



NMVC

National Mass Violence Center

Providing Resources to Victims,
Survivors, & Those Who Serve Them

National Mass Violence Center
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences
Medical University of South Carolina
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Survivor-to-Survivor Guide

Navigating the News Media After Mass Violence

By Erika Mahoney

"It's your story. It's your narrative. And it's your choice whether you want to tell it, or not." ~Erika Mahoney

I have experienced the news media from both sides of the microphone—as a reporter covering breaking news and as a survivor navigating national media attention after the loss of my father. My dad, Kevin Mahoney, was killed in a mass shooting at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. He was one of ten people who were targeted at random while simply going about their day.

In the aftermath of a tragedy, reporters may reach out through social media, email, text messages, or phone calls requesting interviews. It can feel overwhelming at a time when you're still in shock and trying to process what has happened.

As both a journalist and a survivor, I know how vulnerable it can feel to share your story. I also know that many journalists genuinely want to honor victims, tell their stories with care; and help the public try to understand the human impact of what happened.

There is no right or wrong way to engage with the media. Some people find comfort and purpose in speaking publicly. Others choose privacy. Many move between those choices over time. Whatever you decide, remember this: **You are in charge.**

TEN TIPS FOR INTERACTING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

1 Limit your exposure to news coverage, as needed.

In the aftermath of a tragedy, it's natural to want information. But there comes a point when exposure can become harmful. Graphic images, videos, and continuous news coverage can add another layer of trauma, especially in the early days after a traumatic event. Some of the hardest images to get out of my head were the ones I saw on national television. I wish I had turned the TV off sooner. It's also important to remember that nearly everyone carries a phone with them today. Photos and videos from the scene may circulate online within minutes. In the case of the King Soopers shooting, someone live streamed from the scene for more than three hours. Consider limiting your exposure to this kind of content, or asking a trusted friend or family member to monitor updates and share only the information you truly need to know.

2 Mentally prepare for media attention.

The first days after a tragedy are often filled with shock, confusion and grief. Even as someone who works in media, I was caught off guard by the sheer volume of coverage. Instagram messages. Texts. Emails. Phone calls. Community leaders and public-information officers (often called PIOs) often speak first. But when you or a loved one is identified publicly, interview requests can quickly follow. In my own experience, a social media post honoring my father went viral and resulted in a flood of interview requests. Before agreeing to your first interview—or making a public post—consider how much attention you feel prepared to receive. It's okay if the answer is none. It's okay if the answer changes over time. It's okay if the answer is yes.

NOTE

Home should remain a place where you feel safe. While many journalists are respectful and compassionate, there may be times when a reporter arrives at your home unannounced. After a traumatic event, home can feel like one of the last places where you have a sense of safety and control. If someone knocks on your door and you're not ready to talk, you do not have to answer. You do not owe anyone an interview simply because they showed up. If you decide you do want to share your story and feel most comfortable speaking from your home, that's your choice. The difference is that you are deciding when, where, and how the conversation happens.



3 Most journalists are human beings first.

One thing I wish more survivors knew is that most journalists are kind people who genuinely care. Many entered this profession because they want to tell meaningful stories and help communities understand what happened. The best journalists want to know: Who was your loved one? What made them special? What should the world remember about them? If you choose to participate in an interview, remember that you can ask questions too. It's okay to ask what the story is about, how your interview will be used, whether it will be live or recorded, who else is being interviewed, and when it will air or be published. A good journalist understands that trust is earned.

NOTE

Consider asking these questions. What is this story about? How will my interview be used? Will this be live or recorded? Who else are you interviewing? When will it air or be published? A good journalist will respect your questions and your boundaries.

4 Your voice can help keep the focus on the victims and survivors.

In the immediate aftermath of mass violence, public attention often shifts toward the perpetrator. When survivors choose to share their stories, it can help refocus attention on the people and communities whose lives changed forever. These conversations remind the public that behind every headline are real people who were physically-injured or killed, who were loved, whose lives mattered, and whose absence will always be felt. But this responsibility is not yours to carry. Sharing your story is a choice—not an obligation.

5 Choose how your loved one is remembered.

If you decide to engage with the media, consider gathering a few favorite photographs of your loved one that could be used in print, online, or on television. You don't have to sit for an interview to help tell their story. Sometimes sharing a photograph or providing a short, written statement is enough. Ask what options are available and choose what feels right for you.

6 Gather your thoughts before an interview.

If you decide to speak publicly, take a few moments to write down your thoughts beforehand. Consider what message feels most important to share and what, if anything, you'd rather keep private. Interviews can be emotional and stressful, especially in the aftermath of tragedy. Having a few key points written down can help you stay grounded and ensure your voice comes through.

7 Consider asking for a pre-recorded interview.

One of my strongest recommendations is to request a pre-recorded interview rather than a live appearance whenever possible. Recorded interviews can feel less stressful because there is less pressure to say everything perfectly. You can take a moment if emotions become overwhelming. You can also ask to take breaks during the interview if you need time to regroup. You may be able to clarify information afterward. You can sometimes request that a specific quote or detail be removed. Every newsroom operates differently, but it never hurts to ask.

8 You don't have to do this alone.

Some families designate one spokesperson. Others find comfort in speaking together. My mother and I often participated in interviews side-by-side. If one of us became emotional, the other could step in and continue the conversation. If media attention feels overwhelming, consider reaching out to a victim service professional, family liaison, a vetted non-profit organization, or public information officer for support. There is no single right approach. Find what feels most supportive of you and your family.



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9 Keep the reporter's contact information.

Before your interview ends, consider exchanging contact information with the reporter. If you think of something afterward, need to clarify a detail, or have a follow-up question, it's helpful to know how to reach them. You may also cross paths again in the months or years ahead. Having that connection can make future conversations feel a little more familiar.

10 Give yourself grace.

Don't be overly hard on yourself after an interview. Each conversation is a learning experience, and there is no perfect way to navigate the media after tragedy. You may say yes to one interview and no to the next. You may decide to speak publicly years later—or never at all. Every choice is valid. Your story belongs to you, and you are allowed to tell it on your own terms, in your own time.

BEST PRACTICE FOR COMMUNITIES

Assign each affected family a public information officer (PIO).

One of the greatest sources of support my family received after the King Soopers mass shooting was being assigned a dedicated public information officer. Every affected family was paired with a PIO who helped us navigate the overwhelming volume of media requests and served as a trusted point of contact during the days that followed.

Because there were ten families affected, Boulder requested assistance from neighboring law enforcement agencies. Our family's PIO came from the Arvada Police Department. This approach allowed us to focus on grieving instead of managing a constant stream of interview requests.

I hope other communities facing mass violence consider adopting a similar model. Assigning each affected family a dedicated PIO can provide compassionate support while helping survivors make informed decisions about if, when, and how they choose to engage with the media.

Erika Mahoney is a journalist, host, and writer whose father, Kevin Mahoney, was killed in a mass shooting at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado in 2021. Drawing from her experiences as both a journalist and survivor, she created and hosted [Senseless](#), a limited-series podcast from Lemonada Media about grief, trauma, and moving forward after the unthinkable.

*Every tragedy is unique and every person handles tragedy differently.
I hope that sharing my experience and knowledge will be helpful to you.*



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