

Amplifying Your Advocacy Messages in the Media

As members of the **Pediatric Policy Council (PPC)** organizations, your voice is incredibly important for advocating for legislative and policy changes on numerous child health issues. Media outlets can provide an effective platform for amplifying your advocacy messages, from providing an expert perspective for a TV news segment on a child health topic to writing a letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper. Below are useful tips and advice for working with the media.

10 Tips for Talking with the Media

1. **Speak from the viewpoint of your audience.** Knowing your audience is the first step for any effective interview. The audience of a professional trade magazine will have a different knowledge base than the readers of a general interest magazine or newspaper. Your tone and approach should be tailored to the audience of the particular medium you're communicating with, but it's also good to go into the interview understanding the opposing point of view so you can prepare to address it.
2. **Don't use jargon.** Explain any technical medical terminology. Avoid abbreviations or unnecessary terms of reference that are not essential to the story's meaning.
3. **Personalize and localize.** A human example always helps readers, viewers and listeners relate. If the interview is for a local market, the more you can make your example relevant to your community, the better.
4. **If you don't want something quoted, don't say it.** There is no such thing as "off the record." Anything you say can be quoted. It's always better to say you don't know but can get back to the reporter with the information than to speculate.
5. **State the most important facts at the beginning.** Repeat them at the end of the interview.
6. **Don't argue** with the reporter or lose your cool if the interview becomes contentious. Even for topics like immunizations where the medical evidence is strong, your message will land more effectively if it's delivered in a calm manner.
7. **If a question contains offensive or erroneous language, don't repeat the negative.** If you say it, the statement becomes your quotable words. It's better to answer with a positive, correct statement.
8. **If you don't know, don't say 'no comment.'** These are flag words for reporters; they may believe you're hiding something. Say you don't know, and offer to find out and follow up.
9. **Don't exaggerate the facts.**
10. **Always tell the truth.**

Remember... when a reporter calls, **do your homework!** Learn more about the news outlet, ask about the angle the reporter is pursuing for the story and anticipate questions. If the outlet has a biased point-of-view, if the reporter's approach and questioning in reaching out makes you uncomfortable, if the topic feels irrelevant for your expertise, or if you simply cannot accommodate the reporter's deadline, you can decline the request. Further, we suggest that you speak with your home institution to find out the organization's policy for engaging the media on an issue. Finally, for useful videos and testimonials regarding communicating with the public as a scientist, please visit the website of the [Center for Communicating Science](#) at the State University of New York (SUNY) – Stony Brook.



Preparing for an Interview and Communicating Your Key Messages

Before your interview, come up with one to three key messages or SOCOs -- **Single Overriding Communications Objectives**. Crystallize these into a few short sentences using simple, jargon-free language. Develop message supports that will help you communicate your SOCO. Messages supports include:

- **Stories** – A story or anecdote can help make an emotional connection with your audience.
- **Statistics** - Use statistics that people can relate to. Make it personal, or use a ratio that brings a large number down to an individual level.
- **Sound bites** - A sound bite expresses your message in a memorable, colorful or witty manner. They make dull stories livelier. It will be hard for a reporter to resist using this quote. Take some time to think of a sound bite in advance; these are difficult to ad-lib.

Interview Techniques

During the interview, you can use techniques to highlight your SOCO and to bridge into your message supports. Three techniques can help you stay focused on your SOCOs: **Bridging, hooking and flagging**.

Technique	Description	Example phrases
Bridging	Using a transitional phrase to go from a negative question to a positive statement that reflects your SOCO. Bridging does not mean you ignore or evade the question. You briefly address the topic and then bridge into your key message.	<i>"We don't know that, but what we do know is ..."</i> <i>"Keep in mind that..."</i> <i>"Let me put that in perspective"</i> <i>"I'm not sure that's the case..."</i>
Hooking	Answering a question by leading to one of your SOCOs by offering statistics, data or lists.	<i>"Although X has occurred, new data show that Y is true"</i> <i>"That's just one of the benefits of..."</i>
Flagging	Using phrases that make the reporter stop and listen.	<i>"The real issue here is..."</i> <i>"If you only remember one thing, remember this..."</i>

Earned Media Opportunities

Earned media opportunities, such as **letters-to-the-editor** (LTEs) or **opinion-editorials** (op-eds), are effective platforms for communicating your opinion about a timely issue in a local or national news outlet. The table below highlights the differences between the two earned media opportunities:

Opinion editorials (op-eds)	Letters-to-the-editor (LTEs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest editorial, typically by a community leader, expert or prominent individual • Should be timely but does not have to be in response to a specific story • Your opinion: personal voice, express a position you are uniquely suited to write about • 400-600 words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sent "To the Editor" in response to editorial and/or news article • Must be timely • Used to clarify a point, refute a charge, praise an initiative • Typically less than 250 words • No guarantee it will be published

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The guidelines and instructions for submitting LTEs or op-eds to a specific newspaper can often be found on the newspaper's website. **Please note that many op-eds and LTEs are considered "exclusive;" you can only submit your piece to one newspaper at a time.** Should one publication decline to publish your piece, you can resubmit to another, but you should avoid sending your op-ed to several newspapers at once. In addition, please click [here](#) and [here](#) to see examples of a successful op-ed and LTE respectively.