



MACSAS Information on Contact with the Media

The media may contact you, especially if you are going through a church tribunal regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

You may wish to contact the media yourself or you may be concerned about media harassment.

This leaflet is written to help you think about all three possibilities. It is important to safeguard yourself as much as possible from media intrusion. Sometimes this is not possible when someone leaks your name to the press during, for example, a church tribunal. Some newspapers can be especially intrusive and difficult to deal with. We hope this leaflet will help you understand some of the issues.

Media contacts you after someone gives your name

You are not obliged to speak to any media person if you do not wish to.

If you are in the middle of a court case, or church tribunal, you may wish to speak to your solicitor since care must be taken with ongoing cases.

In church trials / tribunals your identity is not safeguarded in the same way as it might be in a criminal court. This means you can be photographed and identified. If you are not happy with the way information has been obtained about you, or you feel you have been represented unfairly, you can report the newspaper to the Press Complaints Commission (contact details below). Unfortunately this is rarely a successful route.

Some newspapers may take what you say out of context, misrepresenting your comments. In the 'quality' papers this is less likely, but can happen. If you wish to speak to the press, seek legal advice first. Newspaper editors reserve the right to write the article's headline. You can ask to read the article before printing and even make changes. However it still remains the journalist's / editor's choice whether to amend the article.

You want to talk to press

Many survivors, let down by the justice / church system, feel that the press is the only route open to them for shaming or exposing their abuse. This can work, but requires careful thought.

Such a route is always fraught with dangers. Following publication you may experience a 'backlash' from the congregation of the clergy in question. You may even be sidelined and asked to leave. You may receive unpleasant letters. People may try and harass you. Your family and spouse may be angry and upset. The newspaper may represent you in a sleazy or unfavourable light, which can be very alarming. This is more the case with tabloid papers.

Press harassment

'Door-stopping' by the media during a high profile case can be particularly distressing. The Dean of Lincoln case is an example of this. You may need to consider moving to a secret location during the trial.

Always ask the church / police what safeguards will be in place during the trial. In all these situations it is best not to talk to the press - let your answer-phone take the calls. If necessary, go to stay with friends where you cannot be traced.

General guidelines

It is possible to find journalists who will treat you with respect and integrity. These tend to work for the 'quality' papers. Some church papers can represent you well, whilst others may scapegoat you. If you intend to talk to the press seek advice before doing so.

Ask yourself:

- Why do I want to go to the press?
- Is it likely to achieve anything?
- Could there be repercussions on my family, my work, and my church attendance?
- Am I angry and vengeful? (If so, it is unlikely this is the right time to go to the press)/
- What if they represent me wrongly?
- How would I cope being identified / photographed for a paper?

In cases where you did not approach the press you have every right simply to say "no comment" or nothing at all.

Remember:

- If unpleasant or unrelenting seek help and protection.
- Consider moving.
- Keep records of intrusion, by whom, day, time, and name of journalist, if you know it.
- See our leaflet "Your Safety".

It is our experience that the press has a crucial role in uncovering secrecy and cover-ups and in seeking justice and change. There is a level of skill required in influencing the press well and in writing your thoughts and views accurately.

Some of the difficulties mentioned above should not put you off if you want to go to the press, but we urge thought and consideration concerning which paper, which journalist and why you are doing it. You will also need to consider the legal and personal ramifications of doing so.

In the case of complaints contact:

Press Complaints Commission
Halton House
20/23 Holborn
London EC1N 2JD

Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk
Web: www.pcc.org.uk