

# **Working with the Media**

**A guide for CPS spokespeople**





## Canadian Paediatric Society Working with the Media Quick Response Sheet

### **CPS Contact:**

Media Relations Coordinator

Tel: 613-526-9397, ext. 247

Fax: 613-526-3332

E-mail: [media@cps.ca](mailto:media@cps.ca)

Websites: [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)  
[www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)

### **When contacted by the media:**

#### **Find out what the reporter wants:**

- information or opinion
- print or broadcast, live or tape
- time requirement
- deadline
- location

#### **Take 5 minutes to collect your thoughts:**

- call CPS if possible
- assess whether you can meet the reporter's needs
- prepare information
- call reporter back

\* Please note that the CPS will never give out your contact information without your prior consent for each individual request. If a journalist claims they were given your contact information by the CPS please contact the Media Relations Coordinator.

### **CPS messages:**

- The CPS is the primary source for credible, reliable information on the health and health care needs of Canadian children and youth.
- Children and youth are a distinct population group with specific health care needs.
- The CPS works to keep child and youth health issues high on the political/public agenda.
- As child and youth health specialists, paediatricians are uniquely qualified to provide information about the health of children and youth.
- The CPS is committed to advocating for the needs of paediatricians in Canada.
- The CPS encourages collaboration with other organizations, agencies, and corporations that share our mission and vision for Canadian children and youth.

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## **Introduction: Working with the media**

They're insatiable. Media outlets broadcasting and publishing 24 hours a day, 7 days a week seem to have an unquenchable thirst for information. Listeners and readers want to know the latest, most up-to-date information that affects their lives, especially health information, particularly health information about children.

As paediatricians you have information that is in high demand. And as paediatricians you know the value of public awareness of health issues. The media needs your expertise and you need the media to reach the people you care most about, children and their parents.

From getting information to the general public on a disease or virus, to correcting misinformation or simply providing tips on staying healthy, the media can be one of the most valuable tools of communication.

To use this tool effectively, you need to understand the business of journalism and the different "personalities" of various media outlets - local, regional and national. Just like communicating with kids and their parents, you need to develop a working relationship with journalists.

Media training will help you to understand that confident, smooth communication is no coincidence, nor is it an art. It is a skill honed by proper training and practice, and by building relationships.

This document will help you learn more about how the media works and:

- How to be an effective spokesperson
- How to better manage the interview process
- How media exposure can help your patients
- How to handle difficult media interviews
- Your responsibility as a CPS spokesperson

## **CPS key messages**

The CPS has developed six key messages to help spokespeople when asked to comment on the CPS. They may come in useful when you are delivering your messages.

- The CPS is the primary source for credible, reliable information on the health and health care needs of Canadian children and youth.
- Children and youth are a distinct population group with specific health care needs.
- The CPS works to keep child and youth health issues high on the political/public agenda.
- As child and youth health specialists, paediatricians are uniquely qualified to provide information about the health of children and youth.
- The CPS is committed to advocating for the needs of paediatricians in Canada.
- The CPS encourages collaboration with other organizations, agencies, and corporations that share our mission and vision for Canadian children and youth.

## Media relations: The basics

Journalists are human beings who are taught that the best reporting is unbiased reporting that provides the facts of a story. If they have had the opportunity to get to know you, they will work even harder to make sure both sides of the story are told.

The first step in working with the media is to understand their needs and assess whether you are the person to meet those needs. Your first call should be to the CPS Media Relations Coordinator at the CPS in Ottawa. She will guide you through your assessment. She will also be able to provide background material that is easy to read and understand.

Know the issues that are becoming hot button issues ahead of time, and feel comfortable about talking about the CPS position on any of these issues. Understand them from all perspectives, not just your own. Do a regular "environmental scan" through the news, professional publications, and don't forget about the Internet. As you become known as a leader in your field, media will often call to ask for your opinion on topics that concern your field as a whole, and this is an opportunity to get your key messages out. If you are unable to discuss a certain issue, say so and say why.

### Use these five techniques to distinguish and add credibility to your key messages:

- **Facts** - use simple statements that describe a situation or condition.
- **Statistics** - put information into easy to understand terms
- **Authorities or experts** - quoting an expert adds credibility to any statement, especially if the expert is an unrelated third party.
- **Analogy or comparison** - tell a story to make your statements more memorable.
- **Personal experience** - use your own experience to illustrate your point and help your audience relate to your message.

It is always a good idea to prepare questions and answers (Q&A's) to the kinds of questions you hope NOT to be asked. It is better to think them through in advance and be prepared for your worst nightmare question than to be caught off guard.

Provide your key employees with the ability to redirect a media inquiry quickly and professionally. All employees should be informed that if you are unable to speak to a journalist, they can refer the reporter to the CPS or another paediatrician.

Begin to develop contacts among your local media. Get to know the "style" of the reporters and columnists who write about your area. Listen to, watch and read your local news. The more you know how a certain reporter approaches a news story the better prepared you will be to answer their questions.

## When the call comes

Never assume that a telephone call from a reporter is simply a friendly chat and NOT an interview.

If a reporter calls regarding a story that he or she has initiated, treat it confidentially with the reporter. Never discuss the story with other reporters unless they make the call first.

Don't be afraid to tell a reporter you don't have that information handy - never speculate. Tell them you will call them back and then do.

By anticipating issues up front, you will be better prepared when the call comes (the Media Relations Coordinator will cover this ground if the media call comes to her first).

- Always ask why an interview is being requested. It is all right to find out who else is being interviewed and whether you are being asked for background information or a direct quote. If you are uncertain about the questions, topics or purpose of the interview, ask for clarification.
- Ask if the interview is "live" or taped and what it will be used for. A news story may need information in a shorter form than a feature piece, particularly for broadcast.
- Find out when they need the information by. Deadlines vary; they can be hourly, weekly or monthly. The more pressing the deadline, the more aggressive the reporter. Find out the reporter's deadline and respect it.
- If you feel the need to clear your head and pull together some information before going ahead with the interview, ask to call them back. Never make it more than 20 minutes.
- Is it national, regional or local? Find out who the audience is so that you can frame your answers accordingly.
- If a question out of your area of expertise comes up, simply say so and recommend someone else they can speak to on that subject. The reporter will understand and appreciate it.
- Answer questions as briefly and directly as possible. Always be factual - state the essence first and back it up with facts while avoiding unnecessary elaboration. When you are done, stop. And don't fall into the trap of filling in "silences"- this is often used as a technique for you to say more without being prompted. Use silences as an opportunity to "bridge" to the information you would like to provide.

- Clarify whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of the CPS. You can always check the CPS website at [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca) for position statements and information for parents.
- Don't try to outsmart the reporter- if they don't understand it they won't use it. Use your expertise to deal with uninformed issues directly then move on to positives as quickly as possible. And avoid medical jargon.
- Welcome the simple question. Often the reporter uses this to establish an understanding of the subject for their audience.
- When asked to make a prediction, think before you answer. Quick answers may come back to haunt you.
- Never say "no comment", "off the record" or "don't quote me". If you are unable or uncomfortable answering a question, explain why and move on.
- If an interviewer asks multiple questions, respond first to the question you would like to answer, if you fail to answer a question they feel is important, they will ask again. If they keep repeating a question, it probably means you are not giving them the information they want and it is OK to ask them to clarify exactly what information they are looking for.
- If a question contains language or phrasing you don't like - do not repeat them even to deny them. Generally only the response of the person being interviewed is quoted or broadcast, not the question.
- If you promise further information - follow up quickly.
- To close the interview, thank the reporter for their interest and their time. Never ask a reporter if you can view, read or listen to a story before it is released, or what are they going to do with the material. Simply advise them of your availability if they have further questions.

## Delivering your message

How a message is delivered is as important as the message itself. Every interview is an opportunity to highlight the strengths within an organization. However, it needs to be done in a way that flows, appears natural and does not sound too commercial.

**Flagging** is a simple way to help the public remember your messages by emphasizing or placing a priority on what you consider to be the most important:

"The most important thing to remember is...."

"We've discussed a lot of things today. I think it boils down to these three things..."

"The best part about...."

**Bridging** is a way to move from one issue to another. When asked a question, you can respond by answering and then using a phrase to bridge to your key message:

"Let me put it into perspective..."

"What's important to remember, however..."

"What I really want to talk to you about..."

"And don't forget..."

"Before we get off that subject/topic let me add..."

"What that means is..."

"Another thing to remember is ..."

"That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...."

**Hooking** is used to set up or influence the next question by an interviewer. In other words, you can "hook" the reporter into asking you a question you specifically want to answer:

Reporter: "How many products do you make?"

Answer: "Five, but with the upcoming changes we are adding three new products to our line."

The reporter will no doubt then ask about upcoming changes.

# Interview Techniques

While print stories make it difficult for you to convey emotion through your answers, television and radio can convey to the listener/watcher multiple messages simply by how you breathe, look and respond.

Here are some tips on how to prepare:

- Watch or listen to the show you will be featured on and review past articles written by the reporter if it is a print interview. This will prepare you for the format, style and mood of the show, column, etc.
- If it is a story that you instigated, it often helps to give the reporter a one-page fact sheet prior to the interview. This helps to keep it focused.
- Keep breathing. When doing a radio and television interview, breathe deeply from your diaphragm as this will give your voice power and assist you with speaking clearly. And remember to speak at the right pace.
- Be natural. If you bring notes, refer to them only for statistical information or specific details. Speak from your heart and trust your own knowledge. A person reading a prepared statement over the radio sounds wooden and boring.
- Don't get angry, even if provoked. Getting angry tells viewers and listeners that you can't control yourself and reduces your effectiveness. If the interviewer is being unfair the audience will understand and likely sympathize with you.
- Don't look at the camera when being interviewed. The general rule is to concentrate on the interviewer unless directed to do otherwise.
- Be careful of the "two-shot". During a television interview, a reporter will ask for shots that show you being interviewed with the reporter without any sound. A shot of you laughing and smiling, when the topic being discussed is serious can send the wrong message to viewers.
- The interview is not over until the reporter has left the room. When cameras and tape recorders are turned off, casual comments made to reporters can still be made into headlines.
- Don't be upset if you or something you said is "edited out". It is the media's prerogative, and their job to ensure the story makes sense.

# **"Speak into the mic" and other things to know**

## **On camera...**

- Physical habits are accentuated. Know your "nervous quirks" and avoid them.
- Relax or at the very least, sit still, and lean forward slightly when seated. Don't slouch if standing.
- Look directly at the interviewer. If asked to speak directly into the camera, try not to move your eyes around too much.
- Avoid wearing white for technical reasons, and don't wear plaids, stripes and overpowering prints.
- Wear grays, browns or navy blue if possible. Avoid black.
- Pastel colours are better for shirts and blouses.
- Don't wear dangly jewellery.
- Check your appearance before any interview.

## **On tape...**

- Use your natural voice and speak in a regular rhythm.
- If the topic is a positive one, smile while you are speaking as this will add "life" to your voice.
- As with public speaking, avoid "ums" and other words that allow you time to gather your thoughts.
- Watch the reporter and "tell them your story". If the reporter moves the mic around, don't move your head with it, as they are trying to find the best reception.
- Vary your voice level to match the significance of your message.

## **After the interview – follow up**

If you felt the interview went well and good information was shared to the general public, let the reporter know. A thank you card or quick phone call will help you continue to build that relationship.

If you feel misinformation was relayed, let the reporter know as soon as possible, so that it can be corrected.

In print, a letter to the editor can also assist you with correcting information or getting key messages out that you felt were missed.

Once you have done all you can to correct information, move on. Your story will be old news by the end of the day, and if it isn't, you will have an opportunity to correct the facts in subsequent interviews.

## **Your responsibility as a CPS spokesperson**

The CPS responds to more than 300 requests for interviews from various media each year. Most requests require interviews by CPS spokespeople. CPS spokespeople include: board members, committee chairs and members, section members and other volunteers who may be associated with particular CPS projects. Spokespeople must be CPS members.

The actions of CPS spokespeople can have far-reaching significance and consequences. It is widely accepted that statements to the media by spokespeople are CPS policy, and therefore must be accurate and UNbiased.

As a CPS spokesperson it is your responsibility:

- To attend at least one media training session provided by the CPS.
- To provide up-to-date contact information on how best to reach you (please fill out Appendix A).
- To be aware of and support the CPS policy you will be discussing with the media.
- To notify the CPS of any interviews you did that were not originally arranged by the CPS office and for which you discussed CPS policy.
- To read the CPS Code of Ethics (<http://www.cps.ca/English/insideCPS/ethics.pdf>, see especially section 4 on Public Affairs and Communications), and declare a conflict of interest if necessary (see below for more information).

## **Conflicts of interest**

Conflicts of interest are situations that might not allow for impartial or objective determinations. They can be real or perceived and can include:

- Relationships with products, devices or companies such as pharmaceutical, formula or equipment manufacturers (related to the subject on which you are speaking);
- The receipt of research support or lecture honoraria from companies (related to the subject on which a person is speaking);
- Disclosing opinions and beliefs that different from the position of the CPS.

The CPS does not wish to exclude individuals who are experts in given fields from acting as spokespeople. However, CPS members, the media and the public trust the CPS to be an objective source, concerned only with the best interests of children, youth and their families. Therefore it is expected that all CPS spokespeople will openly disclose to the CPS Media Relations Coordinator any real or potential conflict(s) of interest before agreeing to speak to a journalist on behalf of the CPS.



## CPS Media Spokesperson Commitment Form

All CPS spokespeople are asked to complete the following form.

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

I prefer not to be contacted to do media on behalf of the CPS

**CPS affiliations (eg., board, committee, section):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Will do interviews in:**                      English                      French                      Both

**Contact information** (please provide information for how best we can reach in the event of a media request)

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

Pager/Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of assistant: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Professional achievements and current responsibilities (short bio, no more than 40 words):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Summary of key issues addressed on behalf of CPS:**

I am willing to do interviews on behalf of the CPS for:

Print media

Radio

Television

Are there any media you would prefer not to be interviewed by?

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I have reviewed *Working with the Media: A guide for CPS spokespeople* and understand my responsibilities as a CPS spokesperson.

Please return by fax to 613-526-3332 or e-mail to [media@cps.ca](mailto:media@cps.ca).