

Working with Journalists

Journalists want to come and interview me. How can I prepare myself?

As with every profession, there are good and bad journalists. The most important criteria is that you feel comfortable with both the person you will have contact with and the publication he or she represents. If something doesn't feel right, don't agree to an interview. At a time when you are hurting and confused, it makes sense to gain as much knowledge as possible about how the media works in order to minimise additional stress and make it work for you.

Coping with the spotlight

- However much it may work in your favour when searching for a missing person, interacting with the press can feel very intimidating if you are not used to it. It's a good idea to try and set basic ground rules for dealing with journalists based on what you do and don't feel comfortable with.
- It may be a good idea to have someone with you who is more removed from the situation and less emotional to allow them to step in and answer questions if necessary, and provide support.
- If you have reported your person as missing to the police, they may suggest or be able to help you arrange a press conference on neutral territory.
- Never throw your home open to the media without restrictions or boundaries. It's important for your own well-being to try and maintain some privacy.
- You may only feel comfortable being interviewed outside your house or in one room only. If you are not happy being interviewed at home at all, consider asking a close family member or friend whether they would be prepared to let you use a room in their home to meet members of the media.
- Be aware that if you choose to involve the media, you will automatically come under a degree of scrutiny yourself and this can feel intrusive. People may recognise or approach you in the street, supermarket or at the school gates.
- A poster appeal created by Missing People can act as a media pack to give to journalists to save you having to repeat information every time you have contact with the media.

Understanding the technicalities

- Not all publications will agree to it but it's worth asking for what is called 'copy approval' – a guarantee that the journalist will read the finished article he or she writes back to you before publication and allow you to raise any concerns you may have.

- Bear in mind that all reporters have deadlines. The later in the day the interview, the more likely that the article will not be able to appear until the next day.
- Be aware that any photographs of your missing person that you give to a journalist will become public property. Whilst you will obviously need to provide one or two so that people can see what your missing person looks like, it is advisable to protect your and their privacy by not allowing journalists free access to take anything they choose from your photograph albums.
- Any quote you give during the interview can be used for publication. If there is anything you DON'T want included in the media, make a mental note to avoid even mentioning it. Likewise it can be useful to note down any facts you consider vital for the appeal and definitely want published.
- Be aware that if the media do wish to run an appeal, they may approach other people for additional information about your missing person.
- They may also present the story in a different way to what you expect, using a different 'angle' or including a sensational headline.
- You can turn down an interview with any newspaper, magazine or television programme. You don't have to give a reason for doing so.
- If you don't like or feel comfortable during your initial contact with a particular journalist, explain the situation to his or her Editor and ask to deal with someone else you feel more relaxed with.

Summary

The best way of making the press work for you in terms of publicising your appeal quickly and in the manner you want it to appear is to develop a friendly relationship with journalists who want to interview you. However the importance of maintaining boundaries and not being persuaded into doing or saying anything you don't want to cannot be over-emphasised. Answer what you consider to be fair and relevant questions in as much detail as you choose but a simple 'I don't want to go into that' should stop any line of questioning you are unhappy with. Trust your instincts. If a journalist makes you feel ill at ease, you are under no obligation to be interviewed by them or allow them into your home.

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For further information and guidance on the issues addressed in this guidance sheet, or for support relating to any aspect of someone going missing, call Missing People's free and confidential 24 hour helpline on **116 000** or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Whilst this information has been provided in good faith, it should not be taken as legal advice. For information tailored to your circumstances, please contact your police force, solicitor or an advisory organisation as appropriate to your query.

Please let us know whether this guidance has been useful, either by answering a few short questions at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MissingPeopleGuidance> or by emailing your comments to policyandresearch@missingpeople.org.uk