

Handling Media Attention after a Major Incident

Dealing with the media can sometimes be distressing and daunting. It is your decision whether or not to speak to journalists. While it may not feel like it, you are in control of this. Remember if you do not want to, you don't have to.

Why would you want to speak to the media?

Sometimes, communicating with the media in a controlled way can be a positive experience. It may also satisfy the media's demand for information, and reduce the number of enquiries you receive. Ways to do this include issuing a statement – which could be read by you, someone else, or released in writing – and answering questions for a limited time. However you should be aware that providing information can sometimes lead to more coverage and interest. There may also be situations where you would want to exercise caution – for example, when others are at risk or if an investigation is ongoing.

Why is the media interested?

The media plays an important role in satisfying the public's demand for information and holding public services to account. Speaking to a range of sources can help the media build up an accurate picture of events.

What happens if you don't want to speak to the media?

You should be aware that the media might use information in the public domain, including the electoral roll and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to find people, addresses and other personal details. They may also talk to local people, friends, family and colleagues. If you want to reduce the access the press have to this information, you can:

- have someone you trust look after your phone and filter your calls for a while;
- check your privacy settings;
- delete content from social media; and
- tell your friends/family/colleagues you do not want them to talk to the press about you (although they may still do so).

What should you consider if you do want to speak to the press?

If you do speak to the press, you should first be clear about what you want to say, and think about the questions they will ask, and the answers you want to give them. You should remember that you do not have to answer any questions, but the media could use any information that you give them – even if you tell them something in confidence or off the record. Alternatively, you could also ask a friend, family member or employer to speak to the press on your behalf. If you want to speak on a sensitive matter you might wish to consider seeking the advice of a lawyer.

There are Public Relations (PR) agencies that specialise in managing relationships with the media, although these can be expensive. While we cannot recommend a particular agency, you could seek advice from the Chartered Institute for Public Relations or the PR Consultants Association.

What can you do if you are being pressured or harassed by the media?

Most UK newspapers are members of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). Newspapers who are members must comply with the Editors' Code of Practice, which means they must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit. If requested, they must identify themselves and whom they represent. In some cases IPSO is able to contact newspapers and magazine publishers to make them aware of concerns that the Editors' Code may be breached via a private advisory notice.

If you feel you are being harassed by a journalist, IPSO operates a 24 hour emergency helpline. The contact details are at the end of this factsheet.

What can you do if you are unhappy with media coverage after a programme has been broadcast?

All broadcasters have procedures to make sure that complaints regarding news programmes, or from those who have appeared in programmes and their relatives, are dealt with quickly – so you may want to contact them directly in the first instance.

If you have a complaint about something you've seen or heard on television or on the radio you can also complain the Office of Communications (Ofcom). Ofcom is the independent communications regulator responsible for regulating broadcast media against the Broadcast Code. Sections of the Code cover offensive and harmful material, hate speech, accuracy, and privacy.

What can you do if you are unhappy with press coverage after a publication?

If you believe something you have read in a UK newspaper has breached the newspaper's Code of Practice, you should firstly contact the publication that published the article. If your complaint is not resolved, you may be able to contact a regulator should the publication be signed up to one.

Support in talking to the media

If you are the victim of a terrorist attack, Victim Support can provide advice on talking to the media. You can contact them on 08 08 16 89 111. If you have been bereaved by an attack, your police Family Liaison Officer can also provide support.

How to get in contact with the organisations mentioned in this factsheet

Organisation	Email/Website	Telephone	Address
Press regulators			
Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO)	Find out more about IPSO's Code of Practice here: https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/ Make a complaint to IPSO here: https://www.ipso.co.uk/make-a-complaint/ More advice on harassment can be found here: https://www.ipso.co.uk/harassment/	If you believe you are being harassed, IPSO operates a 24 hour emergency helpline. During office hours you can call 0300 123 22 20 and out of hours you can call 07799 903 929. Only use this number in cases of harassment by a journalist. For any other enquires call 0300 123 22 20	Independent Press Standards Organisation, Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, London, EC4M 7LG
IMPRESS	Make a complaint to IMPRESS: https://impress.press/complaints/	020 3325 4288	The Independent Monitor for the Press CIC, 16-18 New Bridge Street, London, EC4V 6AG
Ofcom and broadcasters			
Office of Communications (Ofcom)	Find more information about Ofcom's regulatory role and make a complaint here: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/how-to-report-a-complaint/complain-about-tv-radio-ondemand	020 7981 3040	PO Box 1285, Warrington WA1 9GL