

THE MEDIA

"What does the word 'media' mean? People who are always showing microphones and cameras in your face!" – Martha

Every family needs to decide the best way to work with the media.

Often the **media** will play a role in the search for an abducted or missing child. If they do and if you are like the rest of us, being around the media is a whole new experience. Your parents may be the best judge when it comes to deciding who in your family should talk to the media and when.

You may have mixed feelings when it comes to talking to the media. On the one hand, they can play an important part in getting the word out about your brother's or sister's abduction. They can help to keep your sibling's story alive to the public. It may seem like the media only want to help. You may find them very sympathetic and friendly. All of this may be very exciting!

On the other hand, you may feel differently about the media as time goes on. They may be constantly coming into your home, invading your family's privacy, and invading your space. Film crews may park all over your front lawn. Their questions may embarrass or hurt you. The story may not turn out the way you thought it would. Sometimes, it may seem like they are not really concerned about you or your family but are more concerned about getting a story for the evening news.

"I was mad at my Mom because the media took pictures of me at my soccer game." – Carmen

"I remember walking across the house in my pajamas and, 30 minutes later, seeing myself on the news." – Martha

Every family needs to decide the best way to work with the media. Your family may want to cooperate with the media to do everything possible to help find your sister or brother. At the same time, your family may not want to talk with the media because it may feel like the trauma is being repeated over and over again.

You may have different and **conflicting** thoughts about the media. You may want to tell them everything to help find your sibling. You may be afraid to talk with them. You may not want to expose your personal feelings to the public. You may not want complete strangers to recognize you and know your business. Tell your parents how you feel about talking with the media. If you are uncomfortable, let your parents know. If you feel like your space is being invaded, talk with your parents. If you feel like the media is hounding you for information, tell your parents or a trusted adult.

Ericka



"Where the media is concerned, there's no such thing as 'off the record.'"

"I didn't go anywhere because I knew they would follow me with questions and I was afraid I'd lose my temper."

Marcus



"You may not realize that when you do an interview, they can skew it a certain way and distort what you're saying."

Sometimes the story about an abduction gets a lot of media coverage, and sometimes it does not. Remember, the media's aim is to get the news of the day out, but what gets aired has a lot to do with what is occurring right now in your community, in the country, and even in the world. Because of this, or because law enforcement has reasons for keeping the story quiet, your sibling's abduction might not make it on the news. That doesn't mean it's unimportant or nobody cares. In some ways, it can be a relief if the media decides not to focus on your family.

*"A lot of people didn't even know that Jacob had a sister. I was 13, and I wanted nothing to do with the media."
- Amy*

Here are some things you can do and think about when dealing with the media:

- Talk with your parents about how to handle the media. Ask how your family is going to handle interviews and media calls. Don't be afraid to say "I don't want to do an interview."
- Have a trusted person with you if you agree to do an interview. They can look out for you and object if they think the

reporter is asking questions that are out of line.

- It's okay to tell a reporter you don't want to talk anymore.
- If you don't feel like talking to the media, just walk away.
- You and your family can request a reporter whom you trust to do an interview with. You can also choose not to do an interview with a reporter you don't trust.
- If the media talks to you behind your parents' backs and you feel they've asked inappropriate questions, tell your parents or another trusted adult about it.
- If you are talking with the media and you don't know an answer, it's okay to say "I don't know."
- If you agree to an interview and then change your mind and decide not to do it, it's okay to say so.



THE MEDIA

The media can cause extra stress on your family if friends or relatives hear information on the news and not from your family. They may say, "I can't believe I had to find out about this on the news." Don't take this personally. Unfortunately, this may be part of the ongoing process for you right now.

Sometimes an event may trigger another media burst of attention. A similar story may come up in the news, or it may be the anniversary of your sibling's abduction. There may be people who want to **capitalize** on your family's misfortune, hounding you for your story, or wanting to make a movie or write a book about it. The media may come back to interview your family all over again. Just be prepared that this might happen. Remember to talk with your family about how you all will handle this.

QUESTIONS YOU HATE TO BE ASKED

It takes only moments from the time of an abduction for you to realize there are questions you dread hearing. When you're in the public eye, many people think they have a right to ask you questions. Somehow people may feel they are entitled. Some people don't want to bother your parents, so they ask you a lot of questions instead.

People will ask you questions for different reasons. Friends and family may genuinely want to know how you are feeling so they can be helpful. But even a seemingly harmless question from a stranger like

"How many brothers and sisters do you have?" can throw you and leave you uncertain how to answer.

"Even today, after all this time, I still don't know how to answer the question, 'How many sisters or brothers do you have?'" - Carmen

*"Nobody knows how to act with you since they have never gone through it."
- Trevor*

The media may ask you questions and broadcast your answers across the country. Law enforcement will ask you questions to help solve the case. While this is necessary, it isn't always easy. And as hard as it is to answer the questions from people you know, it may be even harder to answer questions from people you don't know.

It helps a little to be prepared for certain questions so you're not totally surprised. Here are some questions that may make you feel angry, uncomfortable, guilty, or uncertain—questions that may put you on the spot:

- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Do you think your brother or sister is still alive?
- What happened?
- Are you okay?
- Was your brother or sister sexually abused?
- How does this make you feel?



SOME POSSIBLE ANSWERS

You may have your own answers to the questions we mentioned. But just in case you can't think of what to say, here are some other possible answers.

- How many brothers and sisters do you have? **I have four brothers and sisters, but one is not home right now.**
- Do you think your brother or sister is still alive? **I hope so.**
- What happened? **I don't know what happened. And I don't want to talk about it.**
- Was your brother or sister sexually abused? **I don't know if my brother or sister was sexually abused. But this is not something I am comfortable talking about.**
- How does this make you feel? **I don't want to talk about my feelings right now.**

"Everyone is different, and no one can tell you how to answer these questions." – Marcus

You may answer questions differently from your brothers and sisters. You may answer them differently at different times. It all depends on how you feel at the time. It doesn't make you wrong or a liar.

Many people have good intentions and are asking questions out of real concern. But some people are just plain nosy and **thrive** on learning information that is not really any of their business. They may spread hurtful rumors about your brother or sister. A good response to a rumor might be, "There's no **evidence** to support that."

"I don't know" is a perfectly good answer. So is, "I don't feel like answering that question right now," or "That question makes me feel uncomfortable." What if you can't think of anything to say? Then it's okay to just walk away.

Talk to your parents about any questions that make you uncomfortable. If your parents are not around, find an adult you trust, like a relative, teacher, or family friend, and let them know the questions that make you feel bad. They may be able to tell the questioner "That's enough questions for now," even if you don't feel you can.

THE MEDIA

Or find a good buddy to talk to. Sometimes it helps to simply admit that you're really bummed out. Your friend may not have the answers, but it can help to have a caring person listen.

"I received the news by the answering machine. I felt very helpless. I was mad." – Robin

THE "CLING-ONS"

"Maybe you should just tell your parents, 'I think this person is really weird.'" – Trevor

If your family has received media attention as a result of your sibling's abduction, your family may experience "celebrity" status in the eyes of many people, some of whom we refer to as "cling-ons." These are complete strangers who feel as if they know you because they recognize you from TV or newspapers. They may stake out your house or try to talk to you when your parents are not around. They may seem weird or wacky, and you may not want to have anything to do with them. Talk to your parents about these people. Trust your instincts. If you don't want to talk to them, tell them. If they don't get the message, you or your parents may need to be blunt.