

## Appendix F: A Media Code of Ethics

Proposed by the National Organization for Victim Assistance

**In recognition** that crime and trauma victims who are most of interest to the media deserve to be treated as *innocent* victims; are likely to be in a state of crisis; are likely to say and do things in that vulnerable state which they later consider undignified and embarrassing; are not likely to have had any experience in working with the media; are therefore vulnerable to “second injuries” by inaccurate, intrusive, or unfair press coverage; and may, in later times, re-experience their trauma if their stories are republicized without warning,

I shall:

Give the public factual, objective crime reports, including:

- the type of crime that has occurred;
- the community where the crime occurred;
- the name and description of a suspected or convicted offender if permitted by law; and
- significant facts that may prevent other crimes.

Present a balanced view of crime by ensuring that the victim and the criminal perspectives are given equal coverage whenever possible and appropriate;

When requesting to speak with victims, explain what experienced news sources already know — that they may be interviewed on or off the record, or on limited topics of their choosing, if they desire to give an interview; and further advise them that they have a right not to be interviewed at all;

Quote victims, family members, and friends fairly and in context, appreciating that their most dramatic statements may be misunderstood if not tempered by other statements also made by these sources;

## Community Crisis Response Team Training Manual

Notify and ask permission of victims and their families before using “file-copy” videotapes or photographs for documentaries, news updates, or features.

In writing longer feature articles on victimization subjects, or in hosting radio and television talk shows, use the media as a public education service, with reliable information about the patterns of behavior and reactions being discussed, and always offer readers, listeners, and viewers the name and number of a qualified crisis line for victims and former victims for whom the show or article is a crisis-inducing event.

### **I shall not:**

Photograph, film, or videotape detailed shots of crime scenes, remains of bodies, or visual evidence of brutality, instruments of torture, or the disposal of bodies; and never print or televise even general pictures of such scenes until assured that all relevant loved ones have been notified of the crime.

Print or broadcast unverified or ambiguous facts about the victim, his or her demeanor, background, or relationship to the offender.

Print or broadcast facts about the victim or the criminal act that might embarrass, humiliate, or hurt the victim unless there is a compelling need, such as an interest in the public’s safety, to publish such facts.

Engage in any form of sensationalism in reporting crimes, their investigation, or prosecution, especially erring on the side of restraint with any victim or witness who was not previously a “public figure” or who has evidenced a desire not to become one as a result of the crime.

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