

Working with the Media

News stories fall into two basic categories. **Hard news** is usually timely information about a new story or an update on an ongoing story. **Soft or feature news** generally is not as time sensitive and often deals with “human interest” stories.

Hard news will always take precedence over soft news, especially in broadcasting, where the unofficial motto is, “If it bleeds, it leads.” Most journalists will view Give Kids A Smile® as soft news. Your success in generating coverage will hinge heavily on the amount and type of hard news occurring that day and week.

Reporters are under constant deadline pressure, so when contacting them about your event, keep the five W’s in mind: who, what, when, where and why. It’s helpful to distribute a media alert about your event (see sample on the givekidsasmile.ada.org website) before you contact reporters in person.

Reporters can’t devote hours to researching every story they cover. Often they are not health care or public policy experts. In fact, that is exactly *why* they need to interview your spokespeople—to get the most pertinent details and to get some memorable quotes for the story.

Spokespeople should view any media interview as a chance to shape a story. Don’t just answer reporter’s questions about your event; use the interview to make key points about how to improve access to oral health care for children from underserved families in your state.

For example, if a reporter asks, “How many children will receive dental treatment at your event?” your spokesperson could say, “Nearly (NUMBER OF) children will receive free dental services ranging from screenings to cleanings up to fillings and more.” **[then expand the answer by saying...]** “But I worry about the thousands of children who need dental care who *aren’t* here today—the ones who continue to have trouble eating, sleeping and paying attention in class because their teeth are in such bad shape. Dentists want to be part of the solution, but can’t solve access to care on their own. A one-day event like Give Kids A Smile isn’t a cure-all, it’s a wake up call. It’s time for politicians, parents and people who care to (STATE YOUR PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION GOAL). Our children deserve a better health care system that addresses their dental needs.”

The entire quote would probably never make it into the story—it’s too long—but this type of quote gives reporters a lot of sound bites to choose from to edit into their stories. Perhaps a reporter would use, “I worry about the thousands of children who *aren’t* here today—the ones who continue to have trouble eating, sleeping and paying attention in class because their teeth are in such bad shape. Our children deserve a better health care system that addresses their dental needs.”