



Media 101: CCBR's Tips for Effective Interviews



Goal

The *primary* goal is to articulate a winsome and persuasive defense for the pro-life message to large numbers of people via the platform of the media. The *secondary* goal is to “evangelize” reporters with the knowledge and wisdom of the pro-life message and with the character of pro-life messengers.

Background


Pro-life spokespersons need to remember they are in a position of advocate—like a lawyer, they are advocating for their “client,” in this case that means pre-born children who cannot defend themselves. It is important the spokesperson be clear and compelling in her language—humanizing the pre-born child and dehumanizing the act of abortion. No matter what question the pro-lifer is asked, she should bridge to the central issue of human rights for the pre-born.

Sometimes media opportunities arise as a result of injustice directed towards pro-lifers, such as censorship; in these situations, spokespersons should look for ways to, as quickly as possible, redirect to the issue of the pre-born: “Silencing and censoring us is an injustice, but that’s nothing compared to slicing and decapitating pre-born children.”


Other times media opportunities arise as a result of a controversial pro-life method, such as the public display of abortion victim photography; again, the pro-lifer needs to redirect to the cause of the babies: “The images are shocking but that’s because dismembering and disemboweling the body of a baby is a shocking thing. We should ask ourselves, ‘What’s worse? The image of abortion or the act of abortion?’”

CCBR strongly believes in the power of images to pierce peoples’ hearts; in media interviews, however, pro-lifers typically don’t have the opportunity to use pictures (media outlets may censor them) so our next best weapon becomes word pictures. It is therefore imperative that spokespersons use language to create mental images, that they use language to accurately and compellingly describe who the child is and what the injustice is that is happening to her.

Language Choices:


Who the child is: 

- Pre-born
- The youngest of our kind
- The weak and vulnerable
- Unrepeatable individual

What abortion does/is: 

- Decapitates, dismembers, and disembowels
- Shreds
- Slices
- Tears apart
- Destroys
- Human rights violation

- Crime against humanity

What we're showing: 

- Abortion victim photography (not “graphic” imagery)

Adoption

- Place a child (instead of “give up”)

Our Fundamental Points: What to Say to Frequently Asked Media Questions:




Unless you are being interviewed live, most interviews last for several minutes and quotes used by you last for several seconds. It is therefore imperative that the spokesperson choose her words wisely. Stay in control of what you say—no one can force you to say anything you don't want to, so learn the art of being focused, clear, and of bridging. Keep your sound bytes brief.

When preparing, think about what questions a reporter could ask, and prepare sample responses. Ask yourself the Five Ws. Within your interview, look for ways to plug facts (e.g., the child's heart starts beating at 3 weeks after fertilization) or plug more information (e.g., and people can see that at EndtheKilling.ca). Avoid disunity/disagreement with other pro-lifers, and instead focus on the positive fruits of our work and the support we do have. Focus on changed minds and saved lives rather than angry complaints.

Below are some sample media questions and pro-life responses . And remember: the question is rarely used in an interview—only your answer:

- Please say and spell your name for me [This is so the reporter accurately reports on you.]
- What is your position and what is the organization?
- What is CCBR?


We are an educational human rights organization.


- Why are you here? 

We are here because children are being killed here.


We exist to make abortion—an action which decapitates, dismembers, and disembowels a child—unthinkable.


- What are you doing?

We are displaying abortion victim photography to show how abortion dismembers, decapitates, and disembowels the body of a child  the youngest of our kind.

Our goal is to save babies from being killed, spare women pain, encourage post-abortive women to seek help and initiate a dialogue about abortion. 


- Describe your postcards.

The postcards depict the broken body of a pre-born child who has been killed by abortion; they show tiny arms with fingers; you can see little legs and feet that have been ripped off the torso; there is a lot of blood because the child has been killed. 

- Aren't these too graphic? 

What is worse: *seeing* that abortion kills a child or the *fact* that abortion kills a child? Shouldn't we be more bothered by the *act* of injustice than the *image* of injustice?

The images *are* disgusting because abortion—killing a human child—is a disgusting thing.

- What about children? 

Part of the category of children includes pre-born children. Shouldn't we prioritize the *lives* of pre-born children over the *feelings* of born children?

Is this about children not being able to handle images of injustice, or about adults not being able to explain to children how they tolerate living in a culture that kills the youngest children among us?

We are taking our message to those who are old enough to have abortions because then they are old enough to see abortions. We aren't going to places where *only* children are present; we are taking our message to where teenagers and adults are.

The Alberta government displays bloody seat-belt ads on billboards warning people to buckle-up, and children can see those images, so why the double standard with abortion images?



- What about people getting angry? 

Babies are alive today because their mothers saw images like these and cancelled abortion appointments.

We care more about what people think about abortion than how they feel about us. We want to turn them off of killing children and we have evidence the pictures do that.

The history of successful social reform movements—like the Civil Rights Movement—involves confronting the culture with a message many don't want to hear or see.





- What about post-abortive women?  

40% of annual abortions are repeats; in other words, 40,000 women who have killed one child will kill another so abortion victim photography is needed to deter people from their first or their subsequent abortion.

We met one post-abortive woman who, through tears, told us nobody had told her it looked like that—and so she killed her child only a few months before meeting us because someone withheld the very information we're bringing forward. Women deserve to know the facts.

- What about someone who's in a tough situation—too tough to have a baby?


Shouldn't a civil society alleviate a woman's difficult circumstances without eliminating that woman's child? 

- Some people are saying this approach is too much, and should be unlawful. What do you say to that? 

If complaints are grounds to censor speech, no speech will ever be allowed because someone is likely to complain.

Unpopular speech needs to be protected precisely because it's unpopular. No one is going to try to censor popular speech.

People don't have a right not to be offended. Furthermore, if people are offended by our message that children are being killed, how much more should they be offended *that* children are being killed?

- Couldn't your imagery be considered obscene? 

From Criminal Code of Canada: "Obscene publication definition: (8) For the purposes of this Act, any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence, shall be deemed to be obscene."

Since it requires violence, crime, horror, etc., AND sex, it doesn't apply to our imagery.



Sample Good Interviews to Study and Emulate

Michael Coren's The Arena, Sun News, about CCBP's postcards:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Da_IeUi-YG8&list=UUn3J5u7kcm1Ja9Yqnr8iE3w

The Current, CBC Radio: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fc-yuBi4u5g&list=UUn3J5u7kcm1Ja9Yqnr8iE3w>

Jim Richards Show, Newstalk 1010:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jov7UGB010o&list=PLFBCECF564A5304BA&index=8>

Jim Richards Show, Newstalk 1010 (different from above):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBo8rXQcWd0&list=PLFBCECF564A5304BA&index=16>

Global News Lethbridge:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKVJT5YL4ZY&list=PLFBCECF564A5304BA&index=18>

Global News Toronto: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8Mk8JmDmvE>

CBC Radio Daybreak South, Kelowna: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaArBP2CAJ8>

CBC Hamilton Online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/news/replay-graphic-anti-abortion-imagery-effective-or-not-1.1873093>

Tips for Communicating with the Media

Overall Advice When Talking to Reporters¹

- Be polite
- Never lose your temper.
- Try to be helpful.
- If you don't know the answer, say so, but offer to find it.
- Don't lie; always tell the truth.
- If you can't tell the truth, don't be evasive.
- Stick to your area of responsibility.

¹ This section quoted directly from: "Communicate With Power: Encountering the Media," Barry McLoughlin Associates, Inc., 2-3.

- Don't be sarcastic or give a smart-aleck response.
- Answer the reporter's questions, but return to your message track.
- If you aren't sure, ask the reporter to repeat the question.
- Put the story or issue into context.
- Stick to the facts. Keep your opinions out of it.
- Repeat messages.
- Respect reporters' deadlines.
- Call back when you promised.
- Keep track of what was said during the interview.
- Watch closely for the story which results

How to Negotiate and Prepare a Media Interview²

When a reporter calls...

- Be polite, honest, helpful, friendly
- Communicate your wish to help
- Stress you need information first
- Be professional
- Avoid “off the record” comments
- Don't say anything you don't want printed or broadcast
- Stay calm
- Don't say “no comment”
- Don't automatically agree or refuse

Questions to Ask the Reporter

- Your name again?
- Representing what media outlet?
- When is the deadline?/When will the story be run?
- May I call you back in an hour?
- What is your phone number? FAX number?
- What is it about?
- What particular aspect are you focusing on?
- What is the story or angle?
- Give me an idea of some other people you're talking to on this?
- How much do you know about our organization (or the subject)?

The goal of the interview is to be message-driven not question-driven.³

Being message-driven means:

- Know what your messages are
- Begin where you want
- Consistently deliver messages
- Assertively bring them into interview

² Ibid., 28-29.

³ Ibid., 33.

- Don't merely respond to questions

What Makes an Irresistible Quotable Quote?⁴ If it is

- Brief
- Self-contained
- Everyday language
- Colourful or metaphorical
- Passionate or energetic

Bridging and Deflecting: Controlling the Track of the Interview⁵

If you find that the reporter is steering the interview away from the subject area that you feel comfortable discussing, bring it back by using **bridges** to bridging phrases that lead to your message.

- “Let’s look at it from a broader perspective...”
- “There is another, more important concern and that is...”
- “Let’s not lose sight of the underlying problem...”
- “That is not the real issue. The real issue is...”

Other Tips⁶

- Assume your interview is being recorded.
- You may wish to record the interview as well.
- Project a pleasant, warm voice.
- Animate your face (it warms up the tone of your voice).
- Avoid “ums” and “uhs.”
- Speak clearly, not too fast and not too slow.
- Direct eye contact with the interviewer is important, unless they tell you to look into the camera.
- Smile when appropriate (be friendly)
- Ensure your appearance is clean cut, modest & well groomed.

Remember: Keep track of reporters you meet—their contact information and copies of their report. They become good contacts when you do other pro-life work in the future.

⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶ Ibid.