**Public Information/Media Plan for School Administrators**

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* Set policies and make decisions about media contact before the occurrence of a crisis event.
* Work with local media before a crisis occurs to make sure they understand your needs during an incident.
* Direct all media inquiries during a crisis to designated spokesperson (Superintendent or PIO - Public Information Officer). This avoids confusion and ensures consistency in information given to the media.
* Use clear, simple, layman's terminology that readers or viewers can understand.
* Avoid being defensive. Acknowledge the difficulty of the media's role and take the position of helpfulness. If you don't know the answer to a question, find out and call back, or put the interviewer in contact with another resource.
* Use caution if the interviewer requests to be put in contact with witnesses, alleged offenders, or survivors. Your first priority is to protect your students and staff and minimize the traumatic effects of the crisis situation on them.
* Make clear before being recorded or interviewed live that you do not think it appropriate to discuss specific details of the event, particularly suicide or weapons-related deaths. Avoid sensationalizing. General information can be more beneficial.
* Do not insist on seeing questions in advance or on editing the final copy. The media will use what fits the purpose, theme, or time frame of their medium. Your willingness to be interviewed involves some degree of trust.
* Arrange for a joint news conference with emergency responders or choose one media representative to disseminate information to all other media outlets. Release of information should be coordinated with other PIO's.
* Confidentiality and privacy issues regarding the identity of juveniles and their involvement in a particular situation should be closely monitored to prevent unauthorized disclosure of information.
* The school district and the police have an obligation to keep the media abreast of significant developments as long as the investigation or action plan is not compromised or parents unnecessarily harmed.
* Only information known to be true and accurate shall be provided. Do not speculate. Do not provide information "off the record".
* If an arrest results from the situation, the police agency should coordinate this announcement through the Superintendent's office, so necessary steps can be taken by the school to prepare the faculty, students, and parents.
* The release of names of anyone involved under the age of eighteen shall be prohibited unless approval of such is obtained from the involved individual or legal guardian of such.
* If a death results from the situation, the release of such a victim shall be coordinated and authorized by the office of the county coroner.
* Work with state and local emergency management to have the Federal Aviation Administration restrict air space over your site.

Resources:

Adapted from "Guidelines for Media Interviews" courtesy of American Association of Suicidology.

U.S. Department of Education: Practical Information on Crisis Planning