



## Chapter 17. The Media

The purpose of this section is to assist child death review teams in relating to the media. The media can promote more effective prevention and intervention by raising public awareness of the true nature and extent of child fatalities. At the same time, we are fearful that the media might report misinformation and divulge confidential information. For this reason, it is important to have clear policies and designate individuals to respond to media inquiries.

### Public Awareness

The media is a powerful tool, and perhaps the single most important ally in Public Awareness Campaigns. Public Awareness Campaigns come in many forms. For instance, a particular county may have noted an upturn in pool drowning during the summer months through its CDRT meetings. The media can be key in launching a campaign to prevent unintentional drowning.

### Education

While education and public awareness are similar, they are not the same. If we look to the schools for support in preventing unwanted child and adolescent deaths, we may then suggest specific training that effectively portrays hazards in ways that young people will understand. Educating any part of the population requires the use of media.

In today's fast-paced world of instant gratification, educational efforts must employ an aspect of entertainment in order to have the desired impact. If we are constantly in the position to educate interested persons, we will also be in the positive position to use and be useful to the media.

### Prevention

The use of the media in prevention efforts is key to success. Whether we are talking about drowning prevention, vehicle safety, safe sleeping practices, infant safe surrender, never shake a baby, poison awareness, or pregnant mothers who smoke, it takes active involvement by many different forms of the media to bring these successful campaigns forward.

The use of media to engender positive support for child death prevention should be very focused and well thought out. The CDR team might want to develop a standard protocol to deal with media issues. Using the media in a prevention campaign helps bring a sense of understanding and concern for our message to our target audience. If handled correctly, the campaign will provide the community with an opportunity to become actively involved in the project.

## Media Priorities

The media follows certain priorities when deciding on what story to pursue. Since those with whom we are initially in contact may not have the ability to set priorities, it is important to build a relationship with various media professionals within an organization. By providing educational interviews or creating easy entry-level public awareness campaigns like *Child Abuse Prevention Month* in April, we become better known to and establish our credibility with the media. As a result, media individuals may seek out CDRT leadership when faced with an unfamiliar situation or be more responsive when asked to support child death and injury prevention programs.

## Types of Media

### Television and short films

- Breaking news is anything that is happening in real time. To add an element of calm and focus to a climate of alarm, it is essential to keep things as simple and straightforward as possible. It's always important to watch out for the snares of offering a personal opinion or remark. Tell the truth and never make up details.
- Prevention Campaigns: Television is also an excellent way of publicizing an injury prevention campaign. The LA County CDRT noticed that there had been a startling number of Ferrous Sulfate (Iron) poisonings. Because the pills looked so much like M&M's, children were ingesting them like candy. A successful campaign was launched, which resulted in the FDA ordering the change of packaging and distribution of Ferrous Sulfate pills. This resulted in an almost immediate decrease in the number of Ferrous Sulfate poisoning deaths.
- Documentaries are especially effective for demonstrating how an individual problem is affecting the people involved. The production of a documentary takes real commitment from an independent filmmaker or the willingness of a network to take on the project. This re-emphasizes the importance of developing strong relationships with local media personnel.
- Docudramas are fictionalized portrayals of real life events. This approach gives the producers of the film more of a license to add flair to their story. Docudramas are frequently based on recent dramatic cases or a single case that has caught the community's or the nation's attention. If the local media knows you, they may seek your advice as to the accuracy of their story.
- Talk shows can be excellent forums to get an important message across. It is important to know what the program's focus is, the audience, and something about the interviewer or host. Watch the program ahead of time. Be succinct when possible and don't get lost in statistics or numbers. If you are asked, have accurate data available.
- Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are usually less than one minute and can make a significant impact. Think of the PSA as the *Cliff Notes* to a major problem. They give the audience a taste of what is wrong and how THEY can do something about it. Some great

PSAs have resulted from issues faced in Child Death Review meetings. One very notable example was the *NEVER EVER SHAKE A BABY* campaign developed in Alabama.

## Radio

Frequently it is easier to get the attention of radio personnel than TV professionals. Radio is always looking for a hook, something to encourage people to tune in, and the subjects you will be bringing to them are attention getters. In small communities, there is an advantage because there is not as much competition from the national networks for airtime. Get to know your local reporters and news directors. One can also buy radio airtime for special announcements at a much more reasonable rate than TV airtime. If an organization has public awareness funds, radio is a good investment.

## Print

There are many types of print media, all of which can have real impact on a local and sometimes national community.

- *Newspapers* will likely react to any breaking news story in a similar fashion as the television media. They want information now and they might be willing to compromise an interviewee to get the spin on the story that they want. The best way to manage the push for news is to remember that anything you say can be quoted or taken out of context, so be careful and use your words economically. There is no such thing as an “off the record” comment to a reporter, even if you say, “this comment is strictly off the record.” The journalist can simply use that statement in the text of his or her report.
- *Professional Journals* are excellent places to make statements that are well researched, documented and professionally written. Professional Journals are frequently looking for very specific submissions. It is a good idea to have a discussion with your team about a possible journal submission, particularly if the material being covered emanates from findings made by the team.
- *Newsletters* are good ways of getting information out to your constituency. Sometimes a local Child Abuse Prevention Council may have a newsletter that can be used. Or, another CDR member agency may allow the team to have a spot in their newsletter. In either case, the newsletter format provides information to individuals who already have a local stake in your mission. Newsletters are good places to list upcoming events or ask for input about a proposed project. If you have not yet done so, please subscribe to the ICAN/NCFR Newsletter, *Unified Response*, at [www.ican-ncfr.org](http://www.ican-ncfr.org)
- *Billboards* have great visibility to a large audience, but the group that places the billboard never really knows how effective it is. When using a billboard, one wants to use eye-catching colors, readable lettering, and words that can be read in the blink of an eye. A billboard with too much information is more of a hazard than help.
- *Bus Signs* work because you have a captured audience, at least while the rider is on the bus. One has to be vigilant that the bus signs are not vandalized by graffiti, which is often

the case on city busses. Engaging the local bus company in cosponsoring your bus signs might help to provide vigilance and replace defaced signs.

- *Bumper Stickers* are creative and a fun way to get a message out. How effective bumper stickers are at influencing public opinion is debatable, but they provide a possible income source and demonstrate YOUR personal commitment to solving the problem that they address.

## Theatrical Performances

Those that address an issue involving children can be a very powerful way of expressing an idea. Some of the most hard-hitting performances are frequently ones that are created by individuals who have been affected by a particular problem. Youth groups can very realistically present self-written plays about dating violence, street violence, child abuse, teen parenting and many more subjects. When these performances are done in front of peer groups, the effect can be intense, sometimes eliciting emotional responses from the audience or perhaps even uncovering past trauma.

## Internet Webcasts

Webcasts of various types are on the cutting edge of disseminating information. Now, with live simulcasts, one can literally invite the professional world to take part in an interactive presentation on Child Death Review and Child Injury Prevention. Literally millions of individuals have the possibility of tuning into an Internet simulcast. While this media is still developing very quickly, it is an important arena to explore.

## Helpful Hints for Building Relationships with Media Professionals

### Media Interviews

1. Deliver your message, whether or not it is requested
2. Television and Radio is superficial; rehearse your sound bites
3. Print is more comprehensive; use data to back up your points
  4. You have more power than you think
  5. Information is power
  6. You are a source of information
7. You can't control events; you can control responses

### Television Interviews

1. Never sit between two interviewers
2. Button your jacket and sit up straight
3. Make eye contact with the reporter
4. Keep your answers short and succinct
  5. Avoid technical language
  6. Use anecdotes
7. Talk to the reporter ahead of time

## Print Interviews

1. Know the reporter
2. Know what else (s)he's written
3. Know the reason for the story
4. Know who else the reporter has interviewed
5. Prepare quotable statements
6. If possible, avoid "no comment"
7. Cite statistics or refer to other experts
8. Don't make "off the record" comments
9. Never lie to the media

## Writing News Releases

1. Write the release to be brief - one page
2. Remember to include "Who, What, Where, When, Why"
3. Fax the release ahead and later phone with a reminder
4. Include all Key information in first two paragraphs
5. Include support for information (data, etc.)
6. Use quotes