

HANDLING THE MEDIA

(The following excerpts are from a paper developed by The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.)

The most important part of media work is preparation. The CCAAC (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada) can give you practical advice if you need it.

Developing a Media List

You need to know how to contact your local print, radio and television media. Your local library will have a list of media in your area. Do not limit yourself to mainstream media. Many organizations have newsletters. Most universities and community colleges have newspapers and campus radio stations. There are also community access programs on cable television. These formats may be more receptive to carrying the child care message and provide more in-depth coverage.

Contacting the Media

Designate one person to be the media contact in your area. Below are some guidelines for your spokesperson to follow:

- If you see a good story, write the paper or call the station and say so. Keep it brief.
- If you see a negative or incorrect story, you can write or call to correct facts of interpretations, but do not argue with the journalist. Usually a letter to the editor or the station is most effective.
- Contact the social services journalist at your local newspaper. Tell them you are lobbying for a national child care program. Offer to send information. Keep it low-key and casual.
- Send a press release to the media after you meet with your MP (or MLA). Keep it to one page, single spaced with no more than three sentences to each paragraph.
- Phone around the day after you issue your press release. Keep it simple. Remind the journalist of your release and offer to fax another if it hasn't reached them. Ask if they want to interview you. Don't push, journalists often don't know whether they can cover a story right away.

- Keep track of your contact with journalists and the coverage you get. This will help you identify which reporters will cover child care, what their angles have been and what the newspaper's editorial position is.

When the Media Call You

Journalists make a lot of people nervous. These tips will help you plan a successful interview:

- Be sure you have their name and the name of the station/newspaper.
- Ask them some questions before you start answering theirs. What is their deadline? What is the focus of their story? Who else are they talking to? How much do they know about child care?
- If you need time to prepare your answers, ask the journalist to call back in 30 minutes and use the time to make notes for yourself.
- Remember the themes and key messages of the campaign. Bridge from touch questions to your agenda. You can keep control of the interview.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know, but offer to get back to the journalist with the information.
- Speak a little more slowly than you normally do so you have more time to think. In live interviews, this ensures you get your share of air time.
- Dress simply and comfortably for live interviews. No dangling jewelery or busy prints. No black and white above the waist – it looks bad on camera.
- If the interview is in your home or office, look around. You want to be seen as non-partisan. There should be nothing distracting or offensive visible. You may want to put up campaign posters or banners.
- Remember, **you are always on the record**. Do not make remarks you wouldn't want repeated.
- Do not argue with media. Present your case firmly and keep coming back to your key messages.
- Do not repeat incorrect or misleading questions. Say instead "the real question here is. Key message".
- Remember, journalists always have the last word.