

**group
action
pack**

**Writing a press release and speaking to the
media: for local and national support groups in
England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales**

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Introduction

A press release is a short summary of an event or other piece of news. This is one of the best and easiest ways to alert the media about an event or campaign you are organising.

A press release is that it needs to be topical. It should be made very clear what is new or what the forthcoming event is. A short, well-written, press release can save a journalist an enormous amount of time and effort. With deadlines to meet, that can mean the difference between using your item or not.

Do not completely rely on the media taking up your story. If it is vital that your information is published make sure you have alternatives - you could produce a flyer or poster with all the necessary information and distribute, or you could use social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter to spread the word.

Once you have built up a rapport with a journalist or editor, a press release may not be appropriate or needed. A telephone call or personal visit may be more suitable. Often positive personal contact can mean the difference between a short item of news and a full length feature.

What should be in the press release?

- The title should be short, say what the press release is about and contain the keywords.
- Write a short introductory paragraph which includes the five 'Ws': What, Who, Where, When, Why. This may be the only part of the press release the editor reads so include all the main details.
- Write the most important facts at the top of the press release - editors short of space may cut from the bottom upwards.
- Include a quotation to make the press release more personal, for example: Sue Clarke, group co-ordinator, said: "We provide support for families in the local area - a place to meet, share experiences and reduce feelings of isolation."
- Give the contact details for the group which you want the paper to include in the article.
- A note to editors at the end of the press release giving them brief details about the group.
- Write the date at the top of the press release.
- The name and telephone number (day and evening) of someone who can be contacted for further details.
- Try not to include jargon or abbreviations.

Tips on writing a press release

- Find out when press deadlines are.
- Decide who you want to target: families only or professionals as well? People from which geographical area?
- You should aim to use just one side of A4 - certainly no more than 300 words.
- No sentence should be longer than 20 words.
- No paragraph should be longer than six sentences.
- Write as factually as possible. It is a journalist's job to think of an 'angle' for the story.
- Stick to a single topic. Don't be tempted to include information on future events.

Tabloid newspapers tend to go for the interest story format with headlines such as 'My daughter is the only one in the UK with A N Other Syndrome'. The bulk of the story will be about the girl and her family. These stories are usually written internally. It can be difficult to ensure accuracy and the inclusion of your group details.

Broadsheet newspapers give prominence to research findings such as 'One in every 30,000 children is thought to have mild A N Other Syndrome'. The text will cover the background and implications of the research with a short quote from a family. You are more likely to be able to work with broadsheet journalists to ensure accuracy and correct details of your group.

Sending your press release

Before you send your press release:

- make sure the press release is agreed by all who need to see it.
- check you have permission to use any quotes.
- double check dates, times and contact details.
- inform any interested parties, for example, doctors or other professionals and families mentioned, about the release before you send it to journalists.

Who should you send it to?

- Read the papers, watch the television programmes and listen to the radio shows you are considering and get a feel for them: would they be interested in your story?

- Phone the papers, television or radio station and ask for the name of the most appropriate journalist to send your release to.

How should you send your press release?

Email: put a brief title in the subject line that summarises the story. Include the press release in the body of the message, not as an attachment. Follow up with a phone call.

Either search the internet or telephone the paper, radio or TV station for an email address.

Always call to check that the press release has been received.

Should you include a photograph?

Local newspapers are always looking for good photographs. If you are holding an event which is a good photo opportunity, you should contact your local paper and ask if there is a photographer available to attend.

If there is no photographer available, you could try taking a picture yourself and sending it to the newspaper. It's worth remembering that newspapers are not keen on photographs of cheque presentations or people standing in a long line. Group photographs of children or families or people taking part in an activity are more likely to be included.

You could send a photograph with your press release. Alternatively, you could include a note at the top of your release - photographs available on request. This is particularly relevant if you are sending the release out by email as attaching large photographs may prevent your email from being delivered.

If you do include a photograph with your release, make sure that you have permission from the families in the photograph to use the photograph in this way. Permission is discussed in more detail in the Group Action Pack Guide *Producing leaflets, newsletters and posters*.

What does 'embargoed' mean?

Some press releases are embargoed. If you want to publish research on a particular day to make a big impact or you want to publicise an event on the day it happens, you can use an embargo. This means the publication cannot print the information in the release until after a specified time and date (see example press release below).

Example of a press release

Contact: Elaine Bennett, Media Officer, to: 020 7608 8741
e: elaine.bennett [at] cafamily.org.uk

For immediate release, 9 February 2015

STOP CUTS TO VITAL SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN SAYS LOCAL GROUP

Local parents in Cornwall are joining forces with other families up and down the country to put pressure on all local authorities to stop cutting vital specialist services for disabled children and their families.

The parents' who are supported by disability charity Contact a Family, want local authorities to recognise that long waiting times and cuts to essential services like speech and language therapy, school transport or short breaks is unacceptable and may be harmful to a disabled child's health and development.

The families want local authorities to do more to ensure they are at the heart of local planning, decisions and commissioning of services and forms part of Contact a Family's *Cuts Watch* campaign to find out more about where and what services are being cut and their impact.

Mrs Jones from Cornwall represents parent-carers in the area. She has a seven-year-old son, John, who has cerebral palsy and says: "It's time for local authorities across the UK to put an end to cutting services for disabled children and their families and to do more to prioritise their needs. When a disabled child gets the right support they thrive. When these services are reduced or cut altogether, their condition can get worse or they can struggle to learn crucial independence skills such as walking and talking.

"As a mother of a disabled child I want to make sure that no child has to wait months or years for an appointment with a specialist or to get a diagnosis for their child. It's vital that as a group we have more say in how our local councils and health services run and deliver services so that delays in accessing speech and language and occupational therapy or mental health support for example is no longer the norm for families with a disabled child."

Una Summerson from UK charity Contact a Family says: "Cuts and pressures on local authority and health budgets over the last few years are chipping away at vital services for families with disabled children that enable families to take part in everyday activities, keeping them working and staying healthy. While Contact a Family recognises that local councils have a difficult decision to make, we fully support local parent groups who are challenging local decisions to cut funding for children's services such as short breaks, school transport and speech and language services."

Notes for editors

- Information about the parent group / forum goes here
- Contact details for more information about this press release goes here

- [Contact a Family](#) supports families with disabled children across the UK. Whatever the condition, whenever they need us, wherever they are. We provide information, advice and support and campaign to improve their circumstances, and for their right to be included and equal in society.
- For more information about Contact a Family and the Cuts Watch campaign contact the charity's press office: press@cafamily.org.uk or call 020 7608 8776

Ends

Talking to the Media

Talking to the media about your support group and about your child's condition provides an opportunity to:

- raise awareness of the work you do
- reach out to more parents
- raise awareness of a condition
- raise the profile of your group with potential funders, policy makers and other related organisations.

Being interviewed by a journalist

A major reason for you agreeing to an interview will be to raise awareness of the support group. The media are most interested in human interest stories and will probably want a personal angle to the story. It is advisable to consider how much you want to reveal about your family situation and your child's condition before the interview.

Remember you are in control and are within your rights to ask what sort of article it is that your interview will be a part of. What will be the central theme of the article? Be aware that you can withdraw at any time if you are unhappy with the journalist or the article.

Journalists are often in a rush and can sometimes get facts and figures incorrect. It's worth checking details with them, such as telephone numbers, addresses and spelling of names.

You can ask the journalist to provide a list of questions so that you can prepare. You can also ask the journalist to read back the transcript so that facts can be verified. It is not always possible to see the article before it goes to print, but certainly you can insist on having a good understanding of what the piece will contain.

If the journalist asks you a question that you are not happy about or which you don't feel confident enough to reply to, it is perfectly ok to say so.

Remember to ask when the article is due to appear so that the group can prepare for possible public interest and increased enquiries.

TV and radio interviews

Check the context your interview will be used in. What is the programme about? What is the purpose of your interview? How will your child and family be portrayed?

Before the interview, think of three points you would really like to get across and stick closely to this. Using examples, imagery or some basic statistical facts will make more interesting listening. Before the interview starts, ask what the first question will be and how long the interview will last. You will want to know whether it is 'live' or recorded. 'Live' has the advantage of broadcasting exactly what you have said. Recorded material will probably be cut and edited, but you have the advantage of being able to stop and ask to rephrase your answer.

Local stations may be interested in support group events for inclusion in features such as 'What's on' slots, news bulletins, longer features or as part of a social action/community programme.

If you are asked to take part in an interview, think about the following:

- consider what message you want to get across to the listening public
- try to brief the interviewer first. They should at least know your name, the name of your group and the main information you want to get across.
- be ready with some facts about the group and your topic, but bear in mind that most interviews are very short - get your key information in early.

National radio and television include more factual programmes and important news interest stories.

- Try to ensure that details of your group are given at the end of a programme.
- Unless you are fully prepared for it, avoid your telephone number being given at the end of the programme (your phone line could be completely blocked with calls - some made in the middle of the night!).

If you do speak to the media, it would be very great if you would give out details of Contact a Family's freephone helpline 0808 808 3555, as well as details for your support group.

Media opportunities with Contact a Family

If you are interested in being a media volunteer with Contact a Family, to raise awareness your family's situation and support other families whose children have disabilities or additional needs, call us on 020 7608 8700 and ask to speak to our press team.

Useful Contacts

How to get local media coverage - a press kit for Locality members

This guide aims to help community and voluntary organisations approach local media.

<http://locality.org.uk/resources/press-toolkit/>

KnowHowNonProfit

You'll find lots of useful information on media, marketing and communications on NCVO's KnowHowNonProfit website

<http://knowhownonprofit.org/campaigns>

Making the Media Work for You - European Journalism Centre

This new resource published by the European Journalism Centre is aimed at civil society organisation communicators. Whether you're running local or national support group, the Guide has practical, cost-effective strategies to help you raise and maintain your visibility and impact.

<http://mediapusher.eu/pressfreedom/downloads/making.the.media.work.for.you-ebook.pdf>

Skills Guide: How to write a press release'

Who? Communications has an online guide to getting your message into the media. The guide goes through the process of writing a press release, deciding when to use a press release rather than social media, who to target and how to produce it.

www.whocommunications.co.uk/WhoComms-write-a-press-release.pdf

The Media Trust Community Newswire

The Media Trust has a Community Newswire service to help selected charities get their stories into national and regional media across the UK.

www.mediatrust.org/communications-services/news-distribution

Pressat press release distribution service for small, registered charities

Pressat provides a free press release distribution service for registered charities, non-profits and social enterprises looking to spread news to various media outlets and channels across the UK. You will also find free templates for writing press releases.

www.pressat.co.uk/free-news-distribution-for-charities-and-non-profits

IBM UK Marketing Matters

IBM UK Marketing Matters provides a *pro bono* consultancy to charities and the third sector. Services include workshops, a one-to-one consultancy, and a mentoring scheme. IBM volunteers spend a day working one-to-one through the challenges that attendees have, using branding and marketing presentations.

www-05.ibm.com/uk/marketingmatters/

Do Something Brilliant - Community channel TV

Do Something Brilliant is a campaign celebrating local charities, communities and individuals and aims to inspire audiences in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to make a difference in their community.

www.dosomethingbrilliant.co.uk

Local Group Network

Our Network is for local support groups to share ideas, top tips and good practice. It is free to join, just visit [our website here](#) and fill out the form. If you are running or want to start a group in:

Northern Ireland, email
nireland.office@cafamily.org.uk

Scotland, email
scotland.office@cafamily.org.uk

Wales/Cymru, email
cymru@cafamily.org.uk

England, email
adele.meader@cafamily.org.uk

Connect with us

www.cafamily.org.uk
www.facebook.com/contactafamily
www.twitter.com/contactafamily
www.youtube.com/cafamily

Group Action Pack for local and national support groups

Whether you're setting up a local parent support group, developing a national charity or a social enterprise, our guides are packed with advice and tips. Other guides include:

- *Effective meetings*
- *Fundraising*
- *The role of trustees*
- *Holding a family day*
- *Group development and information for local support groups*
- *Social media*
- *Newsletters, posters and flyers*
- *Websites*
- *'What outfit do we need?': legal structures for support groups*
- *Public speaking*
- *A guide for professionals working with parent support groups*
- *Developing a national rare condition support group*
- *The role of a medical adviser in national support groups*



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