



Event-in-a-Box

If a Reporter Calls ...

Don't panic!

- Ask the reporter's name and publication or broadcast station.
- Ask the story angle.
- And, how can I help?
- Assess whether you are the appropriate spokesperson. (See sheet on Tips for Choosing a Spokesperson.) If not, refer the reporter to the right person and provide the person's name, title and telephone number. Offer to transfer the call, if you can.

Be prepared

- If you're not ready to be interviewed, ask if you can call the reporter back in 10 to 15 minutes, so you can gather your thoughts. Follow through! Respect deadlines.
- Solidify your message as simply as possible. Write down your key point(s) before the interview and rehearse, if necessary.
- Anticipate the tough questions and practice positive responses.

Keep it simple

- Think of an interview as a way to talk directly to your audience. Be knowledgeable, sincere, straightforward, energetic and compassionate. All will come through in your interview, even if the interview is for a newspaper story.
- Use simple language. Do not use overly scientific or technical terms. Speak in short sentences.
- Get to the point. Keep your answers brief, and keep them focused on your message. The average TV soundbite (outtake from a taped interview) is eight seconds long. Newspaper reporters can use more information, but they also are looking for a few to-the-point quotes.
- If not speaking, close your mouth. You'll sound hesitant, nervous or unsure if you connect sentences while you're thinking by saying something such as "and then" or "uh" or "You know?" Stalling while you think won't fool anybody.
- Be cordial, even if the reporter isn't. Avoid light humor or negative remarks, as anything you say could appear on the news. For all practical purposes, "off the record" does not exist.
- Avoid "no comment" answers. The reporter and public could wonder what you're hiding. If asked to comment on something that's controversial or makes you uncomfortable, just tell the reporter that you don't think that you are the appropriate person to respond.
- Be honest. The truth can hurt, but not telling the truth is the gravest of media mistakes. If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say so.
- Never ask to see or hear a story before publication/airing. Do, however, always tell the reporter that you are willing and available to provide follow-up information if clarifications are needed.

If you don't get a call in time

When reporters learn that you're a good source, they may leave you messages, hoping you'll get back to them in time to meet their deadline. If you missed their call and the deadline has passed, return the call anyway. Explain that you are sorry that you weren't available, and hope they were able to find the information they needed. A reporter may still be working on a story and be glad to hear from you. Returning the phone call is good business and helps nurture relationships.