

Ethical Practices

There are ethical issues you may wish to consider when reporting on traumatic events. Maintaining your ethics and professionalism under pressure will ensure that you are comfortable with your own actions when you reflect on them later and will help you deal with your own feelings about the incident.

Before you interview a person who has been a witness to trauma, or a victim of violence, think about whether it is strictly necessary to interview the person immediately. They may be grieving, shocked, disoriented, or frightened. They may feel either guilty or elated that they have survived if others have not. This means that they may not be thinking clearly when they are asked for an interview or may have their own confused reasons for speaking to you. You need to ensure that they understand your role as a journalist and that they are able to give their consent to talk with you.

Some points to consider include:

- Follow any directions that are given by the authorities, such as police or emergency services, about going onto the site or interviewing those involved. In particular, follow instructions about not revealing information that has not yet been publicly released, such as the identity of those involved.
- Identify yourself immediately and clearly as a journalist and explain that you are there to report on the event. Make sure that those who are distressed understand this before speaking with you.
- Give clear details of what type of report you are doing print or broadcast, what angle you intend to take. Make sure they understand that their comments or footage may or may not be used in the final edit of the story.
- Offer to pause the interview (and stop filming or recording) if a person is becoming distressed. Some people may feel more comfortable if they are able to turn or move away from the scene, or to have someone with them during the interview.
- Avoid revealing the identity of those involved unless you have their consent. Do not reveal the identity of a deceased person unless the authorities have officially released such information.
- Try not to take photographs or footage of specific people without their consent. Avoid capturing particularly disturbing images such as severe injuries or dead bodies, and do not show the method of death in cases of suicide.
- Review the facts with an interviewee before you finish and read back any quotes you are thinking of using. Make sure, again, that you have their consent to include their comments or images in a report.