

Interacting with the Media – Tips for Crime Victims

As a victim of crime you may find media attention upsetting or helpful. You might be contacted by the media or perhaps you would like to communicate with the media but are not sure how to do so. The press can be an important ally in some cases. However, for victims seeking privacy, it can be difficult to know how to interact with members of the media. Above all, remember the choice is yours. The following tips were developed to give crime victims practical advice related to working with the media.

- If you do not want direct interaction with the press but find that it is hard to avoid the press, it might be helpful to appoint a spokesperson who will speak on your behalf. A spokesperson can be anyone you trust who is willing to protect your privacy and represent you and your family in a positive way. A spokesperson can release statements at your request, respond to press inquiries or accompany you to interviews if you decide to speak to the press.
- You are entitled to grieve in private. You can refuse permission for reporters and cameras to be present at a funeral or burial.
- You have no obligation to provide an interview, even if you have done so in the past. If you decide to grant an interview, you can try to set conditions for the interview (such as time, location, protection of your identity, etc.). The media may not agree to your terms but if they refuse, you can withdraw.
- You can refuse to answer inappropriate questions.
- You have the right to be treated with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- You can exclude children from interviews.
- You can file a complaint with a reporter's employer, victim service providers or the police if you feel harassed by reporters.
- You can complain and seek a correction if a report contains inaccurate information.
- You can remind the media that Wisconsin Statute Chapter 950.055(1) states: "The legislature urges the news media to use restraint in revealing the identity of child victims or witnesses, especially in sensitive cases."
- You can remind journalists that *The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics* states that "the media must guard against invading a person's right to privacy. The media should not pander to morbid curiosity about details of vice and crime." The Code of Ethics also cautions against identifying juvenile victims of sex crimes.
- You can remind radio and television media that the *Radio-TV News Directors' Ethics Code* states: "Reject sensationalism or misleading emphasis in any form. Respect the dignity, privacy and well-being of people with whom they deal."
- You can request that offensive visuals be omitted from a story.
- You can issue your own statement to the press or ask a local official to help you release a statement to the press.