



# Working with the media

## A guide for VSO Sri Lanka's mental health partners

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## 1. Why use the media?

Media coverage can have a significant impact on what people think about mental health issues and about your organisation.

This guide takes you through the basic steps of communicating your message by working with the media.

## 2. What do the media want?

Most people in the media are extremely busy and work to short timescales. In the search for an attention grabbing headline, it is easy for them to fall into the trap of using words which stigmatise mental illness and inadvertently make life harder for the thousands of people and their families living with mental illness.

Most media reports covering mental health issues focus on suicide. For many journalists, this is because “Suicide is news. Mental Health is not”. While there is work going on to try to raise awareness of how to report on suicide and mental health issues among the media, you can play an important role in making mental health more newsworthy.

By following the tips in this guide and learning how to package your story in an interesting and newsworthy way, you will increase the likelihood of positive stories about mental health being told through the media.

## 3. What do you want to achieve?

Before you think about contacting the media, you should be clear about what you want to achieve.

- What are your objectives?
  - To raise awareness of the fact that mental illness can be treated?
  - To reduce stigma around mental illness?
  - To publicise the success of a recent initiative?
- Who is your audience?
  - Other mental health practitioners?
  - Government decision makers?
  - Local communities?
  - Consumers?
- How will you reach them? Think about what media best targets your audience
  - Newspapers?
  - Radio?
  - Local newsletters?
  - Ask yourself if using the media is the best way to reach your audience. Using the media is just one way to communicate. You may want to

consider other methods, such as delivering leaflets, holding events or writing letters. The best strategies have combinations of different methods, so think carefully about your options.

- Is there a way of knowing if you've been successful?
  - If you know if your communications has worked (or not), you will learn lessons for when you do it next time. Ask yourself what worked best? If it didn't work, why not?

#### **4. Key messages**

Being clear about your key messages is also important. By doing some thinking at the start you can make sure that your communication is as clear as possible.

The best communications deliver only a few messages at a time. Imagine you are throwing balls at someone in a game of catch. If you throw 10 balls at them at once, they are only likely to catch 1 or 2 – at best 3 or 4! The same is true of delivering messages through communication. Really try to think about what your most important messages are and rank them. Try to limit yourself to 3 or 4 messages – fewer if possible. Try to put yourself in the journalist's shoes and keep asking yourself 'so what?' to help you get to your core message. Is there something you want people to do as a result of hearing your message? If so, give a clear 'call to action' and ideally a place where people can go for more information.

As part of the media strategy for mental health, VSO are encouraging partners to consider using common messages in their own communications. Consider how the following can be used:

- *Anyone can get a mental illness – it could be you.*
- *Mental illness can be treated and people can recover.*
- *If you are experiencing mental health problems, there are people who can help.* (If this message is used, you could include a call to action like 'Call CCline free on 1333')

#### **5. What makes a story newsworthy?**

When you know what you want to achieve, you need to consider whether the media are likely to be interested in your story.

News is defined as information or reports about recent events. When contacting the media make sure your story ticks at least two of these boxes:

- the word 'news' means exactly that, things that are new - is what you are saying new, a first for the area or innovative?
- the number of people affected by the story is important does, or will it, involve or affect a lot of people?
- do you have any good statistics to back your story up?

- famous people get more coverage because of their profile. If your story involves someone with a local high profile or a celebrity it will attract more attention - is there anyone you can approach?
- human interest stories appeal to people's emotions and don't date as quickly. Do you have families with a unique and interesting story to tell?
- promoting key milestones is always a good idea, such as your first, or tenth birthday or community activity that involves families and stakeholders.
- using 'calendar hooks', such as a 'World Celebration' day or Valentines day, can give your story an interesting angle or make it more newsworthy than it would have been otherwise.

## **6. Press releases**

A press release will attract journalists' attention to your story.

### **Writing a press release**

A press release should:

- contain news; make sure it is something new, not just rehashed old information
- give journalists enough basic detail to write a short news story without needing to contact you
- include enough information to answer every journalist's key questions, including the who, what, why, where, when and the how
- be clear and concise, so the journalist can grasp the details when they read it for the first time
- contain your key messages (see the 'key message' section).

### **Press release layout**

Effective press releases should have most important information in first paragraph and the rest in descending order of importance.

Consider the message you want to get across, the audience, and the desired result. You should always write in simple language, and avoid jargon and acronyms. The main body of the press release should be no longer than one page. A press release should include:

- A release date, which is the date the release can be published. It should be clearly stated on the top of the release. If it can be published immediately, the release should state 'FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE'. If you want to make sure that the media cover your story on a particular day, e.g. a 'World awareness day', then you need to send your press release out earlier under embargo so that they have time to prepare their stories. If so, you can write: 'Embargoed until 00.01 on [Date]' at the top.
- Headline – this gives the subject of the press release, summed up in around seven words.

- First paragraph - sum up the most newsworthy aspect of your story.
- Second and third paragraphs - expand on this to explain the story in more detail and answer who, what, where, when, why and explain how.
- Quotes - the next paragraphs should contain a quote from a credible spokesperson (affected community, advocacy leaders, influential figure or celebrity spokesperson). Include 'sound bites' that are readily quoted and remembered. Always state the name and title of the person being quoted.
- Write the word 'ends' at the end of the story to show the journalist this is where the 'for publication' part ends.
- Notes to editors - include contact details and any explanations or background details for clarity but not necessarily for publication, such as some further information about your organisation. Include an 'all hours' contact and phone number and spokesperson details.

Ideally, the press release should be on your organisation's headed paper.

Send press releases to newsdesks and named journalists, where possible, either by fax or email. Follow up with a call afterwards to make sure they have received your press release. If they are interested in your story they will use the release, either verbatim or as background information.

### **What to send with your press release**

If you have photos to go with your story then send them, or mention in the press release that photographs are available or that you can arrange a photo opportunity.

## **7. Photography, duty of care and consent**

Pictures can make all the difference and are one of the most dramatic ways of enforcing a story. Furthermore, a story is more likely to get printed with a good picture.

However, mental health is a very difficult subject to photograph and due to stigma, there are duty of care issues around identifying patients, residents or clients. You should use your judgement to get the permissions from the person themselves, their carer and/or the organisation you work for. Make sure they understand where, when and how their photograph will be used. Ideally, you should give them some time to think about over as some may agree without considering the possible repercussions and change their mind. A sample consent form is at appendix A.

If the client does not want their identity to be revealed, make sure that no distinguishing features appear on camera which could identify them. You could consider blurring out faces, taking a creative picture of the person from behind or in shadow, or focussing on one part of their body, such as their hands or their smile. However, you should think carefully about whether this type of image supports your message or reinforces negative attitudes.

If you do manage to get over these problems and get the relevant permissions, you will need to think hard about how to convey your message within a picture that will really grab the readers' attention, drive their curiosity and make them want to read more.

### **Tips for good photography:**

- Think what the picture says – does it support your key messages?
- Where possible, try to take people-centred pictures
- In order to change attitudes towards mental health issues, try to seek out positive images which will challenge attitudes about what a person with mental health issues looks like.
- Gear the photo to the message or theme you are trying to promote. For example, if your message is about rehabilitation, show people in action.
- Make the scene interesting, do not just show a face but include some action or the environment in the background.
- If your photo depicts a well known person, try to seek out opportunities when they are doing something or at least interacting with others.
- Challenge yourself to be creative – try to avoid photographs of people in a lineup or sitting at a desk. The better the photograph, the more likely it will be used.
- Do not have more than four people in one photograph (unless aiming to show a crowd).
- Avoid dark backgrounds.
- Obtain permission, in writing, from the people you are photographing and make sure they understand how, when and where the image will appear.

### **Technical Information**

Media prefer digital images rather than prints, but check in advance with your journalist contact before you send your picture.

If you are taking the pictures yourself on a digital camera, set it to the highest resolution setting.

Save your pictures as jpeg (filename.jpeg) or tif files (filename.tif ). These are the two main types of images used by newspapers and magazines.

## **8. Human interest stories**

Finding someone in your organisation who is willing to tell their story to the media can be a great way to getting positive coverage. Journalists who want to write positively about mental health are often prevented from doing so due to the lack of a story angle or people who are willing to talk about their experiences.

However, while it can be a great way challenging attitudes about mental health problems, as with the use of photography, particular care needs to be taken with potentially vulnerable people to ensure they understand the implications of sharing their story.

If a client agrees to being a 'case study', make sure they understand how, when and where their story might appear. If you feel your clients are at risk, you can ensure that they remain anonymous, although you should be aware that journalists can be reluctant to use anonymous case studies. If your client does want to protect their identity, then change their name or ask the journalist to disguise their identity. Ask the journalist to put something in writing for you, confirming that they will not reveal your client's identity.

You can also be present when the journalist meets your client to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable. Meet with them beforehand and run through what they do and don't want to tell the journalist. Help them to set the boundaries of what they want to say.

### **Who makes a good case study?**

- A person whose experiences match the story you are trying to tell. Journalists and reporters always want to meet anyone with an exceptional story; someone who has achieved something against the odds, gone that extra mile or "triumphed over tragedy".
- A person who is a good talker, who is able to tell their story or talk about their experiences openly.
- Choose someone who is able to fully understand the possible implications of doing a media interview.
- Ideally, a person who is willing to have their photo taken.

### **What to do if a journalist calls you asking for a case study**

- Find out who else the journalist has approached. Don't waste hours finding the perfect case study for them if their story is a "maybe" or if they've approached several other organisations too.
- Ask them exactly what angle their story is taking so that you can find the right case study for them – or you may decide that the story isn't right for your organisation.
- Try to find examples of that journalist's previous work. Have a look at the magazine or programme they want the case study to appear on and see how case studies are usually represented.
- Find out what the journalist's deadline is and respond as quickly as you can with possible case studies.
- On the whole journalists are not out to trip people up or misquote them. Ask the journalist if they'll read the story back to you before printing it. This way you can check that your case study hasn't be misquoted.

## **9. Organizing a press conference**

In most circumstances, a press release and a phone call will be the most appropriate way of contacting the media.

However, if you have a truly newsworthy story that is likely to cause a great deal of interest from reporters, you can call a press conference.



At a press conference, reporters are invited to a central location to learn at the same time about one story. For journalists to take time out their busy day to attend a press conference, it needs to be worth their while. It needs to be a particularly interesting news story and organized in such a way that there are interesting speakers and a chance for the media to ask questions. If you are unsure, it is worth phoning a journalist you have a contact with to see if they think your story is worthy of a press conference.

Following the rules below will help you to organize a successful news conference:

**Make sure your event is newsworthy and it is appropriate to hold a press conference.**

**Choose the right location.** Your location should be safe, easy to reach and convenient for parking. If you wish to use an on-site location, such as a hospital or a drop-in center, then you must consider issues of confidentiality.

**Choose the right time.** Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday are the best days: reporters may forget about a Monday event, and on Friday they will be preoccupied with preparing weekend stories. News conferences should take place between 9:30 and 1:00. Any earlier, and the reporters may come late. Any later, and they may miss their filing deadlines.

**Notify reporters well in advance, and follow-up the day before.** Mail or fax out invitations at least a week before the event. Invitations should contain a limited amount about the news conference because you do not want reporters writing a story before your conference.

**Follow-up by telephone.** Call reporters to make sure they have received your invitation. For those reporters who do not plan to attend, try to set up an individual interview or deliver media packs and statements to their office.

**Prepare a media pack for the conference.** Your pack should also include verbatim statements of what your various speakers will say and brief biographical profiles of each speaker.

**Prepare yourself for tough questions.** Practice answering difficult questions in advance. Come up with short, quotable answers.

**Think visually.** The more attractive your presentation, the greater the likelihood of television coverage or articles with pictures. Try to use appealing charts, graphs and other visual aids to accompany speeches and prepare camera-ready copies for distribution. Take pictures of the event yourself to provide to small, weekly papers and to include in your own materials such as newsletters and annual reports.

**Prepare the room.** Pick the right size room: A room that is too large will make your event seem like a flop; a room that is too small will be uncomfortable and annoying to reporters. Equip the room with your visual aids, prepare a podium with a banner, use a

mount box to allow reporters to record directly from the speakers' microphones, set up risers at the back of the room for television cameras, and position a table in the front of the room for the reporters' use.

**Set up a sign-in table.** Register reporters and hand out media kits at a sign-in table. You can then send media packs to the reporters who did not show up, and you can introduce yourself at this time to those who do.

**Get started on time.** Don't begin the conference later than five minutes after the designated time. Introduce yourself, welcome all those in the room and thank them for attending, and begin the statements.

**Let a limited number of people speak on your behalf.** A press conference should have enough speeches to last at least one-half hour but never more than an hour. Reporters do not want to hear one person after another deliver a speech. Organize the key points you need to present and divide them among no more than four people. Speeches should be no more than five minutes and should be laden with sound-bites.

**Get personal.** Have an "ordinary person," such as a consumer or a family member who has been personally affected by the issue, tell their own story. Remember to get the necessary permission from that person, their carer or their organisation first.

**Set aside a fixed amount of time to answer questions.** After all the statements have been made, the floor should be open to reporters and other conference attendees to ask questions of the various speakers. Speakers should answer all questions into the microphone, repeating the question before answering it.

**Close the news conference.** Try to limit the conference to no more than an hour. Thank the reporters for attending, and offer to answer additional questions or provide more information as needed.

**Follow-up again.** Mail, deliver or e-mail press packs to those key reporters who did not attend. Be prepared to receive follow-up phone calls from reporters.

**Collect clips of stories.** Monitor the media for stories based on your conference, and collect these articles. You can use them for future promotional materials, and you will also glean some sense of which reporters and publications are particularly interested in your work.

## **10. The feature story**

A feature is an excellent way in which to deal with an issue. Unlike a straight news item, a feature story allows some in depth examination and help generate greater understanding of any issue. The writer will have much greater scope for descriptions, explanations, human interest anecdotes (or case studies) and examples that appeal to the audiences' emotions. Weekly newspapers are more likely to carry feature stories.

Try describing the work of a staff member who has a special training or skill or focus on someone whose quality of life has been greatly changed and improved by your work. Unlike a press release, ideas for features are usually pitched to one media outlet at a time. Discuss with the journalist ideas that may make an interesting feature which would appeal to their audience.

An important thing to remember is that many journalists will not run a feature article without a 'news hook' to link it to. If you want to try to place a feature, you need to think about what makes it interesting. Ask yourself 'so what?' and 'why now?'. What else is happening that you could link your story to? Keeping abreast of current affairs and following what your target media is covering will help you to do this.

## **11. Working with broadcast media (TV and radio)**

When dealing with TV and radio (i.e. broadcast media) remember that 'airtime' is short so it's important to keep your story snappy. Think about the whole package - does your story lend itself to being filmed or recorded? Who could you offer for interview and what would they say? You are more likely to attract broadcast media if you can explain to them how your story could look or sound on TV or radio. If it's for TV think pictures and filming opportunities that demonstrate the story you are trying to tell.

## **12. Be media savvy**

It helps to think about possible negative comments or criticisms your story might attract. Linking mental health issues to politics has proven to be one such 'elephant trap'. The best advice is to consider how the story might be misinterpreted and think of ways you can minimise the risks.

## **13. Media interviews**

Interviews are another important means of communicating with the media. Unlike with press releases, however, you exercise much less control in an interview. You must therefore prepare yourself.

### **Tips for effective media interviews**

#### **1) Do your homework.**

Watch the television programs and read the publications for which you would like to be interviewed. Familiarising yourself with the various formats will help you to better understand the type of news in which the publication or show is interested, the target audience, and the interviewers.

#### **2) Ask about the nature of an interview in advance.**

While journalists are unlikely to tell you the exact questions they will ask, they will let you know the subject areas they are after, which will help you shape the story. Find out:

- The aim and angle of the interview
- Why you, and who else will be interviewed?

- Live or recorded?
- Who will be interviewer?
- Length of interview?
- Audience?
- Ask for type of questions to be asked, and the first question

### **3) It is okay to call reporters back or have them wait.**

Tell them that you need to check on the details, quickly look up the information you need, and then get back to them promptly.

### **4) Know your message.**

Before you start an interview, know exactly what you want to say. Prepare three to five brief points you want to make and integrate into answers during the interview. If you don't formulate your own sound bites, they will be formulated for you. Write them down and practice a few comfortable ways of saying them. Stories or case studies are useful to support a point, but remember to keep them very short.

- Ask for type of questions to be asked, and the first question
- Formulate and learn 3 main 'points to make' in support of this
- Consider all possible questions and practise answers.

Have a notebook on each of the important subjects that you will typically be asked questions about. Include the important facts—names, dates statistics, sources, etc.—so that you can access this information quickly.

State your conclusions first, and then use your supporting evidence. It is a wise idea, if possible, to practice with a colleague in advance.

### **5) Prepare for difficult questions and answer all questions truthfully.**

Think about how someone might disagree with point of view and prepare polite rebuttals, using evidence, for any expected criticism. If you are not at liberty to answer a question, explain why this is so. Never say "no comment."

Respect that the competent journalist also has an agenda to complete during the interview. Aggressively steering the reporter away from the main line of questioning can be counterproductive. Instead, try to interject new facts, insightful information, and a fresh perspective as you respond to the questions at hand.

### **6) Take interviews seriously.**

Never joke. Never say something off the record. Say only what you want in print, and keep confidential information confidential. Be polite.

### **7) Look good for television interviews.**

Dress smartly using strong colours. Avoid checks, stripes, and other busy patterns. Don't wear sunglasses, dangly earrings or glasses that darken in reaction to light. Heavy make up should be avoided, but facial powder for both men and women will help prevent visible perspiration which can make you look nervous and cause you to lose credibility with viewers. If possible, try to be interviewed outdoors in natural light, which is the most flattering.

### **8) Never criticize a reporter's idea for a story.**

If you think the questions miss the mark, then try to work in the relevant information anyway.

### **9) Take precautions.**

If there are any aspects of your work that may easily be misinterpreted, emphasize to the reporter during the interview the importance of such points. Assert the fact that your information may be inaccurate if stated another way.

### **10) Note the reporter's name, media outlet and phone number.**

If you need to follow-up later, you know exactly whom to contact. Will you get to read the story before it appears in print? Rarely, and even rarer is the opportunity to edit the story. You may offer to read a story or request to have portions or quotes read back to you as a check for accuracy, but reporters may accept your offer only in cases when your information is highly complex.

### **DOs**

- Dress smartly
- Be punctual
- Be relaxed, be yourself
- Keep language and messages simple, speak slowly and clearly.
- Think about how you want to be quoted by the media. Condense your message into a 'sound bite': a short statement of less than 20 seconds that it will be easy for the media to use and will get across your what you want to say simply and quickly. Practice it first!
- Get your main points in
- Be sure of your facts
- Always sound reasonable and thoughtful
- Paint pictures, use examples
- Be positive and upbeat
- Try to be personable and express passion for the issue
- Be prepared to answer uncomfortable or difficult questions.
- Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer.
- Mention your organisation
- Use transitional bridges to keep your message on track:
  - "What's important here is"
  - "The bottom line is"
  - "The real issue is"
  - "Let me explain something"
  - "I'd like to make this point before I continue."
- Be concise in your responses to prevent being misquoted
- If being quoted, request to have quotes read back to you.

## ***DON'Ts***

- Exaggerate
- Lose your cool, even if challenged
- Be tricked by leading questions - don't be afraid to say "I don't know."
- Waffle, get sidetracked from your message or use jargon
- Don't repeat inaccurate information.
- Don't speculate or answer hypotheticals.

## **14. Taking calls from the media**

The media may call you from time to time asking for some background information on an issue or for a comment on a breaking news story.

**As with interviews, it is okay to call reporters back or have them wait.** Don't feel pressured into providing a comment there and then. Tell them that you need to check on the details, quickly look up the information you need or talk to your colleagues, and then get back to them promptly. It may be that you are not the right person to comment and you could signpost them to someone more appropriate to comment. Try not to say 'no comment' to journalists. Giving journalists information and advice – even if you disagree with their story – can help to develop an important relationship.

## **15. Advising the media on suicide stories**

If you are asked to comment on a suicide story, it is worth reminding the media that stories about individual suicides should be presented with care.

Research has shown that people who are already feeling suicidal sometimes take their own lives after seeing media coverage of other suicides.<sup>1</sup>

The way you advise the media can help them to avoid inadvertently making life harder for the families left behind or even leading to another death:

- Encourage the media to avoid giving details of method. Tell them that saying someone drank weed killer or set fire to themselves can lead to copycat suicides.
- Remind them that they should not make judgements on the singular reason behind the suicide. Many reports often name a particular incident (such as a scolding or an argument) as the cause of the suicide. As a mental health professional, you can advise them that the causes of suicide are complex and it is not helpful to pinpoint a particular incident.
- Ask them to consider changing the names and villages to protect the family left behind.

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1 Suicidal Behaviour and the Media, Williams K & Hawton K; Oxford University, 2001

- Advise them not to present suicide as a heroic or romantic act. Or as a solution to a problem.
- Ask them to include details of counselling services or helpline numbers to their article – such as Sumithrayo, Sahanaya or the CCline 1333 - so that people having suicidal thoughts can easily get help.

## **16. Correcting inaccuracies**

### **Print**

Most journalists strive for accuracy in their reporting, but you may be misquoted at some point. These errors are rarely deliberate. Your concern should be that the meaning of what you said to the reporter was conveyed accurately, not so much whether the exact words were used. If the reporter completely missed the point, let the reporter know (in as helpful a manner as possible).

In a case of serious misrepresentation of your data or your views, you can request a correction from the Editor.

### **Television**

A common error when being interviewed on television is to allow a reporter's false or inaccurate statements to stand uncorrected. Speak up. If a reporter creates a false premise to a question, correct that first and then reframe and answer the question.

If a reporter cites information or statistics with which you are not familiar, do not assume they are being reported correctly. Simply state that you are unfamiliar with the information.

After an interview, you may ask the journalist if you can contact him or her with more information you think of later. Good journalists are interested in all the facts.

## **17. 'Letters to the Editor'**

Letters to the editor in newspapers and magazines are a good way of correcting inaccuracies, responding to prejudicial portrayals of mental illness or to comment on issues covered by the publication. While only a certain limited number of letters are actually selected for publication, letters to the editor provide a simple way to communicate to a wide audience.

Most publications contain specific guidelines for submitting a letter to the editor, including very limited word-counts. Most publications require letters of less than 200 words. This means that letters must be concise. To increase the chances of publication, letters should comply with the publication guidelines, refer to previous articles or current events, and include contact information.

### *Tips for Letters to the Editor*

- Keep letter tightly composed
- Use specific examples
- One point per letter
- Use accurate, up-to-date information
- Don't make personal attacks on those opposing your viewpoint
- Always sign your name
- Include contact details

## **18. Opinion articles**

In addition to letters to the editor, newspapers also include opinion pieces that are written by members of the community rather than by journalists. Opinion articles provide the opportunity to comment more extensively on an issue of public concern or debate.

Publication of an opinion piece is more difficult than getting a letter to the editor published. However, to increase the chances of publication, the topic should be related to current issues. However, to increase the likelihood of publication, the opinion piece should be written by a well known or credible author and related to a current news issue.

## **19. Developing a relationship with the media**

The most effective way of getting more positive stories on mental health in the media is through developing a relationship with journalists. Keeping a record of journalists who have covered mental health issues and finding out the names of provincial journalists in your area will help you when you want to get a story out in the media.

The following suggestions will help you develop a media contacts list:

- Find publications that cover mental health issues and familiarise yourself with them;
- When you first call, ask whether it is a good time, or if they would like to be contacted later;
- Ask how they would like to receive information (fax, email, phone etc) and make sure you get their direct contact details;
- Ask what kind of stories interest them;
- Keep a note of reporter responses – it may be worth opening a file in which you keep notes of what has been discussed each time contact is made;
- When you subsequently call, remind the reporter of what was discussed before, for example 'you might remember we spoke about xxx a few weeks ago'. This helps build a relationship.



- Invite them to any event your organization may have. They are more likely to remember you after a face-to-face meeting.
- Answer all media enquiries promptly, fully, accurately and courteously. If you do not know the answer, find it and get back to the reporter immediately or refer the reporter to another appropriate source for the information. In this way, you can establish your organisation as a valuable and helpful information resource.
- All reporters work by deadlines. Your first question must always be ‘What is your deadline?’. You must provide the information quickly so that the reporter meets that deadline. If you do not provide the information in time, your side of the story will not be told. Furthermore, that reporter will not come back to you on other stories.
- Ensure you give all reporters equal access to information. Favouring one reporter can be extremely damaging to your relationships with others. However, if a reporter contacts you for a story, their initiative should be respected; there is no obligation to call other reporters.
- When dealing with reporters that appear hostile, sceptical or disinterested, do not react emotionally. Discuss issues calmly and back-up statements with facts. Do not lose your temper or act defensively, as this can easily result in an uncomplimentary story.
- It is not worth approaching the media with a story unless it is newsworthy. Appearing desperate and wasting reporters’ time will result in your organisation being ignored.

## **20. And finally...**

Be confident!

The people who work in media are normal people looking for interesting stories to tell.

Some thinking and preparation from you will give them the stories they want – and their work will help you to fulfill your objectives.

Good luck!

## 21. Contacts

Note: While some of the following are the published contact details for media outlets, experience has shown that the email addresses and fax numbers can be unreliable. The most effective way to get the media interested in your story is to telephone the newsdesks and speak to a journalist directly. If they are interested, they will make sure you are able to get the details to them.

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
<b>Sinhala weekly newspapers</b>			
<i>Irida Lankadeepa</i> (audience 3,116,000)	General contact details		TP 011-2 448 321 TP 011 2 423 919 TP 011 2 441 070 Fax 011 2 314886 Fax 011 2 438 039 sld@lankadeepa.wnl.lk
	Ariyananda Dombagahawatte	Chief editor	077 7354770 011 247 9227
	ALK Perera	Deputy & News Editor	
	Premakeerthi Ranathunga	Features Editor	077 3763549
<i>Irida Divaina</i> (audience 1,672,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2497564 TP 0112497500 Fax 0112344253 divaina@unl.upali.lk
	Garnini Sumanasekera	Editor	0773 035 886
	Chandrasiri Dodangoda	Features Editor	0773 043 486
	Chathura Pamunuwa	News editor	0715 265 467
<i>Irida Lakbima</i> (audience 1,001,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2343406/9 TP 011 2330673 Fax 011 244 9593 Fax 011 239 5485 Sunday@lakbima.lk
	Sundara Nihathamani	Chief Editor	011 461 9312 077 3228461 011 2441896/4
	Jayantha Sri Nissanka	News Editor	0713419541
	Tilak Senasinghe	Assistant and features editor	
	Namini Wijedesa		011 243 3919 077 380 158
<i>Silumina</i> (audience 1,672,000)	General contact details		TP 011 242 9261 editor@silumina.lk
	Karunadasa Sooriarachchi	Editor	0773 130 174
	KCJ Rathnayake	News Editor	0777 270 080
	Semali Kellapatha	Features Editor	0772 990 479
<i>Rivira</i> (audience 241,000)	General contact details		TP 011 470 8888 Fax 011470 8800
	Sisira Paranathanthri	Editor	0773 502 932 sisira@rivira.lk
	Rasika Jayakody	News Editor	0777 304 015 rasika@rivira.lk

<b>Media outlet</b>	<b>Name of Contact</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
<i>Irudina</i> (audience 127,000)	General contact details		TP 011 434 1875 Fax 011 724 7222 editor@irudina.lk
	Mohanlal Piyadasa	Chief Editor	077 3047732
	Chathura Vidyaratne	Deputy and News Editor	0777 761 267
	Dilisha Abesundara	Assistant Features Editor	0772 992 597
<i>Lakbima News</i>	General contact details		TP 011 2 343 406/9 Fax 011 2 395 485 editor.lakbimanews@gmail.com
	Rajpal Abeynayake	Chief Editor	0777 305 770
	Namini Wijedasa	Assistant Editor	0777 380 158 nwijedasa@gmail.com
	Jyantha Sri Nissanka	News Editor	0713 419 541
<b>Sinhala daily newspapers</b>			
<i>Lankadeepa</i> (audience 1,672,000)	General contact details		011-2314714/2448321/2423919 Fax 011 231 4651/2438039
	Siri Ranasinghe	Chief Editor	0722 781 270 0773 113 872
	Dayaseeli Liyanage	Deputy News Editor	0773 596 114
	Chandrika Wijesundara	Deputy and Features Editor	0714 745 658
	Mr Gunaratne	News Editor	
<i>Dinamina</i> (audience 657,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 421181 TP 011 2 331181 Fax 011 2 429 310 editor@dinamina.lk
	Mahinda Abeysundara	Editor	011 2 429 241 0773 130 135
	Nalin Dilrukshan	News Editor	
	Anura K Edirisooriya	Features Editor	0777 725 355
<i>Divaina</i> (audience 598,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 497 553 TP 011 2 497 559 TP 011 2 497 551 Fax 011 2 344 253 divaina@unl.upali.lk
	Narada Nissanka	Editor	
	Wasantha Liyanage	News Editor	0777 761 925
	Jayantha Chandrasiri	Features Editor	0773 043 769
	Chathura Pamunuwa	Journalist	0715 265 467
<i>Lakbima</i> (audience 356,000)	General contact details		TP 071 2426000 TP 011 461 7931 Fax 011 2441899 Fax 011 244 1897 daily@lakbima.lk
	Jatila Wellabada	Chief Editor	TP 011 2343406-7 077 3228462 Fax 011 244 1897-8
	Sampath Wellabada	Assistant Editor – News	071 4884539
	Piyanda Maldeniya	Features Editor	
<i>Bududsarana</i> (audience 304,000)	General contact details		TP 011-2429598 Fax 011 244 9069

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
	NS Perera	077 7270096	
<b>Tamil weekly newspapers</b>			
<i>Virakesari Weekly</i> (audience 338,000)	General contact details		TP 011 5322700 Fax 011 5322755/2448205
	V Thevaraj	Editor in Chief	0777 304145
	R Prabajan	News Editor	0777 260828
<i>Sunday Thinakkural</i> (audience 158,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 522 555 TP 011 2 523 216 Fax 011 2 540 691
	R Barathy	Editor	077 7304010
<i>Sudaroli</i> (audience 65,000)	General contact details		TP 011 4 734 401-3 TP 011 239 9666
	KK Ratnasingam	Chief Editor	0714 325 000
	N Pthmaseelan	Editor Weekly	071 422 0054
<b>Tamil daily newspapers</b>			
<i>Virakesari Daily</i> (audience 228,000)	General contact details		TP 011 232 08881-3 TP 011 5322700 Fax 011 5322740
	R Prabaghan	Chief Editor	011-5322750 0777 260 828
	S Srikajan	News Editor	0772 990765
<i>Thinakaran/ Varamajarie</i> (audience 120,000)	General contact details		TP 011-2429271-2 TP 011 2429429 TP 011 2429279 Fax 011 242 9270
	K Sivasubramaniam	Editor	Mobile 0777 270 033
	K Kunarasa	News Editor	077 3457915
	A Sathyanadan	Features Editor	077 7535434
<i>Thinakkural</i> (audience 63,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 522 555 TP 011 2 523 216 Fax 011 242 9270
	V Thanapalasingham	Chief Editor	011 5 335 728
	K R P Haran	News Editor	0714 906056
Yarl Thinakkural	Mr. A.S. Nadaraja	Chief	021 2223735 336, K.K.S. Road, Jaffna yarlthinakkural@gmail.com
Uthayan	General contact details		New Uthayan Publication 021 2229944, 021 2229933 361, Kasthuriyar Road, Jaffna.
	Mr. M.V. Kanamylenathan	Chief Editor	071 4220001 editorial@uthayan.com
	E. Saravanabavan	MD - Uthayan	071 4115002
Valampurii	General contact details		3, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lane, Brown Road, Jaffna valampurii@yahoo.com
	Mr. S. Vettivelautham	MD	021 2223378, 021 3210815
	Mr.N.Vijayasundram	Chief Editor	0773151326

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
<b>English weekly newspapers</b>			
<i>Sunday Observer</i> (audience 496,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2421181 TP 011 2 331181 Fax 011 2 429 250 editor@sundayobserver.lk
	Jayatilake de Silva	Editor	011-2429231/2429227/2429429 Fax 2429230
	Pramad De Silva	Deputy Editor	0777 270 017
	Shanika Sriyananda	Assistant News Editor	0773 493 791 011 242 9429
<i>Sunday Times</i> (audience 193,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 326 247 TP 011 2 328 889 TP 011 2 433 272 Fax 011 2 423 258 editor@sundaytimes.wnl.lk
	Sinha Ratnatunga	Chief Editor	011 2 331 276 0777 345 252
	Anthony Devid	Deputy Editor News	0777 308 029 anthony@sundaytimes.wnl.lk
	Renuka Sdanandan	Deputy Editor Features	0773 012 604 features@sundaytimes.wnl.lk
<i>Sunday Island</i> (audience 103,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 497 500 TP 011 2 497 578 Fax 011 249 7543 Fax 011 244 8185 Fax 011 460 9198 gmd@upali.lk
	Manik de Silva	Editor	011 3 421 599 0114609000-4/4325535 manik@unl.upali.lk
	Suresh Perera	News Editor	0722 254 610 sureshisland@yahoo.com
	Zanita Careem	Features Editor	0777 264 243 zamitacareem@gmail.com
<i>The Sunday Leader</i> (audience 85,000)	General contact details		TP 011 5 365891-2 TP 011 4 741 124 Fax 011 5 365 891 editor@thesundayleader.lk
	Federica Jansz	Chief Editor	0773 017 092
	Gamini Weerakoon	Consultant Editor	0773 128 915
	Mandana Abeywickrama	News Editor	0777 354 350
	Ranee Mohamed	Features Editor	0777 397 550 raneemoham@hotmail.com
<i>The Nation</i> (audience 9,000)	General contact details		TP 011 4 708 888/98/40 Fax 011 4 708 800
	Gamini Abeywardena	Chief Editor	
	Rohan Abeywardena	Deputy Editor – News	0777 314 610
	Dharisha Bastiyans	Features Editor	0773 020 063

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
	Gagani Weerakoon	News Editor	0773124277 gvidwa@gmail.com
<b>English daily newspapers</b>			
<i>Daily News</i> (audience 167,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 421181 TP 011 242 9429 Fax 011 24 29210 editor@dailynews.lk
	Jayatilake de Silva	Editor	011 2 429 711 fax: 011 234 3694
	Ranil Wijepala	News Editor	0773 130 158
<i>The Island</i> (audience 102,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2 497 500 TP 011 2 497 571-6 TP 011 4609174/2324001-4 Fax 011 2 497543 Fax 011 4 609198 wijitha@unl.upali.lk
	Prabath Sahabandu	Chief Editor	0777 236 168
	Shamindra Ferdinando	Deputy Editor	0777 718 476 shamindra808@yahoo.co.uk
<i>Daily Mirror</i> (audience 90,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2479479/ 2479327 TP 011 535731/4714756 Fax 011 2304545/2423258 Fax 011 533 0811 dmnews@dailymirror.wnl.lk
	Champika Liyanarachchi	Editor	077 7530429 011 230 0554 champika@wijeya.lk
	Keshara Abewardena	Deputy Editor News	0773 938 072
	Irushi Bulathsinghala	Deputy Editor Features	0777 569 797
	Sunil Jayasiri	Deputy Editor	0777 380 283 sjayasiri@gmail.com
<b>Special interest press</b>			
<i>Psycho Social Forum Newsletter</i>	Naranjani	Editor, based at CHA	TP 0 114 610943/4, Ext : 158 Peacepa1@cha.lk
<b>Radio stations</b>			
<i>Shri FM</i> (audience 2,834,000)	Nilantha Rajendra	Director - News	011 2 565 592 077 2749608 Fax 011 2573453 sripuwath@yahoo.com
	Charuka Suraweera	Director – Programmes	0772 702 191
<i>Sirasa FM/Shakthi/YES FM</i> (audience 2,824,000)	General contact details		011 2 851 371/2851372 Fax 011 2 851 373/5340116 www.sirasa.com
	Chamika Roshan	Programme Manager	0773 088 748
	Mr Nihal Edirisuriya	Manager	
	Gajamugan	VJ – Shakthi FM	gajamugan21@gmail.com 0773148440

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
HIRU/SUN/GOLD/SHAA FM (audience 1,635,000)	Mr Sudewa Hettiarachchi	Director News	TP 011 4799786 Fax 0112346875 0777 414 842
	Ajith Gamage	Manager News - HIRU	0777 420 263 011 4 799 759 hirufm@abc-radio.com Fax 011 2 346 875
Lakhanda FM (audience 1,244,000)	Gayan Chinthaka Abeysinghe	Manager News	0777 273475 011 2774605 Fax 011 2 774 801
Soorayan FM (audience 707,000)	General contact details		0115 360 360 Fax 011 2346875
	M Indrajath	Manager News	077 3124313
Neth FM 690,000	Saman Kapila Wijesuriya	News Manager	077 3261116 011 2507078/2507080-1 Fax 011 250 7079 info@nethfm.com
	Mr Kula Sri Kariyawasam	Assistant General Manager – News and Current Affairs	
Sri Lanka Broadcasting Group	Mr TDK Jayantha	News Director	TP 011 2696417/2696140 Fax 011 2698576/2695488 Fax 011 2697150 slbcweb@sri.lanka.net
Siyatha FM	Mr Udayashan Idemegedera	News Editor	TP 011 230 4387 Fax 011 230 4386 Mob 071 684486
<b>TV Stations</b>			
Rupavahini (audience 6,558,000)	General contact details		011 250 1050-5/2587722 011 2 599 505/9 Fax 011 2 580 929 Fax 011 2 580 134 news@rupavahini.lk slrcnews@sri.lanka.net dg@rupavahini.lk
	Nishantha Ubayawansa	Director News (Current Affairs)	077 3635203 011 2 501 059
	Mr Suminda Athulasiri	Director General, News	
Maharajah Television: MTV/Sirasa/Shakthi (audience 6,154,000)	Susil Kindelpitiya	Director News	011 2851371/2 011 4301220/1 011 2840278 Fax 011 2 506 226 or 011285 1373/5340116/7 011 2534032/ 011 4792733 sirasatv@maharaja.lk sirasanews@sirasatv.maharaja.lk news@shakthifm.maharaja.lk office@mtv.maharaja.lk

Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
	Warrem Jansom	Director English News	077 3959125
	Mr Gayrika Rerusinghe	News Director	
	Yasarath Kamalasinghe	Director/GM News 1	077 3487330
	Nathasha Dream	Manager Programmes, MTV1	nathashadream@mtv.maharaja.lk
<i>Swarnavahini</i> (audience 5,708,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2503810/2599 650 TP 011 2503818/2503793 Fax 011 2503788/2507417
	Jeewaka Edirisinghe	Manager News	
	Harendra Jayalal	News Editor	071 4159363
	Mr Upendra Herath		0773012266/0712215278
<i>ITN</i> (audience 5,200,000)	General contact details		TP011 2 774423/4 TP 011 2 775494/011 2 773 289 TP 011 4403975 Fax 011 277 4591 011 277 4421
	Sadarman Radaliyagoda	General Manager (News and Current Affairs)	011 2 796 445 071 4115464 Fax 011 277 4421
	Mrs G Nalinda Perera	Acting GM News	
<i>Derana</i> (audience 779,000)	General contact details		011 5 333 354 011 5333 972 Fax 0112506226 news@derana.lk
	Shehan Baranage	Director News and Current Affairs	077 3580453 0115333972 Fax 011 250 6226
<i>TNL TV</i> (audience 335,000)	General contact details		011 5369182/5377566 011 2596241/2430859 Fax 011 2706125/2501683 tnltvr@slt.lk
	Rangana de Silva	News Editor	0773 088378 011 2 501 681 Fax 011 2501683 mkttnl@sltnet.lk
ETV	Mr Asantha Sirimanne	News Director	TP 011 2503779/2599650 Fax 011 2503788 Mob 0777 45028
	Mr Shamindra		TP 011 5369182/7 Fax 011 2866792 shamindrak@gmail.com
SATH TV/FM	Rosmand Senaratne	CEO	071 344 8090 rosmand@hotmail.com
TV Lanka	Mr DL Abeyrantha	News Director	TP 011 263 7430 Fax 011 421 3980
<i>Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation</i>	General contact details		TP 011 2 696 417 TP 011 2 691 972 TP 011 2 697 491-5 Fax 011 2 698576



Media outlet	Name of Contact	Position	Contact details
	Indika Jayantha	Director (News)	0715 208 887 011 2 698 577 Fax 011 2 698 576
	Swarna Gunawardena	Directory City FM	0773 770 607
ART TV (audience 146,000)	General contact details		TP 011 2906759 TP011 2913550/2910496 Fax 011 2906 758/ 551 6621 news@arttvk.com arttelevision@arttvk.com
	Chaminda Rodrigo	News Director	077 3540102
	Ms Indeewari Amuwatte	News Reporter/Anchor – 'The Diplomat'	TP 011 5333354 ext 325 Fax 011 5351621 0777 437278

The majority of these contacts have been provided from the Sri Lanka Press Institute Source Book for Journalists: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2009.

Please note that in time, names and numbers will change.

For the latest edition of the Source Book, contact SLPI at:

96 Kirula Road  
Colombo 5  
TP 011 5 353 635  
Fax 011 5 335 500  
[info@slpi.lk](mailto:info@slpi.lk)  
[www.slpi.lk](http://www.slpi.lk)

**List of journalists who attended the Basic Needs workshop on mental health and media event on 24 May 2010**

Name	Designation	Organisation	Phone
Ishora Jayawardene	Journalist	Daily News	0715310300
Mr Jayasinghe	Reporter	SLBC	0773 112 576
Nisamani	Reporter	Virakesari	0772 736 991
Nalika Rajapakse	Reporter	Tharunaya	0714 232 222
Prageeth Sampath		Lankadeepa	0714 489 218
Mahesh	News reporter	Siyath FM	0715 307 670
Mr Dinesh	News editor	Siyatha FM	0716 844 483
Vishaka Wehella	Freelance journalist	Ravaya	0773 440 816
Jayasiri Jayasekera	Freelance	Ravaya	0777 316 030
Samantha Kumara	Reporter	Neth FM	0776 024 444
Sandaruwan	Reporter	Neth FM	0716 691 439
Kumuduni Bandara	Journalist	Lakbima	0773 175 900
S D Wijesooriya	Reporter	ITN	0716 322 856
Sundara Nihethani de Mel	Editor in Chief	Lakbima	0773 228 461
S Athukoraksa	Journalist	SLRC	0772 963 327
Mangala Karanath	Asst Producer	Derana	0773 970 626
Asiri	Account exec	Derana	0773 580 446
Udara Fernando	Account exec	Derana	0777 422 423
Marlin Marikkar	Associate News Editor	Thinakaran	0773 112 554
Tharanga Runasinghe	Freelance		0773 435 464
Nivanthi Thilakaranth	Journalist	Dinamina	077 3986702
Dharrujuja Sooriyarchi	Journalist	Sath FM	0718112996
Wimalanth Weerathne	Journalist	Ravaya	
Dasuu Edirisinghe	Journalist	The Island	
Lakmal Bogahawatta	Journalist	Divaina	

As Basic Needs have already exposed these journalists to ethical reporting issues for mental health, they should be more open to reporting positively.

Please note that these names may not be spelled correctly – they were transcribed from a sign in sheet and some of the writing was difficult to read!

## Sample consent form - Appendix A

### [YOUR ORGANISATION] PHOTO AND STORY CONSENT FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I am at least 18 years of age and able to make this decision.  
In cases involving vulnerable adults, consent can be given by a carer.

Please sign next each statement below if you agree with it. Cross through the statements if you do not agree with them.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree that my quotes can be used by  
[organisation name] and journalists.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree that you my photograph can be  
taken and used by [organisation name] and  
journalists.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree that my name can be used by used  
by [organisation name] and journalists.