

## **Considerations When Speaking with the Media**

As a victim or witness of crime, the media can be a strong ally or your nemesis. The majority of journalists are ethically responsible and chose to report crime in a way that brings validation, dignity and truth to your misfortune while helping to raise awareness of victims' rights and available services in the community in which you live. But there are also exceptions. An unscrupulous media representative may elect to investigate and cover the news – in this case, you - in a way that violates your privacy and compromises your ability to regain a sense of control over your everyday activities.

As the injured party, you should know that most local and regional media organizations are guided by principles designed to present the plight of crime victims and witnesses in a way that is truthful yet non-exploitive. You should also know that you have rights and can chose to exercise these rights when speaking with a representative of print or broadcast media. With this in mind, we have prepared a guideline to assist you in your contact with the media in the event you are asked to give an interview.

You have the right to:

- Grieve in privacy
- Tell your story in a way that is comfortable for you to tell your story
- Give or refuse to give personal pictures
- Ask that offensive pictures not be used, although media may still use them
- Select the time and location for media interviews
- Select a specific reporter who you feel will provide accurate and fair coverage of your story
- Chose to have a spokesperson speak for you. You also have the right to expect the media to respect your selection of spokesperson
- Have someone else with you during your interview for support
- Release a written statement through a spokesperson
- Exclude children from interviews
- Conduct a television interview using a silhouette or give a newspaper interview without having a photograph taken
- Ask to review a story before it appears, if there is time before the submission deadline
- Know what questions the reporter will ask prior to the interview along with the right to veto any of those questions
- Hold a press conference to speak to all media at the same time or speak to only one report at a time
- Refrain from answering any questions with which you are uncomfortable or feel is inappropriate
- Demand a retraction when inaccurate information is reported
- Say “no” to an interview even though you have granted interviews on previous occasions
- Refuse an interview with a specific reporter with whom you are uncomfortable even though you have granted interviews with other reporters
- Be treated with dignity and respect by the media

If you chose to grant an interview, you should consult with the assistant prosecutor or investigator handling your case before doing so. While the assistant prosecutor or investigator can't prohibit you from speaking to the media, they may give you information that may help you decide how to best handle your interview. This

is especially important if you are a witness to the crime. We don't recommend that you speak to the media prior to the disposition of the case. Remember, any information you give the media is considered public and can be used at trial. As a witness, you have made an investment in the outcome of the case. You don't want to say anything that could compromise the integrity of the investigation or later prosecution of the matter. If you decide to grant an interview, you may want to ask the following questions:

- What's this story about and how will my interview be used in the story?
- Who else will be interviewed for the story?
- Will my interview be broadcast on television or radio? Will my interview be live (real time) or taped and edited?

Here are some additional considerations:

- Prepare for the interview by listing the questions you think the media may want to ask you and think how you would answer them.
- Consider writing an outline in advance to help you keep your thoughts focused and organized
- Be brief and concise. Use simple, clear statements. If you edit yourself, the media will have less editing to do and what they report may be more accurate
- When beginning your statement/interview, have two or three main ideas or facts that you want to tell the media and make your comments right away
- Remember, you can control the information you share. You can set limits and tell the reporter you won't discuss certain aspects of your case or experiences
- Never say "off the record". There is no such thing as "off the record" to the media. Everything you say can be reported. Once you've said something to a reporter, you can't take it back or expect them not to use it
- Don't embellish. If you don't know something or are unsure, just say you don't know or have the information. Don't speculate about any aspect of the case. Stay with what you know.
- When you talk to a reporter, you're actually talking to their entire audience, thousands, if not millions, of viewers, readers, and listeners will read/hear your comments

Discussing your case publicly can be very emotional for some victims. Talking to the media can compound these feelings leaving you confused, frustrated and overwhelmed. As stated, if you chose to speak to a reporter you should prepare carefully. Knowing what questions a reporter could ask during your interview can help you prepare for any unanticipated and/or inappropriate inquiries. While it's impossible for you to know exactly what the interviewer will ask, here are some possible interviewer questions that you can use to help frame your comments prior to speaking with the media:

- What happened? When? Where? How?
- How has the crime affected you and your family?
- Tell me about you (or your loved one). Who are you? Who was he/she?
- How do you feel after the event:
- Why do you think this happened? Do you know who was involved? What was the cause?
- What would you like to see done? Who should pay for this and how?
- What do you think about the jury's verdict? Do you believe the sentence was appropriate?
- Do you think justice was served for you (or your loved one)?

(Excerpts of this article were taken from: [www.azhomicidesurvivors.org](http://www.azhomicidesurvivors.org))