

Being interviewed can be a daunting experience. The important thing to remember is that interviews are not just about answering questions – they are an opportunity to provide useful and positive information about your organisation. This Factsheet includes tips and techniques to help make your interview relaxed and productive.

Deciding to undertake an interview

- ⌚ Many people feel obliged to do interviews. Before you say yes, consider whether you are the best person to respond. If not, refer them to someone else.
- ⌚ Avoid providing an ‘off-the-record’ comment in lieu of an interview. This can cause misunderstanding and uncertainty – it’s best to stay on the record so both you and the journalist know where you stand. Never say anything on or off the record that you wouldn’t want repeated.
- ⌚ Whether you decide to do the interview or not, always let the journalist know by the agreed deadline – leaving them in doubt does nothing to foster the relationship.
- ⌚ See Factsheets *Media enquiries about mental illness* and *Media enquiries about suicide*, for more guidance on working with media.

Preparation

- ⌚ Always prepare for an interview, giving thought to the best wording and message for your responses, rather than commenting on the spot.
- ⌚ Develop key messages you want to communicate during the interview: no more than three key points you want to convey.
- ⌚ Don’t be afraid to ask questions before the interview, such as what motivated the reporter to do the story, who else they are interviewing, or what kind of topics they’d like to cover. This puts the interview in context and can help formulate your responses.
- ⌚ When planning your responses, consider the tricky questions and work out some answers. It helps to have someone work with you to practise.
- ⌚ Have in mind statistics or key findings which are relevant to your organisation or the issue.
- ⌚ Refer to the Australian Government’s Mindframe *Guidelines for reporting mental illness and suicide*. See www.mindframe-media.info.

During the interview

- ⌚ Speak in short, succinct phrases containing your key messages. Avoid long statements.
- ⌚ Pause before answering each question, get your thoughts together and then respond. The silence may seem endless, but it’s a moment.
- ⌚ Try to avoid ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’ by practising your key messages and responses before the interview.
- ⌚ Avoid speaking in a monotone – you can lose your audience.
- ⌚ If doing a radio interview, whether in a studio or by phone, smile; it reflects in your voice.
- ⌚ Stick to plain and straightforward language your audience can relate to. Clinical phrases, technical terms and acronyms will confuse people not familiar with the topic.

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Information and advice on talking to the media

- ⌚ Stick to your words, rather than ones chosen by the journalist. If they use words such as 'dangerous' or 'psycho' to describe someone with mental illness, don't use those in your reply, you may want to point out their wording is not appropriate eg: stigmatising.
- ⌚ If undertaking a print or pre-recorded interview, remember not all your comments will be used. Even if you talk for 20 minutes, you may only be quoted once. Continually work your key messages into all your statements, it increases the chance they will be used.
- ⌚ Try to end with a positive message about things that can be done to improve people's lives and remember to mention helplines if appropriate.

Tips for answering difficult questions

- ⌚ Just because the journalist asks a question doesn't mean you have to answer it. Journalists can only use what you provide.
- ⌚ Build a bridge – acknowledge the reporter's point and use bridging statements such as 'what's important here . . .' or 'the real issue here . . .' to bring the interview back to what you want to talk about.
- ⌚ Stick to your point: sometimes if people don't hear the answer they want, they keep asking the question. If this happens in an interview, stick to your original response – it makes your point clear and keeps the topic on track.
- ⌚ Keep your cool! It's the media's job to ask tricky questions, it's your job to make sure you are prepared and able to answer them and get your point across. Planning and practice are key in interviews. Once you've had your say, stop speaking. Let the journalist fill the silence.
- ⌚ Accentuate the positive: make sure you correct misconceptions and balance negative angles.

Radio

- ⌚ Speak slowly. Measured speech is easier to understand. Remember people may only be 'half listening'.
- ⌚ Let each statement stand on its own, particularly if the interview is pre-recorded. Your earlier statements may not be used and it can become confusing to refer to previous responses.
- ⌚ Don't knock the microphone and be aware all comments can be picked up by the mike
- ⌚ Avoid wearing jewellery that will make a noise as you move, put unnecessary objects out of reach, and turn off your mobile phone.

Television interviews

- ⌚ Avoid bright colours or patterns; they distort on camera and distract viewers. Choose darker colours with flattering tailoring. Wear clothes you feel comfortable in it helps boost your confidence and lessens the chance you may fidget.
- ⌚ Take off sunglasses. They can make people look as though they have something to hide.
- ⌚ Never cross your arms – it can come across as defensive. Try to keep your hands out of your pockets and keep your hands free of distractions, such as pens or glasses. Using your hands to emphasise a point is fine, but if you use them a lot, consider clasping them together so you don't distract from what you are saying.
- ⌚ If seated, choose a straight-backed chair that doesn't move. A swivel chair might tempt you to move about, which makes you look nervous. Make sure the area directly behind you while on camera is suitable, with no distracting or inappropriate signs or activities. This can reduce the impact of your message.
- ⌚ If possible, include your organisation's logo or banner in camera range while you are being interviewed.