

## Chapter IV. Working with the Media—Involving Media in National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month

### The Importance of the Media

Media coverage is important to promoting the messages of NTPPM because the media can carry your message to a much larger number of people than you can reach without media. Luckily, adolescent sexuality always attracts press attention. Unluckily, it is too often covered in a negative fashion, mirroring societal concepts of irresponsible, careless, or “bad” young people. Given society’s general discomfort with adolescent sexuality, media coverage of the issue can fail to explore complicated and interrelated aspects of teens’ health. It can be challenging to get media to pay attention to the roles of poverty, discrimination, lack of accurate information, lack of access to confidential and affordable health care, stereotypes, and adults’ negativity as important factors in adolescent sexual health outcomes.

The media usually welcome opportunities to report on issues related to children and adolescents. Consider media as key players in the promotion of NTPPM programs and activities. Invite the media to all events and inform reporters about new research, etc. Media interest and support can range from airing local programs or public service announcements (PSAs) to printing a calendar of events in local newspapers. Public access cable channels may be willing to show educational programs or to film public forums on issues related to teen pregnancy prevention. Public relations and advertising firms can contribute significantly by promoting NTPPM through *pro bono* work.

### The Media Plan

You or your media committee can involve the press in publicizing the events and activities of NTPPM. Successful media plans usually follow a four-step process:

1. **Informing press**—Appoint a spokesperson to deal with press inquiries and to respond to reporters’ questions. Be aware of media coverage of related issues (such as HIV and other STIs, adolescent development, etc). Know which papers and television and radio stations provide good coverage. Maintain lists of local and national news outlets, including reporters, editors, and news desks. Keep accurate mailing, telephone, e-mail, and fax lists for reporters in your area.
2. **Setting press events**—Decide what press activities to hold and which materials to have on hand as background or current information. Consider sending out press releases, creating press packets, and holding a press conference. You may want to provide examples of past coverage in briefing packets.
3. **Evaluating the press campaign**—Keep track of coverage and determine how the story was presented, who was quoted, and what kind of follow-up was necessary.
4. **Follow-up with press, radio and TV stations**—Thank reporters and stations for story lines about teen pregnancy, broadcasting of PSAs, etc.

## The Spokesperson and the Interview

**The Spokesperson**—Press calls should be routed to a designated spokesperson(s) who can establish regular contact with the reporter, answer her/his questions, and provide follow-up. The spokesperson must be articulate and knowledgeable on issues related to adolescent health and pregnancy prevention. He/she should be able to speak clearly and directly to the issue without using jargon or technical terms. The spokesperson can also set up interviews between the reporter and others who can speak for attribution on behalf of NTPPM efforts. Train youth to be spokespeople. Work with them to create talking points—data and “sound bites” they will use when talking with the media. Practice with them on giving media interviews. Give them the same support, training, and encouragement that you provide to adult spokespeople.

NOTE: Reporters often need more than one credible source for a story; so, it can be beneficial to have more than one spokesperson for NTPPM.

**The Interview**—*When you don't know the answer, say so.* If the spokesperson does not know the answer to a question, it is important that she/he says so. Reporters have the right to ask *any* question; they may also use *any* answer given them, no matter how silly or incorrect. Reporters expect the spokesperson to answer to the best of her/his knowledge.

The spokesperson or respondent has the right not to answer questions that are inappropriate or off topic. Remember that reporters can use *any* remarks made to them. If the spokesperson doesn't want something published, he/she must not say it. If she/he doesn't want to be quoted on a particular topic, the *only safe rule is do not talk about it*. It is also important not to be drawn into criticizing colleagues or other organizations; criticism should be reserved for inadequate programs and poor policies.

## The Story

The spokesperson and the media committee should plan *in advance* what points to make and how to make them succinctly when responding to a reporter or in an interview. Anticipate difficult questions and practice answering them in advance. Focus on two to three points, and stress these points in the conversation or interview. Short snappy sentences (10 to 15 words) provide “sound bites” which make it easy for the media to quote you accurately and to convey your point(s).

## The Press Information Packet

The press information packet, pulled together for conferences or briefings, contains basic background material on the issues and activities of NTPPM as well as press releases or advisories. A standard packet includes:

- Materials related specifically to the press conference, such as graphs, charts, news release, and copies of speeches or testimony to be delivered at the conference;

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- Contact information for the press spokesperson and the NTPPM coordinator;
- A background sheet on rates of teen pregnancy, births, and abortion as well as STI and/or teen sexual activity rates. (Visit [www. http://www.moapp.org/resources/data\\_facts.html](http://www.moapp.org/resources/data_facts.html) for a variety of fact sheets);
- Brief information about NTPPM, including any community sponsors and committee members, a statement of purpose and goals, and a brief summary of NTPPM activities across the country;
- Information on how NTPPM addresses a need in the community; and
- One or two items of favorable press coverage of NTPPM.

### When the Press Calls

Direct the calls to the spokesperson or, in her absence, to an appointed member of the media committee. The spokesperson will either respond to the inquiry or refer the reporter to an appropriate person for additional information or an interview. Respond to all media calls. Don't avoid press calls. Leaving a "no comment" impression may arouse suspicion. Responding quickly will increase the chances of being quoted and cited in the final story. Practice making your one or two points before returning the reporter's call.

Be wary of "sensationalist" journalists, those who have opposed your program, or those who work for newspapers with an editorial position against it. Think about whether to work with these journalists before they call; you may decide not to give interviews to these reporters and/or media outlets.

### When Contacting the Media

Develop a press list, including contact information for reporters with different "beats," such as community and health reporters. Your press list should contain the television, radio, and newspaper outlets in your area, including university papers, community and regional newspapers, radio and television stations, regional magazines, and military press officers.

Learn the deadlines for the media outlets on your press list and research the demographics of their primary audience(s), such as local citizens, sports fans, teens, etc. To be most effective in dealing with the press, also research the contacts for your calls and materials. Regarding:

- **Newspapers and Magazines**—Contact the metro or city desk. Request a health beat reporter. Beat reporters are often best to work with because they may be experts in their area.
- **Television**—Start with the assignment desk. TV public service directors and editorial directors are good contacts too, particularly for public affairs programming. Sometimes, correspondents participate in deciding which stories to cover.
- **Radio**—Identify news directors and talk show producers. Shows with a primary audience of teens may be particularly good for coverage.

## **Media Activities**

The media committee can help answer reporters' questions about the initiative. It can also develop:

- **News Releases**—A news release is normally one page, (maximum 300 to 400 words) that tells What, Who, Where, When, and Why regarding an event, program, or activity. It can stand-alone or be enclosed with additional materials and resources on NTPPM. A news release should be distributed with sufficient lead-time to permit reporters to plan on attending. A news release should also include one or two quotes from spokespeople, the date for release of the information, and contact name and telephone number. Distribute a news release by fax and by messenger.
- **News Advisory**—A news advisory announces an event or a specific news item. It is a one-page document that invites coverage. Answer the questions of What, Who, When, Where, and Why. Fax the advisory to contacts one to two days prior to the event.
- **News Briefing and Press Conference**—Briefings should be reserved for information that cannot be communicated well in a press release. Schedule the briefing to last about one-half hour; best hours are between 10 am and 2 pm. Use a location convenient to the reporters such as a press club or downtown site. Have NTPPM press kits available at the event and designate someone from the steering committee to greet reporters at the door.
- **Public Service Announcement (PSA)**—PSAs are a good way to publicize events. For radio, write a 15 to 20 second statement or announcement and submit it by fax or mail to the station's PSA contact. Television PSAs need to be produced; but the only cost is for production, not distribution. Many newspapers will print information from PSAs in the community calendar and announcements section.
- **Local Cable Access Programming**—Cable access channels offer access to equipment, airtime, and consulting; these are an excellent venue for local issues. Often cable channels will film public forums or debates or air PSAs and/or panel discussions. Contact the local cable company for more information.
- **Letters to the Editor**—One of newspapers' most frequently read sections are "Letters to the Editor." These letters must address an issue or column that was featured in the news *very recently*. This section is a good place to respond to criticism or concerns that have been raised in the community by the issue of teen pregnancy or by NTPPM. Letters should be persuasive, brief, and quote reputable sources. A prominent member of the community could be asked either to write or to sign a letter regarding NTPPM.
- **Guest Editorials**—Guest editorials, or "op-eds," are brief opinion pieces or essays on topics in the news that appear opposite to the editorial page. Op-eds should be approximately 500 to 700 words and make one major point, backed up by reputable statistics and compelling anecdotes. As with letters to the editor, consider asking a prominent member of the community to write an op-ed or to sign one drafted by a member of NTPPM.
- **Regular Contact with Media Professionals**—Maintain press contacts through phone conversations or brief letters to reporters, editors, talk show producers, and editorial

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boards. Suggest interviews or topics for press consideration; acknowledge good coverage of an issue; praise a reporter or editor's work.

- ***Appearances on TV or Radio***—TV and radio stations often feature community members commenting on current events. Members of the NTPPM steering committee might call or send information suggesting appropriate guests for a specific show. Once you or another NTPPM colleague is invited onto a show, research the other guests' views. Plan to make your own case more compelling by using stories as well as facts to illustrate your points. Practice speaking in short, crisp sentences. It's hard to provide background in a television or radio interview than for print media, so assume the audience has no prior knowledge when you make your case. For television, wear bright, solid colors and avoid glasses.
- ***Buying Space or Time***—You can buy space for a prepared advertisement in local newspapers or magazines. Newspapers and magazines have rate cards that explain ad prices by the size of the ad. Buying time for radio advertising is relatively inexpensive. Check with local stations for rates, type of audience, and technical requirements for advertisements. Some stations allow radio personalities to read ad copy on the air; others only air advertisements that have been produced on tape.

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