

**What to Do
When the Media Calls**

Christian Schools
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Before the media calls, be prepared.

- ✓ Consider your media strategy.
 - ✓ Make a plan.
- ✓ Choose a spokesperson.

**Choosing a media strategy:
Questions to ask**

- Might anything at (or associated with) your school become news—negative or otherwise?
- What risks would media coverage present?
- What advantages would media coverage present?
- Who are the local media? Do you have a relationship?
- What resources do you have?
- What is your mission, and how does media fit?

Potential news stories for Christian schools:

- A major community event
 - A scientific discovery
 - An art exhibit
 - Sports teams
 - Controversial beliefs
- Allegations of discrimination or abuse
- Allegations of bigotry or “brainwashing”

Potential news stories for Christian schools:

What will your school be known for?

Proactive media relations:

- Resource-intensive
- Potential for large gain
- Sees media relations as an opportunity for recruitment, fund development, and more

Proactive media relations:

- Building relationships with media
- Seeking out stories on campus and among students and staff
 - Pitching stories to the media
- Offering staff members as community resources

Alternative:

Waiting for the media to come to you

This is the least resource-intensive option, but also comes with the least control over what people say about you.

Reactive media relations	Responsive media relations
Emotional	Thoughtful
In the moment	Planned
Knee-jerk	Considered
Rushed	Efficient
Short-sighted	Big-picture

Making a plan: Things to include

- Your strategy
- Potential problems
- Key messages
- Tactics
- Resources
- Your spokesperson

What makes a story “newsworthy”?

- Conflict
- Money
- Emotion
- Impact
- Timeliness
- The “wow” factor



Key messages 101: The building blocks

- The most important thing you want to communicate to the interviewer
- Short and to the point (one or two sentences at most)
- Direct
- Written in positive, conversational language
- Often backed up by facts, examples and supporting data

Key messages 101:

Know how to present your subject in clear, simple, accessible language.

Accessibility test: Can you explain what you do for a living to an eight-year old?

Example:

- Lingo: I work in public relations.
- Simplified: I talk, listen, write, and tell stories for a living.

Key message examples:

Scenario: CBC is doing a story on the decline of students' writing skills. Is it high school teachers' fault? You've been called for a comment.

1. Top-tier teacher education programs still prioritize written communication training.
2. Research has shown that writing skills have declined because communication patterns have changed—texting has rendered sentence structure irrelevant.
3. Reading can help ensure students' writing skills are top-notch.

Things to remember when you get a call:

- The media is not your enemy.
- The media is not your friend.
- Take a breath.
- Ask for details, including the deadline.
- You don't have to agree to an interview, but consider the risks (and potential benefits).
- Ask for time.
- Be respectful of the journalist's time.

Choosing a spokesperson:

- Have a primary and a secondary.
- Ideally, someone in charge should be on the list.
- Are they comfortable?
- Have they been trained? (Or do they have experience?)
- What will they say about your organization (without talking)?

Your interview will differ with the outlet

Radio:

- Talk shows look for trends, patterns, and background for hard news stories
- You'll have a few minutes to speak
- Likely a phone interview

TV:

- Heavy on visuals
- 15–20-second sound bites
- They'll usually come to you

Online/print news:

- Quick sound bites
- Usually a phone interview, but sometimes in person
- Can be a few minutes or longer, depending on whether it's news or a feature

Regardless of the outlet

- Give short, succinct answers
- Strive for clear, engaging, confident communication
- Respond quickly—they're on deadline
- Don't fill the silence (that's their job)

How to tell a “good-news” story

- Anecdotes and stories
- Excitement and enthusiasm
- The facts: Who, what, when, where, why
- Heart first, head second
- Focus on what’s unique
- Keep it simple

Interview process



Interview pro tips:

- Practice if you can.
- Represent your key messages with one word each. Go back to your list after every question.
- Remember: You can steer this interview.
- You don’t have to answer a question you’re not comfortable with.
- Pause and think a moment before each answer.
- It’s okay to “pass the buck” to someone else.
- Master the art of “bridging.”
- Stay calm and cool.
- Use a land line.
- Offer photos.

The art of bridging



Things to avoid during an interview

- Trying to “win”
- Debating
- Escalating your volume or tone
- Waving your hands (TV)
- Ignoring the question
- Talking off the record
- Not preparing

How can I help?
Contact me for questions or consulting.

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