

Preparing for a TV or Talk Radio Interview

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. An interview should not be a traumatic experience, but rather a pleasant exchange of information. As the subject of an interview, you are not required to do anything you do not wish to do. You have the right to be comfortable and to be treated fairly. Do not agree to be interviewed anywhere you do not feel comfortable and, before the interview, find out who will interview you. Find out in advance what the interview will be about and how long it will take. You may want to send the reporter or producer any information you have that would be relevant.

If you are going to be on a talk show, ask who else will appear on the program with you; also ask about the interview style of the talk show host. Know in advance if the program takes calls from listeners. If you are doing an interview for a print outlet, assume that anything you say can be quoted, attributed to you and your agency.

Before the interview, think about the questions you may be asked and develop concise, quotable answers. You may find it helpful to convene a “media caucus” and have a brief discussion with your colleagues about the issues, your messages and talking points. Devise answers to both the questions you are most likely to be asked and the questions you are most afraid to be asked. If it is not a television interview, it is appropriate to have notes in front of you during the interview.

You have the primary responsibility for the interview; the reporter does not. Look at each question as an opportunity to deliver your message. If you are asked an inappropriate question, try to turn it around. For instance, you might respond, “The issue here is not why the woman didn’t leave sooner. The issue is...” or “No, that’s not really accurate, but I can tell you that...” or “I think what you are really getting at here is...” All of those phrases help to turn an interview back to your messages.

Keeping Your Address Confidential

While you will likely want your program’s telephone number or hotline publicized, you will not want your street address made public. Explain this to the reporter or producer from the outset. Let them know that publicizing the address or location of your shelter poses a serious danger to the victims you are serving. Although you can trust the vast majority of journalists to respect and understand the need to keep your address confidential, you also should make sure they understand that outdoor shots (TV camera or still photograph) of the shelter are off-limits. The risk is too great that an abuser might notice a street sign or landmark that would help him identify or locate the shelter.

Depending on your experience, in rural areas you may want to increase the visibility of your shelter. In some areas, awareness of the shelter location creates greater safety. Isolation in rural areas is often a barrier to victims’ help-seeking, as well as to the outreach efforts by the local domestic violence programs.

Looking Good On Camera

Appearance is important during a television interview; you do not want to do anything or wear anything that will distract the audience and take away from your messages. The following are tips to help you look your best on camera.

Tips for everyone:

- Throughout the interview, sit up straight and pay attention to your posture.
- Use hand gestures for animation, but contain them so that they don't go off the screen.
- Remember that the camera is usually focused on just your face and neck. If you usually wear glasses, keep them on while you are on camera. Otherwise, you may squint.
- If someone at the station offers to apply your make-up, accept it. Face powder is used to keep guests from looking shiny or sweaty on camera.

Tips for women:

- If you usually do not wear any make-up, at a minimum, wear a lipstick color that is slightly darker than your natural lip color—this will keep your face from looking monochrome on camera. Some television stations in larger media markets will have experts who will do your make-up and can help you look natural on camera.
- Be sure to check your teeth for lipstick prior to the cameras rolling.
- Wear simple clothes: a dress, a blouse or sweater with a skirt and a jacket. Do not wear large scarves, bows or ties at your neck.
- Avoid bright red and bright white.
- If possible, wear solid color clothes, but avoid any color that blends in with your skin tone. Do not wear loud patterns, very small pattern (like black and white hounds tooth) and fabrics that sparkle or have a high sheen.
- Avoid large earrings or necklaces that may be distracting and bracelets or bangles that could clang into a microphone.

Tips for men:

- Wear solid colors—blues and grays usually work well but avoid white shirts. A better color is light blue, lavender, or another pastel.
- Try to avoid loud ties and ties with small patterns. A power tie, something with a hint of red, works well.
- Pay attention to “the fit” of your garments, especially the suit jacket, since it may appear heavier or tighter on the TV camera.
- Be sure your hair is well groomed and fresh looking.

Talk Radio

Talk radio and radio call-in shows (such as BlogTalkRadio) are extremely popular and can be a good way to get your message out and educate the public about domestic violence. Before agreeing to go on a talk show, you should find out:

- What is the format of the show?
- What kinds of guests does the show usually use: people offering community services or people discussing issues?
- When does it air?
- Is it live or taped?
- Is it a call-in show? (If listeners can call in, there may be hostile callers with questions that undermine our work. Be prepared to respond to comments and questions intended to throw you off.)
- How long are the guest or interview segments?
- What is the host's interview style? Is she or he aggressive, hostile, a good questioner?
- Is there a producer other than the host?

Booking A Guest On Talk Radio

Try to schedule appearances on programs that air during drive time (7 am to 9 am or 4 pm to 7 pm) or other maximum exposure slots. Before you book anyone on a show, find out what kind of show it is. If the show is in your area, listen to it. If not, ask the producer about the type of show it is and the style of the interviewer. Many radio stations have web sites; visit the website to learn more about the talk show and the host. Sometimes, you can even listen to the show on the website.

Send the producer a pitch email proposing a topic and spokesperson. In your email, highlight DVAM and the events or activities your program is initiating or involved in. Briefly explain your spokesperson's qualifications, provide some simple background material and include a daytime phone number and email address. Follow up with a telephone call.

When booking someone on a talk show, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Will the regular host be there or will there be a substitute host?
- How long will your spokesperson be on the air?
- Will there be live telephone calls with questions?
- Will there be other guests? Who will they be?
- At what time should the guest be at the studio?