



MEDIA INTERVIEWS

MEDIA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Congratulations! If you have received a request from the media for an interview, you are well on your way to successful media advocacy. A few tips will help you overcome any nervousness you might have and lead to a productive interview that will result in positive coverage for your issue.

Relax and have fun! Remember that you are in control. Talk as if you were talking to your Aunt Sally. Don't assume that the reporter knows about your issue. Provide background information, including useful facts and figures. Most important: make the story real and relevant.

Keep language simple and direct. Don't use jargon or acronyms that might confuse the reporter or your audience.

Speak in short, clear, and quotable sentences. Pretaped interviews will be edited, so points that are made in long paragraphs probably will be lost. Remember that media bites—the 9-second quotes that encapsulate main points—are essential in communicating through the media.

Make your most important point first. If you try leading up to it with background information, you may not get to it at all, or you may lose your audience in the meantime. Emphasize your major points by "flagging" or listing them. For example: "The bottom line is..." "The most important point is..."

Don't feel compelled to answer a question if you don't like it. Rather, use it as an opportunity to get *your* point across. Be ready to "reframe" questions that are off the mark. Turn negatives into positives. Responses to badly phrased questions include, "What is really important is..." and "We are really trying to keep our focus on..."

Don't be a know-it-all. If you don't have the answer to any particular question, don't fake it. Instead, use the opportunity to make one of your main points. If the reporter has the time, you can offer to get the information for her. Be patient, not belligerent; kind, not nasty; and helpful, not argumentative. Allow your expertise and personal involvement to come across, but don't be arrogant.

Dress appropriately for TV. Wear clothes that look professional but not too formal. Solid colors are better than prints. Bright colors are fine as long as they are not overwhelming. Keep jewelry simple. Dangling earrings and jingling bracelets can distract the viewer from what you are saying.

Don't count on anything you say being truly "off the record." If you never want to have something reported, don't say it.

