

# Talking to the Media and Using Social Media Media <sup>[1]</sup>

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These days most people get their information from mainstream (traditional) media (television, newspapers, magazines, radio, the Internet) as well as social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.). Using mainstream and social media can be great ways to inform the public about the issues, concerns, and day-to-day realities of living with [HIV](#) [2]. But it can also be a little scary at first. By following a few simple guidelines, you can approach working with traditional or social media with a sense of confidence and control.

## Talking to Mainstream Media

### Responding to an Interview Request

- Always find out who will be interviewing you: ask for the reporter's full name and the media organization for which he or she works (newspaper, TV station, website, etc.).
- Ask what the reporter is writing about and why. "I'm writing a story about HIV/AIDS" is not enough. Ask for more information about the specific issue or angle of the article, what information the reporter already has, and why he or she particularly wants to talk to you.
- Confidentiality may be very important to you. Tell the reporter exactly how you want to be identified in the story and make sure he or she agrees to use only that name. You can use your first name only, initials, or a pseudonym (a false name the reporter will use to refer to you while telling the public it is not your real identity). Feel free to use your full name if you are comfortable doing so, but it is not necessary. There is nothing wrong with using something other than your full name.
- If the reporter is not on a tight deadline and does not need to speak to you immediately, set up an exact time and place to conduct the interview. You do not have to allow the reporter into your home or workplace. Nor do you have to agree to meet anywhere that makes you uncomfortable. You may choose to meet in a semi-public place like a public park with several people around. Find a place that is private enough to have a conversation, but public enough not to be alone.
- Many times the interview will be done over the phone. If that is the case, make sure you are interviewed at a time and location where you will not be distracted by other calls, noise, or people listening in, and where you can be sure to have a good connection.
- Many interviewers record their calls or conversations. If this makes you uncomfortable, it is important to ask the reporter if she or he intends to record the interview and what is done with the recording after the reporter is finished with it.

### Be Prepared

- If the reporter is on a tight deadline and wants to talk to you immediately, do not feel pressured. It is the reporter's deadline and pressure, not yours. It is important to find out who the reporter is and what he or she wants to talk about. Ask if the reporter can call back when you are free to talk without distractions, even if it is only a few minutes later.

This will also give you a little time to prepare.

- Do a little homework. Find out what kind of stories the newspaper or station usually runs about HIV. Look for stories done by your reporter to get an idea of his or her interests, the kinds of questions that might be asked, and if she or he has a particular 'angle' or perspective, etc.
- If possible, have some background material you can refer to while being interviewed. For instance, if you are going to be speaking about medical issues, you may want to have a fact sheet on hand so that you and the reporter will understand any technical terms.
- Think ahead about how you would like to handle questions that might make you uncomfortable. These could be questions about how you came to be living with HIV, your family, your health, or any topic you would rather not discuss. It may be helpful to have a pre-prepared response such as "I am not prepared to answer questions about that right now," or "I would rather not comment on that."

## **During the Interview**

- Try to stay calm. Remember that the interviewer chose you for a specific reason. Most likely, the reporter is interested in your personal story or experience, which means you are the expert and the only one who knows the answers. This means that you are in control of where the interview goes, which questions you answer, and whether the interview continues. This should be a source of calm and relaxation.
- Try to avoid chatting casually with a reporter. You may feel you are simply speaking as one person to another, but remember the reporter is doing a job and anything you say can be used in the story. Even if a reporter asks you something "off the record" (meaning your answer is not going to be directly used in the story), you may say something that will change the tone or meaning of the interview.
- If you are with an organization that is holding a public event, such as a rally or press conference, and a reporter asks you for a quote, it is best to direct her or him to your group's official media spokesperson.

## **Answering the Questions**

- Listen carefully to the question. If you do not fully understand it, ask the reporter to repeat it or ask it again in different words. You can also ask for a few moments to think about your answer. You do not have to have a quick response for every question. And if you do not know the answer to a question, it is perfectly fine to say "I don't know."
- Try to keep answers short and to the point. Only give the reporter as much information as needed to answer the questions.
- Stick to the point you want to make. Even if a reporter asks a follow-up question that seems to disagree with what you said, you can simply repeat yourself or restate your response in different words. Stick to what you believe and what you mean.
- Speak slowly and clearly so the reporter can get your exact words down. Use short, simple sentences because reporters often edit remarks down to brief quotes.
- Finish your point. If the reporter tries to interrupt you, simply tell him or her politely that you want to finish your statement.
- You do not have to answer every question a reporter asks you. If you are unsure or uneasy about a question, ask why it is being asked and what it has to do with the story. If, after receiving additional information, you still do not want to answer a question, try to avoid saying "no comment." This can sound very abrupt and negative. You can say

instead, "I'm not sure I can answer that" or, in the case of very technical information, "I'm not qualified to answer that." Direct the reporter to someone you think can provide the information.

- Try not to let the reporter put words in your mouth. Help the reporter understand what you mean, but if he or she restates your answer differently, feel free to repeat or restate what you said in your own words.
- Remember to protect your confidentiality and the confidentiality of others. If you have told the reporter you want to be identified by first name only or a pseudonym, do not give out a lot of information that may help to identify you. For instance, do not reveal specifics of where you work and what you do. Also, do not reveal information about others by saying something like, "I first went to a support group with my friend Jane Johnson, who is also a woman living with HIV."

## After the Interview

No one can guarantee that you will always be accurately quoted in the media, but following the tips above can help. After the interview, ask when the story will appear. Read or watch it, and if you feel it was unfair, contact an editor at the publication, website, or station.

## Using Social Media

Social media is a new form of media and is a term used to describe ways to communicate or share information with large groups of people with a focus on networking. Social media comes in many forms, including blogs, chat rooms, videos (YouTube), and social/professional networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

In the past several years, social media has become an extremely important tool for non-profit organizations, causes, public figures, and individual advocates to get information out to large groups of people at little or no cost. You can find great tips on advocating using social media by watching our webinar on [Using Social Media as a Tool for Empowerment and Advocacy](#) [3].

Although social media can be a wonderful tool for networking and communicating, it is important to think about how and what you share on the Internet, as well as to be prepared for Internet "trolls" (those who purposefully post mean and hateful comments). Here are a few suggestions to keep you safe and help you get your message across when using social media:

- Nervous about what to say or how to say it? Try to relax and remember that people are reading what you write. Write or type as if you were talking to a real person. Keep it simple and, as much as possible, be positive. Some sites will block you from participating if you are too negative or critical online, if you 'slam' others, or if you use vulgar language.
- While some websites may be accessible to 'members only,' it is best to assume that whatever you put on the Internet can be seen by anyone. What you share online may be seen by people outside your intended audience, including family members, work colleagues, and others. Although it is a good idea to keep your tone conversational (like talking to a real person), remember that you are not just talking to your best friends.
- To protect your identity and confidentiality, be careful not to share personal information such as your home address, phone number, birth date, or Social Security number. Just as with an interview, identify yourself online as you wish to be identified ? use your

whole name only if you are comfortable doing so. You may choose to use your initials or a pseudonym (a made-up cybername or 'handle') to protect your confidentiality. Also remember not to share other information that can be used to identify you (e.g., name of clinic you go to) or others without their consent.

- When writing or 'posting' information for a blog, try to keep your comments under 500 words and tell a story about one particular topic or issue. It can be helpful to consider your audience (who is likely to read what you post) and to use a creative title to attract attention.

***From the source!*** We asked "[A Girl Like Me](#)" <sup>[4]</sup> blogger and social media activist, [Maria Mejia](#) <sup>[5]</sup> to give her views and tips on using social media for raising HIV awareness. Here is what she said: "Social media' (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, blogs, etc.) has helped me reach millions and also exchange information from the US and all over the world. This is something we did not have in the past. Almost everyone has access to social media now, and there are many wonderful opportunities to raise awareness for those interested in social media activism.

Some of my tips and advice include:

- You can use a fake/different name if you are not comfortable using your real name to raise awareness around HIV or join online HIV support groups (Maria has started two very successful support groups on Facebook in [English](#) <sup>[6]</sup> and [Spanish](#) <sup>[7]</sup>)
- Educate yourself about HIV using resources and websites like [The Well Project](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and [TheBody.com](#) <sup>[9]</sup>
- Becoming a successful social media activist requires a lot of time and dedication, but it does not pay! You have to be willing to volunteer your time!
- Sometimes it is easier to get active by joining an existing group or social media campaign than trying to start a new one. I am always willing to share my advice or knowledge with people when they have questions around what might be the best fit for them.
- When you are reaching an international audience, it is helpful to share news and information in different languages and from different parts of the world

*I have been an activist for almost 13 years, but only using social media for the last two years. However, with social media, I have been able to do more and reach more people around the world in the past two years than in all those previous years combined! Even though it can be a beast, and take a lot of time and passion, social media is here to stay. It is something wonderful that I didn't have when I was diagnosed over 20 years ago. You can make so many friends with people that are in the same situation as you, as well as obtain important information instantly."*

*You can connect with Maria via [Facebook](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, [Twitter](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, [YouTube](#) <sup>[12]</sup> or the Facebook group "[International People with HIV/AIDS and the people who love us](#)" <sup>[13]</sup>"*

There are many websites that offer "how-to" webinars on using various social media tools, several of which are free of charge. Some of The Well Project's favorite resources are [Non-Profit Tech 2.0](#) [14] and [Google for Non-Profits](#) [15]. Please also see the additional resources on this page.

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## Additional Resources

Select the links below for additional material related to talking to the media.

[Using Social Media as a Tool for Empowerment and Advocacy](#) [3]

[FinAid: Guide to Talking with the Press and News Media](#) [27]

[How to Talk to the Media and Get Quoted in the Press \(Nathan Lustig\)](#) [28]

[How to Talk to the Press \(Fortuitous\)](#) [29]

[StaySafeOnline \(National Cyber Security Alliance\)](#) [30]

[Using New Media \(AIDS.gov\)](#) [31]

[Social Network Sites \(AIDS.gov\)](#) [32]

[Women's Rights Campaigning: Info-Activism Toolkit \(also available in Arabic, Kiswahili, and Hindi\) \(CREA\)](#) [33]

[Social Media 101: Getting Started with Facebook and Twitter \(American Association of University Women\)](#) [34]

[Get Smart: Social Media Campaign Seeks to Change How We Look at HIV \(The Body\)](#) [35]

[Social Media and HIV \(NIH/HRSA\)](#) [36]

[Blog for a Cause! The Global Voices Guide to Blog Advocacy \(Global Voices\)](#) [37]

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- [29] [http://fortuito.us/2007/05/how\\_to\\_talk\\_to\\_the\\_press](http://fortuito.us/2007/05/how_to_talk_to_the_press)
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