

DHHS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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It doesn't matter who is doing the interview, or whether the interview is for television, radio or print. The important thing to remember is that you need to be in control of the interview. Never lose control of the interview. View the interview as your chance to get your information to the public.

Over the years, we've developed some ground rules for dealing with the media. Those rules are contained later in this chapter.

Got Nerves?

Most people get nervous when a reporter asks for an interview. That's a typical, normal reaction. People have different techniques for dealing with nerves. Some people have found that taking a few deep breaths works. Others swear by a moment of meditation. Others go for a walk to organize their thoughts. There is no secret rule for overcoming feelings of nervousness, but the more you prepare for the interview the better off you'll be.

Take some time to talk informally with the reporter about his or her request. Find out what the reporter needs. Is he or she looking for cursory or in-depth information? Is he or she doing a historical interview, or is the subject current? How long does the reporter expect the interview to last? What kind of deadline is the reporter working on?

Prepare for the Interview

Once you know what the reporter is looking for you can prepare for your interview. You have the right to take time to prepare for the interview. Don't let a reporter bully you into responding off-the-cuff. You want to make sure that you know what you are talking about before the interview begins. It is perfectly acceptable to tell a reporter that you need time to familiarize yourself with the issue.

Pull your notes and files. Read over the information. Familiarize yourself with the subject. Think about what points you want to make in the interview. Practice expressing those points. Think of arresting ways to make your points. Is there a colorful phrase that will express your

point? Can you think of good examples and illustrations to make your point? Can you distill confusing, complicated data down to a simple, concise thought?

It is a good idea to have your files and notes readily accessible, so you can pull information if needed. Don't worry about looking up information. Reporters don't expect you to have memorized everything, but they do expect you to give them correct answers. If providing a correct answer means taking the time to consult your notes or files, then do so.

Television Interviews

Lots of people freak when a television reporter calls. They think that they are expected to look like anchor people. Don't fret. The public doesn't expect you to look like Diane Sawyer or Dan Rather. You don't have to wear a suit and tie or dress and panty hose. Just be yourself. The important thing is that you appear honest, straightforward and concerned.

A useful technique to tame the television nerves is to imagine that your conversation is one-on-one with someone you know and like. Pretend you are explaining your program/issue to your mom, your spouse or a close friend.

Look at the reporter, not the camera. The camera person should be concerned with the camera, not you!

Be prepared to suggest visuals that may help make your story better. You might suggest meeting the reporter outside your office at a more visual location. For instance, if you are doing an interview about water quality you might want to suggest that you meet on the banks of a river. If you're doing an interview about hospital rules, you might want to meet at a hospital.

Radio Interviews

Most radio interviews are conducted over the phone. Make sure that you prepare for the interview by cutting out all distractions. Ask that other calls be held and shut your door, so that phones aren't ringing and people aren't ambling into your office during the interview.

Talk in your normal voice. Don't feel compelled to put on a fake "radio" voice. Radio has changed in the past few years. National Public Radio (NPR) has popularized real voices; you'll hear ethnic and regional accents and normal tones on NPR and most other radio news operations. It is okay to have an accent or to not talk in a deep, fake voice like a sixties deejay. Just be sure to talk so that you can be understood.

Print Interviews

Print interviews usually last longer than radio or television interviews and the reporter usually wants more detail. Make sure you block out enough time for the interview. You may also

want to pull other folks from your office in for the interview. You may not be the expert on every facet of your program/issue. Pulling in other folks helps to round out the interview.

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