

When Media Attention Becomes Overwhelming

If your situation is the subject of intense and ongoing media attention, there are steps you can take to manage the media.

- You may choose to appoint a family spokesperson to represent you. This could be another family member, friend, or attorney who has your best interests in mind. This individual can also help protect your privacy. He or she can help to screen your phone calls, answer your door, or release your written statements.
- If you are being overwhelmed with media requests, you may want to set specific times for meeting with the media or answering their questions so that the media will not try to make contact with you at all times throughout the day and night.
- Let your FBI Victim Specialist or Special Agent know if the media attention is having a negative impact on you and your family. The public affairs specialist in the local FBI field division may be able to help. The FBI can also work with local police to move media away from your private property.
- If you can, it may be helpful to find a place to stay temporarily that is unknown to the media. Your FBI Victim Specialist may be able to assist you with temporary relocation.

Remember, it is your choice whether to interact with the media as well as when and how you do so.

Your FBI Victim Specialist

The FBI Victim Specialist assigned to your case is there to make sure you have information and support to help you get through this process. She or he will explain the criminal justice process, listen to your concerns, help you find counseling and other forms of assistance, and keep you updated on the status of the case. The Victim Specialist works for the FBI but is not an Agent. Instead, the Victim Specialist is often someone with a social work or counseling degree and experience working with young people and adults who have been victims of violent crime.

The Victim Specialist works as part of a team with the FBI Agent and employees from the U.S. Attorney's Office. While most of the discussions that you have with your Victim Specialist are confidential, there may be times when the Victim Specialist will need to share information you provide with other team members. If you have questions about limited confidentiality, you may contact your Victim Specialists for clarification. Generally, the Victim Specialist and the Agent will make every effort to protect your privacy.

Important Contact Numbers

FBI Victim Specialist:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

FBI Special Agent:

Name: _____

Phone: _____



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Federal Bureau of Investigation
Victim Services Division



Tips for Dealing with the Media



Introduction

Reporters may be interested in speaking with you when you or a family member has been a victim of a crime. You decide whether or not you want to speak with the media — you do have the right to say no. If you decide to speak with the media, you can set the conditions of your interaction with them, but you may have limited control over how your story is reported.

Keep in mind that there will likely be an investigation related to the crime that has occurred. It is important not to reveal sensitive information that could harm the investigation and any future prosecution. You will want to consult with the FBI Special Agent investigating the crime or your FBI Victim Specialist for guidance before you speak with the media.

Choosing Whether or Not to Speak to the Media

Each case or situation is unique so there is no standard approach to managing media interest. In some cases the media can play a useful role in maintaining public focus on a tragedy or crime. Speaking publicly about a missing child or adult family member may be a good way to engage the attention of the public in helping to resolve the situation. Many individuals and families use social media to keep in contact with family and friends by sharing family updates, other personal information, and photos.

Media and public attention can also present many challenges to protecting your privacy. Everything reported in print and electronic media today becomes and generally remains accessible around the world through the Internet. Speaking to the media can have unintended, and negative, consequences on your privacy and that of your family and friends. Take time to gather your thoughts and avoid saying more than intended.

Many people will want to support and help you, but not everyone will be sensitive to your situation. The downside of public and media attention is that many people express views that are distasteful and even cruel. Some people may even blame you or your loved one for your situation. These comments are hurtful for families and especially for children. However, you may also receive contact and attention from people who genuinely wish to express their concern and assist.

Protecting Your Privacy

In high profile crimes, the media will try to interview surviving victims and families of murdered victims. The attention and requests can become disruptive and re-victimizing. Even if you choose not to speak with the media, the information about what happened to you or your loved one can result in unwanted attention. Victims and their family members may become targets for identity theft, harassment, and other types of victimization. As a result, you may want to change your passwords and use all of the firewalls, restrictions, or security settings available on your social media host websites. In some situations it may be best to immediately remove information regarding your family and your loved one from all social media sites.

Children are generally too young to understand the consequences of speaking with the media and should be protected from media attention. If you do let the media speak to your child, make sure there is an adult present and that your child understands that he or she does not have to answer upsetting questions.

Federal law requires the FBI to respect your dignity and privacy and to protect the information of living individuals. Your name and contact information may be discovered or released through other agencies, but the FBI will not release your information — including your name — to the public or the media without your consent. The FBI may provide your name and contact information to official agencies that provide a benefit to victims, such as a crime victim compensation program operated by a state or federal government agency.



Setting Conditions for Speaking with the Media

All reporters must identify themselves and their organization. You can choose or refuse to meet with a specific reporter or media organization (newspaper, magazine, radio station, television station, or internet site). You have the right to say that you are not interested in speaking with the media. The information below can help you when you choose to speak with the media.

- You can request to know and agree to the angle or focus of the story.
- You may prepare a written statement that says what you want to say instead of speaking directly to a reporter.
- You can request or require the interview questions in advance. You can also provide the reporter with a list of questions that you do not wish to answer and are “off limits.”
- You can choose the time and place of the interview. You do not have to speak to the media immediately. You may want to consider conducting the interview at a place away from your home.
- You can decide whether the interview will be “live” or recorded ahead of time.
- You can choose to have a support person with you during the interview.
- You can refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time.
- You can request that offensive photographs or other visuals be omitted from being aired or published. You can also request a retraction of any inaccurate information.

It is important to understand that reporters do not have to follow your requests for omissions, retractions, and changes. The media decides how they will report information and you may have limited control over the end product.