



GUIDELINES FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, HON.OFFICERS FOR CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA (PRESS, RADIO, T.V.)

Introduction

The press, TV and radio can be powerful friends for organisations like Mind and the people we exist to help. But they also have their own agenda which may conflict with our own. For this reason, and because they frequently get things wrong, we need to handle our contact with the media with great care.

Enquiries and requests for information or comment from the media fall into three main categories:-

1. Enquiries about specific incidents or individual people

Examples :- a suicide; an assault on a member of the public by a patient released from compulsory detention in hospital; a fire at a Mind project.

No trustee or member of staff apart from the Chief Executive is permitted to comment on specific incidents or individual people and this should be made clear to media representatives. All enquiries must be referred to the Chief Executive or the Chairman. S/he may delegate the responsibility for responding to media enquiries to another staff member or trustee in specific circumstances such as absence on holiday.

Staff must brief the Chairman or Vice-Chairman about the incident in question before s/he makes a response.

2. Requests for comment on general mental health issues

These are likely to fall into two categories:-

a) Issues where Mind's policy is established and well-known.

Example:- support for increased user involvement in running services.

b) Current issues where Mind's Board of Directors may not have discussed and agreed on the view the organisation should hold and promote.

Examples:- what is the impact of the new system of care management on clients locally; are homeless people in Croydon receiving adequate medical care?

The Chief Executive is the only member of staff authorised to comment on these matters.

3. Requests for factual and statistical information

- Examples:-**
- a) how many flats did Mind furnish last year?
 - b) when is the Fairfield Club open?
 - c) how many homeless people in Croydon are mentally ill?

Project leaders (Fairfield, Enterprise, Furniture, Welfare Benefits, Counselling) may answer such questions with direct factual information (provided they are certain they know the answer!) but they may not give an opinion or comment. They should not answer questions about project funding which should be referred to the Chief Executive for a response. Questions like (c) are often impossible for Mind to answer and callers should be referred to the Director of Public Health.

N.B. NON-SENIOR STAFF ARE NOT PERMITTED TO MAKE STATEMENTS OR RESPOND TO QUERIES FROM THE MEDIA IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

This includes all staff members except the senior staff and project leaders specifically referred to above.

Press Releases

Where Mind in Croydon has an agreed view on an issue and wishes to use the press to publicise it or help in campaigning on it, it is advisable to prepare a press release. A press release is also a helpful way of keeping the press informed of the opening of new projects or other achievements. Such prepared statements for the press must be approved by the Chairman before release.

Submitting Articles for Publication

All articles must be approved by the Chief Executive or Chairman before they are submitted for publication.

Radio and TV Programmes

No trustee or member of staff apart from the Chief Executive may agree to participate in a radio or television programme in connection with their work for Mind without the permission of the Chairman or the representative to whom s/he has delegated responsibility in this matter.

Interviews carried out or responses given over the phone must be carried out strictly within the provisions of these guidelines.

Volunteers

Volunteers are not permitted to respond to queries or otherwise give information to the media except under the direct supervision of a senior staff member (project leader or above) or an Hon. Officer.

General guidelines

When a call from the media is received note down who is calling, from which agency, and the subject of the enquiry or request for comment. If possible take notes of the conversation as you go along, or ask someone else to note down at least what you say.

Remember to make it clear who you are, what your status is within Mind, and whether or not you are able to speak for Mind as a whole.

If you are unable to answer a query or make a comment say why you can't (you're not permitted to do so, you don't know the answer etc.) Refer the caller to another agency or the Chief Executive/Chairman if appropriate. This preserves good relations with the calling agency better than stonewalling or avoiding the question.

This policy should be revised every three years.

Review and updated by the Board of Directors December 2007