



Preparing for and Working with Media in a School Crisis

Communicating with Media in a Crisis

- Be prepared. Be honest. Be brief. Stress concern for student, staff safety.
- Be accessible. Stick to the facts.
- Keep cool. Don't become defensive; don't lose your temper or argue.
- Develop a written statement to be read and handed out.
- Contact the news media before they contact you. Set any reasonable geographic boundary or time limits. Explain the reason for the limitations.
- Stress positive actions taken by the school or district.
- Do not make statements about responsibility until all the facts are known.
- Pause and collect your thoughts before responding to questions. (Do more listening than talking.)
- The interview is not over until the reporter leaves. Always be careful about what you say in the presence of a reporter before or after an interview. The microphone may still be on.
- Don't respond to negative questions by repeating words that inflame the situation. *"Yes, it is a real tragedy ..."*
- Be alert to statements that begin:
 - *Isn't it true that ...?*
 - *How do you respond to ...?*
 - *Are you aware that ...?*
- Avoid *"what if"* questions. You can't predict the future.
- Do not say, *"No comment"* ever! Instead, try *"I will have to check into the matter. What is your deadline? I will get back to you."* (then do it).
- There is no such thing as *"off the record."* While many reporters honor this, you cannot assume that all reporters will.
- Understand all the facts, especially technical ones (or get a topic expert to provide information).
- Include date and time stamps on all updated informational releases.
- Know what is being done to help staff and students cope with the situation. (e.g. crisis intervention team offering counseling and support on campus)
- Go public with any changes made as a result of your after-action assessment.