

## What To Do When the Media Calls

When you receive a call from the media you have an obligation to be honest and helpful whenever possible, however you must keep in mind that you have rights as well. Listed below are some tips for you to keep in mind the next time you get a call from a reporter or producer.

### Be Prepared

- ✓ It is usually very valuable to find out who else is being interviewed for the story. Perhaps it is someone you know, or someone you could contact to find out more about the slant of the interview. If you have any concerns about the interview, ask others if the interview was fair.
- ✓ You should ask the reporter for information on the story they are writing or reporting on. What is their message? What do they already know about the topic?
- ✓ Find out the deadline for the story.
- ✓ Depending upon your district policy, inform your public relations or community relations office of the request for the interview.
- ✓ It is perfectly acceptable to ask the reporter to call you back later when you have had time to formulate your thoughts and when things are less hectic in your office, or when you have approval from your school public relations office.
- ✓ Write out your key messages—limit this to no more than four messages! If you are going off-site for the interview, take your notes with you. For a phone interview, have your notes and any supporting background information in front of you.

### Be Comfortable

- ✓ For a television interview dress comfortably, but look professional. Wear simple colors—no plaids or busy prints. Your jewelry should be simple.
- ✓ If the cameras are coming to your school you can choose the location for the interview. Notice what will be in the background. What else will the cameras see?
- ✓ Don't be too comfortable in a phone interview. Consider standing up and be alert.

### Be Treated Fairly

- ✓ Your position and job title should be acknowledged.
- ✓ You should not be interrupted. If you are, try to handle with a physical gesture and with words such as, "I know your audience will want to know..."
- ✓ Do not allow the reporter to lead you down a path you don't want to take. Take care when responding to leading questions, such as "Doesn't all the fat in school meals contribute to the childhood obesity problem in the U.S.?" Remember your key messages. Briefly acknowledge the question, then "bridge" to the points you want to make.

- ✓ If you think that the reporter is planning a negative story on some aspect of your operation you can decline to be interviewed. If this is the case, you may want to work closely with your public relations office. Remember that this can also be used against you, as in... "We wanted to speak to the school foodservice director from X school, but they declined our request for an interview." It may be better to have a carefully controlled interview, rather than a negative message such as this.
- ✓ However, you should remember, that you don't have to talk to the reporter. And if you do, you are under no obligation to answer questions you don't want to answer. "I don't know.", "I have no opinion on that." or "That's not my area of expertise," are perfectly acceptable responses. Perhaps you can refer the reporter to someone who would know the answer. Also, a good rule of thumb is 'if it doesn't feel right, if the interview itself or a question in the interview makes you uncomfortable, go with your instincts - don't do the interview.