

APPENDIX I 6

MEDIA RELATIONS TIP SHEET ¹

Ordinarily in a school emergency, all calls from the media should be referred to the... Office of Community Relations.

If you must talk with members of the media about an emergency or normal situation at your school, here are a few basic guidelines that will help you:

- Above all, plan what you want to say.
- Before you meet with reporters, write down the most important points you want to make.
- Limit your points to three.
- Keep your sentences short and your words clear.
- Practice.

Here are some key phrases that can help you organize your thoughts:

“The important facts are. . .”

“What I can tell you is . . .”

“What we have done to ensure the safety of our staff and students is . . .”

“We take this very seriously.”

If you don’t know the answer, say, “I will get the information and get back to you. What is your deadline?”

Be sure you know whose responsibility it is to answer the question:

“This matter is under police investigation.”

“This is a medical issue. Please contact the health department.”

“Only the school board can change school policy.”

As the principal of the school or the principal’s representative, you must set the interview parameters. You set the place and time.

If you want to have members of the press remain outside the school, you can meet them on the sidewalk. If, on the other hand, you want a more relaxed interview, invite the reporters into your office.

You set the timing. It is courteous to ask the reporter if he or she is on deadline and to respect that deadline. At the same time, you have responsibilities to the students in your building that must also be respected.

¹ Note. From *Crisis management workbook (Section 11)*, by Office of Security and Risk Management Services of Fairfax County Public Schools, VA. (n.d.). Adapted with permission. Retrieved August 25, 2006 from: <http://www.fcps.edu/fts/safety-security/planning/cmw.pdf>

You set the topics. In a television interview, always ask the reporter before the camera is rolling what questions he or she would like to ask. Tell him or her what you feel free to talk about and what you cannot comment on. Reporters want to tape a good interview or write a good story. They will most likely work with you. You can conclude an interview politely but firmly if you can't negotiate the subject matter.

Have confidence when you engage in an interview. Be polite. Be forthcoming with all the information that you can. Educate the reporter. Show the reporter how the story can help support the mission of the schools (e.g., send a message to the community that schools take threats of violence seriously or send a message to parents that they must talk with their children about the dangers of abusing over-the-counter medications).

Before you start an interview, be sure you can get out gracefully:

“Thank you very much for coming.”

“You can help us by . . .”

“When we have more information, we will . . .”