



Coping with media interest after a trial *(Advice for victims, witnesses, defendants and their relatives)*

What to do when a journalist approaches you

Journalists are perfectly entitled to approach you and ask you questions (even if the court has ruled that you are to enjoy anonymity). HOWEVER - You do not have to talk to journalists or answer their questions.

DO NOT be bullied into a conversation; it is their job to be persuasive. If you do not wish to talk to them, just say "I have nothing to say".

BEWARE! The Press may approach other members of your family, neighbours or friends. There is nothing to stop them any of them talking to journalists but you could make your wishes clear to them in advance so that they understand your concerns.

If you think there are journalists at your door, try and find out who they are before opening it. Shout through the door and ask them to put their business card through the letterbox. If you do not want to be photographed do not open the door.

If you open your door to a stranger, always ask for identification. If they claim to be a journalist ask to see their Press card or NUJ card AND their business card - which you should keep. If you do not want to talk to them then and there tell them you will get back to them if and when you want to make a statement. Phone the landline number on their card, to check that they are who they say they are, but do not get drawn into a conversation because anything you say could be quoted.

Journalists can be utterly charming to achieve their objective. Do not let them put words in your mouth. You will need time to consider carefully what you want to say.

BE CAREFUL

If you do agree to speak to a journalist, try and arrange to have a friend or family member present as a witness. If you can, record the interview (openly).

If the journalist plans to record the interview, before the interview starts ask for a copy of the tape or a full transcript in writing, as condition of your giving the interview. They are unlikely to agree, so it helps to have a witness present making their own recording or taking notes. The important thing is to let the journalist know that you do not want your words distorted or taken out of context.

FAMILY PHOTOS

Do not have photos of relatives who may be of interest on show during an interview, and think carefully before you part with anything. If you do decide to give them family photos take care which ones you select since they are not always returned.

Copyright of a photo remains with the person who took it, but once it has been given to the media it is likely to be digitised and added to a database. Once published it enters the 'public domain' and other publishers may pay for use of a copy without your consent at any time in the future. Get an agreement in writing the term of which you have provided them (for one use only, for example).



The best interests of children

Once a story has entered the 'public domain' it can reappear at anytime; sometimes years into the future. This can be particularly problematic where it concerns the welfare of a child. The law makes special efforts to protect the identity and the best interests of young people up to the age of 18 involved in criminal cases - and so should you. Think carefully about the wisdom of allowing your child to be identified with sensational or salacious stories about crime. The media will understand if you request that children and young identity be protected, at least until they are old enough to make an informed decision for themselves.

What to do if a reporter harasses you

If the Press persist in bothering you (by phoning you, knocking on your door, or waiting outside), after you have made it clear that you do not want to talk to them, they are in breach of Clause 4 of the Editors' Code of Practice (Harassment). This could also be viewed as a breach of the peace, or even an offence under the Prevention from Harassment Act 1997. You are within your rights to notify the police.

If you know which newspaper the journalist represents, phone and complain to the editor. If you feel unable to do this yourself, ask a friend, or a solicitor to do so on your behalf. If there are children living in the house, point out the distress and trauma that may be caused to them. It is not in the 'public interest' for the Press to put young lives at risk or cause distress.

If anyone trespasses on your property (e.g. climbs over a fence or wall and enters your back garden) call the police. They may use reasonable force to remove an intruder who is trespassing on your property.

DO NOT TAKE THE LAW INTO YOUR OWN HANDS

Displaying anger, making threats or responding physically provide the media with a story (and pictures) which they can use instead of an interview. It may also put you in breach of the law.

What you can do at the end of a trial

At the end of a trial if you choose to make a statement, WRITE IT DOWN, SIGN IT, and make copies. This can be handed to the Press (but retain a copy for yourself).

Alternatively, ask or arrange for the solicitor, or a friend to read out your statement. If you do not wish to speak to the media ask your representative to make it clear by saying: "The family have nothing to say the media at this time" or "The family are requesting that their privacy be respected to allow them to come to terms with what has happened" or "The family will make a statement in due course."

You may request that all media enquiries are made through your solicitor or a person of your choice.

If you wish to leave the court unrecognised or unhindered on the final day, request assistance from court officials. Alternatively wear clothing (e.g., hat or hood, scarf, dark glasses, etc.) that will prevent photographs being taken that will clearly identify you.