

Telling your story to the media – a checklist of things to think about

Deciding whether you would like to take part

- Think about the potential risks to yourself, such as revealing personal information – perhaps inadvertently – such as details of your financial circumstances and where you live.
- Think about possible impacts on others, especially children and other family members. Discuss with them the possible impacts and whether to take part.
- Consider what others might think. Family, neighbours, friends and others in the community might comment and judge – and might be supportive or critical.
- Consider the agenda or motives of the journalist or media outlet – and how your story might be used.

Negotiating the involvement

- Determine whether or not your identity will be revealed (or is likely to become apparent); bear in mind that it can be difficult to fully disguise someone's identity.
- Find out where and how the interview will take place – on the phone, at home, at a community venue, or in a studio. Will it be pre-recorded or live? If possible, negotiate your preferred option/format.
- Discuss and agree what the interview would cover – you can ask to have the questions beforehand.
- Agree what your editorial input might be – for example, you might be able to check quotes in a press article before it is published. But it is very unlikely you will be able to see and comment on a draft article or broadcast piece before it goes out. Journalists are under no obligation to let you see pre-publication material – but you can negotiate.
- Note that you will probably be asked to sign a release form if you have been interviewed for television or radio. That gives you an opportunity to decide whether you agree to have your interview used.

How to do it

- Try to be confident and assertive, and stay calm.
- Be concise and specific; focus on your key message.
- Establish your boundaries beforehand – and stick to them. Say if you are not happy with the questioning. Try not to get sidetracked.
- Try to be positive if possible and say what action is needed.
- If it is for television, think about image – what you will wear, body language and background. Similar considerations apply if a photo is to be reproduced in a newspaper or magazine.
- Avoid 'off the record' conversation – there is no guarantee that it will not be used.

Get support

- If a third-sector organisation brokered this, they should be asked for support. That might include talking about the implications and the process, media training, a practice interview and accompanying you at the interview.
- In particular, consider whether you would like to have someone with you before, during and after the interview. Debriefing might prove to be as valuable as briefing was beforehand.

Factors to bear in mind

- Doing this might not change anything for you or for others.
- The interview will be edited.
- It might not be used or very little might be used – so be prepared for disappointment.