

Ambassador Program

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA/ TIPS FOR SELECTING A SPOKESPERSON

The information and tips below have been modified from the American Dental Association's [Give Kids A Smile Planning Toolkit](#).

Categorizing the News

News stories fall into two basic categories: hard and soft news.

- Hard news is time sensitive and reports on serious topics like politics, business, local and national security, etc...
- Soft or feature news generally is not as time sensitive and often deals with “human interest” stories, with topics spanning health and wellness, lifestyle, entertainment and more.

Most journalists will view your MDS Foundation sponsored event as soft news, and your success in generating coverage will hinge heavily on the amount and type of hard news occurring that day and week.

Building Connections with Media

Reporters are under constant deadline pressure, so when contacting them about your event, keep the five Ws in mind: who, what, when, where, and why. It's helpful to distribute a media advisory, typically via email, about your event (see sample in the MDS Foundation Ambassador Program Promotional [Toolkit](#)) before you call reporters.

Reporters can't devote hours to researching every story they cover. Often they are not health care or public policy experts. In fact, that is exactly why they need to interview your spokespeople — to get the most pertinent details and relevant quotes for the story.

Spokespeople should view any media interview as a chance to shape a story. Don't just answer a reporter's questions about your event; use the interview to make key points about the issues you are addressing.

If a reporter asks, “How many children will receive dental treatment at your event?” your spokesperson could say:

- “Nearly (number of) children will receive free dental services ranging from screenings to cleanings up to fillings and more.” [then expand the answer by saying ...] “But I worry about the thousands of children who need dental care who aren't here today — the ones who continue to have trouble eating, sleeping and paying attention in class because their teeth are in such bad shape. Dentists want to be part of the solution, but can't solve access to care on their own. A one-day event like Give Kids A Smile isn't a cure-all, it's a wakeup call. It's time for politicians, parents and people who care to (state your program/organization goal). Our children deserve a better health care system that addresses their dental needs.”

The entire quote would probably never make it into the story — it's too long — but this type of quote gives reporters a lot of sound bites to choose from to edit into their stories. Perhaps a reporter would use:

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“I worry about the thousands of children who aren’t here today — the ones who continue to have trouble eating, sleeping and paying attention in class because their teeth are in such bad shape. Our children deserve a better health care system that addresses their dental needs.”

Identifying Local Spokespeople

Spokespeople help to humanize your cause and event by giving faces and voices to the issue at hand. Ideally, your event should have a few people on hand to act as spokespeople. These people should be volunteers who have some experience with the media interviews and/or have been media trained so they can make the most of the media interview opportunity. Choose spokespeople with warm personalities and the ability to speak in easy-to-understand terms. A good voice is a plus for any spokesperson, especially for radio or television interviews.

How to Do Media Interviews

Brevity and clarity are the most important things to remember when doing a media interview. Your spokesperson must crystallize for reporters in a few, extremely brief sentences:

- what your event is, and
- how your local event/program can help, but not solve the problem you are addressing

Remember, presentation skills are very important. In television especially, audiences tend to pay more attention to how you look and say something more than what you actually say. Discuss the issues in ways that are relevant to the local situation.

Tips

- **Speak in a conversational tone.** Imagine the reporter is a neighbor or patient and you’re explaining your event and the issues it addresses. Convey interest, concern, and confidence.
- **Be concise,** stating the most important points first; then provide background information. Print reporters will want more depth than broadcast journalists because they have more space to run stories.
- **Don’t use technical jargon.** For instance, instead of “restorations,” say “fillings and crowns.”
- **Most broadcast interviews will be taped and edited before airing.** The reporter will probably pull out a 10-to-15 second sound bite from your interview and summarize the rest of the information you provide.
- **The reporter wants your voice on tape,** so avoid simply answering “yes” or “no” to questions. Always provide details that help tell the story. A brief story of a child in dire need of access to oral health care is a much more memorable interview than a lot of statistics, which the reporter can gather from your press materials.
- For television interviews, **always look at the interviewer, not the camera.** The cameraperson will find you.
- Remember that anything you say to a reporter before, during and after the interview can be used in the story. **There is no such thing as “off the record,”** so if you don’t want your comment to appear in the story, don’t say it.