

Recommendations for Adoptive Parents Participating in Media Interviews

From time to time, members of the media seek to interview adoptive families regarding current events happening within or impacting the adoption community. While it can be exciting to be part of a media story, it can also feel intimidating and overwhelming for the average adoptive parent who has little to no media experience. Based on our 40 years of experience conducting interviews with media outlets across the country and around the world on a range of topics in adoption, we have compiled a list of tips and recommendations to help families prepare and feel more comfortable when speaking with the media.

1. DO ask the right questions so you know what you are agreeing to in being interviewed, and what to expect before, during, and after the interview.

- What is the story about? How did they hear about you, and why do they want to interview you?
- Will the interview be done by telephone, by video call, in person, etc.? If you are being interviewed in person, where will it happen? If on video, what are their technology and setting preferences?
- Will the interview be live or recorded?
- Will the reporter agree to let you indicate what parts of the interview you would prefer to keep off the record?
**This won't be possible in a live interview of course.*
- How long do they anticipate the interview to be?
- How will the story be produced? Is this for a written piece, will it be part of a radio/podcast/online audio segment, a video format or some combination?
- Will you be given questions and specific topics in advance in order to prepare? (*hint: ask for this anyway; it's appropriate and fair for you to be given adequate guidance*)
- Is the reporter willing to leave certain topics off the table at your discretion? (i.e. the privacy of your children – names, faces, pictures, details of their story or background, etc.)
 - Are they expecting to interview other children already in the home? This should never be a requirement and should only occur with parental consent and the child's assent.

Tip: If at any time in discussing these questions, you feel uneasy about the reporter's questions, comments, or expectations, it is okay to push back and set your boundaries. If the reporter and you cannot come to agreement, it's okay to decline to conduct the interview. Typically, most reporters are willing to make accommodations and ensure you feel comfortable.

2. DO discuss the interview request with your agency.

- Ask for their guidance on what aspects of your story are appropriate to share at your current stage of the process, and for input on any concerns they have about the interview in general.
- Ask for their feedback on any larger adoption issues you should keep in mind beyond your own circumstances.
- Confirm their preference/guidance for sharing your child's picture, if your adoption is not yet complete.
- Ask them to help you think through the message you want to leave with the audience.
 - What is the bottom-line takeaway that you want to communicate?
 - If you cannot summarize in a few sentences what you want to say without referencing notes, you need to prepare more before your interview begins.

Example: "This crisis has reminded all of us just how vital family is and how urgent the need is for families to say yes to adoption. Kids don't need perfect parents, but they do deserve a permanent family that will nurture and commit to them unconditionally."

3. DO think through and prepare some key points you hope to communicate.

Think of your adoption story and current circumstances in sound bites. Most likely, the interview will be edited into very brief segments – 15-30 seconds at most. Summarize, and focus on what is most urgent for the issues at hand.

4. DO respect your children's privacy and protect their story.

Remember that what you share now can live forever on the internet. Exercise great caution and protect your children's privacy as much as possible. Avoid sharing details like their full name, exact location, their history, special needs, or current circumstances. *A media interview is not the place to discuss the hard details.* Consider how they would feel as a teenager or adult when reading or watching this interview. Focus on their need for a permanent, loving family, your commitment to them, and your eagerness to bring them home.

5. DO NOT disparage the policies or actions of the country your child currently resides in.

Families often feel frustrated and even desperate in times of crisis during an international adoption. But a media story is an opportunity to raise awareness and urge action which requires collaboration and cooperation. Avoid political debates or discussions of international policies. Do not disparage or insult specific individuals. Do not insult the foreign country you seek to adopt from. Be respectful of all involved, and focus on what your primary message is.

6. DO NOT be afraid to stop the interview if you are uncertain or uneasy at any point.

It's okay to say "I'm not comfortable answering that question, or commenting on that." It's also okay to say "I don't know, but I can try to find out for you and let you know." It's better to answer in that way than to speculate on something you don't have firsthand knowledge of, or expertise in. You can always refer them back to your agency for follow up.

7. DO NOT make this about your needs/desires.

It is common that as families approach the end of their adoption process, they focus on the joy and benefit of a child joining their family. When conducting a media interview, it's okay to express this joy and excitement, but remember to also communicate that the reason for adoption is about providing a child the permanent, loving family they deserve.

8. DO be yourself and speak genuinely.

Think of this more like a conversation. It's a great opportunity to humanize an issue that may otherwise feel distant to the average American. Stories matter and can be incredibly compelling. Keeping in mind the guidelines above, speak genuinely about the issues at hand and stay focused on the bottom line message.

9. DO ask for follow up.

The reporter should provide you with an estimated timeframe for when the story will come and should provide you with a link to it when it is released.

10. DO your best and expect that you'll receive a variety of reactions.

You are not a professional spokesperson, so it's important to give yourself grace and be proud of your courage to speak publicly on a sensitive topic. In our online world in which comments and opinions are shared freely among strangers, you may receive a mixed response to the story and to adoption in general. Some will be positive, and others may be n. Not everyone will understand or agree on all aspects of adoption. Many people who are regularly quoted in the media advise that nothing good can come from reading online comments. You may want to plan in advance to avoid reading the comments, and instead focus on what you did well and how your story can encourage others.

Example: "We've completed every legal step of the process since we started 18 months ago, and we are so ready to bring our son home. Travel restrictions have had us on hold, so we need our government leaders to act and help us. Our son needs to be with his family."

Contact Us: NCEA is available to members of the media and adoptive families to provide further resources and guidance on a number of adoption related topics. Contact us at nca@adoptioncouncil.org or 703-299-6633.