

ipso.

For accountable journalism

Public information on the reporting of major incidents



What is a major incident?

A major incident can be defined as an event or situation which threatens widespread damage to human welfare or to the security of the country. It could also be defined as an event which results in large scale grief, shock and trauma, and has the potential to directly impact a wider community.

Who is this information for?

This information is for anyone who is caught up in a major incident. It may also be useful for friends, family, and professionals supporting those involved.

We hope this guidance helps you understand why journalists might want to speak to you, provides advice if you do wish to talk, advises what to do if you'd prefer not to engage with journalists, and explains how we can help.

What we can do and about this advice

We understand that dealing with journalists and news reporting during or in the aftermath of a major incident can be overwhelming. We are IPSO – the Independent Press Standards Organisation, the independent regulator of most of the UK's newspapers, magazines and digital news sites.

Our goal is to protect individual rights, uphold high standards of journalism, and help maintain freedom of expression for the press.

If you need advice about the Editors' Code of Practice or are concerned about a story or a journalist's behaviour, please contact us. We are here to help.

0300 123 2220

inquiries@ipso.co.uk

www.ipso.co.uk

For emergencies after hours or at weekends, we offer a 24-hour advice service on **07799 903929**.

Our staff are ready to help you with urgent harassment issues, listen to your concerns, and can give practical advice and guidance. If in doubt, please do call us and we will try to help.

How to complain

If you want to complain about an article or the behaviour of a journalist, visit our website:

www.ipso.co.uk/make-a-complaint

or email:

inquiries@ipso.co.uk.

If you are under 18, we may need your parent or guardian's consent.

The Editors' Code of Practice

Our job is to enforce the Editors' Code of Practice, which sets out the rules that newspapers, magazines, and digital news publishers have agreed to follow.

The Code has 16 clauses which aim to balance the rights of the individual with the public's right to know.

Here are some Code clauses that you may want to look at to understand the rules journalists must follow and may be relevant if you have been involved in a major incident:

- Clause 2 (Privacy)
- Clause 3 (Harassment)
- Clause 4 (Intrusion into grief and shock)

Privacy notices

During a difficult and stressful time, some people want to talk to the press about their experiences; others do not.

We can help if you do not want to speak to journalists or if you are at risk or experiencing intrusive behaviour.

In some cases, this includes making editors aware of your desire for privacy.

We do this by sending out a notice to the media on your behalf to deliver your specific requests, such as stopping unwanted phone calls or addressing

concerns about behaviour which you think could lead to future coverage that may breach the Code.

Privacy notices put editors on notice of your concerns, and we know they are extremely effective at dealing with several concerns including harassment.

Why do journalists cover major incidents?

When a major incident happens, it often draws media attention, especially if it has caused significant harm or risk to life, essential services, the environment, or national security. During an incident, journalists play an important role in explaining what has happened and holding people to account.

Major incidents are often covered by lots of journalists who work for various organisations. They can include freelancers, broadcasters, press agencies, local and national newspapers, and magazines. Journalists can come from the local area, the UK, or even other countries. Other people, acting as citizen journalists on social media, may also be interested in covering an incident.

Why may they want to speak to me?

Journalists may approach you to ask questions, for example about what you saw or felt about what happened. They may contact you by phone, on social media, or come to your home.

Remember, it is entirely your choice whether to speak to journalists. Talking to journalists can help the public to understand what happened and how it affected people like you. It can also be an opportunity to share information about related campaigns. If you are looking for a loved one, journalists can help alert others that they are missing.

Some people find it helpful to talk to the press on the anniversary of a major incident to remind others about what happened or to pay tribute to loved ones who have been affected.

'I want to speak to the press'

If you decide to share your story with journalists, here are some tips that might help:

- Journalists must tell you who they are and where they work if asked. Most reporters will carry a press card or ID which you can ask to see before talking.
- Journalists may contact you via social media, phone, email, or in person. Some people want to have their voice heard immediately, but if you have not

made a decision, you can say you are not ready to talk.

- Be clear about what you want to say.
- Consider having a friend or family member with you for support or ask them to speak on your behalf.
- Sometimes journalists use pictures from social media if they are publicly available. You may prefer to provide a different image – especially if you are paying tribute.
- If you want to see how your quotes will be used before publication, ask the journalist beforehand but be aware that they may refuse to do so.
- Journalists may record what you say or make notes so that they have an accurate record of your conversation; you can also record the conversation if you would like.

'I don't want to speak to the press'

If you do not want to talk to a journalist, you have the right to say no. Here's what you can do to make your request clear:

- Find out the journalist's name and the name of the publication or agency they work for (under the terms of Clause 3 of the Code, journalists must provide this information if asked).
- Tell the journalist you do not want to speak or be photographed and ask them to stop. You may want to keep a record of this where possible. At home, you can post a note on your door indicating you do not want to speak to journalists.

- Change your voicemail or answerphone message stating that you only want personal callers to leave messages and that you do not wish to talk to the press.

The Code says that journalists must not continue to question, contact, or photograph people once they have been asked to stop. If you ask a journalist to stop their activities, the Code says they must unless there is specific and adequate public interest to justify a decision to carry on. However, if a journalist continues to do so without their being a specific and adequate public interest, a complaint can be made to IPSO.

Social Media

Journalists can use public comments and photos you post on social media, including a comment you may have made on a tribute page. If you don't want your comments reported, check the privacy settings, and inform friends and family that you won't be speaking publicly.

Further Support

For additional support, contact Victim Support at 0808 16 89 111 or visit victimsupport.org.uk.

If you have a police family liaison officer, they can also provide help and support during this time.

24-hour helpline

IPSO is available 24-hours a day to discuss any concerns you might have.

From **9am to 5.30pm** please contact us on:

0300 123 22 20.

Out of hours please contact **07799 903 929**, leave a message explaining your concerns and you will be phoned back.