

Media and Public Speaking: A *Mindframe* Guide for Consumers and Carers

The media is an important source of information for the community about mental health issues and plays an important role in influencing the way people think and act towards people who are affected by mental illness and suicide.

Inaccurate, unbalanced or sensationalist stories about mental illness can reinforce common myths and stereotypes about mental illness. This type of reporting can impact significantly on people experiencing mental illness and make them less likely to seek help for their illness.

When opportunities arise, consumers and carers can work with the media to promote balanced, accurate and insightful reporting of mental health issues. Personal stories are important to the media.

Moreover, a personal testimony from a consumer or carer carries far more weight than a testimony from a speaker who has not experienced mental illness or cared for someone with a mental illness.

Speakers who have direct experience will help to:

- Improve the community's understanding about mental illness
- Correct myths and stereotypes about mental illness
- Reduce fear, shame and stigma
- Increase understanding of the challenges experienced by someone living with a mental illness or caring for someone with a mental illness
- Encourage people with mental health concerns to seek treatment and support early if they think they may be unwell or someone they know is unwell
- Provide people with accurate information about mental health issues.

This resource will provide some advice on the best way to share personal stories - whether this is in a media interview or a public speaking opportunity.

A guide for talking about mental illness

Media reports that reinforce stereotypes can lead to negative community attitudes. However, responsible reporting can help in the understanding of mental illness in the community and decrease the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with mental illness.

Consider whether to become involved in the story

- Does being involved in the story give you an opportunity to help the community to learn and understand about mental illness and services?
- Does your personal experience match what the story is about?
- Have you received advice about becoming involved in the story?

For many people with a mental illness and their families, stigma can create as much pain and stress as the illness itself.

Choose words carefully

- Be aware of your own language and suggest other words instead of any unhelpful language used by media.
- Make sure you do not use discriminatory or stigmatising language yourself. In particular, avoid negative words like 'deranged', 'mental patient', 'schizo' or 'psycho'.
- Do not refer to someone as 'a victim', or 'suffering with mental illness'.
- Avoid labelling other people or yourself by the illness. Rather than calling someone a 'schizophrenic', say someone is 'living with schizophrenia' or has a 'diagnosis of schizophrenia'.

Special attention to language must be taken when talking in the media. Try to use plain English and describe what it feels like and what happened rather than using diagnostic terms or jargon. This will help the audience to understand your experience and story.

Avoid negative stereotypes

- Carefully select the parts of your story you will talk about to make sure that you do not accidentally link mental illness with violence or suggest people are unable to work, parent or lead fulfilling lives.
- Where possible provide the media with information that presents a balanced view of people who have a mental illness. Talk about your life as a parent, or a worker or a community member.

Provide support information

- Always provide information about relevant services or suggest where people can get support or further information.

A guide for talking about suicide

Research has shown that the way suicide is reported is important: while some styles of reporting have been linked to increased rates of suicide, appropriate reporting may be helpful.

People who are feeling suicidal may become affected by media reports of suicide, particularly where they identify with the person in the report or where suicide is sensationalised or shown as a way to solve problems.

There are times when journalists will report suicide because it is considered to be 'in the public interest', that is, the public need to know about it. While the media generally take a responsible approach to reporting suicide, examples of inappropriate reporting can still be seen.

The most effective stories look at social and emotional wellbeing, increase understanding of risk factors and warning signs and promote ways people can find support for a number of problems.

Speakers should only participate in stories about suicide, or mention suicide in their story, after much thought.

Speakers can encourage accurate and responsible reporting by making sure that information they provide to journalists is in line with *Mindframe* recommendations outlined below.

Avoid description of the suicide

- Never include detailed descriptions of the method or location of a suicide death or suicide attempt as detailed descriptions of a suicide death can prompt some vulnerable people to harm themselves in a similar way.
- It is best to talk about method and location in a general way only (if required). For example “*I took a mixture of medications*” or “*he went to a local park*”.

Use appropriate language

Certain ways of talking about suicide can alienate members of the community, sensationalise the issue or inadvertently contribute to suicide being presented as glamorous or an option for dealing with problems. People who are vulnerable to suicide, or bereaved by suicide, can be particularly impacted by language.

It is important to use language that is in line with suggestions for the media.

| Do say ✓ | Don't say X | Why? |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| 'non-fatal' or 'made an attempt on his/her life' | 'unsuccessful suicide' | to avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome or glamorising a suicide attempt. |
| 'took their own life', 'died by suicide' or 'ended their own life' | 'successful suicide' | to avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome. |
| 'died by suicide' or 'deaths by suicide' | 'committed' or 'commit suicide' | to avoid association between suicide and 'crime' or 'sin' that may alienate some people. |
| 'concerning rates of suicide' or 'cluster of deaths' | 'suicide epidemic' | to avoid sensationalism and inaccuracy. |

Place the story in context

- Avoid simplistic explanations that suggest suicide might be the result of a single factor or event.
- Highlight the difficulty of the issue; it may have many layers and a number of risk factors and warning signs.
- You may want to refer to some of the facts and statistics provided in the *Further Information* section of this document.

Provide support information

- Always provide numbers of relevant services or suggest where people can get support or further information (refer to the *Further Information* section of this document for a list).

Understanding the Media

The term 'media' covers a variety of communication tools including newspapers, magazines, speciality journals, television, radio, news services, online and specialist industry publications. 'Media' also includes those who work in the industry, including journalists, editors, producers and others.

Media report on events or information, with the goal of educating, informing and entertaining different audiences. Audiences are generally most interested in things that could affect them or those around them. The different types of media are: radio, print, and television.

Radio

Radio is one of the most commonly used forms of media in Australia and the easiest way to get a story across to a target audience. Radio is provided through a large network which includes public broadcasters, commercial and community stations. Programs may also be streamed on the internet.

- **Public broadcasters:** Australia has two public radio broadcasters: (1) Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio is made up of 60 metropolitan and regional stations and four national networks and an Internet service; and (2) Specialist Broadcasting Service (SBS) is Australia's multicultural and multilingual broadcaster. It broadcasts in more than 50 languages across a network which is available in all capital cities and key regional centres.
- **Commercial broadcasters:** There are approximately 260 commercial radio stations in Australia and 60% are in non-metropolitan areas.
- **Community broadcasters:** A 'community', as represented by a community radio station, may be defined in terms of interest, geographical or cultural boundaries. Most community radio stations have volunteers for their day to day running.

Table 1: Working with radio - what you need to know

| Types of stories | | Points to remember for radio |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| News | Delivered in short 'grabs' at frequent intervals. Short grabs may only last for 7-10 seconds. | Speak clearly in short sentences. Use plain, straightforward language. Be brief and to the point. Focus on your key messages. Interviews can be done over the telephone. May be possible to pre-record interviews if you are unavailable for a live interview. Talkback is 'live to air'. |
| Current affairs | Longer reports including discussion and opinion. | |
| Talkback | Longer discussion involving audience members. | |
| Specialist programs and documentaries | May focus on health issues. | |

Print media

Print is a large and varied sector of the media and information is presented in many different forms. Stories appear in the following different types of print media.

- **Newspapers:** There are more than 600 newspapers in Australia, including 12 major national or state and territory daily newspapers, about 35 regional daily newspapers, nine Sunday newspapers and almost 500 weekly or twice weekly regional, rural and suburban publications.
- **Magazines:** There are over 1,500 magazines published in Australia, including women's interest, men's interest, general interest, health, television, home and garden, leisure and current affairs titles.
- **Online news:** The online media environment continues to grow rapidly and almost all major media outlets, from print through to broadcast programs, also have websites that provide and update daily news items regularly.

Table 2: Working with the print media - what you need to know

| Types of stories | | Points to remember for print |
|------------------|---|--|
| News | Basic facts about current issues. | Focus on your key messages. |
| Features | In-depth exploration of an issue - includes opinion as well as facts. | Photos and names may be required. Nothing is 'off the record': anything you say may appear in print. Interviews can be done over the telephone and interviews may appear online on websites. |

Television

Television in Australia is provided through public broadcasters, commercial free-to-air stations, subscription television and a small number of community stations.

- **Public broadcasters:** Australia has two public television broadcasters: (1) Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) provides a national TV service with local and national programming and digital channels; and (2) Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) provides a national television service as well as digital channels. SBS broadcasts a mix of Australian produced and international programs.
- **Commercial television:** Commercial free-to-air television reaches most Australians with the majority of the population having access to three channels.
- **Subscription television:** Subscription television (also called 'pay TV'), is different to other forms of television as it is a direct contract between the television provider and the subscriber. Subscription television has a smaller target audience than free-to-air television and offers more specialised programming.
- **Community television:** Australia has a small number of free-to-air community television stations, most of which are located in capital cities.

Table 3: Working with television - what you need to know

| Types of stories | | Points to remember for TV |
|------------------|--|---|
| News | Usually 30 seconds to two minutes read by presenter or reporter with accompanying footage and/or interviews. | Think about your appearance - television is about what people can see. Speak clearly. Focus on your key messages. Actual screen time used may be very brief (e.g. seven seconds). Use of the story may become available online. |
| Current affairs | Explores issues in more depth. | |
| Other programs | Mix of information and entertainment e.g. Breakfast programs. | |

Preparing for an interview or speech

How does the speaker decide what part of the story to tell?

When asked to do an interview or speak publicly, you should carefully consider which parts of your personal experience with mental illness or caring for someone with mental illness match the type of media you will be working with, the theme of the journalist's story, or the type of audience that you will be speaking to.

Whether you are preparing for an interview or a public speech, one way to become clearer about which parts of your story to tell is to follow these steps:

STEP 1: Write out your story in full.

STEP 2: Go back and take out any information that you would not want everyone you have ever met, or will ever meet, to know about you.

STEP 3: Take out any references to self-harm, suicide, treatments, medication or advice.

STEP 4: Highlight the parts of your story that support recovery, hope and the potential to reduce stigma.

How do speakers decide on 'key messages' for their interview or speech?

When approaching a media interview, your key messages will be your main point of discussion, no matter what questions you are asked by the reporter.

To support your key message you should think about a talking point from your personal experience of mental illness or caring for someone with mental illness.

For example:

Key message = to highlight the importance of seeking help early.

Talking point = personal experience of seeking support early.

Key messages should be:

Short - who you are and what you want to talk about, for example:

- *"I'm XXX and I have experienced depression and I want to talk about how others can find support too".*

Memorable - use your personal experience to highlight the key message, for example:

- *"I felt afraid to talk about how I was feeling, fearing stigma in my community. But I talked to someone and they supported me in searching for and finding a service".*

Include help seeking information useful to your audience.

How do speakers decide whether or not to do an interview?

Many people feel they should do an interview if they are asked. Before a speaker agrees, they might want to ask themselves some questions to see if they are prepared for the experience.

Questions to consider:

- How would your neighbour, employer, or hairdresser react to you if they read or heard you in the media? If the answer is not a positive one, you may need to consider whether being interviewed by the media is the right thing for you now.
- What are you prepared to share about yourself and your story and what would you like to remain private?
- Do you work for a service that places restrictions on your ability to speak with the media?
- Do you want your photograph and name to appear in the newspaper or online, or your face to be shown on television?
- If you are a carer you are not only telling your own story, but also that of the person you care for, are they comfortable with this?

Media interviews

This section has information on preparing for an interview, doing an interview, and what happens after an interview.

Preparation

Once speakers are ready to work with the media, they will need to prepare. Preparation boosts confidence and the ability to focus on what should be communicated.

- Ask questions: In particular, what topics does the journalist want to talk about and why? This helps to decide what key messages you choose.
- Develop three key messages to communicate during the interview.
- Select the parts of your personal story that best match the theme of the story.
- Think about the words you want to use and remember the *Mindframe* recommendations for appropriate language.
- Think about the type of media -do the media want short 'news grabs' or longer interviews?
- Practice responses at least 2-3 times and avoid 'urns' and 'ahs'.
- Have in mind a few key facts or examples which are relevant to your story.
- Let your family and friends know that you are doing the interview.

It is best practice in an interview or public speaking event if you:

- Are able to manage your feelings and aren't likely to become angry or upset.
- Have enough time to prepare.
- Are currently well, and believe that becoming involved will not cause you any difficulty.
- Have decided what you will and will not share about yourself and your story.
- Have good support.
- Feel confident about talking to the media about the topic.
- Feel your right to privacy will be respected.
- Are comfortable about the effect your involvement may have on your family or community.

During the interview

Regardless of whether the interview is for radio, television or print media there are some things that apply to all interviews:

- Speak in short, clear sentences containing the key messages
- Repeat the key messages
- Pause before answering each question ,and then respond
- Use plain and straightforward language that the audience can relate to
- Use your words rather than ones the journalist uses: this helps to stay focused on the key messages

- Do not just answer 'yes' or 'no'. Answer in sentences that can be quoted
- Avoid over-talking. You do not need to keep the conversation going. Simply answer the question asked and wait for the next one
- Stay calm at all times, take 2 to 3 breaths and speak slowly
- Keep messages positive - remember to focus on recovery
- Be respectful and polite
- Smile! Even on radio or on the telephone, it reflects in your voice
- Nothing is 'off the record'. Be prepared for anything to be included in the final story.

Tips for handling tricky questions:

- Ask the interviewer to explain any questions you do not understand
- Instead of saying 'no comment', say you are unable to answer their question and tell them why - e.g. *"I am not the best person to talk about that"*
- Make general reference to the question and then refer back to one of your key messages
- Stay calm and polite, but do not answer questions you are not comfortable with.

After the interview

- Take time to think about how the interview went and what was good or uncomfortable about the experience.
- Make some notes about what you would do the same or differently next time you are interviewed.
- Create an opportunity to debrief about the interview.
- Be aware that there are no guarantees in the media. The story may be much shorter than first planned or than expected despite the length of the interview. This may happen for a number of reasons - it has nothing to do with what you have done or not done.

Tips for public speaking

The key is to prepare key messages and for people with direct experience to be clear about which parts of their story they want to talk about and which parts they want to keep private.

Preparation

- Be sure you have the facts about your audience size, contact person's name, location etc.
- Choose the parts of your story that best match the type of audience you are presenting to.
- Practice: read your speech aloud until it sounds like you are talking not reading.
- Time your presentation to fit the timetable of the group you will be speaking to.
- On the day, arrive early at the venue to allow time to set up equipment if required.

Notes

- Write your notes in large writing for easy reading.
- Leave a wide margin for notes to yourself.
- Leave pages unstapled for easier handling.
- Highlight and mark your script to guide your speech.
- Check the lighting of the podium to be sure you can read.

When speaking

- Check to be sure you are situated correctly in the room with the projector, screen, microphone and audience.
- Take a deep breath and pause before beginning.
- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Make eye contact with the audience from time to time. If you are nervous, look just below or just above the eyes.
- Stay within the presentation time provided by the organiser.

When you are answering questions

- Remain friendly, calm and confident.
- Answer questions briefly and as clearly as possible.
- Remember that you do not always have to know everything. You can say *“I will have to check that out for you”* or *“I don't think I am the best person to answer that question”*.
- Avoid allowing one person to dominate the questions by moving on: *“Thank you for your interest. I'll be glad to talk to you about your concerns after the meeting. Right now let's see if anyone else has questions for the group”*.

When you are finished with your presentation

- Thank the audience for their attention.
- Remain long enough to give individuals an opportunity to talk with you.
- If appropriate see to it that arrangements are made for distributing information and/or resources.

After the event

- Think about how the presentation went and note things that worked well and things you might do differently next time -you learn something every time you do a presentation.
- Create an opportunity to talk about how you felt and things you may have been comfortable or uncomfortable with. This will help when planning the next public speaking opportunity.

For more information visit: www.mindframe-media.info