

Effective
Outreach
Through
The Media

Table of Contents

What is the Media?.....	4
Developing an Outreach / Publicity Plan	7
Tips and Taboos: Working With the Media	11
Resources	15
Templates / Worksheets	16
Developing a Media Plan	
Press Packets	
Letter to the Editor Guide	
Op/Ed Guide	
Press Release Guide	

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Inc. (WCASA) is a statewide organization created and incorporated in 1985 to support and complement the work of Wisconsin's community-based sexual assault service providers and other organizations working to end sexual violence. WCASA works in collaboration with communities throughout the state to support existing services to victims/survivors of sexual violence, to plan for the development of new services, to create and support community prevention efforts, and to stimulate community ownership of the issue of sexual violence. WCASA is the state's central clearinghouse on the issue of sexual violence and related topics. WCASA staff work statewide to address all facets of sexual violence, from public attitudes and awareness, to effective intervention, to public policy.

WCASA's mission is to promote the social change necessary to end sexual violence in Wisconsin and to support a statewide network of concerned individuals and organizations as they work toward this goal.

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Introduction

The media is a critical partner in any effort to prevent sexual violence. Your media efforts can reach victims, possible victims, offenders, families, friends and jurors. Media attention not only raises awareness and educates, it also helps influence decision makers, funders, and potential supporters.

However, using media outreach to prevent sexual violence is complex. Even with expert planning and execution media campaigns can be disrupted, funding can dry up, controversy can appear and competitors can dilute your message.

This manual is intended to give you the tools needed to integrate media outreach into accomplishing your agencies mission. You may choose to follow this manual from front to back, or you may take bits and pieces out to fit your needs. However you use this manual, you will hopefully find that using the media to its full potential will prove useful in prevention efforts as well as the work to serve victims of sexual assault.

*Media
Coverage
Makes
Us
Visible
to
the
Outside
World*

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What Is The Media?

Media are forms of communication used to spread or transmit information to the general public. Examples of media include newspapers, magazines, television, billboards and the Internet. While media does inform and entertain, bear in mind that in the end MEDIA IS A BUSINESS. The ultimate purpose of most mass media is to make a profit. Regardless of which type of media you are using, the for profit nature of media does have an impact on how they do what they do.

It is helpful to distinguish between two types of media:

1. Media which you use (publicity) and
2. Media which you buy (advertising).

Both publicity and advertising offer a chance to communicate with the public, but the similarity ends there. They differ in their degree of cost, control, credibility and controversy.

Media Which You Use – Publicity

In publicity, which is space and exposure you cannot directly buy, the story is controlled by the media outlet. Although you determine what you say (your message), the reporter and her or his editor decide how, or if, your comment is used, as well as who else is interviewed.

Publicity can have much more credibility than advertising. Consumers are much more likely to believe a news story or feature article prepared by a “neutral” third party.

Despite the fact that there are no “guarantees” when working with print or broadcast media, establishing relationships and communicating with the media on a regular basis can make or break your publicity plans.

Understanding and Identifying Outlets for Publicity

Publicity is obtained in three ways. First, the media may call you directly. Second, they may be referred to you by a third party. Third, you may contact the media yourself.

The most common type of media you will encounter while creating publicity is the news media. The objective of most news media outlets is to make “news.” Media typically define “news” as controversy or change. In addition, compelling human interest stories are often run as “news.”

Characteristics of the news media include:

- *They are very competitive and want to be the first to report or be given an exclusive.*
- *They work on tight deadlines.*
- *They are interested in the truth / verifiable facts.*
- *They may (and probably do) need basic education on sexual assault.*

“Sound-bite journalism” or distilling information into short messages is how the media (largely TV and Radio) currently approaches delivering the news. A ½ hour interview with a reporter will result in a TV spot of between 10 to 30 seconds. While print media devotes more time to stories, the trend is to fit more stories in by shortening the content.

News Media Formats:

Media	TV	RADIO	PRINT
Advantages	Quick. Combines visuals, sound and graphics.	Portable, able to disseminate news to the public immediately.	Reaches a broad audience, more details in the story, dedicates more time to a story.
Disadvantages	Stories are short, work on very tight deadlines.	Rely on sound only, stories are very short.	Not as immediate as TV or Radio.
What They Want	Visuals, availability, controversy, personal stories, local interest.	Availability, controversy, smooth interview, local interest, strong sound bites.	In-depth angle, controversy, local interest, background information.
What They Don't Want	Statistics, jargon, “man stands at podium stories,” past events.	Visuals, complex details, big statistics, past events.	Stories without a local angle, past events, stories covered by Radio and TV.

Media Which You Buy - Advertising

Advertising is paid access to the media. Generally, the larger the potential audience, the higher the cost. Because you pay for advertising, you have more control over how your message is presented. You choose and write the message; you select when, where and how often the message appears.

Keep in mind that the public regards a paid message as biased in favor of whoever pays for it; in some cases advertising may also inspire more controversy than education.

Print and Broadcast Media Ads

Make sure to research the breadth of options in your target community. Advertising space can be found throughout the community. Look for space in theater booklets, restaurant placemats and local shoppers.

Understanding and Identifying Outlets for Advertising

Advertising your initiative or program is an important step in making sure that your services or message reach the widest number of people whom you can help, or who can help you. Many free or less expensive methods of doing this exist, but sometimes you may find you simply have to resort to using paid advertising in order to get the word out. With proper planning and timing, paid advertising can be a vital method of promoting what you stand for.

The primary benefit to using paid advertising is that you retain ultimate control over the distribution of your message. In addition there is a much wider variety of outlets targeting diverse and often specific audiences. Paid advertising might include:

- Public Service Announcements
- Print and Broadcast Ads
- Bumper Stickers
- Fliers or Brochures
- Newsletters
- Billboards and Signs
- Sponsorship of Events or Initiatives
- Promotional Items
- Internet Sites
- Ads in Elevators, Public Restrooms,
Automated teller machines, etc.

Public Service Announcements

Public Service Announcements (PSA's) are generally thought of as broadcast on TV and Radio. However, the core message of a PSA can be reinforced in print or on billboards. Often the expense is high, however, you retain overall control over how the message is distributed. If media outlets offer to run your PSA for free, keep in mind that you are relinquishing control of when and how your message is distributed.

Developing an Outreach / Media Plan

Without a media plan, many agencies find themselves in a reactive stance. That is: reacting to events that have already happened. As a result, media efforts tend to be sporadic and agencies are often unable to take full advantage of potential media opportunities. By developing a strategic media plan, executed over the long-term, agencies can take a pro-active stance, which advances their mission and takes full advantage of all opportunities.

An effective media plan must include strategic thinking about your agencies overall goals and how you will achieve them by using the media. The best plans will integrate several components of the mission and work an agency does, including:

- Public Education
- Grassroots Organizing / Leadership Development
- Fundraising
- Research
- Lobbying / Public Advocacy

Developing a plan consists of the following steps:

- 1. Define your goal or desired outcome***
- 2. Identify your target audience(s)***
- 3. Develop key messages***
- 4. Determine your evaluation method***
- 5. Select the most effective distribution methods***
- produce deliverables

1. Define Your Goals

It is important to ask yourself “What is it I think using the media will achieve?” What is the ultimate desired outcome of your media work? Your answer to these questions should reflect the mission, vision, values and goals of your agency. If your agency has a strategic plan, re-visit it to make sure that those goals are reflected in your media plan.

Generally speaking, most media campaigns accomplish at least one of the following.

1. Increase public awareness
E.g. - “Our agency offers these services” or “Sexual assault happens this often in our community.”
2. Change attitudes
E.g. - “Victims are never to blame” or “No one is entitled to anyone’s body.”
3. Change behaviors
E.g. - “Don’t support media with sexual violence” or “Hold the offender accountable.”

Current research suggests that to be most effective, campaigns should perform these tasks sequentially. By first raising awareness of the issue, followed by offering your audience alternative viewpoints and challenging attitudes, and finally by giving people tangible ways to change their behavior. However, it is possible to achieve all three of these with a single strategy. Regardless of where your goals or desired results fall on this spectrum, it is important to clearly focus your goals. The more specific your goal, the easier it will be to accomplish.

General Category	Specific Action or Awareness Desired
Increase awareness of our agency and services.	90% of target audience will report knowing the name of our agency and that we operate a crisis line.
Increase community awareness of sexual assault.	80% of the target audience will know the definition of sexual assault.
Change the behavior of parents of teens.	70% of the target audience will report talking to their teens about sexual assault.

The desired action should flow into your evaluation plan. How will you measure these changes. Generally, evaluations need a pre and post test to measure any changes associated with a media campaign or program.

2. Identify Your Target Audience

Your audience consists of those whose behaviors or attitudes you want to change or who you want to educate.

Possible criteria for establishing your audience:

- Geography
- Age
- Gender
- Vocation
- Ethnicity

The more specific your target audience for a particular campaign or core message is, the more effective your awareness efforts will be.

A vague target audience = All possible victims of sexual violence in the county.

A more specific audience = 17-25 yr old women living in the county.

Knowing Your Audience

It is always helpful when crafting a message or media campaign for a specific audience, to know something about what that audience knows and thinks. For example, where do they get information, how much do they already know about the issue, what makes something credible.

While doing large-scale research on your target audience may not be possible, there may be ties your agency has with the community that can facilitate some learning. Pre-existing groups offer a great way to gather information.

*Other options include:
Advisory groups
Surveys
Focus groups*

3. Crafting Your Core Message(s)

Since the problem of sexual violence is large and complicated, it may be hard to imagine developing only a few key messages. However, concentrating on no more than three messages at a time is the most effective way to effect social change. Deciding on these messages does not mean that they are the only things your program stands for: they simply provide a focus for your current media efforts. Keep your three core messages for at least a year before you evaluate their effectiveness.

Your core message(s) should achieve the goals of your public awareness initiatives and also resonate with your audience. While you will do non-media work to support your core message(s), they will be the cornerstones of your efforts. Your core message will likely be the only information retained by your audience. Your message should reflect thoughts, arguments, or impressions that you want to leave with your audience. When crafting your message, consider the following:

- What information do you want your audience to have?
- What impression do you want to make (passionate, angry, warm)?
- How do you want the audience to respond (volunteer, write a letter)?

Core messages should appear in your press releases, interviews, and guest articles and in any paid advertising. You should develop soundbites or short phrases which reflect your core message. They can be repeated continually and are the vehicle or “logo” for your social change efforts.

Example Soundbites from Core Messages:

*Sexual Violence is a community issue.
Hold the offender accountable.
You have the right to say no.
Our agency offers free and confidential services.*

4. Determine Your Evaluation Method

This step, while offering crucial information for future planning, is often overlooked: in large part because with limited time and resources, it seems expendable. However knowing whether your message is reaching anyone is important to knowing whether your current resources are being used wisely or being wasted. It is also important to note that any media efforts funded by grant monies may require the use of an evaluation tool. Evaluation can be as simple as monitoring local news outlets for reaction to a guest column or as complex as a large-scale survey. The best evaluations use a pre and post test to determine changes in attitudes and behavior of the target audience.

Your evaluation will ultimately depend on your original goal. If your goal was that 80% of the target audience will know that you operate a 24 hour crisis line, an effective evaluation might include asking callers where they heard about the service. If your goal was to increase the number of parents talking to their teens about sexual assault, you may be able to conduct a survey at local high schools asking if this is happening. However, without a pretest measuring behavior before your campaign, information collected after may be useless. Evaluation can be done creatively to minimize the cost, both in time and dollars.

5. Distribute Your Message(s)

Now that you know whom you are reaching out to and what it is you want to tell them, you must decide on the best and most cost-effective way to reach them. For example if your audience is 17 – 25 year old women and your message to them is that your agency offers services to victims of sexual violence, putting posters in the local senior center or having a story appear in the business section of your local newspaper would not be an effective means to deliver your message. First you must understand the breadth of options available, and then you can choose which will most effectively reach your target audience, and deliver the message you want. Following are ideas for how you might distribute your message.

Media Which You Use (Publicity)

Press Releases
Letters to the Editor
Guest Columns or Opinion/Editorials
Story Pitches
Media Events
Magazine Articles

Media Which You Buy (Advertising)

Public Service Announcements

General Ads

Newspapers

Magazines

Alternative Media

Personal Website

Listing on Others Websites

Promotional Items

Other Publications

Brochures

Letters

Newsletters

Flyers

Special Events

Public Workshops

Speeches

Banquets



Tips and Taboos: Working with the Media

Working with the media can be a very intimidating process. Hurried reporters working on a deadline can be unnerving as you balance helping that reporter with her/his story and making sure you're saying the right thing and delivering your message. These tips should help you learn the "rules" of the media and keep you calm during even the most stressful media interaction.

Remember:

The reporter is not your audience: she/he is the medium through which you reach your audience!

Using Your Core Message(s)

Since the journalistic trend is to present news in shorter and shorter bits it is important to have well crafted "soundbites" that reflect your core messages and are repeated throughout your public awareness efforts.

Sticking with your core messages and reiterating them at every possible juncture can help you control an interview situation, and can also give your community a recognizable connection to your agency. You will need to repeat your core message frequently to get it across.

Developing Relationships With Reporters

Reaching out to the right reporter can make all the difference. Agency representatives can develop a rapport with local journalists by taking a few steps and following a few important rules. Developing a current media list is crucial to getting your message broadcast or published. Health/medical and science writers, city editors, policy/government writers and even the photo editor are all good targets for your messages.

Understanding the Newsroom

Knowing who to call in the newsroom is important information for finding the reporter most likely to cover your story. If you are unfamiliar with your local reporters / news staff, don't be afraid to call and ask "who's the best person to talk to?" Also, most news outlets now have websites which list reporters names with their assigned "beat."

When pitching stories or presenting press releases related to sexual assault the following reporters "beats" can make key contacts: Metro (city), Government, Courts/ Crime, Health and Lifestyles.

It is good to become familiar with the editorial staff as well as the ombudsman/woman. This person is hired to represent the interests of the readership and act as community liason.

The Rules of Engagement

- 1. Be a Resource** - Be known as someone who has accurate information and can be counted on for a newsworthy soundbite.
- 2. Be Available** - Make an effort to call reporters back ASAP. Also, if they request information don't put off sending it out.
- 3. Be Prepared** - Know your core messages and soundbites. You'll always be ready with something to say!
- 4. Be Honest** - Never stretch the truth or give inaccurate information. You will likely never get called back. Saying "I don't know" or referring the reporter to a different source will earn you more points than trying to come up with an answer you really don't have.
- 5. Be Exclusive** - News media love exclusives. Every so often, offer a reporter your familiar with an exclusive story.

General tips for working with the news media

DO:

View every interview as an opportunity to speak your message.

Speak in easy to understand terms. Avoid jargon.

Be engaging and enthusiastic.

Be yourself. Don't try to reinvent yourself for an interview

– it undermines your credibility.

Refer reporters to other sources when you can't find the answer.

DON'T:

Overly fixate on the questions and forget your message.

Over-answer – when you're satisfied with your reply – stop.

Be afraid to pause.

Fake an answer.

Tips for Being Proactive

Being proactive means that you're the one making the news, rather than responding to a call from a reporter to "get your reaction." There are several ways to proactively impact the media. They include:

- Writing a Press Release
- Pitching a Story
- Writing an Op/Ed or Guest Column
- Inviting Press to an Event.

Make Your Story Newsworthy

However, spending a day preparing any one of these does not guarantee you news time.

To help make sure your story is newsworthy try these "news hooks"

- ✓ **Controversy sells! Refuting, disagreeing or criticizing makes the news.**
- ✓ **Human interest stories are extremely popular with all news media. Personalize your story by presenting someone who is effected personally.**
- ✓ **Trends. Can you spot a trend or shift in your community?**
- ✓ **"Brand-New" services, events or policies that are "groundbreaking."**
- ✓ **Historical events such as your agencies 25th anniversary have broad appeal.**
- ✓ **Bring a national story home by relating it to something local.**
- ✓ **Events create good photo-ops. Let reporters know why it's important.**

Tips for Being Reactive

Being reactive is not necessarily a bad thing. Anything happening in your community could be a possible excuse to get in the news! So every time that reporter calls remember, it's another opportunity to get across your message.

How to handle a call from the media

- Remember to get the reporters name and outlet.
- Return media calls ASAP – reporters are often on deadlines.
- Speak concisely and clearly.
- Remember that anything you say may appear in print.
- If the reporter's questions are reasonable, be cooperative, but don't feel obligated to comment on issues outside your area of expertise.
- Don't speculate and don't guess. If you don't know something admit it and refer the reporter to someone who is knowledgeable in that area.
- Always remind reporters to include your agency when referring to you as a source.
- Don't ask to review a story before it runs; this is not proper news etiquette. Do, however, invite reporters to call you back if they need to check their facts.

Tips for Working With Specific Media

Newspapers / Print Media

Find out a reporter's deadlines. Editors and reporters at morning daily papers are usually on a 3 – 4 p.m. deadline. Weekly papers are not on a deadline each day and usually close a few days before their publication date.

The best time to contact a paper is between 10 a.m. and noon.

If you inadvertently offer misleading or incorrect information, correct the error as soon as possible.

If you tell the reporter you will get back with additional information, ask the reporter's deadline and follow up in a timely manner.

Television News

The best times to contact television news staff is from 9 – 11 a.m. and 1 - 4 p.m.

Keep television's visual nature in mind when conducting an on-camera interview. More than merely listening to you, the audience is watching you and judging the content of what you say by how you say it. Your physical demeanor and form of presentation contribute greatly to the impression you make.

A "pre-interview" will often precede the actual on-camera interview. It may last 30 seconds or five minutes. This is your opportunity to mention topics you want addressed and to build a rapport with the reporter.

Keep eye contact with the interviewer. Don't worry about the camera. Remember to stay involved and look attentive, even when not speaking.

Use small gestures and animated facial expressions to emphasize a point, or lean forward and modulate your voice.

Assume the appropriate attitude toward the subject matter; make your expression match your words.

Radio News

Modulate your voice and keep it as expressive as possible. Speak at a normal volume. Stress key points by raising your intensity, level and pitch – not your voice.

Anecdotes and analogies are useful tools to use.

Resources

The following resources offer more information on using the media to accomplish your mission, do outreach, educate the public and effect social change.

www.spinproject.org - The SPIN Project (Strategic Press Information Network) provides media technical assistance to nonprofit public-interest organizations across the nation who want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention. SPIN offers public relations consulting, including comprehensive media training and intensive media strategizing and resources to community organizations across the country. SPIN is growing the capacity of organizations to get their voices heard and do more effective media work on issues important to the future of our society.

www.frugalmarketing.com - Frugal marketing is the art and science of getting the largest marketing results for the smallest expenditure.

www.media-awareness.ca - Resources and support for everyone interested in media and information literacy for young people.

www.fair.org - FAIR, the national media watch group, has been offering well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship since 1986.

www.charityvillage.com - 3,000 pages of news, jobs, information and resources for executives, staffers, donors, and volunteers.

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/> - The Community Toolbox promotes community health and development by connecting people, ideas and resources.

WCASA offers technical assistance on working with the media as well as designing and distributing public awareness and grassroots campaigns. Call 608-257-1516 for more information.

TEMPLATES
AND
WORKSHEETS



DEVELOPING YOUR MEDIA PLAN

Elements of a Media Plan

Identify issue

Establish goals

Target audience

Create key messages

Determine your evaluation method

Produce deliverables (press kit, report, poster, etc.)

Note: These strategy-intensive elements of the media plan are what you do before you even call a reporter or stage a media event. Once you do these, it is time to unleash the other components of your media plan.

Write and distribute media advisories/press releases

Conduct media briefings

Pitch reporters

Stage media events

Write and place op eds

Book radio and TV talk shows

Write and place letters to the Editor

Coordinate efforts on web site

Track coverage

Note: These are the most labor-intensive pieces of the media plan; they should be delegated accordingly. However, there should always be one person who oversees the execution of the plan and is the main contact for the media.

How many of these steps can you realistically do? Accomplish the six initial elements of the plan and then aim for at least three other components, more if you have the resources.

Media Plan Template

Identify Issue

What is Your Agencies Mission?

What are the Goals of Your Agency?

Pull this from a strategic plan, work plan or extrapolate it from the mission.

Establish Goals

What are Your Primary Goals for Media Outreach? (limit to two goals with three objectives for each)

- Primary Goal – a broad goal like “Encourage the public to stop blaming the victim.”
Key Objectives – Well-Defined Goals like:
 - “Educate the public on the root causes of sexual violence.”
 - “Build victim empathy by educating the public on the trauma associated with sexual violence.”

Who are Your Target Audiences? Who is the best audience(s) to reach to achieve your goals.

Create Key Messages

What are Your Key Messages?

State the problem: “Victims often suffer from a great deal of shame and embarrassment as a result of sexual violation. They are often re-traumatized by a culture that holds them responsible for their crime. This exacerbates their feelings of shame, intensifying their trauma and prevents society from holding offenders accountable.”

State the solution: “The public must be educated about the dynamics of sexual assault and the realities associated with this crime. They must hold offenders accountable through criminal and civil means and develop empathy and understanding for victims.”

State an associated action (if applicable): “Jurors must try cases understanding that the victim is not on trial and cannot be held responsible for the crime.”

State associated soundbite(s): “The victim is never responsible for sexual violence,” We must hold offenders accountable to protect our children.”

Evaluation

Determine your evaluation method

Will you do a pre-test and a post-test?

What do you need/want to measure?

What does your funder(s) require?

Produce Deliverables

How Will you Distribute Your Message?

Write an Op/Ed for your local paper.

Pitch a story involving a particular case to a reporter.

Distribute educational materials to community.

Any other proactive media opportunities.

Develop a Timeline

February – Write Op/Ed about trauma associated with sexual violence.

April – Distribute press release associated with SAAM.

June – Distribute press release about sexual assault statistics during summer months.

August – Pitch a story to a reporter.

November – Write Op/Ed about statistics of prosecution/sentencing statistics locally.



Press Packets

Press packets are helpful tools for distributing a larger quantity of information to the press. They not only represent your agency, they help to educate the press! Press packets can be distributed at press events, in association with a press release or at any time you wish to educate reporters on your agency or a particular issue.

A press packet typically consists of the following items contained in a standard twin pocket folder labelled with your agency information as well as what campaign or event the press packet is associated with. A general agency packet could be titled “Sexual Assault Information Packet.”

- One page information sheet describing your agency (mission, services, etc.)
- Contact information for the individual who is assigned to working with media
Including a business card is a must!!
- Agency brochure(s)
- One page information sheet describing your agency’s history
- Fact Sheets:
Depending on the event you may choose to include different information
Standard fact sheets should include:
 - Sexual Assault
 - Child Sexual Assault
 - Sexual Assault Laws
- Local and National Statistics
- Press Release or Statement (if your packet is being distributed around a particular event.)



Your Guide to writing effective Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a simple and effective way of voicing your opinions, educating people in your community, and informing policy makers of your views on issues of importance to you. Whether responding to a previously published letter or article or raising community awareness on a particular issue, your letter will help editorial journalists gauge the interest in certain topics. Elected officials also closely monitor letters to the editor. **Your voice will be heard.** The following tips will help you improve your writing skills and increase your chances of being published.

First Steps

* **Find out your newspaper's policy for printing letters.** The best ways to learn about requirements are to read the suggestions in the letters section or to call the newspaper. Be sure to inquire about length restrictions, the format of the letter, and to whom the letter should be addressed. In general, letters should be typed or neatly written and signed. They should include the author's address and home and work phone numbers. More often than not, newspapers will not print letters from people they cannot reach to confirm authorship.

Writing Technique

* Format: **Begin your letter with a brief topic paragraph.** Your first sentence should be short and compelling enough to catch the interest of readers. Follow the introductory paragraph with several paragraphs in which you **elaborate on your views**, and finish off with a conclusion. This format allows editors to cut for space while still getting your message across.

* **Keep the letter concise**, ideally between 150 and 300 words. Lengthy letters are often cut significantly or not published at all.

* Add credibility to what you write by **stating facts** related to your topic. Include enough background for the reader to understand your point, but be sure to stick to one central message. **Local statistics will also help**, as will stating your credentials if you have expertise in the area you are writing about.

* If you are responding to a previously published letter or article, remember to state the name of the article and the date of its publication.

Increasing Your Chances of Publication

* **Timing is key.** A letter has the best chance of being printed if it is related to an issue that has recently been in the news.

* **Include a personal story** to aid in explaining the issue and your stance.

* **Mention your Representative and/or Senator's names.** Point out their positions on the issue, and challenge them to take a specific action or to co-sponsor legislation. Urge local citizens to take action as well and to contact their representatives. Although it is likely that your Representative or Senator will have already clipped your letter, it carries additional weight if you send a copy with a hand-written note attached letting them know you think they may be interested in the article.

* The tone of your letter is extremely important. Avoid writing dull letters. Arrogance, emotional outbursts, and personal attacks all make a letter an unlikely candidate for publication. **Be impassioned yet reasonable.**

* Explain the local relevance of the issue, and **don't be afraid to approach a controversial issue.**

* If your letter is not published, submit a revised copy at a later point in time, **or find another outlet.** Try sending your letter to a different newspaper or magazine.



letter to the
editor
template

With the appropriate format and composition, your letter to the editor is most likely to be published. Your voice will be heard by elected officials and members of the community.

<Name of Organization>
<Address>
<Bldg., Floor, Suite, Other Address Info>
<City>, <State> <Zip or Postal Code>

Dear Editor:

<State your reason for writing here. If you are responding to writings or editorials by the media outlet, use the first sentence to reference the title of the article, name of the publication, and date it appeared.>

<State your case here. Include facts and references to establish credibility.>

<End with a strongly worded positive statement. >

Sincerely,
<Writer's Signature if this is a paper copy>
<Name of Writer>
<Writer's Title>
<Writer's Organization>



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Sample Letter to the Editor

Valentines Day Safety Tips

Valentines Day is a holiday set aside for us to celebrate the relationships we've established with that special someone. Those of us who are single, however, find this day comes with a great deal of pressure to "couple up." And so we go on dates with a friend of a friend or someone we just met or someone we contacted via online or newspaper dating services, or even someone we've known for a while. Despite the promise of romance, it is important to keep in mind that dating situations are common scenarios for sexual violence and regardless of how nice someone may seem, there are things we can all do to try and avoid a dangerous situation. Some tips include: Always tell someone where you're going and when to expect you home; If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts; Avoid someone who doesn't listen to you, ignores your boundaries, tells sexist jokes or is jealous or possessive. Other tips include: Always ask permission before touching someone; If things seem unclear or confused, don't make assumptions, make it clear; Never pressure someone to give in to you; Whenever you experience a sexual impulse, take a minute to run through the consequences: emotional, physical and legal. For more tips on how to avoid becoming a perpetrator or to spot a dangerous situation, or for a copy of the "Healthy Relationship Checklist," contact The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) at 608-257-1516 or www.wcasa.org.



Your Guide to
writing effective
Opinion-Editorials

Op-eds are opinion pieces that appear opposite the editorial page of newspapers. Written by local citizens, experts, academics, and organization leaders, they are a simple and cost-effective way to educate citizens, influence government officials, and increase your organization's visibility and credibility. Op-eds **provide a local perspective on a national or global issue**. Below is a list of tips to help get your op-ed published.

First Steps

* Check with newspapers to **learn about their guidelines for submitting op-eds**. When possible, try to build a relationship with your newspaper's editorial board in order to understand the newspaper's editorial style.

Writing Technique

* **Keep the writing simple**. Short sentences usually work best. Op-ed pieces run **approximately 700-800 words**, although articles for magazines or weekend editions may be somewhat longer.

* **Double-space your text**, whether typed or neatly written. **Suggest a title** for your article, and include your name and identification.

* The first paragraph states your opinion, introduces the issue, and relates it to a recent news event. **Move from a specific concern to a broader public issue**.

* Focus on one or two points that flow logically to a brief but strong conclusion.

* Using a natural, casual voice will make your op-ed more approachable. **Finish with a memorable phrase**.

* Personalize your op-ed. You may want to **include anecdotes and examples** to illustrate how the topic relates to peoples' everyday lives.

* **State a strong opinion** with confidence. If your opinion is unique, the editors are more likely to be interested.

* Support your argument with **facts and statistics** from reputable sources.

* **Introduce your op-ed with a cover letter**. The letter should establish your credibility, explain the relevance of the issue, include a paragraph describing yourself, and thank the editor for considering the submission.

Increasing Your Chances of Publication

* **Timing is essential**. Be sure to send your op-ed to the editorial staff no later than two days after an event that you want to reference. Your chances of publication are also good if you take an original stance on an older news story.

* Editorials that provide analysis and criticism without a solution or new idea probably won't be published.

Provide creative solutions to the problems you address.

* **Consider co-writing** the op-ed with a prestigious leader or expert in your field to add even more credibility to your article.



opinion- editorial template

Educate citizens! Influence governmental officials! Increase your organization's visibility and credibility! Send an op-ed piece to your local newspaper today.

<Date>

<Byline>

<Suggested Title>

<First paragraph. Should state your opinion, introduce the issue, and relate it to a recent news event.>

<Remainder of body text. Includes your main points and a brief conclusion.>

<Insert identification information at the end of the article.>

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(Indicates op-ed is finished.)



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Sample Opinion/Editorial

Why Victims Recant

Proponents of the misconception that sexual assault allegations are often fabricated simply for petty revenge or guilt often hang their hat on the fact that victims recant their story. Unfortunately, without the understanding or personal experience of the devastating trauma of sexual assault, this may seem like an easy argument to fall for. So if not out of guilt for their deviant falsehoods, why would a victim of sexual violence recant? There are multiple reasons why someone who has been through sexual violation, may attempt to take him/herself out of the criminal justice process. They include the following:

1. Victims of both sexual and domestic violence face the reality of being the prosecutions entire case against someone who is a member of their family or an intimate partner. Underlying the violence is the truth that this person is someone you deeply love or loved, who you feel responsible for protecting, and whom you may depend on for basic needs. Victims often recant with the misguided understanding that he/she can “drop” the case and just move on without the additional trauma of being the one to send their father, husband, boyfriend, or aunt to prison.
2. Inter-familial and intimate partner violence often entails a process of grooming, emotional abuse, and psychological mind games. By the time a case enters the criminal justice system, the victim has faced a barrage of threats, oppression, dominance, and of course violence. Victims may have faced years of being told they aren’t worth a piece of garbage. Additionally, abusers often threaten death or suicide or psychological ruin. These threats are not idle, as we see them played out in our communities all the time.
3. The trauma of sexual violence is dramatic. Suicide, self-mutilation, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and a number of other serious impacts are not uncommon. Victims are in the thick of this trauma at the time that the criminal justice system is asking them to be their entire case against the abuser. Some victims physically, emotionally and psychologically cannot face the reality of sitting on the stand and discussing in detail what was done to their vagina in front of a room full of strangers. Also, a typical defense strategy is to discredit the victim by calling her promiscuous or unstable. Essentially, blaming the victim for the attack. The courage it takes to face such degradation, even in the name of justice, is incredible.

4. The social response to sexual violence is often marked by a tendency to blame the victim. We often work unbelievably hard to find any reason for why this happened. “What did she do to deserve this?” By making these doubts part of our cultural sentiment we leave many victims asking themselves the same question. Such doubt in the mind of a victim can undermine her ability to face the process.

The reality is that any victim is likely to be facing, not one of these hurdles, but all of them. We set victims up for a loose-loose situation. If they continue through the system they face an intensification of their trauma, public stigma and threats. If they do not continue through the system they are branded as liars and cowards and may be returning to their life of abuse.

This above picture presents a daunting reality for victims. Creating a system and a culture where victims see their offender held accountable without fear of additional trauma and suffering will take a commitment from all of us. The criminal justice system must find ways to prosecute cases of inter-familial and intimate partner violence without depending on the victim. The public must create communities of support and compassion that can help victims find the courage to make their way through the criminal justice process. We all must drop our assumptions and stereotypes of sexual violence victims. FBI statistics indicate that only 2% of sexual assault reports are false and no more prevalent than false reports of other crimes. A recanting victim is not an indication of a false report, simply a human being struggling to move on with life in the face of intense trauma and personal humiliation about to be played out in the public theater.

Your Guide to writing effective Press Releases

A well-written press release **makes your organization visible** and can greatly enhance its image. It is a great way to advertise news related to your organization. The following tips are designed to help you write solid press releases.

Format

- * If you are sending a hard copy, use **8 1/2 X 11 paper** with a minimum of **one-inch margins** on all sides of the page.
- * Use a **bold typeface for the headlines**, capitalizing the first letter of each word. Do not capitalize articles and prepositions. The combination of upper and lower case makes the headline easier to read.
- * **Complete paragraphs on one page** instead of carrying over to the next page.
- * Use only one side of each sheet of paper.
- * **Include contact information**, complete with contact name, company name, full address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address, and website URL.

Writing Technique

- * The maximum length of a press release should be **500 words**.
- * Be **factual**. Provide **details** so the editor understands why it is important to her/his readers. **Background information** and quotes may be helpful.
- * Make sure the information is newsworthy and that you have something with enough substance to issue a release.
- * Start with a **brief description of the news**.
- * Make readers aware of how the information relates to them, and explain why they should continue reading the press release.
- * **Craft a headline that is direct and conveys why this news is important**. The quality of your headline determines whether or not readers will read the rest of the release.
- * The first paragraph should answer the questions who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- * Not all journalists want to receive press releases via e-mail. Contact them so that you can **send the press release via their preferred method**. If you do send your press release via e-mail, do not include an attachment. Write the release within the body of the message.
- * It is important to **know your editor's deadlines**. Inquire as to when you should send your press release for the best possible timing.
- * Unlike letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, **do not follow up with the editor**. Most editors become annoyed by a second contact if they received your press release.



press
release
template

Increase visibility,
enhance your
organization's image,
and advertise news
related to your organi-
zation by sending a
press release to your
local newspaper.

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

<date>

CONTACT: <Contact Person, Company Name, Telephone Number, Fax Number, E-mail Address,
Web Address>

<Headline>

<City, State, Date> Opening Paragraph (should contain who, what, when, where, why)

Remainder of body text. Should include any relevant information on the topic.

If there is more than one page, use:

-more-

(top of the next page)

<Abbreviated Headline>

Remainder of text.

Restate contact information after your last paragraph.

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(Indicates press release is finished.)



Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 11, 2003

Sample Press Release

CONTACT: Maggie Thurs, Public Awareness Coordinator, WCASA
(608) 246-9687
Linda Morrison, Executive Director, WCASA, (608) 257-1516

New Resource to Help Prevent Sexual Assault of Individuals with Disabilities.

Madison – The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault Inc. (WCASA) has published a booklet entitled “Creating a Healthy Balance.” This booklet is designed to promote healthy sexuality and prevent the sexual assault of people with cognitive disabilities. It is written for people with cognitive disabilities, their families, services providers, sexual assault advocates and the multitude of other support persons and friends in the life of a person with a disability. The underlying premise of the booklet is that sexuality begins at birth and without sexuality education an individual is at high risk for abuse.

“This resource is the first of it’s kind to address healthy sexuality for individuals with disabilities in the context of preventing sexual violence. Too often we address the problem of sexual violence only after a crime has occurred. This resource enables community members to create environments that prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place.”

- Linda Morrison, WCASA Executive Director

Cognitive disabilities are one category of recognized developmental disabilities. It is estimated that among adults with development disabilities, as many as 83% of females and 32% of males are the victims of sexual assault. Misperceptions and stereotypes about people with disabilities and a subsequent history of oppression put people with disabilities at an increased risk for sexual assault. Also, a lack of healthy sexuality education and other environmental factors such as boundary violation, learned compliance, dependence on caregivers and lack of privacy increases vulnerability.

In order to stop the cycle of abuse so prevalent among persons with cognitive disabilities, our culture must change. WCASA’s new booklet encourages and discusses providing people with disabilities assertiveness training, offering options, accepting choices, and allowing self-advocacy. This information may help change the way society looks at and/or treats people with cognitive disabilities and, thereby, prevent sexual assault.

For more information on sexual assault, or for a copy of “Creating a Balance,” contact The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault at 608-257-1516 or visit www.wcasa.org.

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