

## GETTING PREPARED FOR AN INTERVIEW

### *A Guide for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS*

- 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. Have the person who arranged the interview play the role of reporter. It is a good way to settle your nerves and consider how best to answer questions you expect to be asked.
- Be clear in your mind what you are comfortable in disclosing about your HIV status 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 you share stories, for example, about how you became infected, do not provide information that would make it obvious who infected you. Instead of saying, “my boyfriend Gary infected me” you can say “I had unprotected sex with a partner.”
  - If you have children it will, of course, be very difficult to shield them. If you go public they, by default, will be easy to identify in your community and in their schools. So, think this through and make sure the decision you are making for yourself is also a good one for your children. Allowing a television camera into their lives escalates this even more, so be cautious and make sure the consequences have been thought through.
  - 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.
- Don't 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 say something you later regret.
- Once you have told a reporter something, there is no taking it back. That is why this kind of preparation is necessary.