



If you are involved in a news story, you may be approached by members of the press at some point for comment, for information or for photographs. Sometimes, people are only too happy to speak to journalists in such circumstances. There are occasions, however, when people will want to be left alone.

The PCC offers clear protection for those who feel harassed by the media. Clause 4 (Harassment) of the Code of Practice enforced by the PCC says that 'journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit' and that they 'must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on their property when asked to leave and must not follow them'.

Only when there is a clear public interest in doing so may a journalist breach this clause of the Code.

There are a number of practical steps that you can take to avoid unwanted or repeated approaches:

1. Get the name of the journalist and the newspaper or news agency for which they work. Tell them politely that you do not wish to speak to them and that they should not contact you again. Say that you understand that under the Code of Practice journalists must not persist in contacting you after having been asked to desist. It will help if you tell them that you are saying the same to every journalist. This applies however a journalist is approaching you – whether it is at home, in a public place or over the telephone. You should then be left alone. If you are not, see point 5, below.
2. If you are at home and too distressed to answer your door, pin a short note to it to say that you do not wish to speak to journalists and do not want to be disturbed.
3. Similarly, if you are being telephoned repeatedly and do not wish to speak to journalists, alter your answerphone message to say that only personal callers should leave a message as you are not speaking to the media.
4. Some people – particularly at times of grief or shock – find it helpful to ask a friend or neighbour who is not as closely associated with the story to deal with press enquiries. They can then answer your phone and door and either pass on a prepared statement (reflecting what is said in point 1) or turn down requests for interviews.
5. If these measures fail and you feel that you are still being harassed, contact the PCC immediately. You can find all of our contact details [here](#). The number of the PCC's emergency 24 hour advice service, designed to offer round-the-clock help, is 07659 152656. We will get in touch with the editor concerned and deal with your complaint urgently, aiming to stop any harassment that is occurring as soon as possible.

If you do not know the names of the journalists concerned, or the newspapers for which they work, you should still contact the PCC. We may then be able to communicate your concerns across the industry as a whole via a general 'desist' message, which should alleviate the problem.

Broadcast journalists are not covered by the Editors' Code of Practice. But if you have concerns about the presence or behaviour of such journalists, we can also forward this message to the broadcasters, who will then be able to take action. This helps to reduce the problem of 'media scrums' that involve journalists from all forms of media.

The above measures should mean that there is no need for a formal complaint to be lodged. However, if you do wish to pursue a complaint further about print journalists, it would be most useful if you could provide the PCC with as much information as possible, including:

- a note of the dates and times that you were approached, along with a brief note of what was said;
- a copy of any note that you pinned to your door or any instructions that you left on your answerphone;
- copies of any letters posted to you by journalists.

Should the Commission proceed with a formal complaint, a named case officer will be assigned to you with the aim of resolving the matter to your satisfaction. You will be kept informed of the progress of this investigation and, if the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, the Commission will decide whether or not the journalist breached the Code.

Contact details

Press Complaints Commission
 Halton House, 20/23 Holborn, London EC1N 2JD
 Switchboard: 020 7831 0022
 Facsimile: 020 7831 0025
 Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk
 24 hour Advice line: 07659 152656

Or email the PCC's Head of Complaints directly:
scott.langham@pcc.org.uk

www.pcc.org.uk