

Work with the Media

The press is a very powerful tool for shaping public opinion. Newspapers, radio shows, and television news programs are looking for stories on relevant topics that have broad public appeal. Citizens can write letters to the editor, call talk shows, and suggest topics to reporters to stimulate interest in early childhood issues.

Write Letters to the Editor

- Letters are most effective when they are in response to a published article. Include the article name and publication date in your letter. Send your letter within 24 hours of the publication date to have a better chance of getting it published.
- Be concise. Shorter letters, generally around 200 words, are more likely to be printed.
- Use clear language that will resonate with the average person.
- The first line of the letter should be a strong statement to draw the reader in.
- Keep it relevant and time-based by mentioning what issues are currently in the news.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms associated specifically with your program.
- Be accurate and avoid personal attacks.
- Close your letter with the thought you want readers to remember.
- Find the letter-writing guidelines of your local newspaper (generally on the editorial page or on the Web site). Make sure you adhere to the word limit and include your name, address, and phone number.

Tips for Early Childhood Programs

General Tips

- Get your stories ready. Use real-life testimonials to demonstrate why your program is important and how it affects children and families.
- Build media relationships. Get to know reporters and local radio-show hosts to build interest in early childhood issues.
- Invite reporters to visit your organization to see first-hand the positive impact your program has on young children.
- Identify spokespersons. One or two staff or board members should be able to represent your organization and your messages. You may want to identify a few families who illustrate success stories and are comfortable talking to the media.

Contact the Media

- If you have news to share, write a press release that incorporates your key messages.
- Do your homework. Read your local newspapers, watch local TV news programs, and listen to local radio news shows. Make a list of the names of reporters who cover education and state government, and get their contact information.
- Do you have existing relationships with reporters? Contact them first to see if they are interested in your story.
- When you call or e-mail a reporter, keep your pitch short and to the point.

Media Interviews

- Make sure your spokespersons are prepared with unified key message points.
- Arrange to have photo opportunities that show the positive aspects of your program.
- Know your stats. Well-used, easy-to-understand numbers can make a strong case for early childhood programs and spending to support those programs.
- Be understandable. Avoid jargon that is specific to your program. Speak in terms that the general public will understand.
- Keep to the facts. NEVER make up or exaggerate data or stories.
- Be confident during the interview. You are the expert on your program and the benefits of early childhood services in your community.

For more media-relations tips, consult the Community Media Workshop (www.newstips.org).