

## Additional Tips to Prepare for Media Interviews

Victim Service Providers (VSPs) can offer you some basic tips to prepare for media interviews. Their past personal experiences and knowledge of the specific news medium or reporter involved can be helpful. Below are some additional tips for managing media interviews:

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- **Relax and be yourself.** Your level of personal comfort will improve your interview experience.
  - **Be sincere and honest.** Your personal credibility is your most important asset. And your personal feelings and perceptions of what happened and its impact on you and your loved ones are what will make the news story truly powerful and memorable.
  - **Know what you want to say.** Be prepared with two or three key points *you* want to make and find a way to make them early in the interview. For example: “The one thing I really want to say is....,” or “My most important message is....” Return to those messages and repeat them in different forms whenever you can.
  - **Speak slowly and clearly.** Think about the question, then think about your answer.
  - **Keep your answers brief and succinct.** You can follow a brief answer with more details, but make sure what you feel is the most important information is conveyed simply and to the point. Consider preparing and practicing specific quotations you feel are important in advance.
  - **Once you make your point, stop talking.** Don’t worry about silence. It is not your job to fill it. Talking beyond your stopping point makes it harder to edit your quotes. It is also when many people say things they wish they hadn’t.
  - **Send your messages.** You can reinforce your key points by repeating them.
  - **Listen to the entire question before answering it.** Take the time needed to formulate your response. In broadcast interviews, overlapping your answer with the interviewer’s question can make it difficult for editors.
  - **Make sure you know what is being asked.** If you don’t understand a question, ask for clarification.
  - **Refuse politely.** If an interviewer’s question makes you feel uncomfortable, politely say, “I’m not comfortable answering that question.”
  - **Don’t overextend.** If you don’t know the answer to a question, simply say so. If you feel you can’t respond, give a brief reason, such as, “I’ll be able to answer that once I know more about.....”

- **Never say, “No comment.”** You can say, “I’m unable to answer that question at this time” or “I don’t have enough information to fully address your question.”
- **Avoid going “off the record.”** Simply assume that *everything* you say is “on the record” and speak accordingly.
- **Avoid distractions.** Do not use hand gestures that may block your face or expressions that detract from the content of the interview. Don’t wear jangly or shiny jewelry to broadcast interviews. Avoid tapping your fingers or your feet.
- **Correct errors.** If inaccurate information is presented in the course of an interview, present the facts to correct it in a positive manner.
- **Avoid fatigue.** If you need to take a break (except during live interviews), ask for one.
- **Don’t feel guilty about being human.** Always remember that what happened to you was very traumatic and is likely still distressing to you. It’s okay to show emotions during an interview!

## During the Interview

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- Your personal comfort level—both physical and emotional—will directly affect the actual interview. When you are well prepared, you will feel a greater sense of confidence and control.
- Recognize that interviews can be stressful. Remember to breathe during the interview! You can use stress reduction techniques—such as deep breathing, physical stretching, visual imagery, or listening to your favorite soothing music—to relax immediately prior to interviews.
- Your support person or VSP can help plan for a comfortable physical environment. If the interview is conducted at your home or office, you can choose the place where he or she feels most comfortable talking. If you do a visual broadcasted interview, consider if there are any pictures or personal items you do not want to have broadcast and temporarily remove them from view. Your support person or VSP can arrange the physical space to avoid clutter, have a box of tissues on hand, ensure there is appropriate light and space, and provide for electrical outlets or extension cords for the media. The goal is to have an interview setting that is quiet (no external noise, cell phones turned off, etc.). A bottle of water should be provided for both you and the interviewer.
- If the interview is conducted in a studio or other environment, your support person or VSP can work with media professionals to address physical comfort needs (see above). VSPs can explain, review, and discuss key interview logistics with you such as:
  - The person who is conducting the interview and how he/she would like to be addressed.
  - Different personnel responsible for production, light, sound, and makeup.
  - Use of lavalier microphones and conducting sound checks (your VSP should explain any boundaries on personal touching).
  - Guidelines for speaking directly to the interviewer or camera(s).
  - If and how visuals will be used.

- If and how other guests will be involved.

If the interview is conducted from a remote location, you should determine in advance:

- The length of the interview.
- Whether it is live or tape-recorded.
- Arrangements for the interviewer and you to speak prior to the actual interview, in person or by telephone, to enhance your familiarity and comfort with each other.
- The equipment and logistics related to remote interviews—such as cameras, microphones, earpieces, and sound checks—and ensure that you are comfortable with the equipment and process.
- Where you should look during the interview, and how to know where to look if multiple cameras are used.

## Follow-Up

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- Following an interview, you may seek feedback from your support person and/or VSP about your interview style and the information you conveyed. It's important to first assess *how you felt about the interview*. Constructive feedback can help you improve your interview techniques and gain confidence for the future.
- Your support person or VSP should determine, to the degree possible, when a story will be published or aired and inform you. If you want to document your interview(s), it's helpful to prepare a scrapbook or audio/video library.
- If you have time, it's always a good idea to send a "thank you" text, email or note to the journalist who interviewed you. It's important to validate and support their interest in covering MVIs and the personal impact on victims, and collective impact on communities in which they occur.

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***The NMVVC is grateful to victim advocate Anne Seymour and to both Bruce Shapiro and Elana Newman of the DART Center for Journalism & Trauma for their collaboration on this tip sheet.***