



Preparing for an interview

Media relations toolkit

Engaging the media to elevate sexual violence prevention

Coverage in local, regional, and national media is important — news coverage across formats keeps communities and leaders up to date on key issues and informs public understanding. When sexual violence prevention practitioners engage the media, it is an opportunity to elevate sexual violence prevention, connect with new audiences, and increase your organization’s credibility and recognition.

One way you may find yourself engaged in news coverage is as an expert source for reporters. This is a great opportunity to share your key messages and inform the public about the prevention work your organization is doing in the community. Reporters are more likely to contact you if you’ve built a relationship with them. For ways to engage journalists, please see Chapter 3 of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*.¹

Whether a journalist is reaching out for background information (like statistics on rates of prevalence) or comments on breaking news, it’s important to make the interaction count by adding value to their news coverage while also speaking to your key goals and messages. The trouble is that sexual violence is a complex topic for journalists to cover, and it can be even more difficult for the general public to understand. Generally, reporters covering this topic are also limited by quick turnarounds to meet publication deadlines and brief word counts for their stories.

To be prepared and ensure that you and the journalist both get the most out of this interview, remember to:

Organize logistics

- Most reporters are on a deadline, so it's important to respond promptly.
- Ask the reporter about their deadline, the focus of the story, and who else they've contacted.
- Do background research on the outlet and journalist. Check out their social media and read some of their recent stories to get an idea of their style and angle.
- Remember: You're in control of the interview. You decide if and when it takes place, for how long, and what is discussed.

Prepare your message

- It is not possible to be both comprehensive and strategic. Since you can't tell the journalist everything you know, think about how this interview could fit into the larger goals you are trying to accomplish. What do you want the journalist to leave the interview knowing? Have two to three messages (or talking points) you plan to get across, no matter what questions you're asked. (See Chapter 2 of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*¹)
- Have at the ready any resources or information you want to disseminate or refer the reporter to.
- Gather your notes and supporting statistics with citations, but avoid overloading the reporter with numbers. If you do use any stats, follow up with the reporter afterward to provide citations.
- Many reporters end an interview by asking if you have anything else you'd like to say on the topic. Be prepared to draw on your talking points and repeat your key messages.

Stay on message

- The most important thing to remember is that *an interview is not a conversation*. In other words, **don't assume anything is off the record or private**. Play it safe and

never say anything to a reporter you wouldn't want to hear on the evening news.

- Prepare for difficult questions. You can't predict every tough question a reporter might ask, but based on your own experiences or conversations with your colleagues, you can probably brainstorm at least a few of the tougher questions you might be asked. (See Appendix B of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*¹)
- Practice pivoting, or refocusing the conversation, back to your talking points using phrases like:

What is most important for people to know is...

I think it's important we take a step back...

Many people don't realize that... (State a fact instead of answering questions about myths)

We want people to know that... (An opportunity to promote local resources)

- For more examples of phrases that can help you refocus the interview, see Appendix A of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*.¹

Reporters may call to talk about breaking news, asking questions such as “How can there be monsters like this in our community?” or speculating about how a local case compares to a story in the public eye. This is a great time to pivot to your key messages — saying something like, “What's really important for people to take away from this situation is...”

Focus on your delivery

- It's understandable that an on-the-record interview about a sensitive topic can be nerve racking. Preparation and

practice are the best tactics to minimize nervousness. Practice your talking points out loud. If possible, you might want to try practicing with a friend or colleague to build your confidence.

- Remind yourself to slow down. People tend to talk faster when they're nervous, so remember to pace yourself.
- Think of your responses as media bites. Less is often more. (See Chapter 3 of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*¹)

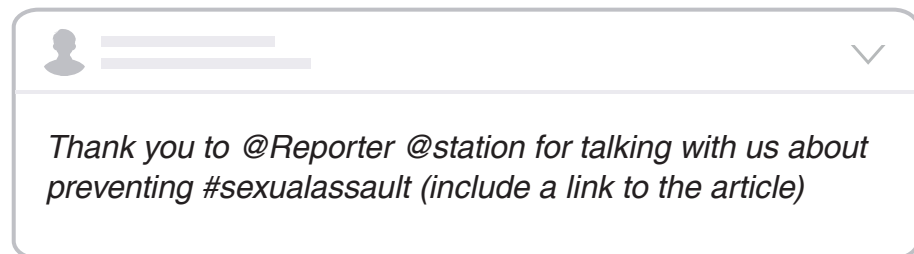


- Present information in plain language and avoid using acronyms or “insider” language. Instead of “rape culture,” you might talk about norms and expectations that could make abuse or assault seem normal or less serious. Instead of “bystander intervention,” could you talk about taking care of one another? (See Chapter 2 of *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*¹)
- Be positive and speak with confidence. Remember, you are the authority on this topic.
- Be transparent and honest about what you don't know or are unsure about. For example, you may be asked to comment on a topic that is beyond the scope of your expertise or an event or case you are not prepared to comment on. It is OK to let the reporter know you are not able to speak to a specific question or topic at that time. You may be able to follow up later to share information or make a referral to another source.

- Be brief, and be comfortable with silence. When you've finished your answer, there may be a pause before the reporter responds or asks the next question. Don't feel as though you need to fill this gap.

Remember to follow up

- Offer to follow up if there are questions you are not sure how to answer.
- Send any further resources you think it will be helpful for the reporter to have.
- Follow the journalist on social media and post a thank-you:



References

1. Berkeley Media Studies Group, & National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2018). *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsvrc.org/moving-toward-prevention-guide-reframing-sexual-violence>

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