

Managing media interest



This guide offers you helpful tips to make informed decisions about dealing with journalists and photographers.

When the media is interested in your story

A crime, unexpected death, or serious incident will quickly become public information when the media shares details about what's happened. Newspapers, TV, radio, magazines, internet news sites, and social media can all play a role in spreading the story, or part of it, far and wide.

In some cases, such as after a suicide, family violence or harm, sexual violence, or homicide, a judge may decide to suppress the names of victims, the person accused, or details of the case so no media can report on them.

After a very serious crime, the Police may offer to work with you to release a media statement. In other situations, anyone from a media organisation could contact you, your family, whānau, friends, acquaintances, and even people you barely know to ask for details, comments, or an interview. If they do contact you, it is always your decision about whether you want to speak to them.

Sometimes the media can have a positive role in helping with Police enquiries, such as if you or family members are asked to make a formal public appeal for more information about the incident. Occasionally, journalists also independently investigate a case and find helpful evidence.

Be cautious

It pays to assume the media do not have your best interests in mind.

Some victims find journalists persistent, demanding, and manipulative when they're searching for details about a story. Their attention may be intrusive,

distressing, and they may sometimes find inventive ways to discover more information, including staking out homes, hospitals, and workplaces, pretending to be someone they're not, or taking pictures from social media without asking.

Be aware that you may unexpectedly hear, read, or see something in the media about your case or incident that is extremely upsetting.

“ We couldn't even get off of our bus... the media were right up against the door of the bus and the police had to come and move people away and then they only removed them enough for just basically a person to make a tunnel between the bus and the Pike River building in town... all you could see was microphones and cameras... I stood at the top of the step and I was fearful to actually go through there, it was like going through a tunnel of I dunno, claustrophobic... It was the worst experience.

Family member of a Pike River miner



Tips for dealing with media attention

The tips below come from people who have experienced how challenging it can be to deal with media interest in their story. Your support worker is your best point of contact for help and will support you with any of these steps.

Consider appointing someone else to deal with the media on your behalf

You can pass all media enquiries onto this person to deal with as you choose.

Use your voicemail or text messages to filter your calls

This way, you won't accidentally answer a call from someone you don't want to speak to and you can choose to return the call when and if you are ready to.

Use social media wisely

Social media can be easily misused. Any information or photos shared openly on social media, messaging apps, or text messages can be used by media as public information. Members of the public can make comments on posts that are insensitive or upsetting. Children and young people especially should be discouraged from viewing or replying to such comments.



If you decide not to speak to the media

- You can simply ignore media requests. You have no obligation to talk to them. It's okay to tell them you have nothing to say or ask them to direct all enquiries to the Police.
- It may be easier to decline to comment by using text or email where this possible, as journalists can still keep pushing you for a statement if you are talking over the phone.
- Be aware that even if you choose not to comment, it may not be possible to stop the media reporting on your case.

If you decide to speak to the media

- Don't feel you need to answer straight away. You can tell the journalist you're busy right now and set up a time for an interview later. Ask them to email you their questions first so you have time to prepare your answers.
- Decide carefully what information you do want to share with the public and what you don't before you talk to the journalist. You may want to discuss this with your family or whānau.
- You might choose to issue a written statement only. After very serious crimes, like homicide, the Police can help you with this. Ask the Police officer in charge of your case how to contact the Police media team. After any incident, you can post a statement to social media and refer journalists to that.
- Choose who will speak to media on behalf of you and your family or whānau. This could be you, another member of your family or whānau, or a trusted friend. Spend time with them first to ensure they know what you want to say. If you decide to speak to the media yourself, take time to carefully think through what you want to say.
- Always assume your interview is being recorded. If you're not comfortable with that, tell the journalist before your interview.
- Don't let the media rush you. If you feel pressured, say you will call or message them back or have someone else do that on your behalf. You can also delay an interview you've already arranged if you need to.
- There is no such thing as 'off the record'. Media can use anything you say at any time. Avoid saying anything that you might later regret.

- If you give an interview, you don't have the right to see or approve what is produced before it's made public. You can ask, but it's the decision of the journalist. People can feel angry that their words have been twisted or misconstrued, so planning what you want to say is very important.
- You can be proactive and set up interviews with the media at a time you choose, such as around an upcoming anniversary or when family and whānau want to highlight an aspect of the case. This allows you to get ahead of the media and tell your story on your own terms.
- Think carefully about which photos, written messages, audio, or video you may want to give to the media. Any of these can be used again in the future without your permission.
- Ask Police to tell you about any media statements they're making about your case or situation before they release them to the media.
- Incorrect information given to the media can be infuriating and hurtful. If this happens, you can ask the media to correct any misinformation. Understand, though, that people pass on information that is factual or just their opinion.

Media attention in your case may increase again at any time. Use these tips whenever you need to.



What the media can legally report on

Laws and guidelines govern what journalists can and can't report.

Suicide

Under the law, the media must follow certain restrictions about what they can report if a death appears to have been by suicide. This is to decrease the chance of further suicides. The media can't make public the following details.

- The method or suspected method of the death.
- Any details, like the place of death, that might suggest the method or suspected method of the death.
- A description of the death as a suicide before the coroner has released their findings and stated the death was a suicide. However, the death can be described as a suspected suicide before then.

Victims of sexual violence and children

Victims of sexual violence and children are protected from being identified by the media. In some cases, the prosecutor may ask the court to prevent identification of other witnesses who are vulnerable.

If media pressure is getting too much

Media can be persistent and resourceful. If you have concerns or questions, you can talk with Police or your support worker.

To find out more or make a complaint, visit the Media Council's website at www.mediacouncil.org.nz.



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