

# Media Relations: A Toolkit for Families

## Introduction

Speaking to the media can be hard. It is not always clear what facts to share and how and when to share them. This media kit is intended to help you with this. In addition, your family should always discuss media issues with the police. They know your case and have dealt with the media many times before. This media kit has the following sections:

- a) Information the media may ask for;
- b) Deciding who should be the family spokesperson;
- c) Putting on a news conference;
- d) Creating a media advisory;
- e) Holding a media scrum;
- f) One-on-one interviews;
- g) Creating a statement to the media;
- h) Contacting the media in long term missing persons cases; and,
- i) Raising public awareness without using the media.

### **a) Information the media may ask for:**

- What the person looks like (physical appearance, tattoos, birth marks, height, what the person was wearing when they went missing, etc);
- Where the person was last seen;
- A recent photo of the missing person (photos that clearly show the person's face are needed);
- The phone number of the local police or RCMP and the name of the investigator who is handling your case.

### **b) Deciding who should be the Family Spokesperson**

What is a family spokesperson? A family spokesperson is the person who will be the family contact with the media. Any member of your family or a close friend can take on this role. Family members may not want to deal with the media. If this is the case, a friend of the family may want to be the family contact. The police may also be able to provide someone to inform the media. Your family may want to have two people in mind for this role. If one person is unavailable, the other person can fill in. Here are a few pointers:

- The person should feel confident speaking to the media;
- The person should be able to keep messages to the media clear and brief;
- The person should know about the missing person's case so he/she does not have to stop and check basic facts;
- The person should be able to remain calm when dealing with reporters who may ask hard questions.

**(c) The News Conference**

If you hold a news conference you can talk to all media outlets at once. This decreases the number of times you will need to talk with the media. If you can, get a person with media experience to help put on the news conference. Someone with experience will have media contacts and understand the news cycle. They will also look after details that may otherwise be forgotten. You can talk to the investigator in charge of your case. Ask the investigator to put you in contact with a media spokesperson.

Try to hold the news conference away from your home. You may want to keep your house free to continue efforts to locate your loved one. Choose a location, such as your local police station, that has a room set up for news conferences. Other options may be a local church hall or a business that has a board room.

**(d) Creating a Media Advisory**

A Media Advisory tells the media about a future news conference. It provides the time, date, and location of the news conference. It also describes when your loved one went missing. A contact number is included so questions can be answered about the news conference. Below is an example of a Media Advisory. You can use it to help make your own. Send the Advisory to all media outlets the day before the news conference either by fax or email. If fax or email is not an option deliver the media advisory to each outlet.

**Media Advisory**

June 14, 2006- The Family of Jane Doe will talk to the media about her disappearance. She has been missing since June 13, 2006 from her home in Big City. The RCMP will be in attendance.

**Time:** 10:00 am  
**Date:** June 15, 2006  
**Location:** United Church Hall  
234 Local Church Way  
Big City, Province

Contact Info:

	<b>RCMP Communication person</b>	<b>Family Member</b>
Direct	XXX.XXX.XXXX	Cell XXX.XXX.XXXX
Cell	XXX.XXX.XXXX	

### **e) Media Scrums**

A scrum is like a news conference but it is not formally organized.

A group of reporters will interview a person at the same time. You may have noticed on TV shows like CSI Miami and Law and Order that after a court ruling the defendant is asked many questions. That is a media scrum. Scrums can be stressful but they provide families with a way to get important facts to the public.

If possible, have someone with experience in communications set up the scrum. This person will tell the media what questions will be answered and how long the scrum will last.

The family spokesperson should state his/her name and relationship to the missing person. Family members often prepare a statement (see statement section of this toolkit). The information in the statement should be discussed with police. The spokesperson should read the statement and give reporters the chance to ask a few questions. Refer questions about the case to the lead investigator. Do not comment on gossip or rumors. Thank reporters for coming and be firm when you tell them that the scrum is over. If you like, you can ask someone to moderate the news conference and bring it to a conclusion.

### **f) Giving One on One Interviews**

One on one interviews are optional. You don't have to agree to an interview if you don't want to. If your family has an interview, the family spokesperson should be well prepared. Your family should decide on a few key points for discussion during the interview. The spokesperson should try to stick to these points. If you are worried about the interview remember that you are in control. The spokesperson can stop the interview at any time. Always discuss with the police what facts should be released to the media during the interview.

### **g) Creating a Statement to the Media**

A statement to the Media is an easy way to involve the media in your case. It contains basic facts about your loved one. It should provide enough information to allow a reporter to create a story for broadcast or print. Below is an example that you and your family can follow. The format could be used for a missing man, woman, or child:

## **Statement to Media by the Family of Jane Doe**

June 14, 2006- The family of Jane Doe would like to issue the following statement regarding Jane Doe.

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Jane Doe was reported to the police as missing. Repeated attempts to contact her by family members failed. Jane Doe is 35 yrs old, has a husband and two small children. At this time, we are working with police to locate Jane.

We are very worried about Jane. It is not like her to not contact her family or to miss work without calling in to report her absence. Jane does not have a history of any illnesses. We can not think of why Jane would walk away from her family or disappear in the manner which she has.

We are asking the public to please look at the pictures of Jane included. As well, Jane's picture can be seen on missing persons' posters which have been placed (or posted) in local public areas. If you have seen Jane or know anything which could help us find her, please contact the local police at XXX.XXX.XXXX or call Crime Stoppers at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

A quick message to Jane: We love you and wish that you would come home. Your children and husband miss you and we would like you to contact us ASAP. We are very worried about you. We love you.

### **h) When a loved one has been missing for a long time**

Sometimes a missing loved one will remain missing for a long time. If this is true in your case, you may want to contact the media to bring attention back to your case. You can do this in any of the ways outlined above. As well, you may want to hold a vigil or awareness walk. If you do, invite the media to the event.

### **i) Creating Public Awareness without using the Media**

There is no guarantee that the media will cover your case. Here are a number of ways to raise public awareness about your missing loved one without using the media:

- Create and put up posters around your neighbourhood. The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police has many samples of posters of missing persons that you can follow (<http://www.sacp.ca/missing/details.php?id=13>).
- Create a page on Facebook or some other social networking site. These sites provide access to many people who may not see a poster.
- Hold a vigil or an awareness walk.

### **Conclusion**

Contact with the media is important. The media are able to bring attention to your case. The increased attention may produce leads from the public. This may help locate your

missing loved one. Try to remember that you control the relationship with the media. You and your family decide when, where, and in what format you are going to interact with the media. In addition, you and your family, along with police input, decide what facts will be released to the public. This toolkit is a basic source of advice for you and your family. If you have any questions about the media talk to the police agency in charge of your case. They can direct you to someone who can help you with media related questions.