



Media Guidelines for PAPYRUS Members

These guidelines outline the position of PAPYRUS with reference to the media. They give advice on how to deal with newspaper, magazine and radio interviews and television appearances to ensure the best outcome for you and for the public at large.

We know that there is an element of contagion in suicidal behaviour - copy cat suicides are well documented - and it is in this context that some of the advice is given.

Working with the media gives us excellent opportunities for reaching millions of people and we would always seek to establish positive relationships with reputable journalists and broadcasters - many of whom have a sincere interest in suicide prevention.

Journalists and broadcasters should know that responsible reporting avoids:-

- *Explicit details of the suicide method and procedure.*
- *Pictures showing the means such as railway lines, bridges, tall buildings or cliffs.*
- *Making the victim appear heroic, a role model etc.*
- *Highlighting that it was a solution to problems.*
- *Naming a single cause for the suicide. Contributing factors are complex and can include individual risk, current life events and surrounding social situations.*
- *Romanticising suicides.*
- *Endorsing the myths surrounding suicide.*
- *Excessive, dramatic, sensational reporting.*
- *High profile position e.g. front page.*

The underlying motive for PAPYRUS members to become involved with the media should be to deliver a message which the organisation would wish to be conveyed to the general public.

So.....what points do we want to get across?

Here are a few from a long list:

- Parents / carers to be aware that children and young people can suffer from mental distress and have suicidal thoughts.
- The need for communication from an early age; talking through problems and feelings is important.
- Any mention of feeling suicidal should be taken seriously, and advice should be sought quickly. Early intervention is essential. Parents / carers should persist in seeking help for their child.
- The need for a crisis intervention service for suicidal young people.
- Better access to / more funding for psychiatric services for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and 16 -24 year olds.
- The role of education in preparing young people for understanding and coping with emotional distress / mental illness.
- We need to stress that POPYRUS is not a bereavement support or counselling organisation. We are concerned with the **prevention of suicide**. However we can put callers in touch with services to suit their particular needs.
- Since some of the readers / viewers will be people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, we should always try to convey a message of hope - that help **is** available and that people **do** recover.

If you are unsure whether what you intend to say reflects POPYRUS' view, please check it out with us first.

We would always want to come across in a non-confrontational way. This can be difficult if you feel you were badly let down with your own child. We want to develop positive relationships with those with whom we would hope to forge links. This is unlikely if POPYRUS has a reputation for being critical, hostile etc.

Remember that whatever your involvement with the media, you can call the tune! Because these people often work to short deadlines you can feel very pressured by them. Take your time before agreeing to participate. Talk it over with someone. Call them back if necessary.

You should be clear in your own mind beforehand of how much personal detail you are prepared to give. Many of us, especially in the early days of our bereavement, want to talk about it - to tell the whole story with all its details. This is not always in your or the public interest, although the personal story is often what the journalist/broadcaster wants. You should never disclose the details of the way your child died.

Don't be afraid to ask for a fee or donation or at least your expenses.

Being interviewed for a newspaper or magazine

Read the newspaper / magazine first so that you can familiarise yourself with the style of journalism. Your 'piece' will probably be written in the same vein. As a general rule the tabloids go for the more personal, sensational details which are often embellished.

Ask if you can see a copy before it goes to print. Because of the sensitive nature of the content this is sometimes granted, although editors do have the right to change the final text. Titles are chosen by editorial staff so you're unlikely to see them beforehand.

Don't be surprised if they've got some of it wrong or even invented bits you didn't say. You can fax information which needs to be factually correct.

Ask them to mention POPYRUS. We prefer them to print our postal, web

site and e-mail addresses, not the phone number, as Tony cannot cope with the volume of calls which may follow.

Remember to stress that POPYRUS is **not** a bereavement support organisation. We are concerned with the prevention of suicide.

Being interviewed for radio / TV

What is the purpose of the interview, and what role will you be playing ?

Is the programme going out 'live' or will it be pre-recorded ?

Who else will be taking part, and what will they be representing ? You don't want to find yourself in contention with another party.

You need time to gather your thoughts and to decide what you do and do not want to say. You may also want to check whether family members are in agreement with what you are doing.

Establish that you will be allowed to mention POPYRUS, and find out whether they are going to publicise our details after the programme. e.g. via the BBC helpline

Find out what questions you will be asked beforehand so that you can be prepared. You should be clear in your own mind what you want to get across. Keep your responses short and concise, and look for opportunities to 'slip in' important points.

You can always refuse to answer a question whether it's a live show or not. You are less likely to have the opportunity to put your views across in 'chat shows' where many people are taking part.

If the programme is pre-recorded you can ask to redo part of it, or ask them not to broadcast an answer you were not happy with. It's negotiable !!

Ask whether they can provide you with a video / tape recording of the programme. We like to keep a record in the office if possible.

Finally.....

If you feel aggrieved by the way you have been represented by the press, whether you actively took part or not, you may complain to the Press Complaints Commission.

Copies of their Code of Practice and How to Complain are available from our office or from the
PCC, 1 Salisbury Square, LONDON EC4Y 8AE
Tel: 020 7353 1248 e-mail: pcc@pcc.org.com

PAPYRUS wholly subscribes to the Samaritans 'Media Guidelines on the Portrayal of Suicide' A copy may be obtained from
The Samaritans, 10 The Grove, SLOUGH SL1 1QP Tel: 01753 532713.

Please feel free to talk things over with us if you are asked to take part in any media event.

**Call Tony Cox in the office Tel: 01706 214449
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