



## PRINCIPLES OF WORKING WITH THE PRESS

Whether you are working with an editor, news reporter or a radio show host, there are certain principles common to working with all members of the press.

**Persistence:** Journalists have hectic schedules and many competing priorities. They often don't return phone calls – don't take it personally. Keep trying to reach them. Often journalists are hard to reach, and they know it. They will not be annoyed if you leave several messages, as long as you are polite. Once you make contact, if they express interest, keep after them until they follow through. If they don't express interest, ask them if they could recommend a colleague for whom your ideas/resources would be useful.

**Relationship:** Like all people, journalists respond to personal relationships. Try to meet the journalist in person. There's no better way to develop an ongoing relationship than a face-to-face meeting. Let them know that you liked a particular piece or program that they ran, even if it is unrelated to early childhood issues. Everybody likes to have their work affirmed. Acknowledging their previous work shows that you are someone from the community who reads their newspaper or listens to their show. Continue to be in contact with him/her from time to time even when you don't have a specific request. If you can continue to feed the journalist useful information, he/she will generate coverage for you on a regular basis. If your relationship results in an editorial or story, be sure to call or email or even send a handwritten note of thanks.

**Education:** Most journalists are responsible for covering an enormous number of issues. Except for a few who specialize in particular areas, journalists know far less about early childhood issues than you do. It's your job to educate them. If you're articulate and have useful information to give them, they will appreciate having you as a resource. Make full use of background information, current press releases and new resources on the Kids Are Priority One Coalition's web site.

**Substance:** Never call any journalist without proper preparation. When you're making a phone call, develop a concise talk—no more than one minute—that communicates all the essential points you want to make. Repeat your "pitch" aloud several times until you are comfortable with it. Doing a role play with someone—another Regional Council member, your regional Council director, the Coalition's Communications Coordinator, a spouse or a friend—before making a phone call can be helpful. Before you make a pitch, anticipate questions that the editorial writer will have or what the reporter will need in order to sell the story idea to his/her News Editor. Answer the "so what?" question sufficiently—how will your story idea better serve the journalist's audience?

**Sensitivity:** Journalists are busy people who receive many phone calls and deal with constant deadlines; they don't have time to waste. When calling them, always begin by asking if they have a moment to talk. Don't spend a lot of time on the phone with them unless they want to have an extended conversation with you. Be prepared with a succinct talk that simply and clearly explains what you want them to cover. Always be polite. Be sure to spell their names correctly on anything you mail or fax them. Never assume that you know the spelling of even the most familiar names (Scott can be Skot; Mary can be Mari). Learn as much as you can about them, including what issues they cover, their format and when their deadlines are.