

Responsible criminal justice reporting

Checklist



Sensitive, trauma-informed journalism means understanding what a contributor might be experiencing before you reach out, and how your reporting will impact them after you pack up and leave.

Your reporting has a profound impact on how society perceives the criminal justice system. You have the potential to inspire positive change for people in prison, victims of crime, and their loved ones.

Preparation and approach

- Have you done your research on the topic? Writing a story on criminal justice should not be a fishing expedition!**
Remember, charities and non-profit organisations often have small teams and responding to journalists can take considerable time and resource.
- Have you selected the correct organisation to consult?**
Often, support in the criminal justice sector overlaps. Do your research as to where and with who your query best sits. If you're unsure, you can contact the Criminal Justice Alliance.
- If you can, be flexible with your time frames**
Demanding a quote for that same day before something goes to print is often unachievable for small charities, and/or contributors with full time jobs.
- Do not refer to potential contributors as 'case studies'**
They are people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- Be transparent**
Clearly communicate your intentions and the purpose of the story.

Interview and reporting

- Have you thought about the possible vulnerabilities of the contributor?**
Do they need extra support with informed consent? Do they need someone with them during the interview?

- When telling their story, do you need to name the offence?**
Think about this carefully. If you don't/it has no bearing on the story, do not ask! Doing so is sensationalising.

- Do you need to report graphic details?**
This can be unnecessary and triggering for the contributor who has already re-lived the story when sharing with you.

- Give the contributor as much information as you can**
If possible, offer contributors a preview of the story before publication and copy/quote approval. Try to clarify how their interview will be used and when the story will be published.


- Use humanising language**
If ever in doubt regarding terminology, ask a relevant criminal justice organisation, or consult your CJA writing guide.


- Do you fully understand the terminology you are using?**
Consult your CJA writing guide.


- Don't rush to publish**
Review your notes, don't hesitate to call the contributor back to confirm or verify information.


- Respect your contributor's wishes**
How do they want to be referred to? By first name, full name, pseudonym?

Publication and beyond

-  **Get feedback from your editors and peers**
Work closely with your editors and fellow students to review sensitive stories. This collaborative approach allows you to gain multiple perspectives and insights regarding potential impacts and sensitivities.

-  **Familiarise yourself with any legal and ethical obligations**
For example, are you reporting on someone who is out on Release on Temporary License, might your story affect their terms of release?

-  **Request/ensure the 'comments' section of an online article/broadcast be switched off**
This could help avoid any potential negative feedback for the contributor.

-  **Check in with your contributor post publication.**
The process may have been upsetting or re-traumatising for them. If so, signpost them to support services and check-in periodically.



Remember, your story has impact. What you write will exist in the public domain forever. Check facts, don't assume.

*We had a really positive experience with the media in the run up to my husband's appeal. They came and they got to know us, **we were people to them, we weren't just a story.***

Sue Beere



The Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA) is a network of 200+ organisational and academic members working towards a fair and effective criminal justice system. We advocate for sensible changes to make the criminal justice system work better.

Our insight comes from our members, their broad remits enable us to piece together the right formula for lasting change. Our drive comes from the recognition that a fairer and more effective system will help communities across England and Wales, with positive effects that can be felt far beyond crime and justice.



This guide is part of a toolkit promoting responsible criminal justice reporting to journalism students, created by Holly Brooks-Burgin, CJA Communications and Engagement Manager and journalist Albie Matthews.

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions from CJA members and are grateful to everyone who took part in focus groups for this project.

For more information about the project visit:
criminaljusticealliance.org/reporting

