

Press & Media Protocol

(For Guidance Only)

Requests from the media

Occasionally there will be legitimate requests from various branches of the media for general background information on the issues of abuse and sexual violence. This Protocol is published to offer guidance in these circumstances.

Where requests for victims to participate are concerned; DABS will only pass such requests to other suitable counsellors and organisations who have already expressed their interest. They can then consider the requests and if they feel that they have suitable client/s, make direct arrangements with the media ensuring that their client/s have full support, protection and anonymity if they so wish.

From the counsellor's perspective

During and following an initial approach made to you by the media we recommend that you consider the issues mentioned below; for yourself and any potential client/s you may have in mind:

General

It is important to obtain enough information about the proposal.

When dealing with any enquiry, you are advised to make full notes as you go. Ask for clarification of specific points and details if and where necessary.

Make sure you get the names and roles of the individual/s you speak to.

One should not be concerned with the needs and wants of the media.

At the completion of the initial approach, it is always wise to end the conversation with a short statement that you need to think about the proposal and that you will get back to them. How this is accepted is a good indicator as to the suitability of the organisation that has approached you.

Unless there are very exceptional circumstances, requests for counsellors and victims to appear live at short notice should be refused.

Be aware of the differing time scales involved. Film productions may last for many months, sometimes over a year. Magazine and newspaper articles often have to work with shorter deadlines. Timescales should not be accepted by or be a significant influence to the counsellor/s or victim/s involved.

Information to ask for

1. Is it to be part of a currently produced series of programmes or articles?
 - If so, you can familiarise yourself with the recent output
 - If not, find out who the likely producer/s and journalist/s will be and the kind of work they have already done
 - Ask for copy recordings or written articles of their past work
2. What is the proposed programme or article about?
3. What are the core issues and intentions of the programme makers or writers?

4. What will be the setting and format for the work? Is it to be studio or location work, live or recorded, an open debate or a number of interviews? Are others participating and if so what part will they play?
5. What are the deadlines or expected timescales?
6. What degree of disclosure of detail about past events will be expected as opposed to generalised statements?
7. What degree of involvement and time commitment will be expected from you and the client/s and what payments will be made to meet expenses?
8. What opportunities are there for meetings so that you and your client/s can familiarise yourselves with the people and settings before work commences?
9. Will participation be anonymous or otherwise? Use of silhouette / voice disguise / actors to play the part etc.
10. Will you and your client/s be able to see / hear / read the material before it is published?
11. What control if any will you and your client/s have over the content? (Usually it is very little or none, they have a business to run; but a responsible and ethical organisation would be disappointed if you and your client/s were not pleased with the finished product. You are looking for respect from them from the start).

Following the initial approach

Take some time to consider and digest the experience. It may help to discuss the proposition with a colleague or supervisor. Consider the following:

1. How comfortable did you feel with the enquiry?
2. Did you feel under pressure?
3. Did you feel drawn into their plans or were you able and allowed to stand apart and focus on your needs and that of your client/s?
4. Was the proposition considered and well planned, and did it demonstrate respect for the subject matter and the victims or survivors?
5. How did they respond to your wish to think about it and get back to them?
6. What other questions now come to light? Make a list and get back to your media contact with your follow up enquiries.
7. Once you have a sense for the proposal, you are in a position to consider whether or not you have any client/s, past or present that may be suitable. Here of course **the welfare of your client/s is paramount**. If you have any doubts at all that can not be satisfied through further enquiries, it is best to decline.
8. Generally, the most suitable clients are going to be those who are autonomous and strong, those who are assertive and have resolved all their most important issues and those who are able to consider the media proposition/s critically.
9. Consider how involvement with the media could affect the therapeutic relationship, issues of trust, the process with your client/s and their overall outcome.

10. Check out the questions for prospective suitable clients below and be prepared to assist your client/s with their processing and decision making. They may not be focussed on protecting themselves ~ you must be.
11. Consider the fact that you may need to accompany and protect your client/s and be sure that you can make that on-going commitment.
12. If involvement with the media is at your suggestion, you must be prepared to support your client/s at no cost to them. The safety and welfare of your client/s will be your responsibility. It may be that work will need to be done to help your client/s deal with issues that arise following media exposure. This work could be with you at no cost to them, or you may have to pay for the client/s to work with another counsellor. If the idea of the involvement comes from the client/s in the first instance, then they must be prepared to meet the financial costs.
13. As a rule of thumb you are looking for an opportunity to provide your client/s with an experience that is good and positive in their lives.
14. You are also looking for a positive outcome for yourself.

From the client's perspective

There are some considerations that clients should be made aware:

1. What impact will the proposed media work have on my healing process and the resolution of my issues and problems? List the positives and negatives.
2. What is the timescale involved and what are the deadlines? Are these comfortable for me?
3. What affect could this work have on my counselling relationship/s?
4. How will the proposal affect my right and need for confidentiality?
5. How much detail will I be expected to disclose?
6. What reproaches or recriminations could follow? For example, if my abuser was terminally ill, very elderly or facing a serious life crisis, disclosure might seem harsh to others. Also you should consider what legal action might follow.
7. What could be the consequences and impact of disclosure on relationships with and between the following:
 - Children
 - Partner
 - Parents
 - Wider family members
 - Friends and acquaintances
 - Work colleagues now and in future
8. What could be the effects if generic terms are used to partially describe the abuser; terms such as: teacher, family member, youth worker? Such terms may seem reasonable but could easily stigmatise many innocent people in those groups.
9. Is my involvement going to lead to a public label?
10. Could my involvement create unhealthy and unwanted interest in me? It is not unknown that following identification in the media, participants attract people who find the idea of meeting an abused person interesting.

11. Also some consideration may need to be given to the innocent family members and associates of the abuser who could be stigmatised if identified.

Information published through the social media:

Clients need to be aware that any information shared through social media, including email, is insecure. Attempts to limit the scope of publication by restricting the readership list does not guarantee that those people will not copy and share details more widely. Publication through social media could also interfere with the work that the press and other mainstream media organisations wish to publish on your behalf.

Unless there are very important reasons why social media services need to be used we advise avoiding any disclosures through this medium. If information has already been shared in this way, it would be wise to inform any press and media organisations that you work with; and it would be reasonable for them to have access to that information if it was requested.

What degree of control will the client/s have on the completed work?

A client should assume that the people they least want to see or hear the programme or read the article are going to.

They should be aware that however respectful and considerate journalists are, they WILL ask the most difficult, personal and challenging questions; it's their job. Your client/s should know that they have a right to refuse to answer any questions and that they do not have to offer an explanation.

Your client/s should be prepared for staff changes amongst those working with them on a programme. Your client/s may build up a good relationship with one or two individuals only to find that they are replaced at short notice.

Your client/s should be prepared for changes in direction and style as the programme or article evolves.

Your client/s should be prepared for the programme or article to be delayed; or for lengthy gaps during production or for it to be withdrawn altogether.

It may be admirable to have a wish to help other victims and survivors by participating, but such good intentions can be mistaken. **Your client/s must be made aware of the fact that there can be no guarantee that their desired outcomes will be fulfilled and that their primary duty is towards themselves.**

Your client/s should retain the right to withdraw from any proposal at any time without needing to give an explanation.

Your client/s should be looking for a positive outcome from their involvement.

BOOKS ON HANDLING THE MEDIA

HOW TO HANDLE MEDIA INTERVIEWS - *Andrew Boyd*

FACE THE MEDIA: The Complete Guide to Getting Publicity and Handling Media Opportunities - *Judith Byrne*

HOW TO HANDLE THE MEDIA - *Nicholas Comfort*

MEDIA SMART: HOW TO HANDLE A REPORTER - BY A REPORTER - *Dennis Stauffer*