

Contact with the media: A guide for survivors and victims of domestic abuse and their families

About this leaflet

This leaflet is produced by IPSO, the independent regulator of newspapers and magazines in the UK. This is intended to be for survivors and victims of domestic abuse, their families and friends, and the organisations who support them. It covers the rules the press should follow when reporting on domestic abuse and can help you to decide if you want to speak to the press or not. It also includes information about the support IPSO offers and details of other useful organisations.

The main points:

- You may be asked by a journalist whether you want to be interviewed about your experiences. You can choose whether or not you speak to the media and, if so, when.
- If a case ends up in court, journalists are allowed to go and can report anything which is said or given as evidence in open court. This means that the judge has not put in place any restrictions on what can be reported.
- Journalists are generally allowed to identify people who give evidence. This may include their address and a photo of them which may be taken outside court.
- Journalists are allowed to choose what information they report and do not have to report everything which has been said, but the information they report must be accurate.

How we can help

We are the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the independent regulator of most of the UK's newspapers and magazines. We protect individual rights and uphold high standards of journalism under the Editors' Code of Practice (the Code).

Website: www.ipso.co.uk

Email: inquiries@ipso.co.uk

We can help you if you need advice about published material or the behaviour of journalists and can offer support with urgent harassment issues. In some cases, we can send out a notice which will allow you to pass on a specific request to the press (for example, to stop phoning you) or highlight concerns about the future publication of material which might break the Code. You can contact us on 0300 123 2220.

In an emergency after hours or at the weekend, you can also contact us using our emergency 24-hour advice service on 07799 903929.

We can take complaints about articles or journalists' behaviour which may have breached the Code. You can complain in writing through our website (<https://www.ipso.co.uk/complain/complaints-form/>).

What are the rules the press must follow?

IPSO regulated newspapers and magazines, in print and online, follow a set of rules called the Editors' Code of Practice. It covers what is written in newspapers and magazines and the behaviour of journalists. You can see the full Code here: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

Some of the relevant clauses are:

1. Accuracy

The press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading, or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text. If a significant inaccuracy is published, it must be corrected.

Anyone can make a complaint under this clause about a point of fact. We do have to consider the position of the affected party.

2. Privacy

Everyone is entitled to respect for their private and family life, home, physical, and mental health, and correspondence, including digital communications.

3. Harassment

Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit. They must not continue questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing people once they have been asked to stop, or remain on property when asked to leave.

4. Intrusion into grief or shock

Enquiries and approaches made by journalists must be made with sympathy in cases involving personal grief. Publication of articles should be handled sensitively.

The person or people directly affected by press coverage or behaviour of journalists can make a complaint under these clauses.

If you think the Code has been breached, you can complain to IPSO. If we assess your complaint and if it raises a possible breach of the Code we will investigate it.

We will work with you to find a solution to resolve your complaint, but if we cannot and your complaint is upheld, IPSO has the power to make a newspaper or magazine publish a correction or long form ruling, in the size and place it orders.

What if I am unhappy with the coverage?

If you have concerns about how your story has been covered, or about how the journalist behaved, you can contact us.

We can give you advice about what to do next or about making a complaint.

We can only consider complaints about newspapers or magazines (and their websites) which are regulated by us.

If you have a specific request to make to a newspaper or magazine, it is often quicker and easier to contact them directly. You can generally do this through the “contact” section of the website or by phone. We advise you to keep this correspondence in case you consider making a complaint later on.

Why does the press report on domestic abuse?

It is in the public interest that the press is free to report on important societal issues such as domestic abuse. There are many reasons why newspapers and magazines might report on domestic abuse, including:

- To raise awareness of domestic abuse
- Campaign for better rights for survivors
- Amplify the voices of survivors
- To highlight help and support available

Newspapers also routinely report on crime and about what happens in court, including cases which involve domestic abuse. For more details on this see IPSO's information on court reporting. It can be read online here: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/media/1584/court-report-v4-pleng.pdf>

You might come into contact with a journalist if:

- They are reporting on a court case you are involved with
- They approach you for an interview or for a comment
- You speak to a journalist as part of a campaign you are involved in

It is an individual decision about whether you want to speak to the media or not. However, it is important to be aware that in some cases, even if you chose not to speak to the press, there may still be reporting, for example, if there is a court case.

What to do if you do not want to talk to the press

Journalists are allowed to contact you to see if you want to comment on a story. They may do this by telephone, via social media or by knocking on your door. It is up to you whether or not you want to talk to the press and this is a very individual decision. Some people decide to do it with support from a domestic abuse charity, like the organisations listed at the end of this leaflet, who are able to provide media and safety support.

Some people prefer not to speak to the press as they find it upsetting and intrusive. If you are contacted by a journalist, you can find out their name and the name of the publication or agency they work for (journalists must provide this information if asked). If you don't want to speak to the press you should make this clear by asking a journalist to stop contacting you. You could:

- Tell the journalist clearly that you do not want to speak to them or be photographed and that you are asking them to stop.
- Pin a short note to your door to say that you do not want to speak to journalists and do not want to be disturbed;

- Change your answerphone message to say that you do not want to speak to the media and only personal callers should leave a message.

The Code says that journalists must not continue to question, contact, or photograph people once they have been asked to stop. If you clearly ask that a journalist stops their activities, the Code says they should do so unless there is specific and adequate public interest to justify a decision to carry on. In cases where there is concern about potential press intrusion, IPSO can send a privacy notice passing on a specific request to the industry, such as to stop contacting you. Someone else can request this on your behalf with your permission.

To access this, please phone 0300 123 22 20 during office hours.

Out of hours please contact 07799 903 929. If calling out of hours, leave a message explaining your concerns and you will be phoned back. Only use this number in cases of harassment by a journalist or for pre-publication advice, not for general enquiries or to make a complaint.

What are the rules on using posts from social media?

Journalists can use posts from social media, provided they follow the Editors' Code when using them.

Some general points to be aware of which may be helpful:

- When you put information onto social media, you are putting it into the public domain for other people to view. Unless your posts are protected by privacy settings, anyone, including journalists, can see them.
- Most social media websites allow you to restrict what you put into the public domain by allowing you to change your privacy settings.
- Journalists are normally allowed to publish photos, comments and information from social media profiles, forums or blogs if there are no privacy settings protecting them and they do not show anything private.
- Journalists may publish information about you which is in the public domain. This may have been put there by you or someone else via social media.
- Journalists may use social media to get in touch with you, to gather information or to check facts.
- Journalists must always consider whether publishing information taken from social media might intrude on your grief or privacy.
- Journalists should not publish information which is about a child's welfare without parental permission, or which might identify a victim of a sexual offence, without the permission of that person.

IPSO has guidance on how journalists use social media which is available at https://www.ipso.co.uk/media/1517/social-media-public_v4.pdf

Other organisations which may be able to help

There are a number of organisations who work with survivors and victims of domestic abuse who may be able to offer additional support and information. Some of these are listed here.

Level Up is a feminist community working to challenge sexism in culture and media. Working with victims' families, Level Up are helping to improve the way domestic violence is reported in the media through campaigns, resources and training.
Website: www.welevelup.org, Phone: 07375 020288

Refuge is a national charity supporting those who have experienced domestic violence, sexual violence, "honour" based violence, forced marriage, human trafficking and modern slavery, as well as some men escaping domestic violence.
Website: www.refuge.org.uk, Phone: 0808 2000 247 (24 hr)

Solace Women's Aid is the leading specialist charity in London supporting women and children experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence.
Website: www.solacewomensaid.org, Phone: 0808 802 5565,
Email: advice@solacewomensaid.org

Victim Support is a charity in England and Wales which supports people who have been affected by a crime or traumatic event. They are one of the biggest providers of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) services across England and Wales.
Website: www.victimsupport.org.uk, Phone: 08 08 16 89 111 (24 hr)

Victim Support Northern Ireland is an independent charity which helps people affected by crime. They offer a free and confidential service.
Website: www.victimsupportni.com, Phone: 0808 802 1414 (24hr),
Email: help@dsahelpline.org

Victim Support Scotland is the leading charity dedicated to helping people affected by crime, including domestic abuse, across Scotland.
Website: www.victimsupport.scot, Phone: 0800 160 1985

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children and is a federation of just under 170 organisations which provide local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. Support services include the Live Chat Helpline and the Survivors' Forum, and the charity provides media training and guidance to journalists. Website: www.womensaid.org.uk, Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

ipso.

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