
A Checklist for Communicating with Media in a Crisis

- Be prepared. Be honest. Be brief. Stress concern for student safety.
- Be accessible. Stick to the facts.
- Keep cool. Don't become defensive; don't lose your temper or argue.
- Develop a written statement to be read and handed out.
- Contact the news media before they contact you. Set any reasonable geographic boundary or time limits. Explain the reason for the limitations.
- Stress positive actions taken by the school or district.
- Do not make statements about responsibility until all the facts are known.
- Pause and collect your thoughts before you respond to reporters' questions.
- The interview is not over until the reporter leaves. Always be careful about what you say in the presence of a reporter before or after an interview. The microphone may still be on.
- Don't respond to negative questions by repeating words that inflame the situation. *"Yes, it is a real tragedy ..."*
- Be alert to statements that begin:
 - Isn't it true that ...?
 - Aren't you really saying ...?
 - How do you respond to ...?
 - Are you aware that ...?
- Avoid "what if" questions. You can't predict the future.
- Do not say, "No comment." Instead, try "I will have to check into the matter. What is your deadline? I will get back to you."
- There is no such thing as "off the record." While many reporters honor this, you cannot assume that all reporters will.
- Understand all the facts, especially technical ones.
- If you update news media handouts during the day, be sure the time of release is at the top of the page.
- Know what is being done to help staff and students cope with the situation. (For example, the crisis intervention team is offering counseling and support on campus.)
- After the incident, announce any changes made as a result of it.