

Successfully using media (social and traditional) to promote your forum and reach more parents

Elaine Bennett (Media lead at Contact) and Ruth Hobbs (Contact Associate and Chair of Somerset PCF)



Building Confidence, Strengthening Voices, Creating Impact

- Communicate key messages clearly and confidently
- Prepare for interviews and handle challenging questions
- Use media opportunities to raise awareness of SEND issues
- Engage families and influence decision-makers through social media
- Manage online challenges, misinformation, and reputational risks
- Know when to respond—and when not to engage online
- Increase visibility, celebrate successes, and advocate effectively for parent carers

Empowering Parent Carer Forums to use media positively, responsibly, and effectively.



When used effectively, social media can inform, connect, influence, and strengthening the voice of Parent Carer Forums.

Raises Awareness – Helps share information about SEND issues, services, and events quickly.

Improves Engagement – Enables direct communication with families and stakeholders.

Amplifies Voices – Gives parent carers a platform to share experiences and influence change.

Shares Information Quickly – Provides timely updates, resources, and opportunities.

Celebrates Successes – Showcases achievements, good practice, and positive outcomes.

Connects Communities – Brings families, professionals, and support networks together.

Encourages Peer Support – Creates spaces for parents to exchange advice, experiences, and encouragement.



Top Tips for Effective Social Media Post

1. Keep It Clear and Simple

- Use plain language and focus on one key message.
- Make posts easy to read and understand.

2. Use Engaging Visuals

- Add photos, graphics, or short videos to capture attention.
- Ensure images are relevant and accessible.

3. Know Your Audience

- Think about what parent carers want to know or find helpful.
- Tailor content to their interests and needs.

4. Encourage Interaction

- Ask questions, invite feedback, or encourage sharing.
- Respond positively and professionally to comments.

5. Think Before You Post

- Check facts, spelling, and tone
- Consider whether the post reflects your forum's values and objectives.



Social media

Not everything needs a response

- Don't get drawn into arguments.
- Try to keep the emotion out of it.
- Don't take it personally.
- If it is a personal attack, then you can delete.
- If someone has posted something that is factually incorrect, then it does help to clarify.
- If the forum is being criticised unfairly, it's fine to rebut what has been said, set out your stall, explain how it works, be transparent.
- There's a difference between responding quickly and responding well.
- It's fine to put out a holding statement and buy yourself some time to get a response you are happy with.



Deleting comments

- Delete comments which are aggressive, violent or include swearing
- Do not delete comments where someone disagrees – erodes trust, looks like you have something to hide
- Screenshots are forever – people are taking more screenshots of social media posts, so deleting can add to suspicion if done without valid reason.
- If a thread attracts several aggressive or violent comments, put a note from admin to say: “I have deleted some comments on this thread because they have been aggressive and violent. We encourage healthy debate and comment.” Sounds authoritative, acknowledges that you have deleted and that you have a valid reason for doing so.



Be prepared

Have Clear Policies in Place

- Social Media Policy for staff, volunteers, and representatives.
- Community Guidelines outlining acceptable behaviour on your channels.
- Confidentiality and Data Protection procedures.
- Escalation process for complaints, safeguarding concerns, and sensitive issues.

Assign Roles and Responsibilities

- Identify who can post on behalf of the forum.
- Define who monitors comments and messages.
- Nominate a lead person for managing difficult situations.
- Ensure admin access is secure and regularly reviewed.

Prepare Key Statements in Advance

Have template responses ready for:

- Complaints or criticism
- Misinformation or inaccurate information
- Sensitive incidents or service concerns
- Media enquiries

Example:

"Thank you for raising your concerns. We take this issue seriously and are reviewing the information provided. We will provide an update when appropriate."



Traditional media

Media and news management strategies

- Managing and maintaining the reputation of your forum.
- Building relationships with journalists – helps you build your forum's profile and is useful if a crisis scenario arises.
- Opportunity: Using local newspaper and radio to:
 - ☐ show the value of your forum
 - ☐ let people locally know what you do
 - ☐ let other parents know how they can get involved.



Media relations process

- Monitor incoming calls/emails from the media
- When you get an enquiry – make a note of name, contact details, what they want and a deadline
- Buy some time – reply or say you will get back to them. You don't need to respond then and there. Give yourself some time to think about your response, even if it's just 15 minutes.



Interactive:

What does a journalist want?

Is it A, B or C?

A. Reports and meeting minutes

B. Soundbites/quotes, personal stories, and facts

C. Internal forum processes



What is a soundbite?

- Short, memorable, emotional.
- Sums up what you are trying to say in short, snappy memorable sentence

Not a soundbite:

Our forum works in co-production with a wide range of local authority departments to improve outcomes for families in the local area.

Soundbite:

When parents have a voice, children thrive.



Interactive

Your PCF has worked with local Children's health teams and has been given an Excellence in Co-Production Award at the National SEND Best Practice Event, recognising your work to improve support for children with SEND.

Write a 10-12 word soundbite and pop it in the chat



Media interviews

- You're the expert – a journalist is asking to interview you or someone from your steering group because you have knowledge and expertise on the subject.
- Journalists want to know the 5 Ws and the H - Who, When, Where, What, Why and How?
- If it's print, it's a telephone call. If it's broadcast (TV or radio), you need to know is it live or pre-recorded?
- Don't use jargon
- Address the question – You don't have to answer the question, but you do need to address it. It's fine to say: I don't know the answer to that, but what I can tell you is..... You can rebut. It's fine to say: "That's not our understanding..."
- Prepare - 3 key messages, 2 facts and an example



Top Tips for Media Interviews

1. Know Your Key Messages

- Decide on 2–3 main points you want the audience to remember.
- Keep bringing your answers back to these messages.

2. Prepare in Advance

- Understand the topic, audience, and purpose of the interview.
- Anticipate likely questions, including difficult ones.

3. Keep Answers Short and Clear

- Use simple language and avoid jargon.
- Speak in concise, memorable statements.

4. Stay Calm and Positive

- Take a moment before answering.
- Be confident, friendly, and professional.

5. Listen Carefully

- Make sure you understand the question before responding.
- If necessary, ask for clarification.



Top Tips for Media Interviews

6. Bridge Back to Your Message

- If asked an unexpected question, acknowledge it and move back to your key point:
- "That's an important issue, but what's most important for parent carers is..."

7. Be Honest

- If you don't know the answer, say so.
- Offer to find the information rather than guessing.

8. Avoid Speculation

- Stick to facts and your area of expertise.
- Don't comment on rumours or confidential matters.

9. Use Real Examples

- Stories and examples help audiences connect with your message.
- Protect confidentiality at all times.



Crisis

- Be available
- No comment looks like you have something to hide
- Key messages – regret but consider legal implications, facts, actions – what are you going to do to make sure it doesn't happen again, reassurance.
- What does a crisis look like for a forum – scenarios you could plan for and what you would do. Who needs to be involved?

**WHAT DOES A COMMS CRISIS LOOK LIKE FOR YOUR FORUM – POST
IN THE CHAT**



Crisis Response Model

STOP → FACTS → PLAN → SPEAK

Stop – Don't react immediately.

Facts – Verify what is true.

Plan – Agree messages and actions.

Speak – Communicate clearly, calmly, and consistently.

Know When to Take Conversations Offline

For complaints or complex situations:

"We would like to discuss this directly. Please contact us via email or telephone so we can understand your concerns."



Questions & Answers

Pop any questions you have in the chat..

