



Preparing for and Working with Media in a School Crisis

The Media Perspective

- In crisis situations, an adversarial relationship may occur between the district and a news outlet, especially if good relationships have not existed in the past.
- The media consider the district spokesperson to be someone who will paint the best possible picture of all elements of a disaster or crisis.
- Media are likely to explore aspects of the blame game, such as a staff member's error, some structural defect, or lack of maintenance in the building. Why? Because it's a question the public will be asking.
- Media do not consider the spokesperson to be the only source of information. They will seek to interview other involved or connected to the incident, and there is a seemingly endless supply of students, parents and fringe folks willing to share their experiences.
 - In some crisis situations, consider designating a media/press area as near to the incident site as possible (otherwise media will stake out its own location).
 - Media does not have a right to interfere with the educational process; they do not have a right to enter a school or district facility when school or business operations are in session.
 - It is a judgment call whether to allow the news media on your school campus. The news media may use any public property, such as sidewalks or a park, and may interview students, staff, or parents at this location.
 - If appropriate, arrange for several student leaders to meet with reporters to share the general feeling of the student body. Parent permission is required for anyone under 18 years old. A school administrator should be present during interviews with students.
- The news media's role is to make public the information people seek. Reporters see their role as informing parents and the general public.
- School systems that do not respond to media inquiries and reporters' questions in a timely manner is likely to leave the impression that the district is trying to hide something or is indifferent. Being unresponsive is the quickest route to ensure an adversarial relationship. If reporters assume the district is lying to them, they will assume the district is lying to the public.