

Media Preparation for Youth interviews

A. How Media Think

- Stories have a “**spin**”. Interviewers have an “agenda”

Sometimes the spin is obvious, sometimes it is decided after the interview and dictates how the interview is edited. Be wary of how your statements can be re-edited to make a different message.

- Stories have “**human interest**”. Interviewers look for emotion; tragedy; disclosure of personal information; personal challenge.

Sometimes this gets in the way of the story you want to tell. Be wary of attempts to make ‘you’ the story, or attempts to make you reveal more about yourself than you want.

- Stories need to be “**simplified**”. Interviewers may use generalizations or stereotypes to simplify a story. Interviewers don’t like complex thoughts or arguments.

Sometimes media will want to say “all youth” or “most young women” or ask you to represent the opinions of all young women. Be wary of generalizations or comments on “your generation”.

- Stories need “**tension**”. Interviewers will often probe for conflict, controversy, shock value. Interviewers look for opposition or us vs. them.

Media may ask you who opposes this or who supports this as if it is a political statement. Be wary of questions that talk about “other people”. Be wary of “shock value” questions.

B. Do's and Don'ts and Hints

1) The “**weakest**” statement you make is always the one they use.

You can talk for 30 minutes, but the one statement you are least happy with is the one they will quote. Every statement is important!

- Don't make casual jokes. Don't say things to shock the interviewer. Don't be flippant. Don't relax too much.
- Don't generalize. Don't speak for your gender or your generation. Don't make broad statements. “The government doesn't care” or “Youth today...”
- Never argue. Never get mad. Do not be rude, even if they seem rude. (When they edit, they will take out their own rudeness). Be calm. Be firm. Stop when you want to stop.

2) Decide how far you will go with **personal stories** beforehand.

They will ask you personal questions and they may try to get your life story. Stay in control of this information. Remember people will see/read this later. Your grandmother might be watching!

- Set limits on how much of yourself you will reveal. Do not cross that line no matter how sympathetic the interviewer is!
- If you plan to tell a personal story, practice it first. Talk it over with your parents, friends, etc. Do not use stories you haven't practiced.
- Media likes stories of youth overcoming challenges. Be careful. Do you want to admit publically that you have been arrested, been kicked out of school, had problems with drugs, had an abortion. This is your private information.

3) You do not have to **answer** every question.

You cannot plan for every question. Do not answer rude, personal or surprise questions. You can decide what is rude or personal for you. There are many ways to avoid a question:

- You can say: “I don’t feel comfortable answering that question”
- You can say: “I don’t know”
- You can say: “I don’t understand the question”
- You can change the subject. If they ask: “Have you been involved in children’s aid?”, you can say “We are here today with youth from all over the province who have been let down or fallen through the cracks of a lot of different services, like children’s aid. We want to protect the privacy of the youth here today.”
- You can seek help from another youth: “I think our youth co-chairs could answer that question better”.
- If you need time to think, you can always say: “I’m sorry, I’m nervous, can you repeat the question?”

4) Plan a prepared **statement**.

You need to be clear about your message! Have a prepared statement ready on who you are; why you are attending this event; why policy is important to youth. You will be asked for this statement in an interview!

- Practice your statement. Be comfortable with it. They will often start the interview with an open question: “What are you here for today?” or “Please tell us about yourself and this campaign”
- Use the statement again if you get uncomfortable with the way the interview is going: “I am doing media interviews because I believe in this campaign....” Sometimes interviewers get off track.
- Also have a prepared closing statement. They will often ask if you have anything to add, anything more to say. Make it short, clear and ‘powerful’. Ie. “We all believe the best way to improve the lives of youth is to have them identify common goals and outcomes and agree on how to measure progress. Others have done this and we can too.”