

Media 101

Working with the media can be fun, exciting and nerve-wracking. As a mental health professional, you can be a great resource to the media by sharing your expertise on a particular subject. So where do you begin and how can you help the media? Read on...

So you're going to be a spokesperson...

A spokesperson represents the company or organization to the media. They are the face of a company. The best spokespeople...

- Must be knowledgeable about their topic and be able to relate it to everyone.
- Must be available spur of the moment and think quickly.
- Must be credible and honest with the reporter. If you don't know the answer, tell them!

Should you do the interview?

- Don't do an interview outside of your knowledge base.
- Don't do an interview if you haven't rehearsed.

Tips before going on a radio or television interview

Ask the reporter:

- What will the interview be about and how long will it last?
- How will the interview be used—for a news or feature story?
- Will the interview be done over the phone, at my office or at the station? Will it be live or taped for later?
- What kind of questions will you be asking?

Now that you've landed that television gig, how can you succeed?

- Be prepared! Do research on the topic.
- Practice! Have your co-workers and colleagues throw questions at you to answer.
- Ask your host ahead of time about the time requirements and interview style.
- Create **talking points** and **key messages**. These are key phrases and ideas you want communicated in the interview and that you must get across!
- Dress the part. Women: wear solid colors. Men: wear light gray or blue suits, red or burgundy tie. Avoid checks, stripes and other patterns and heavy makeup.
- Don't use one monotone of voice. Be yourself in natural conversation tone and be enthusiastic!
- Don't use jargon and big words. Don't speak too fast!
- Look at the interviewer, not the camera.
- Cat got your tongue? Can't think of what to say? It's okay to gather your thoughts and say I have to think about that one to the interviewer.
- What if you don't know the answer? Don't lie or make up an answer. State the truth!

Helpful Tip: Are you ever off the record?

No! It's not wise to reveal something to the reporter that don't want it publicized, and say it's off the record. A rule of thumb: It's best never to say anything to the reporter that you don't want announced. Although journalists are supposed to follow a code of ethics, sometimes saying "off the record" doesn't mean anything.

The name game: Don't forget to showcase your organization!

Emphasize your organization's name in interviews! Instead of saying, "we are working on mental health parity issues," say "the Ohio Psychological Association is working on mental health parity issues."

More about Key Messages

Key messages are the main points you want the audience to walk away with. These can be about:

- Your point of view you want to tell everyone
- What your organization is about and what areas you cover
- Your organization's mission
- A solution to the problem
- The Who, What, When, Where and Why of a story

Remember to repeat your key points throughout your story/interview.

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Oh no! The reporter is going off topic. What can I do to get back on track?

Use transitional phrases to keep your message on track:

- “What’s important here is”
- “The bottom line is”
- “The real issue is”
- “Let me explain something”
- “Let’s get back to the subject matter”
- “That’s a good question, but what is really important is...”
- “I’d like to make this point before I continue.”
- “Let me give you the latest information on . . . that is really interesting.”

AH! I have a crisis situation on my hands...what do I do?

You are in a crisis situation when something unexpected happens and you don’t have a response. During a crisis situation, you must be quick on your feet! You must respond to the media immediately, but not before crafting a response. Other things to keep in mind:

- Tell the truth and tell as many details as you can.
- Stick to your key messages.
- Accept responsibility and take action for the situation!

The Power of the Pen...Writing a Letter to the Editor

Need to express a thought to a newspaper? The simplest and easiest way is through a letter to the editor. Keep these tips in mind when you sit down to write...

- Know the paper’s policy for printing letters, including length and contact information requirements (most newspapers require an address and contact phone number to verify it’s you)
- Keep it simple and brief. Don’t use a lot of jargon. The shorter, the better.
- If possible, tie the letter with recent articles in the newspaper or recent happenings in the national news. OPA recently published a letter to the editor in the *Columbus Dispatch* that tied in with the paper’s previous editorial.
- Follow up on the letter a few days later to see the status. Don’t be disappointed if your letter isn’t published!

How to Write a Good News Release

Have a good research project or announcement you want to share with the media? Do it in a news release! The components of a release are:

1. **Contact Information:** Place your contact information, including e-mail and phone, in the top right hand corner. On the left hand side place FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE to let the editor know it’s okay to run.
2. **Headline:** Grab the reader’s attention with a catchy headline.
3. **Opening Paragraph:** Think about how you can hook the reader in with a catchy beginning. Also provide as many details of the who, what, when, where and why as you can.
4. **Quote:** After the first paragraph, try to get a quote that adds flavor to the story. Don’t repeat information in the quote.
5. **Body:** Place the rest of the information. The body should be written in inverted pyramid style, with the most important information about the top, followed by the least important. Get to the good stuff first!
6. **Boilerplate:** This should close the release with information about your organization and where to go for additional information. This is usually the first thing to get cut when a release appears in a newspaper, but it provides a wealth of information to consumers and reporters.

Remember to keep your release simple. This means clear language, no fluff, no cliches and no redundancy. For example, if you see the word utilize in your release, switch it to use. The word very never adds any color; cut it out. Are you using phrases such as first began (use began) or past history (use history)? Keep adjectives out of the story. Edit, edit, edit!