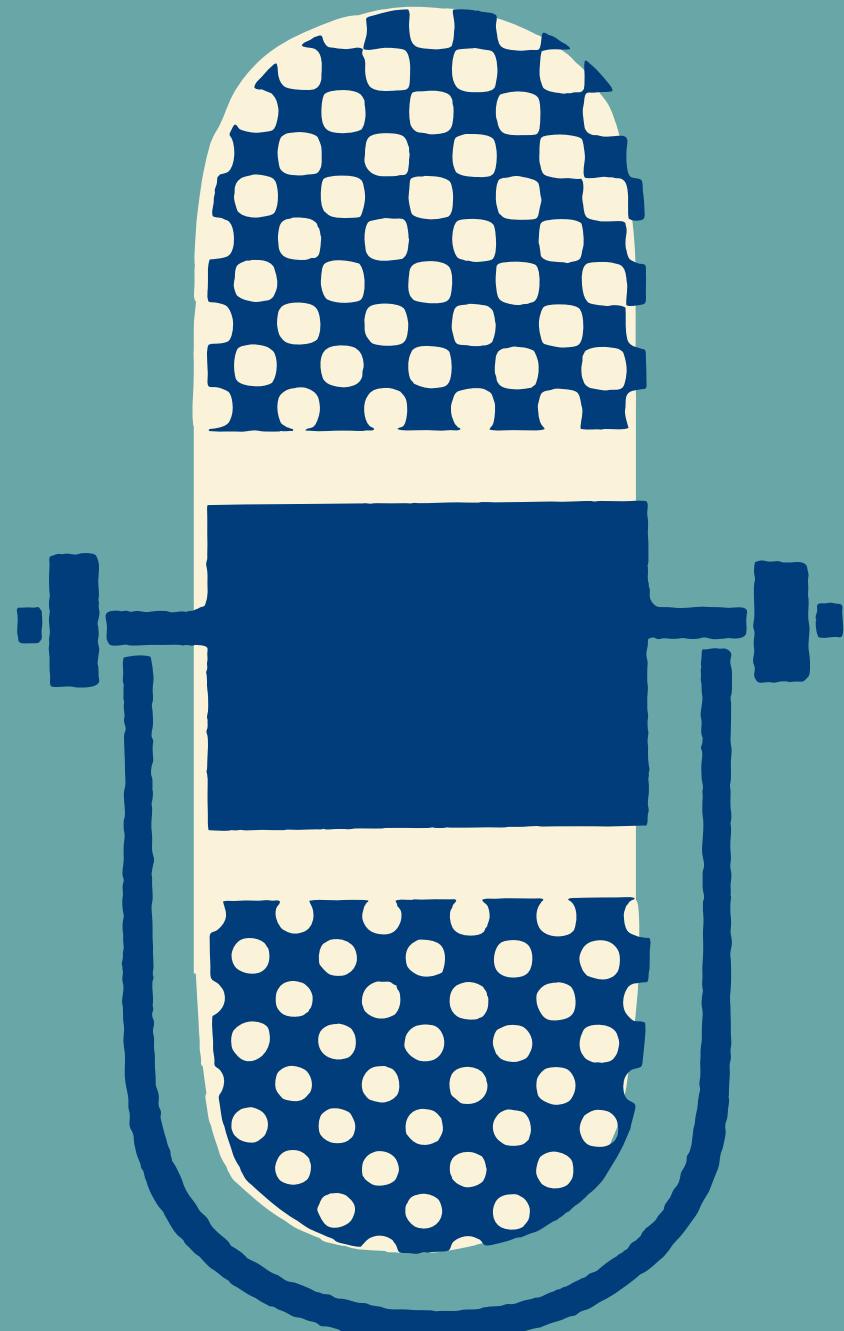




**pennsylvania**  
OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE



# SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA

A Survivor's Guide

# SELF-CARE

When reliving a traumatic event, it is common for the same emotions, senses and feelings to return to your body. You may find your heart rate quicken, your pulse race, your eyes to dart quickly. You may get a headache or a stomach ache. Remember that trauma is stored in the body. Just like an emotional response, physical symptoms are to be expected when trauma resurfaces. **You are okay, even when you are not feeling okay.** It is common to experience these feelings. Take your time. Feeling angry or crying – even laughter when nervousness is overwhelming – is typical and you should allow your body to release these emotions in whatever way happens.

Traumatic memories are often linked to our senses – what we heard, felt, smelled, saw, tasted. These techniques can help ease the intensity by engaging your senses.

## Preparing Your Body

Learning how to feel safe in your body again reduces the long term effects of feeling helpless, ashamed or isolated. Caring for your body can have a profound impact, far after publicly speaking. If you have the time to prepare, you should:

Get enough sleep. This can help fight off headaches and fatigue that often occur after reliving trauma.

Always drink enough water. By hydrating, your body can better compensate for physical symptoms like muscle tension or indigestion.

Exercise and/or stretch to relieve tension. Be present - with your body - while you are caring for it and visualize any negative feelings leaving.

Speak to your advocate, a friend or trusted person. Allow yourself to feel the comfort and hear the encouragement - don't dismiss it.

Write your feelings down on a piece of paper. Consider ripping it up or throwing it away if it holds negativity.

**Remind yourself that your feelings are normal responses to an abnormal event and your story matters.**

## Preparing Your Physical Space

Practice how to hold physical space in your body and your home for your feelings.

Take slow, deep breaths that fill your lungs.

- Visualize breathing in the air filled with colors that calm you. Challenge yourself to think of specific colors that remind you of a time and place that you felt safe.
- Visualize breathing out air filled with the negative feelings in your head. Often, colors associated with these thoughts are brown or grey.

Have something to hold in your hand when feelings arise. This could be a tension ball to squeeze or a soft blanket that soothes you.

Light a candle nearby that calms you and brings peace. Visualize breathing them in deeply, allowing the air to fill you.

Post physical reminders to yourself and read them out loud.

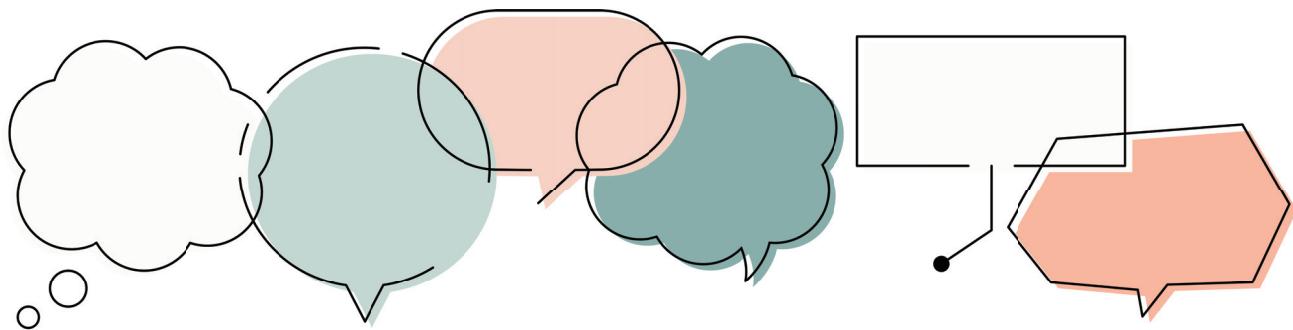
*I am brave. I am more than my story. I can do hard things. My truth matters.*

Be prepared by having water, tissues, a notepad and pen nearby when you may need them.

## Supporting Yourself Afterwards

After sharing your story or unexpectedly reliving your trauma, be mindful that you may feel many different emotions. You may be exhausted and want to sleep or have an influx of energy to burn. The emotional upheaval your body just went through needs a release. Listen to your body.

# YOUR STORY AND THE MEDIA



As a victim of crime, media attention can be both upsetting and 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 and loved ones seeking privacy, it can be difficult to know how to interact. Above all, remember the choice is yours.

- If you do not want direct interaction with the press, but find it hard to avoid them, you can appoint a spokesperson to speak on your behalf. A spokesperson can be anyone you trust who is willing to protect your privacy and represent you/your family in a positive way.
- You are entitled to grieve in private. You can refuse permission for reporters and cameras to be present at a funeral or burial.
- You can choose the photo of your loved one that you want media to use as to avoid license photos, social media pictures, etc.
- 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 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 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.

## Your Story and the Media > Personal Considerations

**Your words will likely live forever.** Expect that anything you say or write in any public forum – on video, radio or print – will likely end up on the Internet.

**You become accessible to everyone** from your past, present and future. Once you are on the Internet, anyone searching your name can find your comments and learn your story. This includes any family member (whom you may not want to tell about the violence you lived through), employers, potential romantic partners, old friends and more. Consider how comfortable you are with having that information and label of you out there for all to see.

**Anonymity is not guaranteed.** Even if you choose to share your experiences anonymously, those who wish to uncover and expose your identity may be able to. You can become “outed” and will then have to deal with consequences from that.

**Anyone can comment on you, your statements, and your experiences.** Many online forums have comment sections. Along with positive and supportive comments, you may also get negative and nasty comments, even threats against you. These can be quite upsetting.

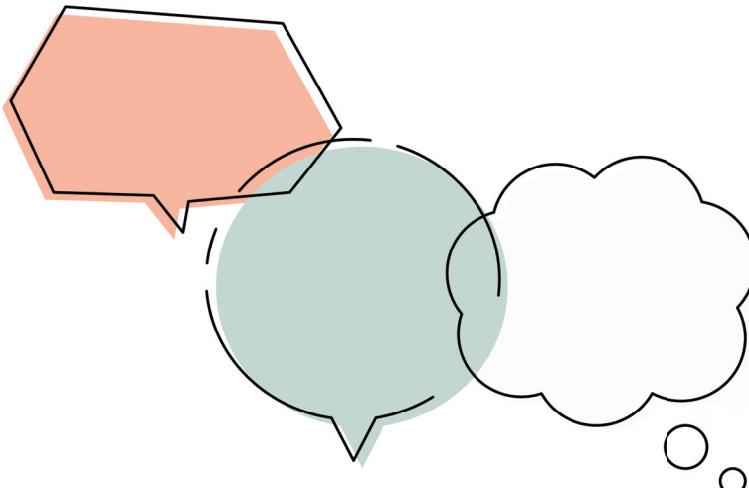
*Your assailant - or friends or acquaintances - may decide to tell their version of the story in public also. Consider that if you tell your story, you may be opening the door for others to dispute your experience, and for there to be a virtual trial.*

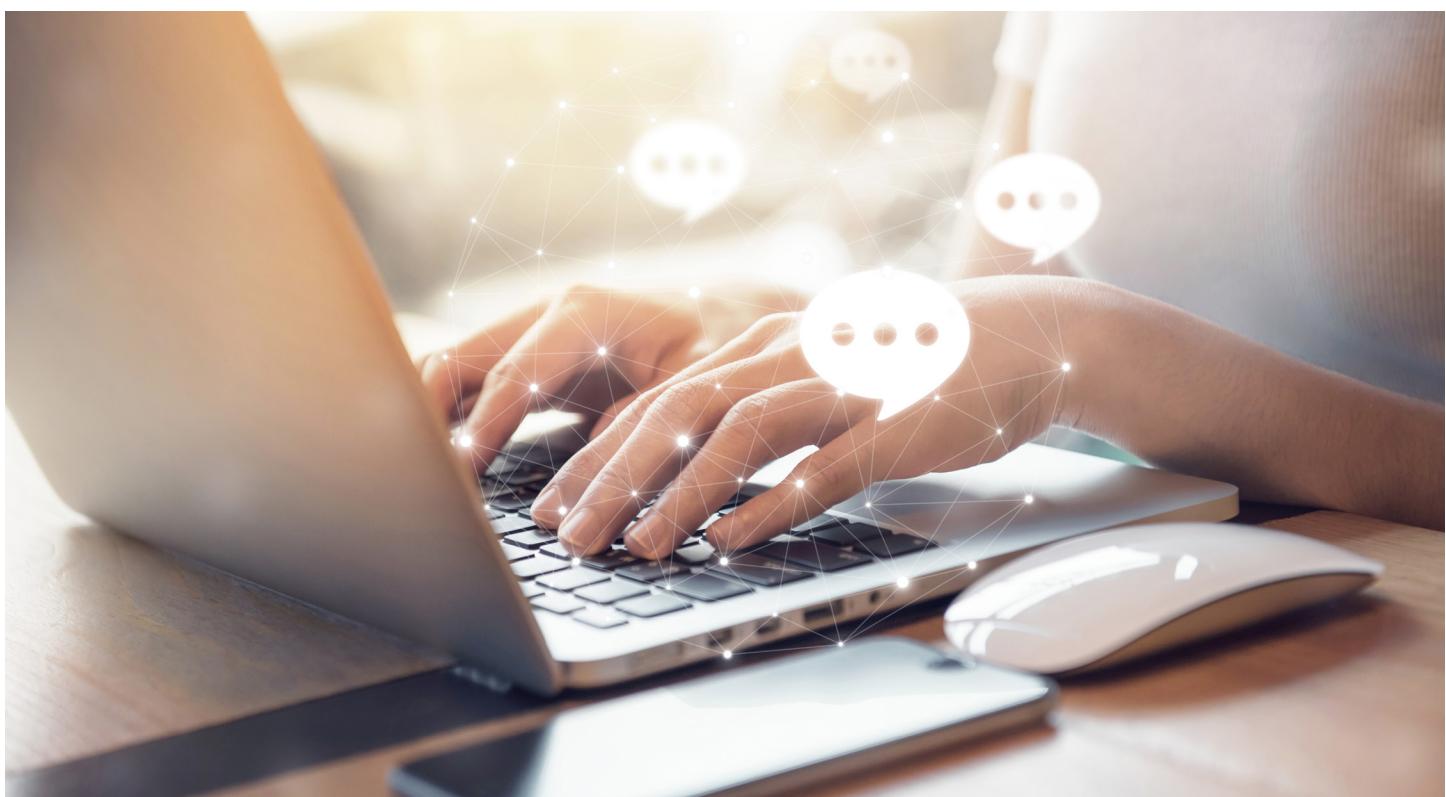
### > The media may not be your friend. <

**There is no such thing as a risk-free interview or encounter with the media.** There are always risks, even if you are 100% prepared for the interview and the potential consequences. There is an unbreachable power dynamic between the journalist and the interviewee, even though social media has leveled the playing field somewhat.

**You will not have full control over how you are portrayed, or even what you say.** Journalists will edit your words. They will choose what to share with their audience based on the angle or story they wish to convey. Your message, your point of view, even some facts you relay might not come out as you said or intended them. Even if you are speaking live on television, it is possible that the way you and your experience are portrayed will not feel true, and might even show you in a negative light.

**Protecting your emotional, mental and physical health is paramount.** On the day of an interview, check in with yourself, and be honest. You will need to decide whether you are in a good enough mental and emotional space to speak to a journalist. If you think that talking with a journalist might stir deep emotions and memories that you are not ready to handle or relive at that moment, do not go through with the interview. If you do participate in an interview, consider having a support person with you.





Tweeting, posting a picture on Facebook, or snapping with a friend all feel like the most normal of activities to partake in. However, after experiencing trauma, these social media platforms need to be navigated carefully. Remember, nothing is private on the Internet.

Remaining authentic is key to one's personal brand, particularly on social media. There is a delicate balance between your needs and the potential risks associated with being authentic in all spaces. Trust yourself that - depending on where you are in your healing process, the strength of the support networks you have established in real life and online, as well as legal considerations - social media may become a viable option for your healing at various points in the timeline.

Social media *can* be a really powerful tool for you in the aftermath of a trauma.

**Where my peeps at?** Talking about surviving crime and the healing experiences can create a sense of community with others who have experienced similar trauma. Also, an online community can be crucial for those who live in isolated areas or feel isolated in their offline community.

**Strength in numbers.** Remember learning about participatory democracy in school? And, remember reading about the variety of movements that created social change? The same can be said about movements that started online or are reinforced online. Your experience, and the sharing of that experience, can help change the law or school policy (ie #YesMeansYes). When more people shatter the silence surrounding violence, more change will happen.

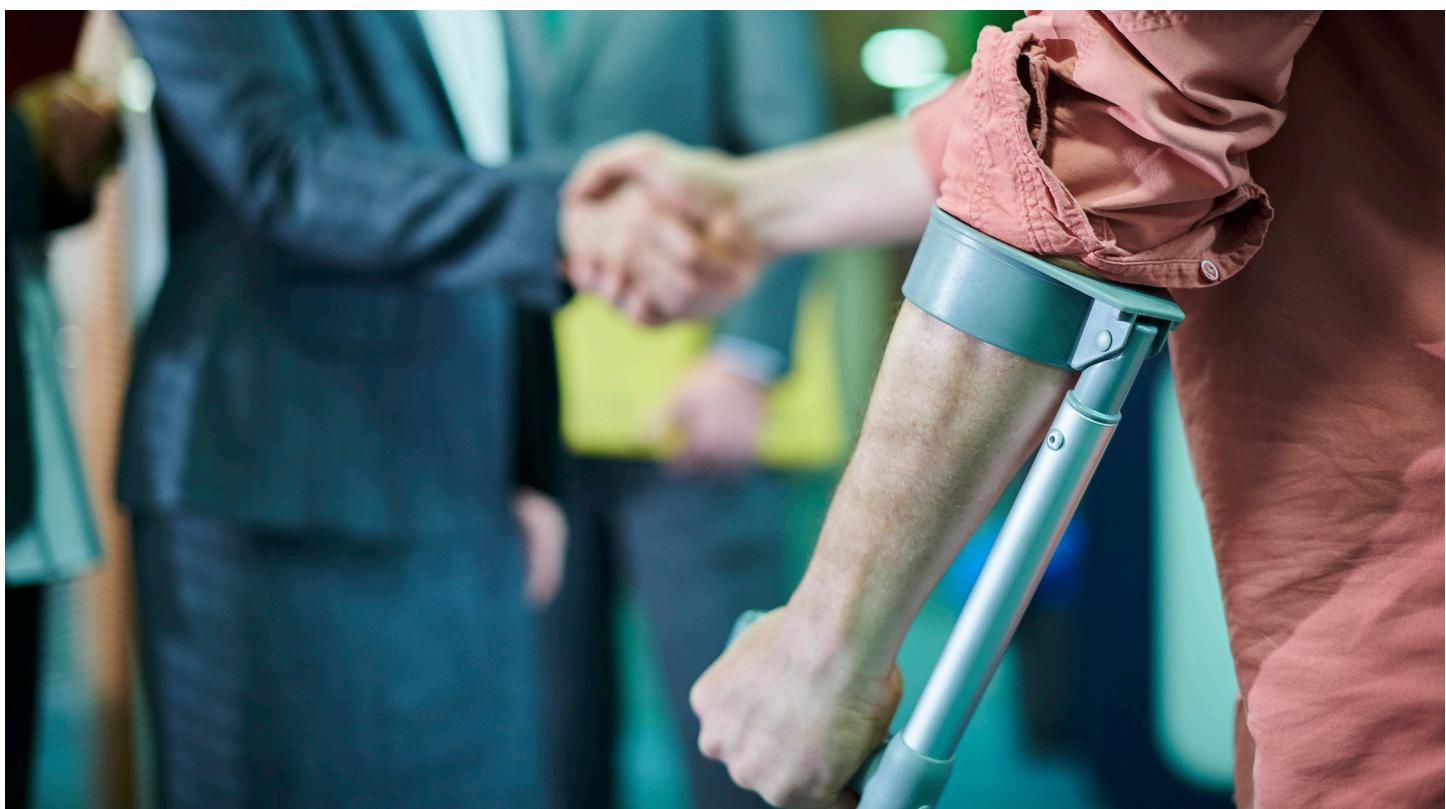
## > Don't click just yet. <

**Cookies. Screen Shots. Data Mining.** When posting anything on social media, be conscious of how quickly items are culled by strangers and, sometimes, those in your social media network. Screenshots are easily saved and shared. Savvy tech people can also assist in data mining your footprints (ie cookies) to see what was deleted.

**140 characters or less may not be worth it.** Although you may be a native in processing a triggering event via social media, it may not be the right choice this time. Even if you think you can get a handle on the privacy controls, sharing a photo may pose a risk: it could be used in future litigation. For example, you decide to file a civil protection order (CPO) in your state against the perpetrator. In writing the CPO petition, you state that after the crime, you have been experiencing high levels of anxiety. A few days after the crime occurred, you go to an event where individuals take pictures of the night. Defense counsel may suggest that you aren't really suffering since you were out a few days after at a "party." Fact finders can be influenced by pictures, even with a strong argument that survivors of crime attempt to move on in different ways.

**Threats.** Cyberbullying is real; you may experience it when you use social media to discuss a crime. Online harassment is becoming more prevalent, particularly against crime victims who speak out about a multitude of issues. Even though you may know your network, there's no guarantee that everyone will allow your thoughts to be accessible only through you. A variety of features allow for those outside of your network to potentially know what you are thinking. And those who disagree with the sentiments may start saying things about you that are hurtful, shaming, blaming, and potentially threatening to you or your family.





**Check with an attorney.** If you are currently, have previously, or are considering any form of lawsuit or protective order, please check with an attorney about the advisability of speaking publicly and what you should and shouldn't say. Do this before interviews or writing any publication about the violence you lived through.

**The legal risk of speaking in public?** You might say something that is, or sounds, inconsistent with something else you've said. If you are ever involved in the legal system, someone may say that your inconsistent statements show that you are lying.

**This doesn't mean you should never speak in public.** People understand that reporters can select your words out of context or use them in misleading ways.

**You can try to minimize the risk of inconsistency by limiting what you talk about.** For instance, if improving your school's response to violence is your goal in speaking out, but a criminal investigation into the assault itself is currently underway, then you may choose to tell reporters that you can talk about your school but not the assault.

**Think carefully about whether you want to name your assailant(s) publicly.** Sometimes, naming your perpetrator in the media is a necessary part of your advocacy. This opens up the possibility that your perpetrator will decide to sue you for defamation, which can be expensive and time-consuming to fight. You may decide this is a necessary cost of achieving social justice. But if you have other goals that naming your assailant doesn't achieve, like making other survivors feel less alone, then naming them may not be necessary. If you decide not to do so, be sure to redact any unnecessary names and identifying information from documents before providing them.

# HOW TO SPEAK WITH THE MEDIA

**Prepare for your interview.** The last thing you want is to engage in an interview without being ready. There's usually a very strong correlation between the quality of your preparation and your happiness with the outcome of the interview. (If the interview occurs on the spot, keep your responses very short, decline to talk, or let the journalist know they caught you in the middle of something. Determine their deadline and then make sure you or someone else gets back to them in a timely fashion.)

**Before you agree to an interview, do research to get a sense of how your experience might be treated.** Find out who the reporter is, how they frame their stories, their way of thinking about violence, and learn to read between the lines. Read, listen or watch the outlet they work for. It's transparent: how the journalist thinks will be evident in the reportage. There is no such thing as journalistic objectivity.

**Ask the journalist if they know how the story will be "played."** Cover story? What section of the paper/site or segment of TV/radio? A sidebar (if yes, of what other main story?) If part of a larger piece, who else will be interviewed? Who writes the headlines? If online, will there be multimedia? Will the comment section be open? If the comment section is open, will it be moderated? By whom? How the story is played, the prominence it has, can impact your emotional state.

**If you do not trust the reporter or outlet don't give the interview.** Remember, you decide with whom you share your story. Survivors might need journalists and the media to spread their messages, testimonies, raise awareness, and influence public discourse and policy, but journalists/the media also need survivors for their stories. In this sense, the relationship is more reciprocal than you think. You have agency, never forget this.

**You have the right to opt out.** If, at any point in the process - even the day of - you feel uncomfortable, you can decline the interview. Even after you speak with a journalist (unless it's a live broadcast), you can decline to have your account used. Ethically, journalists should honor your request. In reality, however, there are some who might not.

**Develop a short list of key messages that are most relevant to you.** Then list all the questions you can possibly anticipate, including hostile ones, and practice your responses – integrating key messages where appropriate. Practice role-playing with a friend, a family member, your lawyer - someone you trust. Have them ask you difficult and uncomfortable questions. Be prepared for the unexpected.

## How to Speak with the Media > General Interviewing Techniques

Consider an interview as an opportunity to discuss specific issues on your mind. Instead of merely reacting to the journalist's questions, remember you want to introduce your key messages into the conversation at every credible opportunity. Listen carefully to each question; pause for a beat if you need to. Think about the question, the issue being addressed, and answer with your own words and information.

Try not to give short, reactive answers to questions. Answer each question directly (in a positive way that suits your purposes) and, whenever possible, bridge to your key messages.

Stay away from saying "I think" or "I believe" to preface your remarks. They water down the impact of the point you are making and make you seem less confident.

Flag your key messages. Call attention to them with signal phrases like:

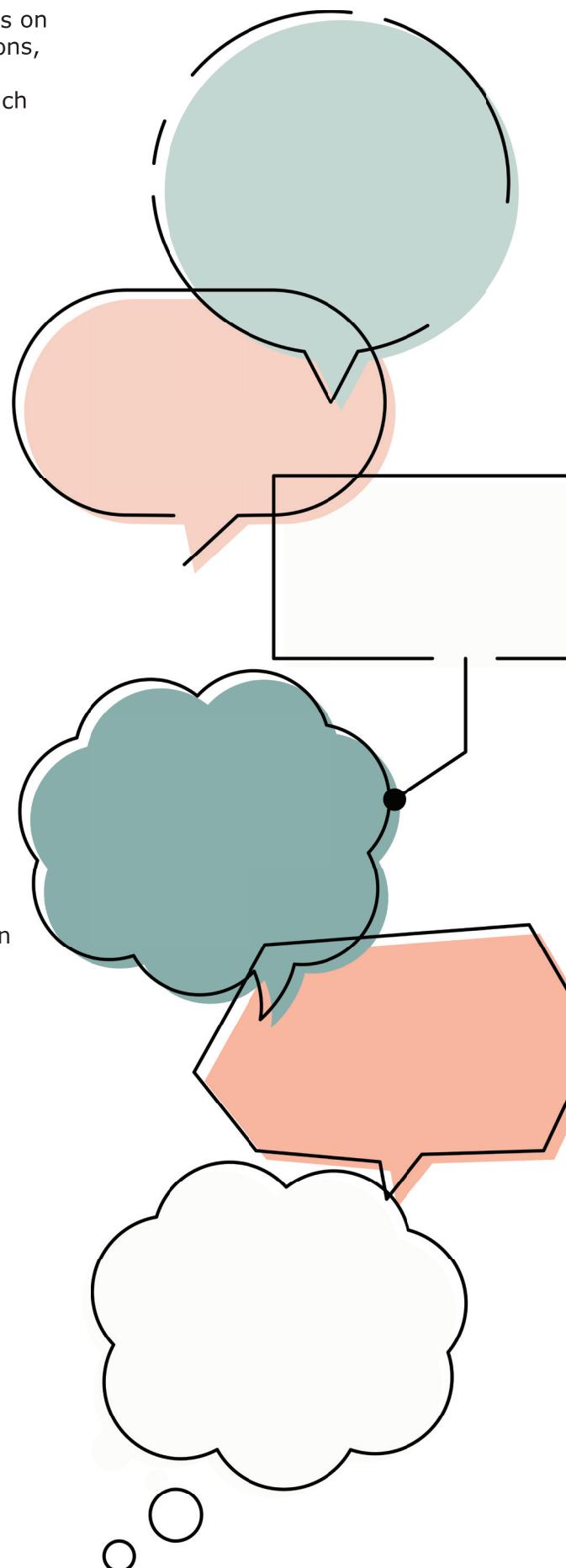
- "Something we haven't talked about before..."
- "What's really interesting about all of this is..."
- "What's really important here..."
- "The critical point..."
- "Something I'd like to emphasize..."

When confronted with an uncomfortable question, politely explain why you can't give specifically what they asked you for. Instead, tell them something you are comfortable revealing (something closely related). In particular, you can respectfully decline to go into the details of an assault itself if it doesn't advance your key messages or your emotional well-being.

However, don't be evasive and remember never to say "no comment." Don't decline to answer a question unless you explain why you can't respond. Audiences believe that interviewees who say "no comment" have something to hide.

If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" and tell the journalist you will try to find out.

Reporters often look for drama and conflict in a story. Consequently, journalists might do more than their share of searching for negative drama and conflict. But reporters will make good use of the positive as well.



## How to Speak with the Media > **Interviewing Tips**

Most of the time, reporters will ask you straightforward questions to obtain information. Sometimes, journalists use different interview techniques to probe an issue and/or to elicit information when you are not providing material that will survive the editing process.

### > **How to Answer a Negative Question When the Reality is Actually Positive** <

<b>WRONG</b>	<b>RIGHT</b>
Repeating negative or sensational words journalists may use in their questions.	Politely correct the reporter and change the wording to reflect a sensitive manner of addressing the issue at hand.
Q: Are you angry about the jury's verdict?  A: No, I'm not angry.	Q: Are you angry about the jury's verdict?  A: On the contrary... I felt justice was done and most importantly, I hope this encourages other survivors to come forward and... (go on to elaborate)
If you do say similar, you could end up reading a headline like: "Rape Victim not Angry."  It's in the same ballpark as "I'm Not a Crook, insisted Nixon." The only two words people remember are "Crook" and "Nixon," even though he was denying it.	There are different ways to enable yourself to respond in the positive to a negative question.  The phrase "on the contrary" is valuable as used in the above example. It helps you spring into the positive.
So, don't respond by denying negative words or phrases. When faced with a general negative, come back with a general positive and bridge to your key messages.	You could also use a word like "actually" or phrases like "the fact is," "the reality is," "as a matter of fact" or "quite the opposite" in a similar way.





## > How to Answer a Negative Question When the Reality is Actually Negative <

If a journalist asks a negative question that is specific in nature and the reality is actually negative, coming back with a general positive is not a valid option. It makes you seem evasive and you come across as someone who is not really answering the question. That can antagonize the journalist and alienate your audience.

WRONG	RIGHT
<p>Q: You lost a case where the evidence seemed clearly aligned against the alleged. That has to be very disappointing.</p> <p>A: Actually, the public attention to this case yielded a few good things. For example...</p>	<p>Q: You lost a case where the evidence seemed clearly aligned against the alleged. That has to be very disappointing.</p> <p>A: We're definitely fixing the problems that led to those results in our appeal.</p>
<p>Coming back with a general positive just makes you seem shifty when the question was specific in nature, especially when the journalist knows his or her facts are true.</p>	<p>Come back with a problem/solution response, where you incorporate the problem and the solution in the same brief nutshell.</p> <p>For example, "We've fixed that problem" or "We're fixing that problem" so they can't be easily separated in the editing process. You admit the problem but then focus on the solution for the rest of your answer.</p> <p>A: Yes. We lost the case and it was because of two main problems with the way we approached this. We made a mistake on X and we also dropped the ball when it comes to Y. The good news is we will address both of those problems in our appeal. Here's what we've done...</p> <p>The benefit of this approach is that you are being forthright. You are not being evasive. You will portray yourself as proactive and dynamic, rather than reactive and negative.</p>

## **Hypothetical/Speculative Questions**

As soon as you hear "if" or "what if," you know the journalist is asking you to speculate. Stick to "what is," not "what if." Don't speculate or answer hypothetical questions. The best way to respond is, "It's tough to speculate on hypothetical scenarios, but what I can tell you is..."

## **When They Expect You to Know Everything**

Tell the journalist it's outside your area of expertise and that you'll try to find that information. After the interview, find out and get back to the reporter before their deadline.

## **Multi-Part Questions**

When a journalist asks you more than one question at a time, answer the one you want or address the main issue raised.

## **Nondisclosure Information**

Sometimes, journalists ask for secrets or nondisclosure information. Explain why you cannot give specifically what they asked you for and then respond with what you can share. "This is something, closely related, that is for public consumption."

## **Interruptions**

If a reporter interrupts you or doesn't let you complete your point, either 1) let them interrupt you and come back to answer the original question later, or 2) stop, listen patiently to the new question and say you'll address it in a moment. For example: "I'll get to that question in a moment, but it's important that I address your previous one first..."

## **Paraphrasing**

The journalist unfairly and incorrectly restates what you say. Don't get angry. Just restate your position clearly. "Jane, I guess I didn't make myself clear..."

## **Silence**

Reporters sometimes use long pauses or silence between questions to encourage you to talk more. Either fill those voids with positive points, or don't say anything at all. Be on guard for this technique and don't feel pressured to say any more than you want to.

## **Humor**

Be careful about using humor. It can backfire when an interviewer quotes you out of context. Best case, people do not understand your wit. Worst case, you truly offend a key audience.

## **"Off the Record"**

Journalists are ethically bound to keep something off the record as long as the interviewee says that the information is off the record before offering it. However, like most ethical principles, this is not absolute. Best to assume that nothing you say is "off the record." Reporters may also quote you even if they're not writing down notes.

If you don't want to read it, hear it, or see it, don't say it. In fact, the toughest questions often come near the end or after the interview. Be prepared for the "casual" question after the interview is presumably finished.

The information provided in this guide does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. All information and content available in this guide is for general informational purposes only.

Victims/survivors should contact their attorney to obtain advice with respect to any particular legal matter.

Media inquiries for the Office of Victim Advocate can be directed to Ashley Walkowiak at [anwalkowiak@pa.gov](mailto:anwalkowiak@pa.gov) or 717-773-2399.