

GETTING PREPARED FOR A MEDIA INTERVIEW

How to Maximize the Impact of Your Message

- Have a good understanding before the interview begins what the reporter generally plans to cover. You should be able to get that information from the person arranging the interview.
- If you are nervous or anxious, ask to do role-playing ahead of time. Ask the person arranging the interview to play the role of reporter. It is a good way to settle those nerves and consider how best to answer some questions you expect to be asked.
- Be clear in your mind what you are comfortable in disclosing about your personal life so that if a question is asked that you do not want to answer you will not go beyond your boundaries. Do not make these decisions during the course of the interview. Have your own internal ground rules set ahead of time.
- You have agreed to be interviewed and identified by the media. That does not mean anyone else in your life has agreed. That confidentiality must be respected.
- If there are people in your life who you believe would not object to being identified and discussed, clarify this with them up front and before the interview.
- A reporter may ask you the same question in several different ways in an effort to elicit more information than you are willing to provide. Do not let them badger you. If you do not want to answer the question—no matter how it is asked—do not give in.
- If you are confused about what the reporter is asking in a particular question, ask the reporter to rephrase the question. Do not try to guess. This is your life and your story and you have every right to be certain what is being asked of you!
- You may well know more about HIV than the reporter you are talking to knows. If the reporter says something that is factually incorrect do not let it stand. Correct the record. It will not be helpful to you, or the reporter, to be associated with a factually flawed story.
- At the end of the interview, if you feel the reporter has missed some key points, say so. A reporter usually will be grateful for that kind of help because the information will make for a stronger story.
- Do not be fooled. A reporter is not your friend. The *story* is a reporter's friend, so he or she will do what is best for the story. Do not get lulled into a comfort zone where you may say something you will later regret.
- Once you have told a reporter something, there is no taking it back. That is why this kind of preparation is necessary.