

Practical Tips for Talking to a Journalist [about your abuse]

Compiled by Whistle and reviewed by journalists

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1. Write down three columns:
 - a. Everything you want to say
 - b. Everything you will not say/ don't want to say
 - c. Things you will say if certain conditions are met. Some examples:
 - i. I will talk about a personal experience if I have control over whether it will be published after our conversation.
 - ii. I will talk about a personal experience if I am anonymous.
 - iii. I will talk about a personal experience if I don't have to name names.

2. Research the journalistic standards and options for the country in which the article will be written and published.
 - a. In the US, you can use terms like "on the record" or "off the record" and journalists who have ethical standards (you can ask them about this too, case by case) will adhere to the rules set out about 'the record'. Stating things on the record means they can write about it and quote you directly.
 - b. Be aware about what's officially **on the record** as a writer/editor can contextualize as they wish, and they will do so to fit their agenda. You can use context from your "if/then" column if you want. **Off the record** stuff will help them build their story/angle and will probably lead them to ask other people questions and ask you other/further questions on the record.
 - c. Be **very specific** about when and what is on or off the record as you're speaking/telling your story. For example, "the name Jane Doe is off the record. Now i'm going back on the record."
 - d. Get verbal confirmation about **their understanding** of what is on or off the record.

3. Ask about **their and their editor's** agendas in writing the piece. Straight up.
 - a. What are their goals?
 - b. What angle will they take?
 - c. What are their priorities?

- d. What does their editor want from the story if different from what the writer wants to explore?
 - e. How likely is it to get published?
 - f. What does the publishing hinge on?
 - i. A story may get published if specific conditions are met. For example, a piece may get published only if their source (you) agrees to put their name in the story.
4. Ask yourself what you want out of the story. If you know what you want out of something, **you can decide what your boundaries are** and what you want to share.
- a. What do you want to see in the future?
 - b. What are your desires around the issue? Around talking to a journalist? Around something getting published?

Not all publications/writers/editors can or will agree to the following as a standard practice. Most publishers may decline these requests.

You may have to lower your expectations, but it never hurts to ask.

5. Request fact checking and to confirm quotes before something is published.
- a. Have them send you an email (a hard copy) of the text or at least of the quotes of yours they will print, with context if desired. Discuss this in advance of the interview if this is one of your hard or soft requirements for participation.
 - b. Ask for the right to revoke statements before published BEFORE you say anything and get it IN WRITING.
 - c. Record the interview for your records. The journalist will record your interview and take notes, but it is good to have your own recording as well. That way if you feel you are mis-quoted you can check it and have proof if you were. If you are misquoted, you can request a correction to be made or mentioned in the publication after release.

6. Practice saying phrases that shut down or divert the conversation. In the moment it can be hard to pivot away from topics. Know and practice phrases that can do this. For example:
 - a. I don't want to discuss that.
 - b. While I don't want to ____, I do want to mention that...
 - c. I can't speak to ____, but I do want to say that...
 - d. As I said, I don't want to go into that topic.
 - e. Or, do what politicians do: answer a question you want to answer even if they didn't ask it. For example this hypothetical exchange:
 - i. Journalist: Tell me about your relationship with XYZ.
 - ii. You: Good flooring is a fundamental necessity of safe working conditions. So, too, are breaks and fair living wages.

7. Read as many pieces by the journalist before you agree to the interview to get an idea of the type of investigations they participate in and how they tend to report. Once an interview has begun, if you feel unsafe or that the journalist is in any way sketchy. Stop talking. End the call/zoom/meeting.
 - a. You are allowed to stop talking and end situations. Politeness can be abused. You do not have to be polite.
 - b. Sometimes you just have to trust the writer. But even if you've researched their work and are onboard with working with them, it doesn't mean you'll automatically like what they wrote about you.

8. Bring a friend, a witness, or a lawyer if it makes you feel more secure.

9. Practice aftercare. Have a self care plan for after you speak to the journalist. Talking about delicate topics, trauma, and personal experiences can be re-traumatizing or cause anxiety or be difficult on you emotionally, mentally, and physically. Find out what soothes you, it might be talking to your friends, talking to a therapist, taking a bath, going for a walk, watching a silly movie. Whatever it is, practice aftercare. Sometimes we don't know we need aftercare until much later – maybe two days or a week. So, just be gentle with yourself as you figure out what your response might be.