims may expose them to journalists who are covering a crime. Therefore, media training and awareness of agency policies related to interactions with the news media are essential to their volunteer duties.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

*How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 3. Educating the Media

#### Providing the Media with Information About Victims' Rights and Trends

All victim assistance professionals may be called on to provide information about victims' constitutional and statutory rights, as well as trends and data related to crime, victimization, and victim assistance.

##### a. About Victims' Rights

Victim service providers should be able to articulate important information about victims' rights as defined by state constitutions, statutes, and case law. They can also explain specific victims' rights that apply within an individual justice agency. In general, there are seven victims' rights that are applicable to *most* victims in all jurisdictions that advocates should be prepared to explain to the media:



**Right to Be Treated With Dignity and Respect:** This right is articulated in most states' "victims' bills of rights" and offers a global guideline to fair treatment of victims throughout criminal and juvenile justice processes.

**Right to Notification:** Victim notification is essential to help victims understand and become informed about criminal justice processes and supportive services available to help them. In general, victims are notified about the status of their case, the status and location of the alleged or convicted offender, and services that can help them rebuild their lives in the aftermath of crime.

**Right to Reasonable Protection:** Victims of crime may have important concerns about their personal safety and that of their family and loved ones. Often, victims' concerns about safety arise from the trauma of victimization; from real or implied threats made by the alleged or convicted offender and his or her colleagues; or from not knowing or understanding their rights to protection as defined under law and the range of services available to address their safety concerns. When victims have concerns about safety and they identify these concerns to criminal justice and victim assistance officials, a variety of approaches can be developed that promote their safety.



*[Photo Staged with Professional Model]*

**Right to Be Heard:** Victims have the right to be heard at various stages of the criminal justice process, including at the time of sentencing and at any parole release hearing. The victim impact statement is the victim's opportunity to describe how the crime affected him or her—emotionally, physically, financially, and spiritually. The “voice of the victim” is clearly heard through the victim impact statement process.

**Right to Restitution:** Victim restitution is the payment to cover crime-related expenses to a victim from an offender who is convicted of a crime. It is designed to help crime victims recover out-of-pocket expenses that result from the crime, such as medical treatment for physical injuries, the costs of mental health counseling, and the loss of or damage to property. It generally does not cover costs such as those resulting from “pain and suffering.” When an offender is found guilty, the court can order that he or she pay restitution to the victim based on financial losses resulting from the crime.

**Right to Victim Information and Referral:** Victims of crime often have needs, issues, and concerns about how they feel, what is going to happen, their role as a victim or witness, and what services are available to help them. There is a wide range of services to help victims cope in the aftermath of a crime and to help them make informed decisions about their lives. Many services are available to *all* victims of crime, while *some* victims' rights and services require that a victim reports the crime to law enforcement and cooperates with the investigation and prosecution of a criminal case. In addition, some specialized services are available to help victims of specific types of crime.

**Right to Apply for Victim Compensation:** State victim compensation programs provide financial assistance to victims of nearly every type of violent crime, including rape, robbery, assault, sexual abuse, drunk driving, domestic violence, and survivors of homicide victims. Compensation programs reimburse for expenses such as medical care, mental health counseling, lost wages, and, in cases of homicide, funerals and loss of support. These expenses or costs cannot be covered by insurance or some other readily available “collateral source.” Each state has eligibility requirements that victims must meet to qualify for compensation benefits.



In some states, victims may also have additional rights, including, but not limited to, the following: prompt return of property, a speedy trial, and measures to ensure compliance with their constitutional and/or statutory rights.

It is important for victim service providers to be fully informed of key victims' rights so they can describe these rights to victims, journalists, and others. Many sources can enhance victims' rights information—such as changes in existing statutes, new laws, and court decisions that become case law—including state legislatures, state and local victim assistance coalitions, state and national organizations, training programs, and research findings (please see “Resources” at the end of this guide).

### **b. ABOUT TRENDS AND DATA: National, State, and Local Trends and Data Related to Crime, Victimization, and Victim Assistance**

When covering individual victim cases or a specific type of crime and victimization, journalists often seek additional information that can expand a story's scope and overall impact. For example, a reporter covering a local domestic violence homicide may want information and statistics about trends and the scope of the problem nationally. A reporter for a national news program about sex offender laws may want state-specific information and the opportunity to speak with the parents of a child who was sexually abused. When a major national research report is issued that addresses a specific type of victimization or changes in the prevalence of certain crimes, victim service providers often have an opportunity to help develop a story with a local angle.



(Staged with Professional Models)

As part of an overall media plan, victim service providers can prepare information and assess opportunities to provide journalists' access to victims as sources, thereby shaping the story to ensure victim issues are included and victims' voices are heard. It is important that *all* information provided is timely and accurate and that interview sources are reliable and capable of dealing with the stress and consequences of being interviewed.

The types of additional information that victim service providers can provide to journalists include—

- Statistics and trends about specific types of crime and victimization (national data are important but state and local data are more relevant).
- “Myths and facts” about different types of crime and victimization that can enhance accurate reporting.
- State and federal laws related to crime and victimization, including information about victims' constitutional and statutory rights and case law.
- Brief overviews about the dynamics of different types of victimization.
- Research-based information about crime victims and perpetrators.

- A “glossary of terms” related to different types of victimization, as well as relevant justice proceedings.
- How people can report crimes to authorities.
- Community-based and system-based resources for victim assistance.
- Reliable local, state, and national experts—including crime victims and survivors—who can offer additional insights and perspectives on the issue.

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## 4. ETHICS

### a. REFERRING VICTIMS: The Ethics of Providing Victims for Interviews

Victim service providers often receive requests from the media to “get a victim” for a story or program. Victims’ participation in interviews can offer a critical human touch to a story and personalize crime and its impact from a real person who has been harmed. However, careful consideration must be given to the victim’s safety, level of stress and trauma, and any possible negative effects of giving an interview.

Victim service providers can think and plan proactively to respond to media requests for victims:

- Develop and continually update a list of victims who want to speak to the media and are comfortable doing so (“Crime Victim’s Media Handbook” offers extensive resources to help victims become effective public spokespersons).
- 
- [Professionally Staged Photo]*
- Identify victims of different types of crime—both violent and nonviolent—who are diverse by gender, age, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography.
  - Avoid simply providing referrals. Act as a liaison between the victim and the media. Information that can help victims decide whether or not to do an interview includes—
    - The advocate’s knowledge of the news medium and interviewer.
    - Range of topics for the interview.
    - Other people who may be interviewed for the story or program (such as the defendant or defense counsel).
    - Pre-interview and interview logistics (day, time, and location).
    - Any background information the victim should be prepared to provide (either personal about his or her case, or information related to specific types of crime and victims’ rights).
    - Whether or not the media wants the victim to physically appear on a broadcast program or have a photograph taken for print publications;

and/or if alternatives are available that facilitate the interview while protecting the victim's privacy.



[Photo Staged with Professional Models]

The advocate should always offer to help the victim prepare for the interview and accompany him or her upon request.

Advocates' knowledge of victim trauma and the advocate's past experiences with specific news media can help determine the appropriateness of referring victims for media interviews. Referrals to victims should *never* be provided if—

- A criminal or juvenile case is ongoing and justice officials advise against any media interviews.
- The victim's personal safety is or may be put at risk by conducting an interview.
- A victim's recent media experiences have been stressful or traumatic.
- The use of a victim is sought only for sensational purposes, or the news medium has a history of re-victimizing victims by insensitive treatment.
- The story seeks to bring the victim and his or her actual offender together without the full understanding and consent of the victim.

## **b. CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROVIDERS: Ethical Considerations for Victim Service Providers**

Over the years, numerous ethical issues specific to victim advocacy and the news media have been identified (Seymour and Lowrance; National Organization for Victim Assistance; Michigan State University Victims and the Media Program). They are instructive in providing guidance to victim service providers who assist and/or represent victims who choose to deal with the media.



[Photo Staged with Professional Model]

Victim service providers should—

- Be clear about and honor the victim's wishes concerning news media coverage of his or her tragedy.

- Protect the privacy of victims who do not wish to have contact with the news media.
- Seek a victim's explicit (written) consent when providing information about him or her to the media.
- Seek collaboration between the victim/survivor and those involved with his or her case in dealing with the media.
- Know (well) the victim they are representing.
- Speak on the victim's behalf only after securing consent and after the advocate is clear about what details can be publicly shared.
- Provide victims with guidelines about how to deal with the news media (see "Tips for Crime Victims and Survivors: Guidelines for Media Interviews in Section I of this Guide).
- Help victims, upon request, prepare for print or broadcast media interviews and consider the key points and issues they want to be made public (see "Tips for Media Interviews" in Section I of this Guide).
- Inform victims that talking to the media is *their choice* and explain any options and the consequences of such choices.
- When necessary, provide a neutral location for the interview to protect the privacy of the victim's home and/or workplace.
- Accompany victims, upon request, to media interviews and press conferences.
- Help the victim establish ground rules and boundaries for media interviews and make the victim's wishes clear to the media.
- Reserve the right to end an interview if the victim shows signs of trauma during interactions with the news media.
- Discourage the participation of young children in media interviews, and work closely with parents/guardians to represent the best interests of child victims while protecting their privacy.
- Provide timely and accurate information and referrals to journalists who request them.



(Staged with Professional Models)

### c. Media Codes of Ethics

Most professional journalism associations have adopted “codes of ethics” that address a wide range of issues relating to responsible reporting. Some include language that is specific to news coverage of crime and victimization; i.e., “Treat all subjects of news coverage with respect and dignity, showing particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy;”<sup>1</sup> and “Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.”<sup>2</sup>

The Project for Excellence in Journalism has developed a “Citizens Bill of Journalism Rights:” <http://www.concernedjournalists.org/node/65>

1. Truthfulness.
2. Proof that the journalists’ first loyalty is to citizens.
3. That journalists maintain independence from those they cover.
4. That journalists will monitor power and give voice to the voiceless.
5. A forum for public criticism and problem solving.
6. News that is proportional and relevant.<sup>3</sup>

Just as it is important for news media professionals to understand the concerns of victims and those who serve them, it is helpful for victim service providers to be familiar with the range of codes of ethics that guide journalists. *Figure 1* includes electronic links to various journalism codes of ethics and guiding principles.

<b>Journalism Entity</b>	<b>Web Site URL With Codes of Ethics and Guidelines</b>
American Society of Newspaper Editors	<a href="http://www.asne.org/index.cfm">http://www.asne.org/index.cfm</a>
American Society of Magazine Editors	<a href="http://www.magazine.org/Editorial/Guidelines/">http://www.magazine.org/Editorial/Guidelines/</a>
Associated Press Managing Editors	<a href="http://www.apme.com/ethics/">http://www.apme.com/ethics/</a>
National Press Photographers Association	<a href="http://nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html">http://nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html</a>
New York Times Ethical Journalism Guidebook	<a href="http://www.nytc.com/company-properties-times-coe.html">http://www.nytc.com/company-properties-times-coe.html</a>

Radio and Television News Directors Association	<a href="http://www.rtnda.org/#">http://www.rtnda.org/#</a>
Society of Professional Journalists	<a href="http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp">http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp</a>
Community of Concerned Journalists	<a href="http://www.concernedjournalists.org">http://www.concernedjournalists.org</a>
Project for Excellence in Journalism	<a href="http://www.journalism.org/">http://www.journalism.org/</a>

*Figure 1*

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<sup>1</sup> Radio-Television News Directors Association & Foundation, "Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct," <http://www.rtnda.org/ethics/coe/html>, accessed March 30, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Society of Professional Journalists, "Code of Ethics," <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>, accessed March 30, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006, "Citizens Bill of Journalism Rights," Washington, DC: Project for Excellence in Journalism.

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## 5. Impact of Coverage Can Affect Victims

### How Crime Coverage Can Affect Victims

From the perspective of crime victims and advocates, the news media often wield a “double-edged sword” in covering crime and victimization. Victim service providers should be aware of both the benefits, as well as risks, of media coverage of crime victims so they can explain options to victims and help them explore both the potentially positive and negative consequences of speaking to the media.

#### a. Benefits of Speaking to the Media

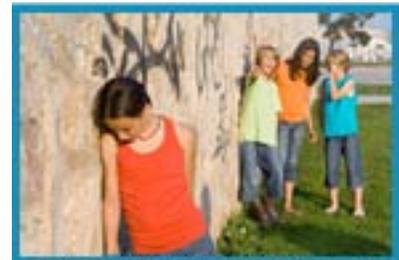
- The “power of the personal story” of victims that is conveyed through the media has been a strong, driving force in the growth of America’s victim assistance field.
- Coverage of individual victims can help other people understand what happens to crime victims and survivors and how it affects them and their loved ones—physically, emotionally, financially, socially, and spiritually.
- Media coverage can humanize crime and its impact on individuals, families, and communities.
- Speaking to the media can sometimes help validate victims who want their perspectives heard.
- Since alleged and convicted defendants and their counsel often speak to the media and give their side of the case, it can be helpful to balance these perspectives with those of the crime victim/survivor.
- Other victims and survivors who learn about victims’ experiences through the media may be inspired to report crimes and seek supportive services.



- Through victims speaking out, people learn that crime is not something that happens to “somebody else” but are reminded that crime can happen *anywhere* and to *anybody*.
- Public awareness and understanding about the plight of crime victims are enhanced every time a sensitive story about one victim’s experience is published or broadcast, which can lead to increased public support for victim assistance initiatives.

### **b. RISKS OF SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA: How Inappropriate or Intrusive Reporting Can Re-Victimize Victims in Trauma**

For some victims, the trauma of victimization can be compounded by speaking publicly about their experiences in the aftermath of a crime. It takes time to cope with the shock and trauma of being victimized and to participate in police investigations and criminal or juvenile justice processes. The detrimental mental health consequences of victimization are well documented. Media coverage in the wake of a crime can result in a “secondary victimization” that may exacerbate victims’ trauma and cause unnecessary additional harm. The shame that some victims feel, as well as the blame they sometimes feel from others, can be increased by untimely, inappropriate, or intrusive reporting.



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## 6. Types of News Stories

### Crime Coverage in Three Acts

Victims are clearly affected by the way that the media report on crime and victimization. Individual victims who become the subject of crime tend to fall into three broad categories, each with its own dynamic and concerns:

- **a. Act I: *Breaking News***—The reporters who cover breaking news, whether for print or broadcast, are under pressure to gather accurate information under deadline from a number of different sources. In many cases, the crime has just occurred and victims and witnesses are literally in shock, trying to assimilate what has just happened to them. Other stories where reporters often seek comments from victims involve breaking news that occurs during trials, especially when verdicts are announced. While the main focus is often on the perpetrator, victims and their family and friends may also be asked for interviews when convicted defendants are considered for probation or parole, when they are released, when they are executed, or when they escape from jail or prison.
- 
- **b. Act II: *Feature Stories***—Victims can be asked for interviews for follow-up features and profiles. For these stories, newspaper, magazine, broadcast, and online reporters want facts, but they also want to capture the victim's feelings, emotions, and opinions, as well as details about the interview subject's appearance, expressions, and environment. Many features are anniversary stories, such as the first-, 5-, and 10-year stories of the victims of the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. There are also continuing mysteries, such as unresolved disappearances and cases where the perpetrator has not been identified or caught. In most cases, the reporter has more time to prepare for and conduct the interview than when reporting breaking news.
  - **c. Act III: *High-Impact Stories***—These stories go beyond traditional crime coverage to explore the social, political, economic, or cultural impact of crime and victimization, or they do an exceptional job of giving victims a voice. These are the exceptional stories that break the mold, making readers and viewers pause to reflect on the reality and impact of crime and victimization in our culture. Such stories are often “enterprise” stories, which means they involve significant planning by a team of reporters and editors. They are often

longer stories and many times they run as a series. For Act III stories, victims are often asked to give lengthy interviews or multiple interviews over time.

Each “act” of crime coverage poses a different set of challenges for victims, their families and friends, and the victim service providers and service providers who work with them—and for the reporters, photographers, videographers, and editors who cover them. Section 1 of this guide offers detailed suggestions for how to meet these challenges. In addition, the Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims offers information, insights, and tips that reporters need to deal with the opportunities and constraints for each of the “three acts” of crime coverage.

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### 7. Major Concerns of Coverage

#### Major Concerns of Coverage

Decades of reporting on crime and victimization have identified key concerns that crime victims often have about how the process affects them. Victimization often places victims on what has been described as “an emotional roller coaster” or “an ocean of emotions.” The fluctuating nature of one’s response to trauma results in good days and bad days. It can be helpful and validating at one moment for a victim to speak to the media, and emotionally devastating and distressing shortly thereafter.

Crime victims’ concerns about news media coverage offer a great starting point for mutual education and ongoing discussions among victim service providers, allied justice professionals, and the news media. When reporters are aware of these concerns, it can begin a productive dialogue in which journalists can also raise their own issues and concerns. Victim service providers can clearly state victims’ key concerns in their ongoing interactions with journalists. The goal for all parties is to promote sensitive news media coverage of crime and victimization.

The following concerns can be augmented and further articulated by the specific experiences of crime victims/survivors and victim service providers within a community:

- a.
**Privacy.** Although crime is a public matter high on the list of society’s concerns, it is a highly personal matter for most victims. Privacy is important to victims who endure sudden and unexpected grief, trauma, and loss. The ability to face the trauma of victimization in private and begin to learn how to cope with it is critical to the victim’s recovery process. Victim service providers can help victims by giving them referrals to supportive services, including crisis intervention, counseling, and support groups. They can explain to victims why the media want to speak to them; the benefits of talking to reporters or issuing a public statement; and measures victims can take to increase their sense of control and confidence in interviews. Victim service providers can also make a victim’s wishes for privacy known and, upon request from the victim, provide helpful information to the media in lieu of a personal interview.



*[Professional Model Pictured]*

- **b. The stigma of victimization.** Nobody wants to be a victim of crime. There is still a stigma associated with criminal victimization. It is unfortunately natural to attach blame or shame to victimization, as a rationale for why crime happens to “other people” and “not to me.” Victim service providers can help the media understand this dynamic and how accurate and sensitive coverage can educate the public and thereby reduce “victim blaming.”

- **c. Confidentiality.** Some victims don’t report crimes or refuse to cooperate with investigators because they are afraid other people will find out what happened to them. For some victims, confidentiality is critical to their personal safety—information that identifies their name or location could put them at risk. Victim service providers can help reporters understand these concerns and help victims find ways to tell their stories without violating their confidentiality or personal safety.



- **d. Language and context.** Victim service providers can help reporters understand that *the words they use* can be inadvertently hurtful to victims and contribute to the stigma of victimization. For example, euphemisms used to describe the offender (the “Night Stalker”) or the crime (the “Preppie Murder”) may be memorable but they can glamorize the offender, thereby marginalizing the victim’s experience. News reporting that infers shock at allegations against specific defendants because of their gender, race, socioeconomic status, location or standing in the community negates that crimes are committed *by* all types of people and *against* all types of people.
- **e. INAPPROPRIATE TIMING: Interviewing at inappropriate times.** “Inappropriate timing” may include as a crime is actually occurring or immediately following a crime; at funerals; in hospital settings; and during trials when the judge has issued a gag order. The role of the victim service provider is to help reporters understand the situation and offer alternatives to direct interviews or offer interviews at a future date.

- **f. Aggressive or intrusive reporting.** The news business is highly competitive. In their eagerness to get the story and get it first, reporters can push too hard. The Victims and the Media Program at Michigan State University’s School of Journalism reminds reporters that they need different approaches for different situations. Investigative reporters trying to ferret out public fraud or skullduggery need to be aggressive in pursuing leads and pushing people to talk. However, the interviewers who get the best stories from victims are often those who are



[Photo Staged with Professional Model]

personable and friendly, so that victims feel comfortable telling their stories. In addition to experienced journalists, journalism students and young reporters in particular need to use care in balancing the need to remain skeptical and their need to help victims open up.

- **g. Ignoring the wishes of victims and survivors.** One of the most critical roles of victim service providers is to determine what the victim wants and convey the victim's wishes to the media. It helps for victims to understand the "big picture" of what is happening; i.e., the defendant may be granting interviews and reporters may seek other sources for interviews (who are not always reliable or accurate). Victim service providers can convey media requests for interviews and information to victims and help them explore options that respect and reflect their wishes. They can also ask the media to refrain from pressing victims to answer questions that ignore their wishes.
- **h. Explicit visual depictions of crime scenes and/or victims.** Photographs and broadcast images of bloody crime scenes, injured victims, bodies, or body bags are highly intrusive and add little to a story besides sensationalism. Repeated visual clichés can contribute to desensitizing readers and viewers to violence. This is a concern that can best be brought up with reporters by victims who have been directly affected by this type of coverage.
- **i. Inaccurate reporting.** While accurate reporting is essential, mistakes will be made. Victim service providers can help increase accuracy in news reporting by providing clear, written information about the facts of a case and about the victim; and by responding to the news media when inaccurate reporting occurs.



*[Photo Staged with Professional Models]*

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### 8. Impact in Victims of Specific Crimes

#### The Impact of News Media Coverage on Distinct Victim Populations

Every victim is unique, which makes the impact of crime unique. While some organizations serve all victims, the victim assistance field has also become specialized in how it assists and advocates for different victims of crime. When the news media cover different types of crime and victims, there are also unique aspects that victim service providers should consider as they seek to help victims. This section offers considerations for the news media coverage of—

- Rape and sexual assault.
- Domestic violence.
- Child victimization.
- Homicide.
- Drunk driving.

#### a. Rape and Sexual Assault

A major concern of rape and sexual assault victims is having their identity exposed through the news media. Confidentiality is important to many victims and concerns about privacy result in many victims who don't report rapes and sexual assaults for fear of others learning about the crime. Most media have policies that protect the identity of rape victims, and some states have passed laws that prevent anyone from publishing or broadcasting information that identifies sexual offense victims.



Victim service providers and survivors can work together to identify key issues that can help journalists understand the scope and nature of sexual assault in the United States and victims' privacy concerns. For example:

- Rape is one of the most underreported crimes in America. Only 18 percent of forcible rape cases are reported to law enforcement, and only 16 percent of forcible rape cases among college students are reported.<sup>5</sup>

- Many victims don't report the assault because they don't want others (such as family and friends) to know about the crime, or they are concerned about being blamed.
- Victims also have privacy concerns related to their fear of possible retaliation by the alleged or convicted offender.
- There is still a societal stigma associated with such crimes that can result in victim blaming.
- There are serious mental health consequences of rape and sexual assault, including depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Most rapists are known to their victims—the myth of “stranger danger” is inaccurate.
- The use of the term “alleged victim” is degrading to people who have suffered a sexual assault. The phrase “person who alleged charges against. . .” conveys the same information in a more sensitive manner.



*(Staged with Professional Model)*

Ethical considerations in media coverage of rape and sexual assault developed by the Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault <http://www.lafasa.org/> can be offered as suggestions to journalists who cover rape cases and victims:<sup>6</sup>

- When reporting on sexual assault, journalists are encouraged to balance the victim's right to privacy with the public's right to know.
- Reporters must judge when details are needed for public safety and when such details only serve to re-traumatize the victim or reinforce myths about the victim's role in the attack.
- Details about the attacker are relevant: physical description, how access was gained; whether a weapon was used; and if additional physical violence was involved (for example, the victim was incapacitated, held down, or blocked from leaving).
- Details about the victim's private life—habits, sexual history, clothing or physical appearance, clothes she was wearing, for example—do not contribute to the public's safety and usually lead to victim blaming.



- Carefully choose words and phrases to avoid furthering the notion that the victim is culpable for the crime. Consider the assumptions inherent in these phrases:
  - “Innocent victim”—All crime victims are “innocent.”
  - “Violent assault”—Rape and sexual assault are acts of violence, whether the victim sustained other physical injuries or not.
- In place of “rape allegation,” try “reported rape.” The word “allegation” is not neutral and strongly implies doubt.
- In place of “date rape,” use the term “acquaintance rape.” The former term implies that the assault occurred “on a date.” In fact, the term is often broadly used in cases where the victim knew the perpetrator.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma offers tips and tools to journalists covering sexual violence offered by sexual assault advocates, as a way to build mutually positive relationships [ [http://www.dartcenter.org/quick\\_tips/sexual\\_violence.php](http://www.dartcenter.org/quick_tips/sexual_violence.php) ]

- Use accurate language. Rape or assault is not “sex.” A pattern of abuse is not an “affair.”
- Avoid language that suggests the victim is somehow to blame for the crime.
- It may take time to build trust with victims and family members. Explain the type of story you’re planning to write. Show clips of stories you’re proud of.
- Consider letting victims read portions of your story before publication. While controversial in journalism circles, many award-winning journalists report that this helped them identify errors or insensitivities in their reporting. It can also build rapport that encourages victims to share more of the story with the reporter.
- When describing the assault, reflect on how much graphic detail to include. Too much can be gratuitous; too little can weaken the victim’s case.
- Include information that can help others avoid assault without inferring that the victim caused the assault.
- Provide contact information for agencies that assist survivors and their families within stories or as a sidebar.



## b. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent crimes in the United States—and one of the most underreported. It's a crime that deserves media coverage within the broader context of family violence. It is essential that communities understand its prevalence; why victims often don't report; why victims are afraid to testify in court against their abusers; and the devastating physical, emotional, financial, and social impact of such violence on victims and their children.

Utah State University professor Cathy Bullock, who has researched the news media's coverage of domestic violence, wrote that:

"...there seems to be something lacking in newspaper coverage in general when it comes to domestic violence fatalities. I've studied coverage of such cases by newspapers in Washington state and Utah. While there were exceptions in both states, the coverage tended to present common misconceptions about domestic violence.

I suspect this is due in part to the time and other constraints of newspaper work. However, I still wonder how well reporters and editors understand the social ill they're writing about. If they don't understand domestic violence—what it is, the characteristics that set it apart from other forms of interpersonal violence, its patterns—they're not bringing all the relevant facts to bear when they're faced with questions about how to handle the coverage.

For example, it's worth knowing that experts believe domestic violence is about the abuser's need to dominate and control; that it often (but not always) plays out as a repeating cycle of tension-building then violence then remorse; that abusers may shift the blame for their actions to others.

The more I learn about domestic violence, the more I appreciate the fact that abusers have their own way of looking at relationships and don't necessarily share others' ideas about what's logical and reasonable.

Granted, knowing more about domestic violence isn't a fix-all that will allow reporters and editors to predict with certainty what abusers will do next or what effect coverage will have on their actions. But understanding domestic violence would allow journalists to better evaluate what's at stake and better judge the possible consequences of coverage—not to mention better inform readers about an important social problem."<sup>7</sup>

The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers tips for journalists to help them accurately cover domestic violence. Victim service providers can use these tips as a foundation for media interactions and training programs:



- Place the crime in the context of domestic violence.
- Acknowledge that domestic violence is not a private matter.
- Look into prior history of domestic violence and let the story evolve.
- Convey that domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that often escalates when a victim is trying to leave or has left the relationship.
- Illustrate the warning signs of an abusive relationship.
- When interviewing a domestic violence survivor, consider her safety and confidentiality needs.
- Avoid calling domestic violence a “relationship problem.”
- Do not focus on the victim’s behavior or use victim-blaming language.
- Do not assume that some cultures or classes are violent, and others are not.
- Avoid using sources emotionally connected to the abuser or sources that do not have significant information about the crime or those involved.
- Avoid treating domestic violence crimes as an inexplicable tragedy, beyond the reach of community action.<sup>8</sup>

Advocates for domestic violence victims can also review some of the “quick tips for covering domestic violence” published by the Dart Center as a good starting point to promote sensitive media coverage of domestic violence crimes.

[http://www.dartcenter.org/quick\\_tips/domestic\\_violence.php](http://www.dartcenter.org/quick_tips/domestic_violence.php)



- Use accurate language. Rape or assault is not “sex”—even when the attacker is the victim’s spouse.
- Avoid language that suggests the victim is somehow to blame for the crime.

- Avoid undue focus on the socioeconomic status or ethnicity of the victim or perpetrator. Domestic violence is a public health problem that crosses all lines of race, class, and culture.
- Domestic violence is, in general, poorly understood by the public and underreported by mainstream media. Take the opportunity to inform your readers with statistics and context.
- It may take time to build trust with victims and family members. Explain the type of story you're planning to write. Show clips of stories you're proud of.
- Include information that can help others avoid assault without inferring that the victim caused the assault.
- Provide contact information for agencies that assist survivors and families.



### c. Child Victimization

The victimization of children is major news, unfortunately on a regular basis. It can involve physical or sexual abuse by strangers or persons known to the child, child abductions, gross neglect by parents or caretakers, or mass crimes (such as school shootings or sexual abuse of many children by one perpetrator).

Many victim service providers strongly believe that children should be protected from the news media at all costs. Their rationale is based on—

- The fact that young victims, because of their age and cognitive development, are not able to make conscious, informed decisions related to what has happened to them or what will happen in the future.
- Parents or caretakers sometimes make decisions affecting their victimized children that don't always consider the child's privacy and interests.
- Children process and cope with trauma differently than adults.
- The stigma of victimization—especially sex crimes—can be overwhelming to a child who lacks the capability to deal with how others perceive them as victims.

The reality of the news media's coverage of crimes against children is that journalists *will* seek to interview child victims. Although victim service providers can seek to protect the privacy of young victims, they cannot ultimately prevent them from being interviewed.



(Staged with Professional Model)

A recent publication from the Dart Center, "Covering Children & Trauma: A Guide for Journalism Professionals," presents information for reporters and editors relevant to covering child victimization. While victim service providers may disagree with the basic premise of interviewing child victims, this publication offers insights into guidelines that journalists can follow when speaking to children who are victimized. It is helpful to understand the media's point of view on the subject. "Covering Children & Trauma" can be accessed at [www.dartcenter.org](http://www.dartcenter.org).

#### d. Homicide

The impact of a homicide on surviving family members and friends is immeasurable. Nothing can prepare them for the shock, trauma, and devastation of finding out that a loved one has been murdered.

One of the major concerns related to homicide cases is death notification. Law enforcement and victim advocacy professionals should be trained to provide sensitive notification that takes into consideration the feelings and possible reactions of the surviving family members. It is critical to ensure that surviving family members receive the death notification from the proper authorities, *not* from the news media.



Another concern is learning graphic, gory details of the murder through the media, rather than by sensitive, trained law enforcement officials or victim advocates.

Victim service providers can help homicide family survivors deal with media inquiries:

- Identify their wishes in regard to interviews and make their wishes known to the media.
- Arrange for a family member, support person, or victim service provider to stay with the family *as long as needed* to provide support and to screen and respond to media requests.
- Explain the value of media coverage in helping the public know about the impact of the crime, humanize the person who has



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been murdered and, in cases in which no suspect has been apprehended, to help facilitate an arrest in the case.

- Help surviving family members plan, such as preparing a clear, sensitive message that can be left on telephone answering machines or on an automatic response to e-mail inquiries.
- Review with surviving family members the type of information that the media will want to know and help them consider and formulate responses.
- Help surviving family members prepare for media interviews by documenting—
  - The *full context of the life of the victim*—details about who they were; their contributions to the family and to society as a whole; their professional accomplishments; things they enjoyed doing; and aspirations that were unfulfilled.
  - Photographs or film footage of the person who was murdered.
  - Contact information for families and close friends who wish to speak to the media (with surviving family members' consent).



(Staged with Professional Model)

In “tips and tools for covering murder”

([http://www.dartcenter.org/quick\\_tips/murder.php](http://www.dartcenter.org/quick_tips/murder.php)), the Dart Center offers six suggestions to journalists that victim service providers can also share with reporters who are covering homicides—

- Preoccupation with the accused and the grisly details of the crime can romanticize the crime and the killer and can make your coverage one-dimensional.
- Focus on the life of the victim and the effects of the murder on the victim's family and friends.
- During trial and sentencing, even though the courtroom events are the “news,” don't ignore the victim's family and friends.
- When crafting the lead of your story, consider putting the victim's name first.
- Sensitivity in your reporting and writing can help build trust between you and your sources. The victim's family and friends may be reluctant to speak with



(Photo Staged with Professional Model)

you in the weeks following the crime, but months later they may feel like sharing their stories with a reporter who treated them respectfully.

- Provide context for your readers. How common are murders in your town or neighborhood? Avoid letting stereotypes drive your writing and reporting.



In 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* launched a new blog—“The Homicide Report”—that documents every homicide in Los Angeles County. Its author, Jill Leovy, describes it as an attempt “to reverse an age-old paradox of big-city crime reporting, which dictates that only the most unusual and statistically marginal homicide cases receive press coverage, those cases at the very eye of the storm—those which best expose the true statistical dimensions of the problem of deadly violence—remain unhidden.”<sup>9</sup> The blog can be accessed at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/homicidereport/>.

### e. Drunk Driving

Drunk driving is a significant social problem that, as recently as 1980, was not even considered a crime in many states. Drinking and driving are no longer considered socially acceptable and underage drinking is no longer considered simply a “rite of passage,” due in large part to public awareness efforts sponsored by organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), often in partnership with the media. Drunk driving is a violent crime that injures and kills tens of thousands of people in America each year.



A longtime concern of drunk driving victims and survivors is the use of the term “accident” to describe drunk driving crimes. They believe that with all the public awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving, there is nothing “accidental” about a person’s decision to get behind the wheel of a vehicle while intoxicated. While references to “accidents” usually occur before a police investigation confirms the involvement of alcohol or other drugs, victim service providers can encourage the media to describe such incidents as “crimes” or “crashes.”

In 2003, MADD began its Media Awards Program to “recognize media professionals and organizations for outstanding coverage and advancement of issues related to MADD’s mission to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime, and prevent underage drinking.” Victim service providers can nominate individual journalists and news media from their communities for a MADD Media Award. Further information

and a nomination form are available at: <http://www.madd.org/Media-Center/Media-Center/Media-Awards/2008-Media-Awards.aspx> .

### **Resources about Specific Types of Victimization**

Statistics about different types of victimization, as well as the unique impact of different types of crime on victims, are available from the Office for Victims of Crime at [www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov). In addition, many national organizations included in the “Resources” section of this guide can provide information and referrals to experts.

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<sup>5</sup> Dean G. Kilpatrick, 2007, “Drug-facilitated, Incapacitated and Forcible Rape: A National Study,” Charleston, SC: Medical University of South Carolina, National Crime Victim Research and Treatment Center.

<sup>6</sup> Judy Benitez, 2002, “Ethical Considerations in Media Coverage of Rape and Sexual Assault,” Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault.

<sup>7</sup> Cathy Bullock, “Understanding Patterns of Domestic Violence,” DART Center for Journalism and Trauma, [http://www.dartcenter.org/articles/oped/2004\\_06-23.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/articles/oped/2004_06-23.html), accessed March 30, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly Starr, Revised 2006, *Covering Domestic Violence: A Guide for Journalists and Other Media Professionals*, Seattle, WA: Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

<sup>9</sup> Jesse Tarbert, “Covering homicide: A new approach.” Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, [http://www.dartcenter.org/need\\_to\\_know/2007/02/covering-homicide-new-approach.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/need_to_know/2007/02/covering-homicide-new-approach.html), accessed March 30, 2007.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

#### *How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 9. Cultural Consistency

#### Cultural Competence in Victim Advocacy and News Reporting

America is an increasingly diverse nation, with different cultures represented in victims, alleged and convicted perpetrators, and communities that are affected by crime. Today, the term “culture” can encompass race, ethnicity, country of origin, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and even geography (highly urban or rural/remote communities).

The news media share concerns about cultural competence in news reporting. The diversity of the United States is reflected in both news stories and news audiences, and the media seek a balance that addresses issues important to both.



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Cultural competence in media relations should be a priority for victim service providers:

- Learn all you can about different cultures and promote cultural competence training, both within your agency and collaboratively with the media, as it relates to news reporting.
- Increase your value as a reliable source by increasing the diversity of your spokespersons.
- Reflect the diversity of the victims you serve through your staff (and for nonprofit organizations, your board of directors). This is an intrinsic value that extends beyond media relations.
- Be sensitive to the cadre of victims maintained for media referrals. If white, middle class spokespersons comprise the core of your referrals, it's critical to diversify.
- Remember that a person's culture is only one part of who he or she is. It is impossible to accurately represent an entire culture in the media or otherwise.
- Disregard a victim's culture, race, or ethnicity unless it involves a hate crime perpetrated against a person or community of a specific culture. However, cultural diversity in a specific story can identify nuances or issues that affect

victims because of their culture, which can promote greater understanding of issues such as crime reporting, the impact of crime on diverse victims, and correcting false assumptions directly related to culture.

- Be aware that a victim's culture may affect his or her willingness to report a crime committed by a family member or someone known to them, and that the family may react in a manner that differs from the mainstream culture.
- 
- (Staged with Professional Models)
- Be cognizant of the needs of victims who are newly immigrated or illegal immigrants, who may not understand either justice processes or how the American media operate.
  - Develop important relationships with culturally diverse communities within your jurisdiction:
    - Establish and cultivate relationships with “gatekeepers” who are leaders of culturally diverse communities. You can work together to improve outreach and services to victims, and to collaborate on developing spokespersons who can offer expertise on crime and victimization (including victims and survivors).
    - Consider and document false assumptions or stereotypes that are often made based on culture, and develop a strategy to address these issues with the media and through public awareness initiatives.
    - Develop a database of culturally specific news stations and publications and, for every victim outreach or public awareness initiative, provide this information and spokespersons to these media.
    - Sponsor resources and booths at different ethnic events that enhance connections to culturally diverse communities.
- 
- (Staged with Professional Models)
- Be sensitive to the need for translation and interpreters, and the nuances for both. Considerations should—
    - Make information available in the languages that are represented within a community's diverse culture, and have spokespersons who speak different languages. Relationships with gatekeepers (see above) can help facilitate translation.

- Sponsor TTY and TDD telephone numbers for Deaf victims and, at public events, provide interpreters for the Deaf.
  - Seek translation of victim and public awareness information into Braille for blind or vision-impaired people.
  - Ensure that all public awareness events are accessible in accordance with *Americans with Disabilities Act* requirements.
- Avoid (and ask reporters to avoid) making assumptions about victims based solely on their culture.



The Poynter Institute continually updates its resources for journalists related to cultural competence and diversity, and is a good resource for victim service providers:  
<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=58&aid=137951> .

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

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#### *How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 10. Victim Privacy v. Media

#### The Victim's Right to Privacy Versus the Public's Right to Know



The history of constitutional law in the United States is the story of balancing one right against another, in this case the public's right to know versus the victim's right to privacy. On one side are members of the press who want unfettered access to public information and the ultimate authority to decide what to print. On the other side are crime victims, typically private citizens thrust into the media's glare, struggling to maintain privacy. A patchwork of federal and state laws and court decisions at various levels illuminate ways the pendulum has swung over the years.

The public's right to know derives from the constitutional right to a free press enshrined in the First Amendment. For many years, the U.S. Congress and the courts favored expanding reporters' rights. The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (FOIA) resulted in so-called "sunshine laws" in all 50 states, designed to enhance public access to government records and meetings. The Society for Professional Journalists provides information and advice to reporters on filing FOIA requests to gain access to public records. Court decisions have generally supported that anything open to the public can be reported by the news media.

However, access to information about crime and crime victims also depends on how local law enforcement agencies interpret their responsibility to share such information. Each of this country's roughly 17,500 local law enforcement agencies can make independent decisions about what should be shared and what should be kept secret as part of an ongoing investigation. As most criminal justice journalists will attest, there is almost always constant negotiation between local news organizations and the police about access to information about crimes and crime victims.

Despite the tensions, conflicts between reporters, law enforcement, and the courts are usually resolved informally, though some result in litigation. Various groups, including victim advocacy organizations, can promote legislation to codify or change current practices and those cases can end up tested in court.

In recent years, the pendulum appears to have swung in favor of greater protection of personal privacy. Passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, the impact of 9/11, and concerns

about the Internet's intrusion into our lives have created a climate in favor of reducing access to information that reporters have previously enjoyed.

An individual's right to privacy is not explicitly addressed in the Bill of Rights. However, since the late 19th century, a growing body of constitutional law finds a right to privacy in various aspects of the first, fourth, fifth, and ninth amendments. The four basic areas that the emerging body of privacy law covers include—



1. Appropriation of name or likenesses for trade purposes.
  2. Intrusion on an individual's solitude.
  3. Publication of private information about an individual.
- Publishing information that puts an individual in a false light.<sup>10</sup>

The first issue is more likely to come into play for crime victims when entertainment media, rather than news media, seek to portray what happened to them. While it can be argued that the story of what happened to a crime victim is in the public domain, media companies often offer to pay victims or their families when they want to do a “docudrama,” to preclude the possibility of litigation. The succeeding three areas have obvious implications for reporting on crime and crime victims:

- **a. Intrusion.** According to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, journalists can be found to intrude on a person's right to solitude when they gather information, regardless of whether the information is later published or not. Court cases involving trespass, hidden surveillance, and fraudulent entry generally support the idea that private citizens enjoy a zone of privacy, especially at home.<sup>11</sup> Reporters can stand outside a person's home as long as they stay on public sidewalks and roadways.



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It may be considered harassment, however, if reporters ring the doorbell or telephone too often. In *Gallela v. Onassis* in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that freelance photographer Ron Gallela could not pursue Jackie Kennedy Onassis into private places. He was also ordered to stay at least 25 feet away from her and at least 30 feet away from her children. Gallela had argued that Onassis was a public figure who therefore enjoyed fewer rights to privacy than a private citizen, but the U.S. Supreme Court viewed his actions as tantamount to harassment.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of technological intrusion, a number of states have laws that prevent people from recording telephone calls without the permission of the other party. The courts have also told reporters that they cannot use electronic eavesdropping devices to gather information.

In 1999, in *Wilson v. Layne*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that police agencies should not allow reporters on “ride-alongs” to follow police into private residences, which has implications for victims and witnesses.<sup>13</sup>

The general test for still and moving images is that photographers and videographers do not need permission in places people have no expectation of privacy, which means people on public thoroughfares are therefore “fair game.” It should be noted that schools are public places paid for by tax dollars, but courts allow them special privileges in denying access to reporters. News media, however, should obscure the faces or other identifiers of people used in stock photos or file footage that portrays them in an unflattering light.

Numerous state court cases have decided that photographers and videographers cannot use telephoto lenses to intrude visually into private spaces, even though they are not intruding themselves. People in their own homes enjoy an expectation of privacy, so shooting photos of them through a window constitutes a violation of their personal privacy, even if the photographer or videographer is standing on public property.



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Many states have laws that prevent a person (including reporters) from taping telephone conversations without the permission of all parties. Courts have also generally decided that reporters cannot use hidden cameras or tape recorders except in limited cases where investigative reporting serves a greater good. Ethically and legally, reporters should identify themselves as such when they approach crime victims. Again, there may be cases where investigative reporters can mislead people about their intentions, but even these instances have narrowed over the years.

- ***b. Cameras in the courtroom.*** Today, most states allow cameras in the courtroom (which technically incorporates televising, recording, and taking photographs). The exception is in federal courts and the U.S. Supreme Court where cameras are not allowed. Victims’ concerns for privacy can be taken into consideration even if cameras are allowed. Prosecutors and victim service providers can present any concerns to the court that protect a victim’s privacy (for example, in cases involving people in witness protection programs) and safety (if showing a victim/witness’s image will place them at risk for threats, intimidation, or harm).

Many state court organizations have developed operating rules that guide the use of cameras in the courtroom. While not binding, they address issues such as—



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When media coverage is allowed or prohibited.

- Court personnel responsible for coordinating media coverage and cameras in the courtroom.
- Accommodations for media personnel and equipment.

An example of guidelines for cameras in the courtroom, published by the Supreme Court of Missouri, can be accessed at <http://www.courts.mo.gov/page.asp?id=333>.

- **c. Private facts.** Information that is part of a public record is generally considered open to the press to report. A landmark 1975 U.S. Supreme Court case that still resonates today is *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*, where an Atlanta television station reported the name of a 17-year-old girl who was raped and murdered, violating a Georgia statute that made reporting the name of a rape victim illegal. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that the Georgia law violated the Constitution. Among the reasons the justices cited for the majority decision was that reporters should not be prevented from reporting information already in the public record.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar 1989 case (*Florida Star v. B.J.F.*), the U.S. Supreme Court reversed an appellate court that awarded a rape victim \$100,000 when a rookie reporter published her name, in violation of the news organization's policies. (The local sheriff's office had published the name in a news release, while asking reporters not to use it.) The U.S. Supreme Court decision stated that news media have the right to publish public information.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Florida court challenges involving whether the *Orlando-Sentinel* could gain access to autopsy photographs of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt denied news organizations the right to do so. As is often the case, legislators responded to the controversy by passing the *Earnhardt Family Protection Act*, to prevent news organizations from securing autopsy photos. A subsequent attempt by a student publication to secure the photos, arguing the law was being applied retroactively to the Earnhardt photos, failed when the Florida court decided that the press had no inherent right to them.<sup>16</sup>



In contrast, the courts have generally supported that news organizations can publish information they uncover about people that is not necessarily

germane to the crime. In 1984, a California appellate court decided in *Sipple v. Chronicle Publishing* that the *San Francisco Chronicle* had the right to publish that Oliver Sipple was a homosexual. Sipple argued that publishing this information was an intrusion on his privacy. A lower court found in his favor and awarded damages. The *Chronicle* reported his sexual orientation as part of its story about how he deflected the gun that Manson family member Sara Jane Moore wielded in her attempt to assassinate President Gerald R. Ford. The California appellate court determined that Sipple's sexual orientation was newsworthy because he participated in gay activism and because his heroism might dispel the idea that homosexuals are "timid, weak, or unheroic."<sup>17</sup>

- **d. False light.** Portraying a person in a false light is not necessarily actionable. The test is whether the news organization knew the information was false (and exercised its responsibility to determine the facts) and then recklessly or maliciously published the information anyhow.

A U.S. Supreme Court case that helped set the standard was *Time, Inc., v. Hill* in 1967. In a six-to-three decision, the High Court found that Time, Inc., could not be held liable even though the information published was untrue. The case stemmed from an incident in 1952, when three escaped convicts took James Hill, his wife, and their five children hostage, releasing all of them unharmed hours later. The following year, an author published a novel based on the case that was later made into a play. *Life* magazine (owned by Time, Inc.) later repeated information from the play about the family that was not true. Lower courts found in favor of the family, but the U.S. Supreme Court established the standard that, to be held liable, a news organization has to display malicious intent.



Most news organizations use sensitivity when dealing with crime victims, while serving the public by providing them the information they need about crime and victimization. It serves all parties when disputes can be handled without litigation. As we see with the laws regarding disclosing the names of victims of rape and sexual assault, a news organization may win the case in court but lose the case in the court of public opinion.

<sup>10</sup> Don R. Pember, 2002, *Mass Media Law, 2003/2004 Edition*, New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.

<sup>11</sup> Photographers' Guide to Privacy, "A primer on invasion of privacy," The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, <http://www.rcfp.org/photoguide/intro.html>, accessed March 30, 2007 and "9 Keys to Avoiding Invasion of Privacy Suits," <http://www.rcfp.org/photoguide/ninekeys.html>, accessed March 30, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Pember, pp. 259, 290

<sup>13</sup> Pember, p. 302

<sup>14</sup> Pember, pp. 205, 270–271–, 280.

<sup>15</sup> Pember, pp. 205, 291.

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<sup>16</sup> Roger C. Roy, and Amy C. Rippel, "Earnhardts win right to keep autopsy photos sealed," Orlando-Sentinel, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/sports/motorracing/sns-earnhardt-autopsyphotos.0,4354798.story>, accessed March 30, 2007 and "Fla. college paper appeals Earnhardt autopsy photo case to the Supreme Court, Student Press Law Center, <http://www.splc.org/newsflash.asp?id=677>, accessed March 30, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Pember, p. 179, 268.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

#### *How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 11. The Role of Victim Service Providers

#### The Role of Victim Service Providers

Victim service providers have two important roles when dealing with the media on behalf of crime victims as—

- **Facilitators** who often serve as a liaison between victims and the media and, for victims who choose to speak to the media, help them prepare for all media interactions and interviews.
- **Public awareness professionals** who, on behalf of their organizations and the victims they serve, promote victim outreach and public education through the news media and other venues.

These two roles are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Becoming a reliable, trusted source to the media involves both victim/media facilitation and strong media relations to promote victims' rights and services. Individual victims put a real face to crime and statistics. By publicly sharing their experiences as victims, they fulfill the media's need for relevant news and help people better understand the devastating impact of crime on victims and communities.

This section of the guide addresses the role of advocate as facilitator. Section 2 addresses "How to Build Positive Relations with the News Media."

#### a. Case Coordination

There are often many professionals associated with a criminal case, including law enforcement officials, prosecutors, court personnel, community and institutional corrections officials, attorneys general, and public information officers or victim/witness staff within each agency. Case coordination can help ensure that the integrity of a case is not negatively affected by dealings with the media.



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Case coordination can also build consensus regarding if and how justice professionals and victims deal with the media. The goal is *not* to prevent media coverage but rather to

facilitate it in a way that protects the integrity of the case and any privacy wishes of the victim while meeting the media's need for information.

Working closely with allied professionals involved in a case, victim service providers can—

- Determine in advance any allied professionals who are publicly representing their agencies in a specific case and develop a list with contact information (names, titles, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses).
- Determine the victim's clear wishes about dealing with the media and share their wishes with others involved in the case, as well as the media.
- Solicit input from each about if, when, and how media interviews can be conducted.
- Coordinate any release of specific information to the media related to the facts of the case or the crime victim/witness.
- Obtain consensus among key players to refrain from speaking about the case in public venues where such conversations can be overheard.
- Discuss any issues related to pretrial publicity (which can result in a change of venue) or pre-parole hearing publicity (which can affect the process and outcomes of such hearings).
- Coordinate any victim privacy protection guidelines with justice officials (such as prosecutors, court officials, or parole board members), especially in cases in which cameras are allowed in the courtroom or parole board hearing room.
- In cases involving justice system proceedings where victims do not want to speak to the media, determine in advance a private room in the courthouse or correctional agency for the victims and alternative routes for the victim to enter and exit without being confronted by the media.
- To the contrary, if case officials and victims will be speaking to the media, determine a location that addresses the victim's comfort needs, as well as the needs of the media (i.e., light, sound, and electrical outlets).
- Victim service providers can also ensure that victims are involved in efforts related to case coordination and that any relevant information is provided to them.



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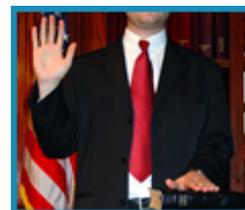
## b. The Victim's Choice

It is *always* the victim's choice whether or not to conduct an interview. There may be times when it is not advisable to give interviews, such as during a trial, or when it is against court rules to give interviews, such as when a judge issues a "gag order" during a trial.



It is also important to recognize that the trauma of victimization—especially in the hours, days, and weeks following a crime—may preclude a victim from conducting effective interviews. Since victims at this point may be unaware of the intricacies of the news media and may not understand the potential implications of agreeing to interviews, the role of the victim advocate is critical in helping victims examine their choices related to talking to the media, as well as the *consequences* of such choices. Advocates can help victims fully explore any concerns related to—

- ***The victim's personal safety.*** By publicly speaking out, there may be risks associated with the alleged or convicted defendant or his/her cohorts, based on past behaviors or current threats.
- ***Privacy and confidentiality.*** Once a victim is identified by name, it becomes part of the public record. This is an important choice that, once made, *cannot* be rescinded.
- ***Potential trauma and stress.*** Media interviews can be stressful to victims. Talking to journalists can ease the trauma by validating the victim's experiences or it can add to problems by asking the person to relive a traumatic experience. While careful preparation can ease some potential stress, victims should be aware of how the trauma of victimization can be either increased or decreased by speaking to the media.
- ***The impact on a criminal case.*** Anything a victim says in the media can be used in a criminal investigation, court, parole board hearings, or appeals process. This is why case coordination (see above) is essential to help victims understand any possible consequences of speaking publicly about an ongoing case (e.g., pretrial publicity can result in a change of venue).
- ***Providing "balance" to news coverage.*** Some victims feel compelled to speak to the media after reading, seeing, or hearing news stories that present the perspective of the alleged or convicted defendant. Giving "their side of the



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story” is often a key factor in a victim’s decision whether or not to speak to the media.

- ***Increasing awareness about the impact of crime.*** Any time victims speak publicly about their experiences, it helps humanize crime victims and survivors as real people who are hurt by crime. This can promote greater understanding of the impact of crime on victims and communities and increase empathy within the community.

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### 12. Victim Referrals to the Media

#### Identifying Victims Who Can Speak to the Media

Victim service providers and service providers are often asked to “find victims” for reporters. This is both an opportunity and a potential danger. On the one hand, you want the reporter to include victims who can help people understand the trauma that crime victims endure. You also want to ensure that the victim isn’t harmed, but even the requests can seem dehumanizing: “We need a rape victim.” “We want to talk with the family member of a homicide victim, preferably someone under 30.” “We need a stalking victim for a live newscast in three hours.”



(Staged with Professional Models).

Also of concern is that reporters often want “fresh” victims who haven’t told their stories before, and they often want them on short notice. However, some victims find that telling their stories is therapeutic. Identifying appropriate victims and preparing them for an interview may also be preferable to having reporters pursue victims who may not want to speak or who may not understand the risks and benefits. Recruiting appropriate victim spokespersons can be part of building a good relationship with the media.

The challenge is to find victims who can be articulate about their experiences without suffering undue damage. The Victims and the Media Program at Michigan State University’s School of Journalism adheres to guidelines to recruit victim volunteers to speak about their experiences in the classroom. The goal is to find victims who can handle an occasional insensitive question, recognizing that students can make mistakes. Among the issues:

- **Victims should self-identify as candidates to speak to the media.** Victims who volunteer to speak with the media are often the best candidates. They are the best judge of their readiness and there are fewer ethical concerns about their willingness.



- **Victims should understand the special challenges of speaking soon after the victimization.** While it is always the victim's ultimate choice, experience with the MSU Victims and the Media Program suggests that victims whose victimization occurred at least 2 years previous are often the best candidates for interviews. The incident remains fresh in their memories but the intervening time helps them better understand and assimilate what happened to them.
- **Victims should understand the benefits and drawbacks.** People who work with victims have an obligation to explain both sides. With proper preparation, many victims can benefit from speaking about what happened to them, but they also risk negative experiences. Victim advocates can try to discourage interviews when a victim or victim's family member is especially angry, simply to protect them from portraying them negatively and possibly hurting themselves.
- **Never pressure a victim to speak.** Reporters eager for stories can make advocates and victims feel as though the victim is obliged to speak. The advocate can play an important role in ensuring that the victim is truly comfortable about speaking out.
- **Match the victim to the assignment.** Some victims may be wonderful candidates for a print story but not for television, and vice versa. Advocates and service providers should work with the victim to explain the different dynamics of daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, television, and radio (see "Types of Media" in Section 2 of this guide).
- **Provide help prior to, during, and after the interview.** Victims will need support throughout the process. Provide preparation and guidance before the interview. It may also be appropriate to accompany the victim to the interview, as a source of support and an independent set of eyes and ears to assess whether the interview is going astray. It is also essential to provide opportunities for the victim to talk about his or her experience afterward.



## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION I:

#### Victim Media Advocacy:

#### *How to Facilitate Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Crime Victims*

### 13. Tips for Crime Victims and Survivors

#### Tips for Crime Victims and Survivors<sup>13</sup> *Guidelines for Media Interviews*

These guidelines can help victims who choose to speak to the media think about and plan for their interactions with the news media. A one-page “Quick Tip Sheet” that victim service providers can provide to victims is included in the *Resources* section of this guide.

#### 1. **PLAN INTERVIEWS: You should plan for media interviews.**

The most effective media interviews are those that are carefully considered in advance, with attention paid to the key points that victims want to make. Advocates can help victims think about and outline what they want to say in order of priority to ensure that their key messages are conveyed concisely and to the point. When possible, advocates can role play with victims so that they understand the process and gain experience in fielding questions.

#### 2. **DEMAND RESPECT: You should expect to be treated with respect by the news media.**

While media interviews can be stressful to victims, they should always be conducted in a manner that is courteous and respectful. Victims and advocates should discuss strategies about how to respond if they are not. It may make sense to have a prearranged signal that victims can use to alert the advocate to end the interview if certain boundaries are crossed.

#### 3. **SAYING NO: You do not have to speak to the media and can say “no” to requests for interviews, even if you have previously granted interviews.**

Victims should never feel required to speak about their victimization, and advocates can explain to journalists how important it is for victims to regain control over their lives in the aftermath of crime. Victims should never feel pressured to grant an interview. Journalists should also be told that there may be specific times—such as during a



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trial, or when they are feeling trauma or stress—when victims can't speak to the media. Advocates should advise victims that it is completely up to them to decide if and when they wish to speak to the media and they should not allow themselves to be pressed into an interview.

**4. CHOOSE WHEN AND WHERE: You can select the date, time, and location for a media interview.**

Victims can take charge of the process by granting interviews that fit within their schedules and their lives. However, advocates should explain that the media often work on tight deadlines, so it's a good idea to try and meet their scheduling needs to the degree possible.

**5. OPTING FOR A SPOKESPERSON: You can select a spokesperson or advocate of your choice to speak on your behalf to the media.**

Some victims choose to have a family member, friend, or victim service provider represent them with the media, either as their principal spokesperson or in cases where it is not possible to conduct an interview. Advocates can advise victims to choose somebody they trust and to establish clear guidelines for representation (such as key points they want to make and issues that they consider “off limits” for interviews).



**6. OPTING FOR A SUPPORT PERSON: You can ask to have a support person present with you during any interview.**

Advocates should advise victims and journalists that the more comfortable they are in an interview setting, the better the interview will be. Sometimes it's a good idea to have a family member, friend, or victim service provider with them to provide moral support and comfort.

**7. RELEASING WRITTEN STATEMENTS: You can release a written or oral statement through a spokesperson instead of an interview.**

The benefits of a written or oral statement are that the media get at least part of the information they are seeking, the victim's feelings and opinions are clearly conveyed, and there is no margin of error for inaccuracies.

**8. ONE AT A TIME: You can avoid a stressful atmosphere by speaking to only one reporter at a time.**

For some victims, a press conference can be overwhelming. Victim service providers can help victims schedule individual interviews at the time and location of their choosing.

**9. ESTABLISH GROUND RULES: You can establish “ground rules” or boundaries for all media interviews.**

Victim service providers can help victims consider “ground rules” that can facilitate a more effective interview and avoid discussing issues that are potentially traumatic. Examples include the victim’s desire for a support person to be present; topics that are “*off limits*,” any limitations on visual depictions of the victim’s face or visual image; and an agreement to take breaks during the interview or end it if needed.



**10. DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER: You can refrain from answering any question that makes you uncomfortable.**

Advocates should clearly advise victims that they do not need to answer a question just because it is asked. If a question appears to be insensitive or makes a victim uncomfortable, the victim (or his/her support person) can simply state that he or she is unwilling to answer or ask that the question be rephrased.

**11. ENDING INTERVIEW: You can end an interview at any time.**

Advocates should remind victims that participating in a media interview is their choice. If an interview becomes too stressful, it is the victim’s choice to end it.

**12. TAPE IT YOURSELF: You can audiotape or videotape all interviews to ensure the accuracy of what you say.**

Advocates can provide victims with taping equipment to document their interviews.

**13. ASK WHAT ITS ABOUT: You can ask in advance what the story will be about.**

If victims have an idea about the scope of the story, they can better prepare for an interview. Most reporters will give victims or their advocates a general idea of what the story is about. However, victims need to know that editors almost always have the last say about what the story will ultimately say.

**14. ASK FOR A SPECIFIC REPORTER: You can request a specific reporter.**

In the course of a criminal investigation and trial, victims may identify a reporter with whom they are comfortable and, to the contrary, reporters with whom they are uncomfortable. They may also ask the advocate's advice about which reporter to talk to. Choosing a specific reporter is another element that can help victims regain control following a crime.

**15. REFUSING SPECIFIC REPORTERS: You can refuse an interview with a specific reporter, even if you have granted interviews to other reporters.**

Victims should refuse an interview with a reporter who has been insensitive or has covered their case inaccurately.

**16. EXCLUDE CHILDREN: You can and should exclude young children from interviews.**

Young children are particularly vulnerable to the traumatic effects of a crime. They rely on adults for support and decisionmaking, and to protect them from further harm. Advocates can advise the parents and guardians of children to avoid exposing them to the public eye, especially in times of crisis. Parents and guardians can speak on behalf of their children while still protecting their identity. (See "Child Victims.")



**17. DEMAND CORRECTIONS: You can demand a correction when inaccurate information is reported.**

If victims feel that information is not accurate or that they were misquoted or taken out of context, it's important to raise these concerns with reporters and their editors. Mistakes are usually unintentional and can be corrected.

**18. REFUSING PHOTOS: You can conduct a television interview using a silhouette or a newspaper interview without having your photograph taken.**

Advocates can advise victims that their right to privacy should not preclude them from granting interviews, since modern technology can protect their privacy without preventing them from speaking to the media.



**19. TELLING YOUR SIDE: You can completely give your side of the story related to your victimization.**

Advocates can advise victims about the many sources that are available to reporters who are covering their cases and let them know that *their* insights and perspective are important.

## 20. FILING A COMPLAINT: You can file a formal complaint against a journalist.

You may first want to talk with the reporter about your complaint. If you do not get satisfaction, you can send a formal complaint to their editors or news directors, as well as publishers and owners.

### a. HELPING VICTIMS PREPARE:

#### Helping Victims Prepare for Media Interviews: The Role of the Victim Service Provider<sup>14</sup>

##### i. Preparation

The most important part of preparation is establishing the victim's goals for the interview. What does the victim want to say? Are there specific messages he or she wants to convey? Is there information already in the public that he or she wants to correct or comment on? Remember that it is difficult to convey more than a few distinct messages, so advocates can help victims hone their presentations.

Additional preparation involves sharing knowledge, answering questions, rehearsing, and preparing for logistics:

- **Educate victims about the media.** Begin by asking victims what they know and would like to know about the media. By establishing a baseline, advocates can provide the most important information and avoid being condescending to victims who already have experience with media relations.
- **Explain how the media operate.** While a victim will deal directly with a reporter, there are also editors, managing editors, photographers, and headline writers who contribute to print stories, and editors, news directors, and camerapersons who contribute to broadcast stories (see Section 2, "Types of News Media").
- **Explain what you know about the person conducting the interview.** Give the victim the journalist's name, media affiliation, type of publication or radio/television station, its audience, and any details known about the style of interviewing. Offer any insights about the interviewer based on your past personal experiences. You can use Internet search engines to find past stories done by the journalists, both print and broadcast, to share with the victim.

- **Ask if the victim wants someone there with them.** Discuss whether a support person (family member or friend) or victim service provider should accompany the victim to the interview and what role the support person should play. Make sure to negotiate this with the reporter on the victim's behalf and facilitate this process with both the victim and the reporter.
 

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- **Confirm the logistics of the interview in advance.** You will want to know the date, time, location (including directions), length of the interview, and name of the reporter. Plan to arrive at least 30 minutes in advance of the interview. For a telephone interview, in addition to being ready in advance, make sure you have the reporter's telephone number in case of technical difficulties.
- **Determine the format of the interview.** Is it live or taped? In-person or over the telephone? What is the anticipated length of the interview? For broadcast media, are there other guests or will the victim be the only interviewee?
- **Determine the topic.** Find out what the reporter wants to talk about and provide the victim with a framework for the interview (while advising that other topics may be introduced).
- **Attempt to identify others who have been contacted.** If possible, determine in advance who else the journalist has spoken to. It's important for victims to know in advance, for example, that the alleged or convicted defendant or his/her counsel has been interviewed for a story.
- **Explain pre-interviews and working with producers.** Broadcast media often require a pre-interview or an informal discussion with a producer before the on-camera or on-air interview. Advocates should explain this process. It's an opportunity to discuss and confirm basic facts and details, obtain correct spelling of names, establish ground rules, and answer any questions the victim may have. When conducted close to the time of the interview, it can also be an opportunity to warm up and get comfortable prior to the actual interview. Note, however, that questions may be asked during the interview that were *not* asked during the pre-interview.
- **Provide information and context to the reporter.** Consider additional information that may be helpful to reporters (such as crime statistics or local crime trends, information about victims' rights or services, etc.) and offer it to them.
- **Negotiate ground rules, if any.** Ask if the victim would like to establish any "ground rules" for interviews. This could include whether the victim can ask

questions of the journalist to clarify any issues or concerns. You might want to specify the length of the interview, the presence and role of a support person, topics that are “off limits,” and the victim’s ability to end the interview at any time. Explain that journalists may also have ground rules that they want honored. Reporters have conventions such as “off the record” and “only on background” that dictate what they can and cannot use in their stories. However, this is an area where confusion and errors can mean that unintended comments are included. Crime victims should operate under the assumption that *anything they say can be included*.

- **Determine if victims have any privacy concerns.** Is the victim willing to be interviewed without being identified by name or being photographed or filmed? How will the person speaking on behalf of a child victim be identified so that the child is not directly or indirectly identified? Convey these concerns to the interviewer.
- **Discuss taping the interview on the victim’s behalf.** Advise the victim that he or she can audiotape or videotape any interviews to provide his or her own documentation and avoid any inaccuracies in what is said.
- **Brainstorm possible issues and questions to be covered.** Anticipate questions that may be asked and review these with the victim.
- **Rehearse in advance of the interview.** Use the questions identified above to discuss possible answers. Advocates can role play the role of the reporter so that the victim can gain mastery of the process. Practice and constructive feedback can help victims feel more confident and concise in their responses.
- **Carefully review “Tips for Media Interviews” with victims to help them prepare.**



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If the victim is a survivor of a homicide victim, there are additional issues to address:

- **Portrayal of the loved one.** How do the survivors want their loved one remembered? It’s important to depict exactly *who the homicide victim was* in order to convey the devastating sense of loss to the survivors. Professional accomplishments, the victim’s favorite hobbies and leisure activities, civic and charitable contributions, and personal anecdotes and information about immediate survivors are all issues that reporters may want to cover.

- **Providing visuals.** Do the survivors have favorite photographic options (for print media) (e.g., a simple photograph of the homicide victim alone, along with visuals that show the person with other family members, engaged in favorite activities, at work, etc.?)



- **Access to others.** The media may want to speak to other family members, professional colleagues, and friends who knew and loved the homicide victim. Advocates can work with the victim to identify and provide contact information for such persons to the media.
- **Issues with young people.** For younger homicide victims, information about the child's personality and favorite activities, subjects in school, and hobbies are all important to convey. Advocates can help survivors identify a favorite teacher or coach who can also talk about the child.

In addition, victim service providers should determine the victim's wishes about media coverage at the funeral, wake, or memorial events and convey these wishes to the media.

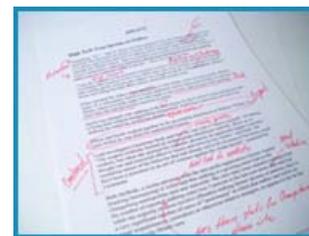
### Explaining Editing to Victims

It's important for victims to understand that the reporter to whom they speak is only *one person* among several who are responsible for editing an article or news broadcast. It is an ongoing process that begins when a story is assigned and ends only when it is published or broadcast. Editing can be done by a reporter, editor, copy editor, or news director.

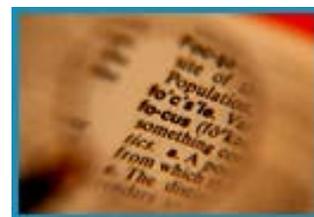
Editing helps make sure that a story is accurate, clear, understandable, and objective, and that space and time constraints do not affect the quality or factual information in a story. Editing focuses on accuracy, style, spelling and grammar, and length of the article or broadcast, as well as lack of bias.

When victims understand the editing process, they can also understand how important it is to—

- **Be concise.** Longer statements are more likely to be edited than those that are brief and to the point.
- **Be accurate**



- **Focus on facts.** It is important to separate facts from personal opinions or perspectives. When citing facts, cite solid sources. When citing opinions, be clear that it is a personal perspective.
- **Speak plainly.** Avoid terminology or jargon that is confusing to media audiences.



## b. Tips for Media Interviews

Victim service providers can offer basic tips to victims to help them prepare for media interviews. The following suggestions can be augmented with tips based on their past personal experiences and knowledge of the specific news medium or reporter involved:

- **Relax and be yourself.** Your level of personal comfort will improve your interview experience.
- **Be sincere and honest.** Your personal credibility is your most important asset!
- **Know what you want to say.** Be prepared with two or three key points you want to make and find a way to make them early in the interview. For example: “The one thing I really want to say is. . .,” or “My most important message is. . .” Return to those messages and repeat them in different forms whenever you can.
- **Speak slowly and clearly.** Think about the question, then think about your answer.
- **Keep your answers brief and succinct.** You can follow a brief answer with more details, but make sure the most important information is conveyed first, simply and to the point. Consider preparing pithy quotes in advance.
- **Once you make your point, stop talking.** Don’t worry about silence. It is not your job to fill it. Talking beyond your stopping point makes it harder to edit your quotes. It is also when many people say things they wish they hadn’t.
- **Send your messages.** You can reinforce your key points by repeating them.
- **Listen to the entire question before answering it.** Take the time needed to formulate your response. In broadcast interviews, overlapping your answer with the interviewer’s question can make it difficult for editors.

- **Make sure you know what is being asked.** If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- **Refuse politely.** If an interviewer's question makes you feel uncomfortable, simply say, "I'm not comfortable answering that question."
- **Don't overextend.** If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say so. If you feel you can't respond, give a brief reason, such as, "I'll be able to answer that once the jury reaches its verdict."
- **Never say, "No comment."** You can say, "I'm unable to answer that question at this time" or "I don't have enough information to fully address your question."
- **Avoid going "off the record."** Simply assume that *everything* you say is "on the record" and speak accordingly.
- **Don't interrupt the interviewer or other guests.** Likewise, if you feel you are being interrupted, you can say, "If it's okay, I'd like to finish what I was saying."
- **Speak plainly.** Avoid any jargon or acronyms that may be confusing to readers, listeners, or viewers.
- **Avoid distractions.** Do not use hand gestures that may block your face or expressions that detract from the content of the interview. Don't wear jangly or shiny jewelry to broadcast interviews or anything else that might make noise that microphones might pick up. Avoid tapping your fingers or your feet.
- **Correct errors or misperceptions.** If inaccurate information is presented in the course of an interview, present the facts to correct it in a positive manner.
- **Avoid fatigue.** If you need to take a break (except during live interviews), ask for one.
- **Don't feel guilty about being human.** Always remember that what happened to you was bad and is possibly distressing to you. It's okay to show emotions during an interview.
- **Emphasize your story.** Remember that you are speaking for *yourself*. It's important to avoid making generalizations that appear to represent *all* victims.



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A one-page summary of the above, "Quick Tips for Crime Victims and Survivors: Conducting Media Interviews," is included in the *Resources* section of this guide.

### c. During the Interview: Supporting Victims During the Interview

The victim's comfort level—both physical and emotional—will directly affect the actual interview. A victim who is well prepared will feel a greater sense of confidence and control.

By acknowledging that interviews may be stressful, victim service providers can help victims prepare. Explain stress-reduction techniques—such as deep breathing, physical stretching, or visual imagery—that victims can use to relax immediately prior to interviews.

The advocate can help plan for a comfortable physical environment. If the interview is conducted at the home or office of the victim, the victim can choose the place where he or she feels most comfortable talking. The advocate can arrange the physical space to avoid clutter, have a box of tissues on hand, ensure there is appropriate light and space, and provide for electrical outlets or extension cords for the media. The goal is to facilitate an interview setting that is quiet (no external noise, cell phones and pagers turned off, etc.). A glass of water should be provided for both the victim and the interviewer.



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If the interview is conducted in a studio or other environment, the advocate can work with media professionals to address physical comfort needs (see above). Advocates should address, review, and discuss key interview logistics with victims such as—

- The person who is conducting the interview and how he/she would like to be addressed.
- Different personnel responsible for production, light, sound, and makeup.
- Provision of lavalier microphones and conducting sound checks (advocates should explain to journalists that victims may not want to be touched in the process of receiving a microphone).
- Guidelines for speaking directly to the interviewer or camera(s).
- If and how visuals will be used.
- If and how other guests will be involved.

If the interview is conducted from a remote location, the advocate can—

- Determine and advise the victim about the length of the interview.

- Arrange for the victim and interviewer to speak in advance, in person or by telephone, to enhance their familiarity and comfort with each other.
- Explain equipment and logistics related to remote interviews—such as cameras, microphones, earpieces, and sound checks—and ensure that the victim is comfortable with the equipment and process.
- Work with producers to determine where the victim should look during the interview and how to identify where to look when multiple cameras are used.

#### d. FOLLOW UP: Following Up After The Interview

Following an interview, victims may seek feedback from advocates about their interview style and the information they conveyed. Advocates should first discuss *how the victim felt about the interview*. It is important to be frank about any times when the victim felt particularly positive or perhaps stressed. Constructive feedback can help victims improve their interview techniques and gain confidence for the future.



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Victim service providers should determine, to the degree possible, when a story will be published or aired and inform the victim. If a victim wants to document interactions with the media, the advocate can help him or her prepare a scrapbook or obtain audiotapes and videotapes of interviews.



All media contacts can be added to a centralized media database for future reference.

Any interactions with the media provide victims and advocates with an important opportunity to build strong, ongoing relationships. If a story is fair and accurate, a brief thank you note or e-mail to the reporter—or his/her editor or news director—recognizes the reporter's good work. If

victims or advocates are pleased with the results of a print interview, they can also write a letter-to-the-editor for publication that expresses their feelings.

If a victim feels that an article or news broadcast contains information that is inaccurate or taken out of context, the advocate can help develop a plan-of-action to express such concerns:

- Create specific documentation of erroneous information.
- Advise the victim to document any concerns in writing.

- Speak first directly to the reporter and, if needed, to editors or news directors about the victim's concerns.
- Seek a correction either in print or on air.

### **Quick Tips for Crime Victims and Survivors** ***Guidelines for Media Interviews***

- You should plan for media interviews.
- You should expect to be treated with respect by the news media.
- You do not have to speak to the media and can say “no” to requests for interviews, even if you have previously granted interviews.
- You can select the date, time, and location for a media interview.
- You can select a spokesperson or advocate of your choice to speak on your behalf to the media.
- You can ask to have a support person present with you during any interview.
- You can release a written or oral statement through a spokesperson instead of an interview.
- You can avoid a stressful atmosphere by speaking to only one reporter at a time.
- You can establish “ground rules” or boundaries for all media interviews.
- You can refrain from answering any question that makes you uncomfortable.
- You can end an interview at any time.
- You can audiotape or videotape all interviews to ensure the accuracy of what you say.
- You can ask in advance what the story will be about.
- You can request a specific reporter.
- You can refuse an interview with a specific reporter, even if you have granted interviews to other reporters.

- You can and should exclude young children from interviews.
- You can demand a correction when inaccurate information is reported.
- You can conduct a television interview using a silhouette or a newspaper interview without having your photograph taken.
- You can completely give your side of the story related to your victimization.
- You can file a formal complaint against a journalist.

### Quick Tips for Victims and Survivors: Conducting Media Interviews

- **Relax and be yourself.** Your level of personal comfort will improve your interview experience.
- **Be sincere and honest.** Your personal credibility is your most important asset!
- **Know what you want to say.** Be prepared with two or three key points *you* want to make and find a way to make them early in the interview. For example: “The one thing I really want to say is. . .,” or “My most important message is. . .” Return to those messages and repeat them in different forms whenever you can.
- **Speak slowly and clearly.** Think about the question, then think about your answer.
- **Keep your answers brief and succinct.** You can follow a brief answer with more details, but make sure the most important information is conveyed simply and to the point. Consider preparing pithy quotes in advance.
- **Once you make your point, stop talking.** Don’t worry about silence. It is not your job to fill it. Talking beyond your stopping point makes it harder to edit your quotes. It is also when many people say things they wish they hadn’t.

- **Send your messages.** You can reinforce your key points by repeating them.
- **Listen to the entire question before answering it.** Take the time needed to formulate your response. In broadcast interviews, overlapping your answer with the interviewer's question can make it difficult for editors.
- **Make sure you know what is being asked.** If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- **Refuse politely.** If an interviewer's question makes you feel uncomfortable, simply say, "I'm not comfortable answering that question."
- **Don't overextend.** If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say so. If you feel you can't respond, give a brief reason, such as, "I'll be able to answer that once the jury reaches its verdict."
- **Never say, "No comment."** You can say, "I'm unable to answer that question at this time" or "I don't have enough information to fully address your question."
- **Avoid going "off the record."** Simply assume that *everything* you say is "on the record" and speak accordingly.
- **Don't interrupt the interviewer or other guests.** Likewise, if you feel you are being interrupted, you can say, "If it's okay, I'd like to finish what I was saying."
- **Speak plainly.** Avoid any jargon or acronyms that may be confusing to readers, listeners, or viewers.
- **Avoid distractions.** Do not use hand gestures that may block your face or expressions that detract from the content of the interview. Don't wear jangly or shiny jewelry to broadcast interviews. Avoid tapping your fingers or your feet.
- **Correct errors or misperceptions.** If inaccurate information is presented in the course of an interview, present the facts to correct it in a positive manner.
- **Avoid fatigue.** If you need to take a break (except during live interviews), ask for one.
- **Don't feel guilty about being human.** Always remember that what happened to you was very bad and is possibly distressing to you. It's okay to show emotions during an interview!
- **Emphasize your story.** Remember that you are speaking for *yourself*. It's important to avoid making generalizations that appear to represent *all* victims.

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Seymour and Linda Lowrance, 1990, *Crime Victims and the Media*, Washington, DC: National Center for Victims of Crime (formerly known as National Victim Center), (*adapted in part*).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION II:

#### Building Media Relations

*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

### 14. Types of News Media

The term “news media” spans a variety of entities that cover international, national, state and local news, and feature stories. By understanding the different types of media and the roles of their respective personnel, victim advocates can develop an effective media strategy and know how to contact the right person.

The news media generally fall into three general categories:

1. Print media.
2. Broadcast media.
3. Web-based media.

Most print and broadcast media today have Web sites that augment their regular news and programming, and often feature a section devoted to the “community”—which is a good source to promote information about victims’ rights and services.

In addition, there are media and outreach venues that are specific to crime, victimization, justice, and public safety issues. These are sponsored by national and local organizations in both electronic-, Web-, and paper-based formats.

#### a. Print Media

##### i. Daily Newspapers

In 2003, there were 787 daily newspapers and 680 evening newspapers in the United States.<sup>20</sup> In large urban jurisdictions, many daily newspapers also publish a condensed daily version of their print publication that tends to focus more on local news and is free to the public.



Newspapers offer a variety of opportunities for victim assistance organizations to make or contribute to the news, publicize their activities, and seek community support:

- News stories often include experts, commentary, or background resources about timely issues that occur at the national, state, and local levels. Newspapers try to provide local angles to national news events, and always need local experts whom they can rely upon for information and referrals to other sources.

- Feature stories focus on the human element of life—people and programs that make a positive difference in a community; overcome adversity and succeed against significant odds; or make exemplary contributions to improving a community.



- Editorial pages feature letters-to-the-editor from readers that respond to past articles or comment on current issues within a community, and often publish editorial columns written by their readers.
- Community calendars—often a regular column published once a week—offer readers concise information about special events and activities.
- Some newspapers have a regular column devoted to volunteer opportunities where local agencies' volunteer needs can be matched to readers' interests.

Key newspaper personnel who are responsible for news, editorials, and community relations include—

- **News editors.** The number and types of newspaper editors will vary depending on its size:
  - An executive editor (also called “editor in chief”) is the person responsible for overseeing the news division and newsroom.
  - If the news and editorial divisions are separate within a newspaper, there may also be an editorial page editor who is responsible for editorials, opinion columns, and letters-to-the-editor.
  - A managing editor oversees the day-to-day activities of the news division.
  - Other editors—such as national, state, features, and photo editors—are specialized in their departments and oversight, and report to the managing editor.
  - The city editor (also called “metro editor”) oversees local news.
  - The copy editor runs the copy desk, which is responsible for checking spelling and grammar, and identifying anything that might be missing in a story. Upon completion, the copy desk will return an article to other editors to finalize.
- **Reporters** (also called “staff writers”) are the journalists who actually research, conduct interviews, and write stories. Some reporters are assigned to specialized “beats” (such as a “crime beat” or “court beat”). Others are general assignment reporters who cover a wide range of issues. Larger newspapers are more likely to have specialized beat reporters.



(Staged with Professional Model)

- **Headline writers** (primarily in larger newspapers) are responsible for creating headlines for all stories.

## ii. Weekly Newspapers

In 2003, there were 6,704 weekly newspapers in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Weekly newspapers (also called “weeklies”) generally cover smaller geographical areas than daily newspapers, or are published as “alternatives” to daily publications. Weeklies tend to focus more on local issues and events that are relevant to the geographic communities they serve. Like daily newspapers, weeklies include news, editorials, and feature stories, and often offer community calendars with brief information about local events and activities. The opportunities for victim and public awareness described above in “Daily Newspapers” also apply to weeklies, and it’s sometimes easier to get published in weekly newspapers because of their community focus.

## iii. Monthly Newspapers

This type of publication can be found primarily in large urban areas. Monthly newspapers are usually free, and often serve a specific geographical area with news, features, and editorials that are targeted to that community. They are a great source for publicizing activities or events within a specific community, as their readers live within and often take personal interest in the neighborhood in which they are published.

## iv. Magazines

There are literally hundreds of magazines published in the United States that address news and general and special interest topics. Magazines are published nationally, regionally, and even locally.



## b. Broadcast Media

### i. Television



There are 1,686 broadcast television stations and 308 cable television stations in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Similar to newspapers, television offers a wide range of public and victim awareness opportunities:

- Television news can be international, national, and/or local in scope. Local experts are often sought to make news or feature stories more relevant to a community.

- Human interest stories inform viewers of inspiring people and activities within the community.
- Some television news programs have editorial segments in which community leaders or spokespersons comment on the news of the day or issues that are of interest to the station's viewers.
- Many television stations include “community calendars” in their newscasts and on their Web sites that provide information about community activities.

All television stations are required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to include public service announcements in their advertising.

Key television station personnel who are responsible for news and community relations include—



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- The **general manager** (also called “station manager”) is responsible for overseeing all station operations.
- The **assignment editor** identifies the most important issues and news that a station will cover. He or she will set priorities, assign reporters to cover stories, and manage logistics such as live coverage or satellite feeds.
- The **community relations director** (also called “public affairs director”) identifies the needs of a community and tries to address them through programming and public service partnerships.
- The **news director** oversees a station's news department and makes key decisions regarding the content of a newscast, staff assignments, and technical aspects related to a news broadcast.
- **News reporters** investigate, write, and report the news, coordinating closely with news directors and anchors.
- **News anchors** are the on-air talent who report the news. Many news anchors are also seasoned journalists with experience in reporting and producing news segments.



Local cable television stations are great venues for promoting crime victim-related issues. Some stations sponsor programs devoted to local issues and seek experts within a community for their news and feature programs.

## ii. Radio

There are 13,261 radio stations in the United States, including 4,811 commercial AM stations, 6,147 commercial FM stations, and 2,303 educational stations.<sup>23</sup> The format of radio stations varies: their primary focus can be news, talk, music, or a combination. Some stations' formats address targeted audiences (such as farm reports in rural communities or listeners in urban communities).



Outreach through radio stations is similar to that described above for newspapers and television stations. In addition—

- Radio public service announcements are a good venue for victim assistance organizations to promote their programs and activities.
- Talk radio stations and programs offer an open, “call-in” environment to address key public issues related to crime and victimization. Talk radio has been experiencing significant growth; radio listeners reported just under one and one-half hours (86 minutes) of radio news/talk listening on the average weekday.<sup>24</sup> A talk radio format allows:
  - Victim advocates to send press releases or suggestions for on-air discussions, or to pitch themselves as expert guests.
  - Opportunities to introduce and/or respond to on-air topics related to crime and victimization.
  - Lively, interactive discussions about crime- and victim-related topics that can include experts and callers.
  - Crime victims and survivors to present their unique perspectives about crime and its impact.

Key radio station personnel who are responsible for news and community relations include—

- The **general manager** is responsible for the overall operation of a radio station.
- The **news director** oversees the news operations of a station, and identifies issues of interest to listeners and assigns stories to reporters.
- **Reporters** investigate, write, and report on-air about local news and feature stories.



(Staged with Professional Model)

- **Radio announcers** are “the voice of the radio station” who introduce programming, news, music, and often read public service announcements.
- The **promotion director** shapes a station’s overall image, activities and programming, and coordinates tie-ins to special community events, as well as local organizations.

### iii. Wire Services

Wire services are news organizations that supply news reports, features, and human interest stories to both print and broadcast news media. The major wire services host Web sites with contact information for submitting press releases or ideas for stories, and some have local bureaus in major cities that focus more on state and local news.

### iv. Web-based Media

All television and radio stations host Web sites that support their mission and programming. Most daily newspapers also publish versions of their publication on the Web. In both cases, Web sites not only document the original news and programming, but also augment it through opportunities for readers, viewers, and listeners to interact with the experts and/or people who are featured.



Increasingly, there are media whose *only* outlet is Web-based. They may address news, politics, and public policy and/or targeted issues.

The use of Web-based blogs is also increasing. A blog (abbreviation for “Weblog”) is a journal or diary that is posted online for viewing by the public. A blog contains an ongoing series of entries that are written from the most recent to the oldest. Blogs are opinion-oriented and provide authors with the opportunity to comment on themselves and their own experiences, current social or political issues, and/or respond to current events in the news.



Blogs are often attached to Web sites and specific issues, but can be independent online journals created by anybody for any purpose. Generally, there is no cost associated with sponsoring a blog and there are many web sites (such as [www.bloggers.com](http://www.bloggers.com)) that host blogs for free.

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<sup>20</sup> 2004 Facts About Newspapers: A Statistical Summary of the Newspaper Industry, “Number of U.S. Daily Newspapers,” Newspaper Association of America, <http://www.naa.org/info/facts04/dailynewspapers.html>, accessed March 30, 2007.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Federal Trade Commission. (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Trade Commission.

<sup>24</sup> Talker's Magazine Online. "The Talk Radio Research Project; American Radio News Audience Survey," Talker's Magazine Online, [www.talkers.com/talkaud.html](http://www.talkers.com/talkaud.html), accessed March 30, 2007.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION II:

#### Building Media Relations

*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

### 15. Organization Communication

#### Specialized Media and Outreach Venues

There are hundreds of national organizations that represent victims' rights and issues, as well as criminal/juvenile justice and allied professionals for whom crime victims' concerns are a part of their overall missions. Most of them sponsor broadcast programming, paper-based publications, web sites, and listservs. In addition, many journals regularly publish scholarly papers and articles related to crime and victimization.

Many of these outreach venues accept external submissions for publication and provide current news to their constituents. They often reach targeted audiences to whom a specific victim-related message can be directed, and can be an important component of general media outreach activities.

- **a. Organization newsletters and magazines** are published in both paper and electronic formats. They feature news and feature stories, calendars of events, book reviews, and regular columns with information and resources available (usually at no cost) to their members.
- **b. Web sites** are today the most popular organizational venue for member and public information and outreach. They provide general information about an organization's mission and goals; programs and services; current activities and events; major public policy initiatives; and often calendars of events. Many Web sites have extensive libraries that are great resources for victim advocates, and "bulletin boards" that allow visitors to post, share, and receive information about timely issues. Some sponsor "Web forums" that are basically "electronic classrooms" to facilitate online teaching, training, and information exchange. Most Web sites also include electronic hyperlinks to other organizations that share their interests, and can be contacted to create a link to victim assistance organizations.
- **c. Listservs and e-groups** provide information to targeted audiences on a regularly-scheduled basis via the Internet. Some are a benefit of a paid



membership, while others are free to anybody. Most managers of listservs seek timely information that is relevant to their members, and are a great source for information sharing.

The “Resources” section of this guide features Web addresses for key national victim assistance, justice-related, and journalism organizations. Many include listings of their key publications and outreach tools, and can be directly contacted for more specific information.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION II:

#### Building Media Relations

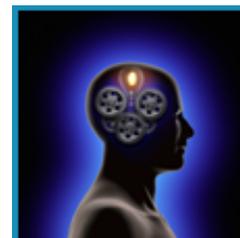
*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

### 16. How to Build Strong Media Relations in Your Community

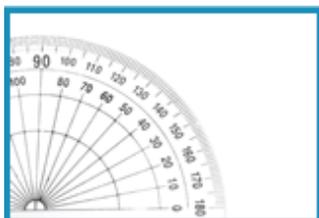
#### a. Outreach to Police Reporters and Court Reporters

Victim service providers who work for nonprofit organizations often want publicity and positive media attention for their efforts. A difficult part of that relationship is fielding victims who can speak to reporters about what happened to them, since the risks can outweigh the benefits for some victims. Another thing that advocates and service providers can do is provide leads on good stories and “package” what they do in ways that appeal to reporters. When you want media attention for your activities and events—

- **Think like a reporter.** Reporters tell stories. Some of those stories address issues but in the context of talking about how those issues affect the lives of real people. Cast your outreach in terms of human stories.
- **Turn what you do into a report.** How many victims did you work with this year compared to last year? What new issues or trends have emerged? How is the community doing overall in responding to various kinds of victimization? Issuing an annual report or a “community scorecard” can take what your organization is already doing and turn it into “news” (see “Turning Data into News”).



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- **Find a fresh angle for annual events.** Many organizations have one or two big events a year that raise awareness and sometimes also raise funds. The challenge is to make the event newsworthy each year. Find a spokesperson with a fresh story to tell. Use the data you gather to explain why this year is different. Remember to stress the *new* elements when talking with reporters and editors.

#### b. Getting to Know Reporters

##### Create and Sustain Relationships: Getting to Know News Directors, Editors, and Reporters

There are many professionals who constitute “the news media” and represent print, broadcast, and Web-based media (see “Types of News Media”). Strong media relations

are reciprocal in nature: While the news media help meet the needs of victim assistance organizations related to victim outreach and public awareness, it is essential to examine what your organization can offer to the media. Effective media relations are both proactive (seeking opportunities for media coverage) and reactive (responding to current news) in nature.

Truth and trust go hand-in-hand in good media relations. When the media begin to view your organization as a reliable source, their trust in you will cement a good foundation for an ongoing relationship.



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Good media relations don't happen by accident—they require proactive planning and action. This means identifying key journalists in your community, and reaching out to them with reliable information and resources they can use.

Personal contacts are essential. Victim advocates can introduce themselves to the media—in person or by telephone or written contacts—as a good local source for information and referrals. You can also enhance media relations by responding to past media coverage: a letter to a reporter or his or her supervisor or, even better, a letter-to-the-editor that compliments a good story or sensitive coverage of a victim's case helps create positive media relations.

It is important to establish your organization as a reliable source with timely information about crime and victimization:

- By staying on top of national, state, and local trends and issues related to crime and victimization, you can alert the media to important news and provide local angles that depict its effect on your community.
- An organization's general victim and public information is critical to success. Your Web site, brochures, newsletters, electronic listservs, and other outreach venues should clearly establish your mission, values, goals, programs, and services that depict your purpose to the media, and are updated to reflect trends in your organization or the field of victim services.
- The media are always looking for reliable experts and spokespersons. You can develop and continually update a diverse roster of potential interviewees, including crime victims and survivors.



- “Around-the-clock” availability can set your organization apart. Be available to the media at all times and develop a plan that ensures your availability 24-hours-a-day for breaking news, including contacts via work and cell phones and e-mail addresses.
- Cultural competence is essential. Your access to information about and referrals to spokespersons who represent diverse perspectives can establish you as a valuable source for journalists.



In addition, “National, State, and Local Trends and Data Related to Crime, Victimization and Victim Assistance” in Section 1 of this guide offers suggestions about the most important information that victim advocates can provide to the news media.

### **c. Seeking Pro Bono Support for Public Awareness Activities: Seeking Pro Bono Support for Public Awareness Activities**

The range of media relations experience among victim advocates varies significantly. It’s helpful to consider sources within the community that can provide pro bono (i.e., free) support for an organization’s public awareness efforts, which can contribute to—

- Development of an overall media plan and strategy.
- Writing materials that describe an organization’s programs, services, and value to a community.
- Graphic design support for creating public awareness advertisements, posters, and billboards.
- Web site development and maintenance.
- Providing training for staff on effective media relations.



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Who can provide pro bono support for media relations and public awareness?

- Crime victims/survivors served by an organization who have media relations expertise and want to volunteer.
- Public relations and advertising firms (especially newer and small firms that are looking to make a name for themselves).

- Colleges and universities—including students from communications, journalism, public relations, and graphic arts programs—that can provide volunteers for specific projects or interns for entire semesters.



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- Commercial art schools whose students can contribute to creative graphic design for public awareness activities.
- For nonprofit organizations, efforts can be made to seek board members who are writers, journalists, or public relations experts.

In identifying pro bono sources, it is important to remember that public recognition of their contributions is essential. Pro bono contributors can be thanked through letters-to-the-editor, public recognition during annual commemorative observances, and awards that honor volunteer support of an organization.

#### **d. Ten Practical Tips on Approaching the Media**

*Detroit Free Press* columnist Desiree Cooper offers these suggestions for how to approach the media:<sup>25</sup>

1. Know the difference between a news story, a column, and an ad.
2. Don't call reporters on their deadlines. After 3 p.m. is the worst time for most reporters who work on morning papers or for evening news broadcasts.
3. Start with a reporter and work your way up, unless you already have a good relationship with an editor.
4. Speak in sound bites, not speeches.
5. Use e-mail and voicemail—don't insist on personal interactions at first.
6. Humor is your friend.
7. Be prepared to follow up conversations with more information: fact sheets, names and phone numbers, Web sites, and faxes.
8. If you are rejected because your pitch is not in the reporter's beat, ask if there is someone else at the media establishment who may be interested.
9. Make as many calls as you can yourself. Public relations professionals rarely have the same depth of knowledge or interest in the topic as an advocate.



10. Be upbeat and enthusiastic. If you're not interested, why should anyone else be interested?

### e. Ten Ways to Make a Good Pitch

How do you make your public awareness activities “stand out in a crowd”? Desiree Cooper offers 10 great tips that can make your media outreach stand out:<sup>26</sup>

1. **Tell me about people, not events.** Try not to pitch another rally or banquet. Find a story involving real people or a current issue (a bill being introduced, a government policy change, a grassroots movement) and pitch that, not the event. Here's an example:

Event: Annual Wayne State University “Take Back the Night” rally against domestic violence.

Pitch: A famous local politician will be speaking. During his first marriage, he abused his wife. He got help and is committed to helping other men understand that violence is the inappropriate way to deal with anger. The focus of the article will be his road to recovery with a mention of the rally and how people can be involved at the end of the piece.

2. **Give me enough lead time.** Because we write several columns a week, columnists are often looking ahead, scheduling issues they want to cover based on the seasons (holiday stress, summer reading, winter sports), social cycles (school year, legislative sessions, sports seasons, wedding season, etc.), and landmarks (anniversaries of wars, historical moments, births, and deaths). In between, there's breaking news or pop events that make for great commentary. You have to wedge your idea between the many items on my agenda. Don't wait until the last minute. Two to 3 weeks' lead is the optimal time to make a pitch. Some organizations have sent me mail for an entire year before someone calls to pitch a specific story.
3. **Don't try to convert me.** I'm an old dog who can learn new tricks, but I'm not likely to learn them by getting beat up by a publicist. If I am a liberal, I'm probably never going to write a pro-gun column, no matter how long your e-mails are or how impassioned your phone calls. It is much better to find a columnist who you think—based on past columns—would be open to your point of view. As an aside, there's a difference between converting and educating a writer. I may have only cursory information about your topic. In that case, a fact sheet, a series of e-mails, or even a conversation over lunch can be very helpful to a columnist.

4. **Along the same lines, pitch to the right person.** Don't pitch sports to a travel writer. Don't pitch food to a fashion writer. Do your research and be able to articulate why you've chosen me for your story.
5. **Pitch it and let it go.** Don't pitch the story and then try to write it. The journalist has some say on whether to take the pitch, but many other hands often get into the brew. Editors decide the relative importance and priority of the story. Photographers may or may not cover the event. Headline writers are a separate department and may not characterize the story as you planned. You have to make your pitch, provide as much information as possible, and move on. The story may not land when you need it. It may not credit every Tom, Dick, and Harry in your organizational food chain. It may not depict the person you chose to be your spokesperson. Yet, it still may do the heavy lifting of creating sympathy/interest/understanding about your issue.
6. **Don't kill the messenger.** I once did a story about a UFO advocate. It's rare for journalists to take a person seriously who claims to have seen/visited UFO's. When I did, there was hell to pay. Not from the skeptics who didn't believe in UFO's, but from the believers who wrote and called me to complain that journalists never take them seriously—even though I had. It's not the best way to make friends and influence people. If you advocate a topic that is often marginalized by the media, it's best to try to cultivate interest in the topic than to berate the few writers who have shown interest. If, however, I have committed a serious error of fact, or given the wrong impression, please let me know so that a correction can be run.
7. **Prevail upon our relationship sparingly.** If I wrote about you last month, I'm not likely to write about you this month. If I covered your annual awards ceremony, don't count on me covering it this year. I once asked a caller whether she was looking for coverage before or after her event. "Well, both would be great," she said.

Not likely. Unless it's something like the presidential elections, you're not likely to get pre- and post-coverage of the same event. Know what would serve your organization best and target your publicity to achieve that outcome.

8. **Drop names whenever possible.** Because I'm often choosing between many equally important ideas, it helps me to know if I have a connection with the subject or the people involved. Sometimes that can backfire (especially for a reporter who has to worry more about conflicts of interest), but more often it helps me warm up to the idea, inching it closer to good material for a column.

9. **Don't give me a pitch you've given to five other columnists/reporters.** I don't need an exclusive, but I also don't need to spend time on a gripping, one-of-a-kind story that will show up in another news outlet before my deadline. Think of many angles to one story and pitch each media outlet a different one, or pitch many angles to one writer, let her choose, then pitch the remaining ideas to other writers.
10. **Mind your manners.** Remember that, in some ways, this is a beauty contest. The most gripping ideas that can be produced with the least amount of grief will move to the top of the heap. Subconsciously, I have put off many good stories because the source was rude and demeaning. Sometimes, I have stayed with the idea, but tried to find another source for the story. That may not serve your organization's needs very well, so just remember to be as helpful, enthusiastic, and engaging as possible.

#### f. Turning Data into News

At the national, state, and local levels, there are many research-based data about crime and victimization. These include research and case studies, statistics, scientific journal articles, and the results of program evaluations. Many data are newsworthy, but are often presented in a manner that is too broad, too complicated, or that lacks relevance to a local community.



The media often receive data in press releases or other sources that are presented from a national perspective. Here are some guidelines to “make data matter” to the news media:

- Provide the media with a local angle that makes statistics relevant to a community. National trends should be compared with state or local trends for maximum impact.
- Partner with local academia to conduct local studies, surveys, and program evaluations that address victimization issues specific to a jurisdiction. Academicians can also help you and the media quickly interpret research findings, and can review research methodology to point out strengths or any flaws that may affect its outcomes.
- Maintain a roster of spokespersons and experts—such as justice professionals, criminologists, and psychologists—who can address the findings of newsworthy data related to crime and victimization. This requires a good communications network, and the ability of spokespersons to respond rapidly to cutting-edge news.

- Crime victims and survivors offer a unique, personal perspective of crime-related data. If they are provided with a summary of research findings, they can respond and humanize the data from their own viewpoint and experiences.
- There may be local initiatives (such as research, surveys, and case studies) that support or negate the key findings of crime-related research.
- National data can be used to create “report cards” for a jurisdiction that offer comparisons to national trends and focus on what is happening at the community level. The simple use of “As, Bs, and Cs” can offer a simple, subjective comparison to what’s happening nationally.



In addition, “National, State, and Local Trends and Data Related to Crime, Victimization and Victim Assistance” in Section 1 of this guide offers suggestions about the most important information that victim advocates can provide to the news media.

### **i. Resources for Current Data about Crime and Victimization**

Efforts to turn data into news require proactive planning from victim advocates. It means staying on top of what is going on in the worlds of public safety, justice, victims’ rights, and services, and getting current information at the same time it’s disseminated to the media in order to formulate an effective local response or angle. Some resources for victim advocates:

- The World Wide Web offers a treasure trove of information about crime victims’ rights, services, and issues. Learning how to use “key words” for search engines will result in an instant library full of timely information.
- The U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal agencies have web sites that include current news, listservs, training and educational Web forums, electronic discussion groups, bulletin boards, and other venues to keep their constituents informed about cutting-edge issues (see, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/>).
- Major national victim assistance and criminal justice organizations offer myriad resources for victim and public awareness (see “Resources”). Victim advocates can sign up for listservs and e-groups that regularly disseminate information about crime and victimization. A quick glance at electronic information will cull resources that are useful.
- Advocates can join state and local coalitions that address crime victim issues. They provide timely information about issues and events on a regular basis.

- While subscribing to journals is a budgetary consideration, they often offer new, research-based data about trends in crime and victimization.

### **g. Tools of the Trade**

There are numerous “Tools of the Trade” that can help victim advocates develop stronger media relations:

- Document Your Successes
- Guidelines for Media Interviews
- Press Releases
- Editors’ Advisories
- Public Service Announcements
- Letters-to-the-Editor
- How to Conduct a Press Conference
- Preparing an Editorial Board Presentation
- Creating an Internet Strategy

### **h. Document Your Successes**

Among the most effective tools for media and public relations are the positive things that other people have to say about your organization. While people are usually pleased and flattered to receive accolades for their good work and stellar efforts, they seldom consider how such statements can be useful for media relations and public outreach.

Statements of recognition for an organization can come from a variety of venues, such as—

- Crime victims who write letters and e-mails of thanks to an organization or a particular staff member for helping them and making a real difference in their lives.

- Complimentary letters or proclamations from legislators or state executive branch offices.
- Awards that are given to a victim assistance organization, and the often effusive commentary that accompanies their presentation.
- Statements from allied professionals that highlight an organization's role as a key partner in fighting crime and assisting victims.
- Media reports—both in broadcast and print formats—that offer positive comments about an organization's programs and services.



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Victim assistance organizations should develop a plan to document “what others are saying about” their organization. Quotations and sound bites from crime victims, public and civic leaders, and the media can always augment victim outreach and public awareness strategies, and offer unique perspectives about how an organization makes a critical difference in a community or state. Of course, permission should be received to directly quote sources and, in cases where people do not want to be identified by name, determine attribution that does not infringe on their privacy.

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<sup>25</sup> Desiree Cooper, “10 Practical Tips on Approaching the News Media,” *Detroit Free Press*, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Desiree Cooper, “10 Ways to Make a Good Pitch.” *Detroit Free Press*, 2001.

## **A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers**

### **SECTION II:**

#### **Building Media Relations**

*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

#### **17. Guidelines for Media Interviews**

Through media interviews, victim advocates inform the public about victims' needs, rights, and services and also promote the good work of their organizations. "Tips for Media Interviews" in Section 1 of this guide includes detailed suggestions for preparing, conducting, and following up to media interviews, as well as tips for "Dressing for Media Interviews."

In addition, all requests from the news media for information or media should be documented, with the news media's information included into an electronic database for future reference and media outreach. A sample "media contact form" is included in the Appendices.

## A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers

### SECTION II:

#### Building Media Relations

*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

### 18. Press Releases

#### Press Releases

A press release provides information to the media that is timely, useful, and informative to their audiences. Editors and news directors receive hundreds of press releases each week and have to decide what is newsworthy. A press release is generally skimmed, so it needs simple, concise details that grab the attention of the person reviewing it.



Not every event or activity is newsworthy. Press releases should always focus on news that is current or that will happen in the future. If it has already happened, it's "old news." It helps to establish priorities for media outreach (see "Developing a Media Plan" in this Section).

Prior to writing a press release, ask the following questions:<sup>27</sup>

- Is this information really newsworthy to the general public?
- What is the main point or feature of this news item?
- Should the press release be distributed to print or broadcast media, or both?
- Is there a creative angle that will make the release more interesting and appealing to editors and news directors?



Many organizations and communities sponsor annual events to publicize victims' rights and services (such as the "Silent Witness" displays during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and "Take Back the Night" marches throughout the year). After a while, the media tend to view such events as "old news" unless they present a new hook. It is important to consider new angles that keep news fresh, and present innovative approaches in both press releases and public service announcements.

## a. Content

- Writing style and content should be succinct, descriptive, and avoid unnecessary information. With the exception of personal quotations, the text should be written in the “third person.”
- The headline should pique people’s interest and does not have to tell the whole story. It should be no more than 10 words.
- The first paragraph can be the “deal breaker.” It should include the “5 Ws” (who, what, when, where, why and how) written to immediately draw people in. For example: “A day without violence is the goal of (event, followed by the 5 Ws).”
- The second paragraph should explain the value and purpose of the event or activity, and why people should care about it.
- The body of the press release should include elements of human interest and articulate the theme of the information. For example—
  - How this event or activity will make a positive difference in the lives of victims and the community.
  - Any information about resources or speakers that are unique and have something special to offer.
  - Quotations from victims and survivors or community leaders.
- The information should be factual, and language should avoid superlatives (the “best,” the “most”).
- Offer information that people can use. If it’s an event to attend, give a reason why they should attend. Offering a free publication or something interesting via a Web site makes the press release more relevant.



## b. Format

The standardized format for press releases is shown below. Some format considerations include—

- Press releases should be typed in a 12 point font (Arial, Verdana, or Times Roman) and double-spaced.
- “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” indicates that the information in the release is ready to be published.

- The headline should not exceed 10 words and should fit on one line, centered, using capital letters in a bold font that is slightly larger than the text font.
- If a press release exceeds one page, type “more” on the bottom of the first page and at the top of the second page, type in bold:

**Press release  
(Topic)  
Page two**

- Type “END” in bold in the center at the end of the release.
- Always “spell check” the draft press release.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CONTACT:** Contact person and organization affiliation  
Area code/telephone number  
E-mail address  
Web site URL

**HEADLINE OF THE PRESS RELEASE**

*City/State/Date* – The first sentence should include the most important information to get the attention of the editor and encourage further reading.

Text of the press release—it is a good idea to keep the length to less than 600 words.

The last paragraph should always read: “For additional information about (topic of the release), contact (name) at (area code/telephone number) or visit (Web URL).”

**– END –**

It is a good idea to have several people review the press release for content and accuracy, format, grammar, and spelling prior to sending it.

Your press release should be sent to the media 7 to 10 days in advance of the event or activity.



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<sup>27</sup> Anne Seymour and Linda Lowrance, 1990, *Media Relations*, Washington, DC: National Center for Victims of Crime (formerly known as National Victim Center), (*adapted in part*).

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### 19. Editors' Advisories

An editors' advisory provides newspaper editors and broadcast news directors with brief, succinct information that condenses the details of a press release. They can be sent to the media instead of a press release, or as a follow up reminder of an upcoming event or activity.

Writing an editors' advisory is similar to writing a press release, but in a format that emphasizes *brevity*. It should contain release and contact information exactly the same as a press release. However, the content of an editors' advisory contains only the briefest details in the following manner:

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**CONTACT:** Contact person and organization affiliation  
Area code/telephone number  
E-mail address  
Web site URL

#### EDITORS' ADVISORY

**WHO:**

**WHAT:**

**WHEN:**

**WHERE:**

**WHY:**

**NOTE:** (includes featured speakers, special activities, etc.)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** (limit to one paragraph)

– END –

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### 20. Public Service Announcements

A public service announcement (PSA) is a brief message aired on radio or television that provides information to the public. The FCC requires that in order to receive or renew a broadcast license, television and radio stations must donate a certain amount of airtime “for which no charge is made,” usually to nonprofit organizations and other community groups. PSAs can air at any time period during which a station broadcasts to the public. Despite FCC regulations, many broadcast media are requesting that organizations pay for what have traditionally been free public service announcements.



#### a. Format

A PSA's format may vary, depending upon the submission guidelines of different radio or television stations. You can contact the public service director (also called “community affairs director”) or visit a station's Web site to determine:

- General submission requirements.
- To whom the PSA should be submitted (it is helpful to get a specific name, title, and mail or e-mail address).
- Preferred length in words or amount of time.
- Suggested format (see below).
- The station's preferences and guidelines related to written copy or providing an audiotape or videotape (if stations allow for “external talent” to tape the PSA, consider a victim/survivor or community leader—such as the mayor or district attorney—to read the PSA).
- When a station requires the PSA copy (the advance time needed prior to its actual airing).
- When to expect the PSA to air once the station receives it.

In general, PSAs should be submitted *at least 2 weeks* prior to when you want it to air, and clarify when you want it to *begin* and *end* on air.

PSAs are usually written in 15-, 30-, or 60-second formats (the 1-minute format can also be used as a “broadcast actuality,” which features the spot being delivered on the radio or television by a person from the organization or entity sponsoring its content). Brevity is very important, in general:

- A 15-second PSA has no more than 40 words.
- A 30-second PSA has no more than 80 words.
- A 60-second PSA or actuality has no more than 150 words.

The format below is generally acceptable to most broadcast stations:

<b>Organization Letterhead</b>	
<b>PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT</b>	
<b># SECONDS:</b>	
<b>START DATE:</b>	
<b>STOP DATE:</b>	
<b>CONTACT:</b>	<i>(Name, area code/telephone number, and e-mail address of primary contact person and organization)</i>
<p>CONTENT OF ANNOUNCEMENT (IT IS CUSTOMARY TO TYPE THE PSA DOUBLE-SPACED AND IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS). ALWAYS END WITH: “FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL (<i>TELEPHONE NUMBER</i>) OR VISIT (<i>WEB SITE URL</i>).</p>	
– END –	

## b. Content

It helps to assemble a “PSA team” to plan, develop, and deliver the PSA to—

- Research the PSA submission requirements of different television and radio stations, and compile a simple database with information.



*(Staged with Professional Models)*

- Seek consensus on the most important message and information for the PSA.
- Write, edit, and rewrite to fit the message with the time limits.
- Read the PSA out loud to each other—several times—to make sure the message is clear, delivered succinctly, and contains all relevant information.

Broadcast stations receive many requests to air PSAs and have a limited amount of time in which to do so. It helps to follow the “5 Ws” in determining a PSA’s content—who, what, when, where, and why—to organize the public service message.

Additional considerations:

- Determine the most important issue you want to communicate:
  - This includes the key fact(s) about any event or issue, but also *why people should care* about it.
  - Consider posing a question to draw people’s interest and engage them.
  - Compel people to listen by relating to *their lives*—most people are concerned about crime; care about their own safety and their family’s safety; and likely have been, or know someone who has been, a victim of crime.
- Keep your message positive.
- Mention the name of the organization more than once to ensure that people remember it.
- Give people something simple to do—show up, volunteer, make a call or send an e-mail, or contact your organization for information about how they can help. A “call to action” is a great way to begin or end a PSA.
- Mention the name of your organization at least once. It’s okay to abbreviate the full name or use your acronym once the full name has first been cited.
- Use short sentences.
- Use short action verbs (avoid passive verbs that end in “ing”).
- Avoid jargon and language that the average viewer or listener won’t understand.

- Keep your telephone number and Web URL as simple as possible. For strictly local PSAs, an area code isn't necessary. For Web URLs, it's no longer necessary to include the "www."

You can submit several versions of the same PSA, either with slightly different content and approaches, and/or different lengths.

### Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Public Service Announcements



In 2005, OVC produced seven video public service announcements in 20-, 30-, and 60-second formats, including one in Spanish. The PSAs provide general information about crime victims' rights and services, and offer good examples of PSAs that have general, timeless messages for crime victims and the public. The PSAs can be viewed at:

<http://www.ovc.gov/publications/infores/psakit/welcome.html> .

An extensive guidebook was developed specifically for victim service organizations, agencies, and professionals that includes advice on how to create your own PSA Campaign

including detailed strategies for how to get them aired or published. The PSA Guidebook is free and available for viewing and/or download at same OVC web address listed above.

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## 21. Letters-to-the-Editor

### Letters-To-The-Editor

Letters-to-the-editor are usually written in response to an article that has already been published in a newspaper or magazine, or to comment on general issues that the news medium has addressed in the recent past. They can be a good venue for victim advocates to address or introduce news of interest to a publication's readers.



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Victim advocates and victims can write letters-to-the-editor to—

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- Thank the publication or acknowledge their prior responsible coverage of an issue.
- Provide expert opinions or additional information to augment a story that has been published.
- Offer unique angles or perspectives about a published article or an event that's of interest to the public.
  - Address any inaccuracies in a prior report, or its (often unintended) negative impact on victims.
  - Address specific details within a story (such as an offensive headline or an inaccurate quotation) while still supporting the value of the article.



### a. Editorial Guidelines

All major publications have specific guidelines about letters-to-the-editor, which are usually available on their Web sites:

- Letters should be exclusive to the publication.

- Specific information about length and format, and details about delivery (regular mail, e-mail, and/or fax).
- If a letter is responding to a published article, the letter needs to specially refer to the article (usually written below the publication's address and above the salutation):
  - RE: (title of original article; its publication date).
- Letters should be signed and include the author's name, title and organization (if relevant), home address, home and business telephone numbers, and e-mail address.
- If a letter is submitted by e-mail (unsigned), the publication will call the author to confirm its authenticity.
- Editors reserve the right to abridge letters.
- Submission delivery (by e-mail, traditional mail, or fax).
- Because of the volume of letters received, not all letters will be published or their receipt acknowledged.



## b. Writing Tips

Since editors receive hundreds of letters on a daily basis, victim advocates must make their letters stand out in order to be published. Timing is critical when responding to a published article. “The sooner, the better” means the letter should be written **immediately**. Editors are more likely to publish letters that—

- Follow the editorial guidelines of their publication (see above).
- Address a perspective that they (and their readers) care about.
- Address a single subject.
- Are concise, creative, and present a fresh point of view—150 words should be the maximum limit. Shorter is better.
- Contain a compelling, catchy opening sentence and theme.
- Provide a “human interest” focus.

- Respond to perceived inaccuracies in a previously published article in a manner that is not only accurate, but respectful.
- Include facts that can be readily verified.
- Avoid attacks that are highly personal or abusive.

In addition, letters can encourage readers to take action: make a call, write a letter, or visit a Web site for more information about how to get involved. Victim assistance organizations can also engage community leaders or other prominent people (including crime victims and survivors) to write letters-to-the-editor on their behalf. A brief sentence about their unique qualifications can be added at the end of the letter.

When victims of crime write a letter-to-the-editor, they should consider identifying themselves as a victim or survivor, depending upon their comfort level and any issues related to personal safety (“As a survivor of my daughter Anna’s homicide. . .”). This offers a truly unique perspective that may grab an editor’s attention and present a viewpoint that can *only* be provided by someone who has been victimized.

All letters-to-the-editor should be proofread for grammar, spelling, and the accuracy of the information included.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 52.

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## 22. Press Conferences

### Planning an Effective Press Conference



Press conferences should be held to introduce timely and important news related to crime victims, victims' rights, victim services, or public safety to your community. This can include—

- Passage of a new victims' rights statute and its application to victims and assistance programs in the community.
- Major research at the national, state, or local level (always providing a "local angle").
- A new program or service to assist victims.
- New collaborations or partnerships that streamline and improve victim services and public safety.

While press conferences require considerable planning, the "tools of the trade" included in this section will make your task much easier. Please refer to them to write an effective press release or editors' advisory; develop public service announcements; and provide spokespersons for radio and television talk shows.

#### a. Press Conference Planning

It's important to establish a *clear goal* for a press conference—exactly what you seek to achieve. Once a goal has been determined—

- Consider the people who will present the information. It helps to have a notable guest (such as an elected official), expert(s) on the subjects being addressed, and a crime victim who can offer the "human side" to the information. Diversity in presenters by gender, culture, and area of expertise is essential.

- Develop a plan that includes the order of speakers, how they will be introduced, and how long they will speak. It helps to prepare unobtrusive “time cards” within view of speakers that tell them when they have “2 minutes,” “1 minute,” and “no time left” to keep to a schedule.



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- Visuals add an extra spark to press conferences and are helpful for photographers and videographers. A large banner and podium sign with information about the sponsoring organization(s) and/or topic(s) visually depict the purpose of the press conference. Creative visuals that depict the key messages of the press event—such as the Clothesline Project featuring tee shirts honoring domestic violence victims, or pairs of shoes that show the number of people murdered or number of children abused in a community—offer excellent opportunities for both print photographs and broadcast coverage of press conferences.

- Plans should also be made to bring key speakers together for a photo opportunity. Some press conference sponsors like to document the event with their own videographers and photographers.



- Most press conferences are 20 to 30 minutes, including a question-and-answer period. This requires careful planning and speakers who can adhere to a tight schedule.
- A question-and-answer period should include determination of a facilitator and length of the Q-and-A session. The facilitator should be prepared to answer any questions as well. All speakers should be advised that if they do not know the answer to a question, they should say so and offer to provide follow-on information to the requestor.

## b. Press Conference Logistics

- The location of a press conference is often critical to its success. It helps to plan for a venue that can accommodate a crowd and is accessible by public transportation. If a permit is required, obtain one and have a copy readily available on the day of the event. If the press conference is outdoors, have a contingency plan for inclement weather. Compliance with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* is also important.
- It's best to hold a press conference on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. This increases the opportunities for a “live at noon” news broadcast, making the evening news, and providing plenty of time for daily newspapers to write the story.



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- It's also helpful to, in advance, check "community calendars" on the Web sites of newspapers and broadcast stations in order to avoid competing with other newsworthy events.
- Some reporters may want to conduct individual interviews of speakers, so adequate space should be provided.
- Prepare and post signage for the venue that helps people find their way to the event.
- Begin and end your press conference on time. Journalists are busy people and, by sticking to a schedule, you increase opportunities for follow-on interviews once the press conference is over.



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### Advance Outreach

- Have a good media list that contains actual names for news directors and editors (see "Types of News Media").
- Write a press release that includes the "5 Ws" (who, what, when, where, and why) and send it to the media 7 to 10 days in advance of the press conference.
- If the press conference is a public event, consider disseminating public service announcements through broadcast media.
- An editors' advisory can be faxed or e-mailed to key media as a reminder 1 or 2 days before the press conference.
- Prepare a media table that is staffed by people with thorough knowledge of the event. They can greet journalists, tend to their equipment needs, and provide them with a press kit (see below). It also helps to have a sign-in sheet that includes the reporters' name, news outlet, e-mail address, and telephone number.
- Plan for the right equipment, which includes a podium, microphones for the speakers, any presentation equipment (such as a laptop computer, LCD projector and screen), and ample electrical outlets and extension cords for both the microphones and media equipment.



#### **d. Prepare a Press Kit**

A comprehensive press kit contains—

- Information about the organization(s) sponsoring the press conference (this can be individual brochures or a summary fact sheet).
- A copy of the press release with a designated “point of contact.”
- A one-page fact sheet that summarizes the information presented.
- Brief biographies of any speakers and contact information (telephone numbers and e-mail addresses).
- Any copies of speakers’ statements or visual presentations.

#### **e. Follow-on Activities**

- Promptly respond to journalists who have any individual requests for additional information.
- Immediately following the press conference, e-mail a good quality photo to local newspapers in the region (that may or may not have attended the press conference), and highlight the basics of the event with contact information.
- A brief e-mail that thanks media professionals for attending can also offer or include any relevant follow-on information.



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### 23. Editorial Board

#### Preparing an Editorial Board Presentation

Many newspapers have regular editorial board meetings in which various individuals or groups can offer presentations. You can call to ask for a slot on the schedule or for another opportunity to have input with the editorial staff. It is the executive and editorial-page editors who make policy for the newspaper, while assignment and copy editors work with line-level reporters. Depending on the issue or concern, you may want to have input with one group or both.



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Here are some tips on how to best approach this important media audience:

- **Lead with the positive.** Open your presentation with a list of good things the newspaper has done. Not only do you want to avoid a confrontational tone; honoring their work demonstrates that you pay attention to their coverage.
- **Short and sweet.** No more than two presenters. Determine the three main points you want to make and make them quickly. Editors and reporters love to ask questions, so limit the time you talk to them to 10 to 15 minutes and encourage them to ask questions during and following the presentation.
- **Include a victim.** Newspapers are in business to tell first-person stories. The editorial board members will want to hear from a victim and will want to ask questions of him or her.
- **Bring handouts and contact information.** You cannot cover all that you would like to in such a short time, but you can bring leave-behind materials that can serve as a continuing resource.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bonnie Bucqueroux, 2007, "Preparing an Editorial Board Presentation," Lansing, MI: Victims and the Media Program, Michigan State University.

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### 24. Internet Strategies

#### Creating an Internet Strategy

The Internet provides a unique opportunity for victim advocates and service providers to reach out to victims, raise public awareness, and (for nonprofit organizations) generate funds. It can also provide an opportunity for crime victims and survivors to tell their stories unfiltered and on their terms.



In developing or updating a Web site, you must first determine your target audience(s) and messages (see “Audience and Message” in “Developing a Media Plan”). It also helps to strike a balance between content and graphic design. The information you present should be brief and current; easily accessed through simple navigation; and spread out over individual Web pages within the site (this also allows visitors to load information faster).

You can use your Web site as a source for reporters as well:

- **Create a media section.** Include a link to a special media section in your Web site navigation and on your sitemap, and also consider putting a small banner on your home page so that reporters can easily spot the section designed especially for them. You want the media to know that you care about and can address their needs.
  - **News items.** The more fresh content you provide, the more useful and vital the section will be for reporters and editors. On the Web, brief is best. A short headline followed by one paragraph with short sentences about recent events is often sufficient.
  - **The latest statistics.** Reporters also want the most recent numbers to include in their stories. Add new national, state, and local information as soon as it becomes available, or provide links for easy access.
  - **A calendar of events.** Make sure reporters know what your organization is planning so that they can get the information onto their calendars.

- **Speakers bureau.** Showcase your media-savvy representatives. Show a picture and explain the topics they can talk about, and provide brief biographies. Note the availability of speakers who can talk about their own victimization.
- **A director's blog.** Depending on your organization, it may be appropriate for the director to comment frequently on national, state, and local news, as a way to build a relationship with the community and the media. A blog ("Web blog") provides an easy way for a trusted expert to share information quickly.
- **Links to other sources.** Hyperlinks to other reliable sources—such as the Office for Victims of Crime and national victim assistance organizations—help visitors find additional information and establish the "network nature" of victim assistance programs in America. Make sure to regularly update links (which often change or disappear).
- **A sign up for an electronic newsletter and alerts.** Make it easy for reporters and other visitors to sign up for your electronic newsletter and news alerts. Issue a news alert with your organization's views and comments when a high-profile case occurs in the community.
- **Archive your news releases and reports.** Reporters often want to compare today with yesterday, so you want to make it easy for them.
- **Include your contact information.** Put your telephone number on each page of your media section.



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### 25. Talk Shows

#### Talk Show Guidelines for Crime Victim Guests



In response to the concern that crime victims are being re-victimized during their appearances on television talk shows, the National Center for Victims of Crime developed specific guidelines alerting television talk show staff to the specific needs of crime victims. . .

#### a. Introduction to Victim Psychology

When a person has been victimized by crime, the traumatic event transforms his or her life. Appropriate support and treatment can help a victim reconstruct a new life.

[Victims often lose a sense of control over their life.] One of the most important services to provide to a victim is information and the ability to make decisions based on that information. This sense of control does not just apply to the investigation and prosecution of their case—it also applies to retelling of their story to the media. It’s critical that the victim’s requests be respected and followed to avoid inflicting a second victimization.



While working with a crime victim who has agreed to appear on television, . . . [it’s important for] members of the media to be sensitive to the trauma the person has experienced. Agreeing to tell their story should not be construed as a sign that the trauma of their victimization is no longer a factor to be considered. . . [To] the contrary, a person who has been traumatized by crime often does not know when, or if, an event will “trigger” a crisis reaction. Appearing on air, whether television or radio, is a new and potentially intimidating experience for most people. This anxiety. . . and the retelling of their story, combined with the trauma of victimization, creates an environment in which a victim needs additional support and control over the situation. The guidelines outlined in this document have been designed to minimize the possibility

of a second victimization inflicted by the mishandling of a victim or his/her story by the media.

## **b. Recommended Guidelines for Talk Shows and Crime Victim Guests**

1. **Television talk shows should use only victims who have had the benefit of counseling and guidance from a trained victim counselor, advocate, or other professional (i.e., rape counselor, domestic violence advocates, legal counsel, etc.).** A surprising number of victims end up on shows in the immediate aftermath of their victimization. This is primarily due to the fact that production staff learn about victims through news media accounts and then contact the victims directly. Because of the short time frame, many victims will not have had the opportunity to speak with a victim advocate or counselor to begin processing what has happened to them and what they can expect in the aftermath of their victimization. In the aftermath, most victims experience a cataclysm of emotions and are generally not in the best frame of mind to consider the emotional, mental, or legal consequences associated with telling their story on television.
  
2. **Crime victims should not appear in the immediate wake of their victimization— particularly if they have not had the advantage of counseling by professional victim advocates and service providers.** It is crucial that victims understand the potential risks involved in telling their story on a television talk show. When victim guests have not had the benefit of guidance and counseling from victim professionals, they may feel intimidated by production staff and/or the studio environment. This inexperience may lead them to consent to decisions that are not in their own best interests simply because they do not know they can object or do not feel comfortable doing so. The first and perhaps most important consideration is the emotional impact of appearing on television so soon after the crime has occurred. A second consideration is the potentially devastating impact that the premature telling of the victim's story may have on the criminal investigation and subsequent prosecution of the case, as well as any potential civil litigation pursued by the victim.
  
3. **Child victims generally should not be guests.** Children who are already suffering from the trauma of victimization are often re-traumatized by exposure to the media often lack the means to verbalize their emotions and are therefore vulnerable to misinterpretation by both the media and the public.



(Staged with Professional Model)

Because of their inexperience with life, and thus being less able to envision and understand the ultimate consequences of their decisions, children are extremely vulnerable to exploitation by the media. Appearing on a television talk show, and thereby revealing their identity to their community and the world, may forever stigmatize them as victims to their peers and the public and have continuing negative effects on their developmental years. While child victims may not suffer negative emotional consequences in all cases, the risks are so high that children generally should not be guests. There may be special circumstances that reduce the risks sufficiently to consider an appearance—for example, the age of the child. There is a significant difference between a 7-year-old and a 17-year-old.

4. **A professionally trained victim advocate and crisis counselor should be on hand at all times.** Utilizing the services of a trained crisis counselor or victim advocate . . . results in guests who are more comfortable and relaxed, more cooperative, and better prepared for the interview and appearance on air. There are many instances in which victim guests who were not properly prepared or who were not really ready to go public with their story were unable to talk about it once tape was rolling or the broadcast began. Having a trained crisis counselor or victim advocate present in the green room with the crime victim guests is important not only for the several hours before the taping or live broadcast begins but also for a period of debriefing after their appearance is over. . . .[A trained victim counselor]. . . can monitor the crime victim's appearance...[and detect and help] with any signs of harmful trauma to the crime victim during the taping or broadcast.
5. **Crime victim guests should be treated with dignity and respect at all times. Talk show hosts and production staff should be particularly sensitive and understanding of a victim guest's emotions and feelings, which may be heightened by the stress of appearing on a television talk show.** Being sensitive to crime victims' emotions and letting them know that their emotional reactions are okay is very different from requesting that they cry and show their emotions on the air. Crime victims' emotional reactions are highly personal experiences that they may not wish to share publicly.



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6. **Crime victims should always be fully informed about the format of the show; how their story will be told; who else will appear (in person or from a remote location); and what subjects will be discussed with each guest. Whenever possible, victims should be provided with copies of the producer's notes on each guest.** The purpose here is not only to avoid surprises in terms of guests, material, and subject matter but to also give victims the information they need to negotiate their

involvement and to prepare for the show. Reducing the unknown will dramatically reduce the victims' fear and trepidation about the show. It will also help them to tell their story more effectively and to defend themselves against insensitive questions or comments from the host or other guests.

7. **If any offender (including his or her own) is to be physically present in the studio or elsewhere in the facility, the victim should be given notice of the specific facts and asked what arrangements can be made in the studio to make the victim feel comfortable and safe (e.g., a physical barrier like a table or floral arrangement between the offender and the victim, interviewing the offender via satellite or from a remote location on the premises, etc.).** Every precaution should be taken to prevent the offender and the victim from "crossing paths" before, during, and after the show. One of the most often stated needs of a crime victim is access to information relating to his/her victimization, case, or offender. By knowing if an offender, any offender, is going to appear on the show with the victim, the victim will be better able to prepare for that portion of the show. It will also be helpful to the victim to know as much about what the offender will be discussing during his/her interview.
8. **Offer victims the opportunity to get comfortable with the set by allowing them to arrive early or even the day before the actual taping.** Crime victims' stress can be reduced when they are prepared in advance by familiarizing themselves with the environment in which the interview or appearance will take place. This involves touring the studio with explanations provided of where the interviewer/host will be, where the audience will be situated, where camerapersons will be located, and which monitor they should look at.
9. **Victims should always have the right to view pictures, video/audio tape, graphic and/or any other depictions that will air as part of the show.** Again, victims should not be surprised with graphic representations they have not seen and approved in advance. Victim guests should *always* have the right to ask about the airing of photographs, and to veto the airing of any visual depictions they find offensive or feel are inappropriate.
10. **Victims should be informed in advance of the option to protect their anonymity by whatever means are necessary (for example, silhouette screens, disguises, electronic voice alteration, pixel and fog screening).** Anonymity is important to victims, not only to protect them from embarrassment and stigmatization from the general public, but in



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some cases from harassment and threats to their safety.

11. **When the victims desire, no information should be presented that would disclose the location of their home, place of work, or whereabouts.** For stalking victims and those who have gone into hiding to escape their abusers, the need for absolute confidentiality about their place of residence and employment is critical for their safety. Care should be given so that no clues as to the victims' current location are given.
12. **Victims should also be informed of when the original show will air and, when possible, when the show will be rebroadcast.** This will give victims the opportunity to make any arrangements they feel are necessary in advance of the broadcast or re-broadcasts. Especially in the instance of a possible rebroadcast, victim guests should be informed whenever possible. . Their situation may have changed (for example, the offender may now be out of prison, the criminal acts may have started again or accelerated) and any rebroadcast could potentially put them in physical danger.
13. **Victims in the viewing audience may experience a crisis reaction while watching a show about crime victimization experience.**

A television program that features crime victims detailing their stories and experiences, especially if graphic depictions of the crime scene are involved,



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will often trigger crisis reactions for viewers both in the studio and viewing audience, who have also been crime victims at some point in their lives. Therefore, it is strongly advised that talk show producers provide a disclaimer at the beginning of their show cautioning viewers of the content. Also producers should provide a public service announcement at the end of the show advising viewers that there is help available for them and provide the name of an appropriate,

qualified victim information and referral phone line that can provide more information and referrals to local victim assistance programs in the viewers' area.

This section is an abridged version of the original "Talk Show Guidelines for Crime Victim Guests" intended for talk show producers and staff. It is reproduced with permission of the National Center for Victims of Crime, Washington, D.C. 2007. To view the document in its entirety, please visit [www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentID=32566](http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentID=32566).

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### 26. Developing A Media Plan

#### Developing a Media Plan<sup>30</sup>

One of the greatest assets of a victim assistance organization is a media plan. A well-developed plan that is executed and evaluated on a continual basis can have a positive effect on all aspects of an organization, and can positively affect—

- Public knowledge and perception of an organization and its services.
- Outreach to victims and survivors of crime, including those who are traditionally underserved or unserved.
- Public policy initiatives that strengthen victims' rights and services.
- Volunteer recruitment.
- Special events sponsored by an organization.
- Fundraising efforts.
- The public's overall understanding of victimization, the impact of crime on victims, victims' rights, and victim services.



(Staged with Professional Models)

A good media plan requires a strong organization to make it happen. Victim assistance organizations or departments must be clear about who they are and what they seek to do before they can reach out to the public, which requires a strong foundation that clearly articulates a vision, mission, values, goals, and measurable objectives. OVC has published a “Strategic Planning Toolkit” that helps organizations develop guiding statements and promote structure that is based upon measurable successes. The Toolkit can be accessed at <https://www.ovcttac.org/taResources/stratplan.cfm>.

### a. Goals of a Media Plan

The overall goals of a media plan guide its implementation. Goals should be clearly written and be measurable to ensure their achievement. They should focus on establishing primary audiences, messages, and the most important media to carry the message to the audiences. Goals should also determine key activities or events that merit public outreach and the resources needed to successfully achieve the plan.



Most media plans are developed on a 1- or 2-year basis, with periodic evaluations and necessary revisions every 6 months.

### b. Audience and Message

Victims and survivors of crime are perhaps the most important audience for victim assistance organizations. However, it's important to recognize that virtually everyone is at risk of being affected by crime, and many people have family members and friends who have been victimized.



Media plans that target “the general public” cannot be truly effective. This is not only too broad, it’s a goal that is usually impossible to fulfill.

Your audience may vary based upon issues and events you are promoting and the messages you seek to send. In developing a media plan, it helps to link target audiences to messages. For example, awareness of—

- Youth victimization, alcohol, and other drug use can target teenagers and young adults.
- Fraud and scams can target elderly people and businesses that fall susceptible to such crimes.
- The psychological impact of crime can target mental health and allied professionals.
- Violence against women can target women of all ages, and engage men as partners in prevention.



(Staged with Professional Model)

### c. Medium

Print and broadcast media are usually the prime dissemination vehicles within a media plan. Geographic considerations will also determine the most effective media: is the jurisdiction at the national, state, county, city, or smaller community level? It's fairly simple to match geographic boundaries with the reach of various media by visiting their Web sites to determine the outreach scope of the publication or station.

The audience and message can help narrow down the field to media that are most effective for public outreach. Many media Web sites offer demographic information about their readers, listeners, and viewers that can help victim advocates focus on target audiences for specific messages. This can also include programming and publications that target—

- ***Readers and viewers by gender.*** For example, outreach about violence against women can focus on television and radio programs with primarily female audiences, or feature sections of newspapers that address women's issues and concerns.
- ***Readers and viewers by age.*** For example, many newspapers have sections for young readers that are appropriate for messages about teen violence, and some television programs (especially on cable television) are focused on audiences based upon age.
- ***Audiences that are distinct by culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and geography.*** For example, weekly news publications geared toward a specific language or culture, or radio and cable television programs that reach a specific neighborhood.



(Staged with Professional Models.)

### d. Key Activities

A media plan must include an annual calendar with key activities weighted in order of their priority for public outreach. Usually, two to four major events a year can help keep an organization in the public eye. These can include—

- The introduction of new programs and services.
- Victims who wish to speak publicly about their experiences and the support they received from your organization.
- Membership drives.
- Information about major crime or victimization research (this can include providing a local angle to national research findings).
- New unique partnerships that promote assistance to underserved victim populations.
- Major fundraising events (and hopefully, reaching development goals).
- The introduction of local public policy or state legislative agendas.
- Special honors a program has received.
- Activities linked to national commemorative observances (see below).

Many public awareness efforts occur in conjunction with key national observances that commemorate different victimization issues:

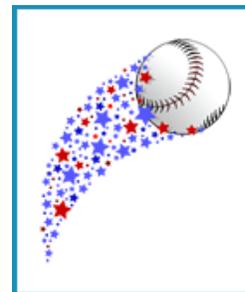
- National Stalking Awareness Month in January.
- National Crime Victims' Rights Week in April.
- National Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April.
- National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.
- National Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October.
- National Drunk and Drugged Driving Awareness Month in December.

Public awareness resource guides that contain sample strategies and documents to enhance victim outreach and public awareness are available for many commemorative observances.

A good media plan should also consider promoting awareness linked to seasonal activities in which the community is already engaged. For example:

- August is a good time to promote safety in schools and on college campuses.

- The holidays can focus on the difficulties that victims often endure, especially those who have a family member who was murdered.
- Each new year can promote “new beginnings” related to violence prevention and victim assistance.
- Awareness themes can link to sports seasons (“Tackle Violence Against Women” in the fall, and “Hit a Home Run for Crime Victim Assistance” in the spring and summer).



### e. Resources

The media will look to a victim assistance organization as a reliable source not only for news stories but also as a resource for their audiences to tap if victim assistance is ever needed. There are five essential resources needed to effectively implement a media plan. These resources should be relevant to and easily understood by all target audiences identified in the media plan.

1. A Web site that contains basic information about its programs and services and provides contact information for more assistance. This can also include e-groups and listservs, bulletin boards, educational Web forums, and interactive surveys in which visitors can register their “vote” on key issues (see “Creating an Internet Strategy”).
2. A brochure that describes a program’s mission, goals, programs, and services.
3. A regular newsletter—either electronic or paper-based—to keep readers informed of current events and activities sponsored by an organization, as well as trends in crime, victims’ rights, and services.
4. Reliable spokespersons who can represent an organization to the community and in media interviews.
5. Standardized victim awareness and public outreach presentations that promote an organization’s mission and programs to the community.

Efforts should be made to provide these resources in the various languages spoken by members of a community, and to have representatives who are culturally diverse.



In addition, specific strategies to seek media coverage are included in the “Tools of the Trade” section of this guide.

### Media Planning for Crises<sup>31</sup>

Organizations seldom expect a crisis to happen and often fail to plan for one. Even a crisis-free organizational history does not preclude the possibility that something bad can happen.

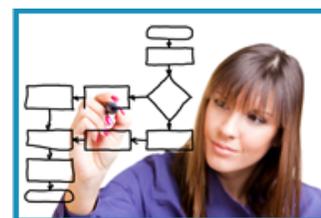
Crises can involve an entire organization, members of its staff, or even volunteers. When the media get involved, something that appears insignificant can become a full-blown crisis that may affect the very integrity of any organization.

Good recordkeeping is a standard “best practice” for organizations and, in times of crisis, critically important for documentation. In addition to fiduciary and personnel records, it helps to adopt a policy for all staff that encourages—

- Telephone logs that document the key information of phone calls (without violating any client/staff confidentiality).
- Writing all e-mails in a professional manner and refraining from using work e-mail accounts for personal use.

A big part of being prepared for a crisis involves routine procedures:

- Determine a spokesperson for emergency situations.
- Establish a clear “chain of command” in case the spokesperson is unavailable or personally involved with the crisis at hand.
- Prepare materials with background information about the organization:
  - Brief biographies of key staff and, for nonprofit organizations, board members.
  - A written history of the organization, focusing on its contributions to the community.
  - A detailed list of key accomplishments to date.
  - A database that documents anything positive that others have said about the organization, including victims and survivors, and civic and legislative leaders.



(Staged with Professional Model)

When dealing with the media in times of crisis, here are some general rules to follow:

- Know all of the facts. Never rely upon hearsay or secondhand information.
- Don't be evasive. Honesty is the best policy. If you try to hide or minimize relevant facts, it will appear that a cover-up is occurring.
- Thoroughly brief all of the organization's principals about the situation, its cause(s), and possible outcomes.
- Require that staff and volunteers refrain from speaking to the media or others about the incident at hand. This will prevent discrepancies in public statements.
- If the crisis is of major significance, call a press conference to present your organization's view of the situation.
- Always present your views in writing to avoid any misinterpretation of your perspectives.
- Avoid being defensive or argumentative, and never say "no comment."
- Refrain from publicly attacking another individual or organization.

When a crisis occurs, it will seem like the worst possible thing that could happen to an organization. By following these guidelines and approaching the crisis with confidence and honesty, even the most significant hurdles can be overcome.

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Seymour and Linda Lowrance, 1990, *Media Relations*, Washington, DC: National Center for Victims of Crime (formerly known as National Victim Center), (adapted in part).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

## **A News Media Guide for Victim Service Providers**

### **SECTION II:**

#### **Building Media Relations**

*How to Build Positive Relations With the News Media*

### **27. Appendices**

#### **Promising Practices**

##### **Colorado/Oklahoma Resource Council Media Consortium**

NVAA “News Coverage of Crime and Victimization Chapter”

<http://www.nvaa.org/assist/chapter18.html>

The Colorado/Oklahoma Resource Council Media Consortium was created when the trial for the Oklahoma City bombing and murders at the Murrah Federal Building changed venue to Denver, Colorado. The Consortium was created to support the federal court; address community concerns; and treat victims and witnesses with dignity and respect. It developed a credentialing process for journalists who wished to attend the trial; worked with the court to secure space for the news media; coordinated pool coverage; and promoted self-policing control and accountability among journalists.

##### **Criminal Justice Journalists**

<http://reporters.net/cjj/index.html>

Criminal Justice Journalists is a national membership organization of journalists who cover crime, court, and prison beats. Affiliated with the Jerry Lee Center of Criminology of the University of Pennsylvania, CJJ participates in conferences and develops resource materials for journalists who cover crime.

##### **Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, University of Washington**

<http://www.dartcenter.org/>

The Dart Center advocates ethical and thorough reporting of trauma; educates journalists about the psychology of trauma and news implications; and serves as a forum for journalists to analyze issues, exchange ideas, advance strategies related to reporting on violence and catastrophes, and foster peer support. Each year, the Dart Center presents the Dart Award for Excellence in Reporting on Victims of Violence to radio and newspaper pieces that sensitively and comprehensively illustrate the compound effects of violence on victims’ lives. The Dart Society, consisting of journalists who have received Dart fellowships or awards, promotes sensitive coverage of victims and provides support to journalists affected by covering victimization’s effects.

**Poynter Institute**

<http://www.poynter.org/>

The Poynter Institute is a school dedicated to teaching and inspiring journalists and media leaders. Poynter offers seminars, courses, and workshops at its St. Petersburg, Florida, headquarters; cosponsors national writers' workshops across the country; hosts a toll free hotline for ethical questions; and offers numerous resources through its Web site. In 2005, Poynter launched News University (<http://www.newsu.org/>), an online resource that provides interactive, inexpensive courses to journalists from all experience levels and media backgrounds.

**Victims and the Media Program, Michigan State University School of Journalism**

<http://victims.jrn.msu.edu/index.html>

This program teaches journalism students to report on victims of violence and catastrophe with the sensitivity, dignity, and respect that victims deserve. Since its establishment in 1991, the program has held conferences, created videotapes, and developed curricula. It helps victim advocates work as “facilitators and buffers” between victims and the media, and helps journalists deal with the stress and trauma associated with covering victimization's effects.

**“Victims and the Media” Forums**

When all key “players” involved with the news media coverage of crime and victimization have an understanding of their mutual concerns and unique perspectives, sensitive coverage of crime victims is a likely outcome. In the past, many communities have sponsored 1-day forums and symposia that address these issues and engage journalists, victim advocates, justice professionals, mental health and allied professionals, and victims/survivors as speakers and participants.

As evidenced by the content of this guide, there are many topics that can be addressed in a “Victims and the Media” forum. In a 1-day, 6-hour session, key issues can include—

- An opening panel of victims/survivors speaking about their personal experiences with the media—both positive and negative.
- The viewpoint of journalists regarding what the public needs to know about crime and victimization.
- Perspectives of justice professionals who must maintain the integrity of a case while, at the same time, provide information to the media that is relevant to the public.

- An explanation of the role of victim advocates as both facilitators for victim interviews, and as sources for reliable information about crime and victimization.

It is also helpful to provide a venue for roundtable discussions that mixes participants with different perspectives, in order to promote informative discussions about critical issues and concerns.

### **Journalism Classes**

In an effort to sensitize future journalists to crime victims' issues and specific concerns about victims' interactions with the media, many victim advocates are guest speakers at college journalism classes. The contents of this guide, as well as the companion Guide for Journalists, provide excellent resources to sensitize journalism students and promote interactive discussions about how to balance the needs of victims and journalists. Some tips for presentations include—

- Bring a victim whose experiences were covered in the media to personalize the message.
- Focus on the positive aspects of the news media coverage of crime and victimization, while also addressing key concerns related to responsible media coverage.
- Provide concrete examples from personal experiences.
- Provide simple tips based upon the contents of the OVC guides.
- Be prepared for tough questions—many journalism students' experiences are based upon classroom learning and books and not actual experiences.

### Media Contact Form

Date Received \_\_\_\_\_ Request Received By: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Method of Contact:  Work Phone  Cell  E-mail  Fax  Snail Mail

Deadline: \_\_\_\_\_ Expected Publication/Air Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Request is:  Urgent  Important, but not rush  Information gathering only

#### Position:

- Reporter  Publisher  Columnist  
 Anchor  Producer  News Director  
 Editor (type): \_\_\_\_\_

#### Beat:

- Crime  National  Special Features  
 Metro  Health  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Medium:

- Newspaper  Magazine  Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 TV news  TV talk show  Live or  Taped  
 Radio news  Radio talk show

Target Audience: \_\_\_\_\_

Region/Market: \_\_\_\_\_ Circulation/Viewership: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Story Assignment/Description:

Any Red Flags?  No  Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Recommended Follow up:**

## Glossary of Journalism Terms

**Attribution:** Journalists are encouraged to “attribute” (cite sources for) the facts included in their stories.

**Broadband:** Fast connections to the Internet.

**Broadcast:** Communicating near and far using radio and television.

**Byline:** The printing of the reporter’s name before or after the article.

**Closed question:** Questions that only require a “yes” or “no” answer.

**Copy:** The written raw material of a newspaper or magazine article.

**Beat:** Reporters who are assigned to a “beat” cover a specific content area or physical location (the crime beat, the City Hall beat, etc.).

**Citizen journalism:** When nonprofessionals in the community contribute content (photos, video clips, blogs, etc.), usually for free.

**Cutline:** Another word for a photo caption.

**Dateline:** The reference at the beginning of a news story that lists the date and place where the story occurred.

**Deadline:** The time by which a finished article or video must be submitted for publication. Deadlines are typically set by editors.

**Draft:** The first rough version of a story that can then be edited by the reporter and editors.

**Editor:** A person who corrects, changes, or challenges the reporter’s story before it is published or aired.

**Editing:** The process of correcting or changing the reporter’s copy. With audio and video, the editor helps to create the final product from the reporter’s clips.

**Editorial:** An opinion piece that is normally unsigned. (An op/ed is a signed opinion/editorial, usually produced by someone other than the editor.)

**Feature:** A more in-depth article on a newsworthy topic or individual.

**Five W's and an H:** Who, what, why, when, where, and how. These are the core questions that most news accounts should answer.

**Grip and grin:** Events where politicians shake hands with supporters.

**Journalist:** Someone who conducts interviews, researches, writes, edits, or otherwise produces print, broadcast, or online news.

**Journalism:** The business or practice of reporting the news.

**Leading questions:** Questions designed to draw the interview subject out.

**Lead (or lede):** The first and most important sentence in a news article or news broadcast.

**Loaded words:** Words that can have negative meanings or connotations.

**Nut graf:** The paragraph (not the first) that captures the essence of the story and why people should care.

**On (or off) the record:** *On the record* comments allows the reporter to attach the person's name to the information. *Off the record* comments are not to be included at all, with or without attribution.

**Online journalism:** News reporting on the Internet.

**Open-ended questions:** Questions that encourage people to share their thoughts and feelings. Questions that cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no."

**Pack journalism:** When reporters from different news agencies come together to report on a single story.

**Publish:** To release a work that the public can read, see, or hear.

**Scoop:** To get a story first.

**Source:** A person, book, report, video, song, or audio clip used as a reference for information.

## ENDNOTES

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