

Bereavement information for families and loved ones

Dealing with the media following a death

Newspapers and magazines often publish stories about people who have died, particularly if the death happened in unusual circumstances. As a result, some degree of media attention may be inevitable. However, there are limits on what newspapers and magazines are allowed to do – these are set out in the Editors' Code of Practice which is upheld by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). This guidance is designed to help families who have lost a loved one, and who may need advice about how best to handle enquiries from the media.

The Code of Practice

There are a number of provisions in the Code that may be relevant when reporting a death:

- The press must take care not to publish inaccurate or misleading information (Clause 1)
- In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively (Clause 5, i)
- The press must not include excessive detail when reporting suicide, in order to minimise the risk of copycat cases (Clause 5, ii)

The PCC is always happy to offer advice on a confidential basis on the telephone. Our contact details can be found below.

Photographs

The press will often want to publish a photograph of the person who died, and relatives and friends may be approached by a journalist requesting this. It is your decision whether or not to provide this, but it can be a useful way of satisfying some of the media interest.

Harassment help

When there is no public interest for doing so, journalists should not follow or persistently question people once they have been asked to desist. The PCC can help with unwanted approaches by passing desist messages to relevant editors and broadcasters. In emergencies, this service can be accessed out of office hours by calling 07659 152656.

Pre-publication concerns

If you are worried about a story you think will be published, you can contact us for advice. The PCC cannot order newspapers not to go ahead with a story but we can certainly help you to ensure that your position has been taken into account at the publication concerned. We will either advise you how to deal with the newspaper or magazine directly or, in some cases, pass on specific concerns to the relevant publication. There is no need to make a formal complaint to use this service.

Making a complaint

If you think the rules in the Code have been broken by something that has been published (or by the behaviour of a journalist) you can make a formal complaint to us. When this happens we will seek to mediate between you and the editor in order to achieve an appropriate settlement. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including: the publication of an apology, correction, letter or follow-up article; a private letter of apology from the editor; the removal of inaccurate or intrusive material from a website. Further examples of successful mediation can be seen here.

In some cases – usually when mediation has failed – the PCC can also issue formal rebukes which must be published in full and prominently by the offending newspaper or magazine.

What to do if the death happens abroad

There may be a particular press focus if a death happens abroad. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will be able to advise you about all the practical aspects of dealing with the death. There is more information available on the **FCO website**. The FCO may also help you with media enquiries.

The PCC's remit covers newspapers and magazines published in the UK but it continues to apply to journalists working for UK publications wherever they are reporting from. If you have concerns about foreign titles and their journalists, we will be able to offer advice on whether there is a PCC equivalent body you can contact.

Court and Inquest reporting

You may find it helpful to read our guidance on **Court and inquest reporting**.

Further information

More information is available elsewhere on our website, www.pcc.org.uk. If you can't find anything you are looking for, do not hesitate to contact us on 020 7831 0022.

Press Complaints Commission
Halton House
20/23 Holborn
London EC1N 2JD

Switchboard: 020 7831 0022 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5.30pm).

Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk

24 hour Advice line: 07659 152656 (emergency calls only).