

Media Relations and Crisis Communications Handbook

building trusting relationships

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foreward

This updated edition of the **Media Relations and Crisis Communications Handbook** is a resource with a two-fold purpose of helping you and your team generate positive media coverage, while also providing guidance for handling difficult crisis situations. Although the nature of our profession results in occasional negative media coverage, it is vital providers offer the media a consistent array of positive stories.

In addition to providing very straightforward, practical guidance on publicity and media relations, we also have included several highly-relevant case studies in the appendices of the Handbook.

It is our intent to keep this resource updated. As such, we welcome any suggestions you may have for improvement of future editions.

David S. Schless
President

American Seniors Housing Association
Washington, DC
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introduction

The Value of Media Relations

Building relationships with the media can enhance your reputation, position you as an expert, and ultimately convey a third-party endorsement of your plans and programs. And in times of crisis, a good relationship can solidify fair and balanced coverage. A good media relations program is founded on mutual trust and respect. Be fair and honest with your media contacts at all times, and use your best judgment and common sense.

Earned media, through traditional media or through newer media such as bloggers, works in telling your story alongside paid media (advertising) and owned media (website, social media, brochures, etc.). Generating media coverage is not as easy, and the changing media landscape is making it more difficult. Newsrooms are smaller, space is tighter, and journalists are not as specialized.

But it is possible to increase the prospects of story placements by using some basic tools and approaches to which the media will respond. This handbook provides guidelines, tips and templates for both proactive and reactive media relations in good times and bad.

developing a media relations plan

Setting Objectives

If your communications objectives don't align with your business objectives, then you need to re-consider why you are doing it. Most business objectives aim to build or burnish a reputation and ultimately grow the customer base.

- Are you looking to introduce or inform audiences about your community and its benefits?
- Are you aiming to persuade audiences of the characteristics and resident experiences that differentiate your community from the alternatives?
- Are you expecting to generate leads by motivating families to connect with your community?
- Are you positioning your executives as thought leaders, experts in the industry?

Creating a Framework

Once you've decided on the objectives, the rest of the plan can be constructed.

- Develop strategies
- Identify communications tactics and tools
- Craft key messages
- Generate a list of newsworthy storylines and topics
- Develop a media list of reporters, editors, producers and bloggers
- Claim branded space in social media channels
- Coordinate a content development and editorial calendar with assignments

Selecting Tactics

There are many tools you can use to reach both traditional and new media outlets.

- **News release:** The basic form of telling your story to the media
- **Pitch letter:** Directed to a specific reporter, editor or producer, it summarizes the story idea and why it is of interest to that outlet's audience
- **Media advisory:** A bullet-pointed statement of Who, What, When, Where and Why
- **Media alert:** An advisory related to a specific event, distributed 24 to 48 hours ahead
- **Op-Ed:** An opinion article stating your perspective of a specific issue
- **Letter to the editor:** An opinion response to an issue or specific story that has appeared in a particular newspaper or on a television program
- **B-Roll video:** More and more often, media outlets of all kinds are welcoming video that is compelling and helps tell your story. B-roll is general and raw video that can be edited for any given purpose. It could include soundbites, as well
- **Images and infographics:** These visual communications tools also have generated more interest. Infographics are designed to quickly and clearly summarize stories, research, trends and facts
- **Press kit:** Used as a general information kit or tailored for a major event or launch, it can include a release, organizational background material, brochures, photos, fact sheets, etc.

targeting relevant media

A strong media list is one that is regularly updated as staff and assignments are shifting all the time. Your media list should include the name of the outlet, reporter or assignment desk emails, newsroom phone numbers, and possibly appropriate social media handles. This list should be prioritized based on the topics covered, reporter or editor focus, and audience demographic.

Local Print and Broadcast Media

The local chamber of commerce is a great resource for identifying media contacts in your local community.

Building a relationship with this media set is crucial. Be sure to understand if/how each outlet caters differently to the local market, but each should be considered a priority outlet.

Regional and National Opportunities

There may be opportunities to place your stories with media outside of your local area. If you are part of a trend in the industry, what you are doing may be used as an example in a national story. The nearest bureau of the Associated Press, an international wire service that feeds stories to all news media, is a good target if you think you've got something of broader significance.

Local radio and television stations that are affiliates of national networks like

NBC, CBS, ABC or CNN

also may feed stories up to the national networks.

Leverage the opportunities appropriately. Every outlet has a specific audience (including demographics such as age, income level and education) and a definable circulation or reach. Their sales departments should have this information readily available for the asking.

Distribution Timing

- Newspapers should receive information (your pitch) about two weeks before their deadline. In this modern landscape, shorter pitch windows can still work as many reporters file web-only articles or relevant blog entries
- Periodicals and magazines – or long-leads – need at least three months' lead time
- Television and radio need only about a week's notice to make their coverage decisions
- Web outlets use a shorter pitch window as their parameter is reporter capacity, not space or airtime

forging relationships with the media

It is important to know what your target outlets cover, who the reporter is, what has been covered recently, and how it gets reported. Read, listen and watch the news with some regularity. Try to understand the outlet's editorial calendar (what they have planned) and how it aligns with general calendar highlights (holidays, seasonal activities, etc.).

Reporter Contact

Email is the preferred method of contact for most editors and reporters, and they get a deluge every day. Telephone is almost a nuisance these days, however, reporters still say that a phone call follow-up may – at times – be appropriate. If you are pitching a story, email early in the morning before reporters' morning assignment meetings. Any follow-up phone calls should be made before mid-afternoon as most are on deadline.

In the afternoon, ask if they are on deadline after you identify yourself. If so, politely thank them, and let them know you'll call back at a more convenient time. Don't be discouraged or take it personally if a reporter is short with you. Reporters do appreciate your understanding of their business. Be ready to pitch your story to them in fewer than 30 seconds. Sometimes it helps to write out your 30-second pitch in bullets. It will make your pitch smoother.

After you have worked on a story, make a thank you call to reporters and editors. It isn't expected, but appreciated.

Face-To-Face Meetings/Desksides

At some point, the opportunity will occur for you to meet editors, producers, reporters and bloggers in person. Take advantage of that meeting. Reporters like to know with whom they are working; who is giving them story ideas. You also will be surprised at how willing they are to talk about their jobs, how they do them, and what kind of stories they like best.

A deskside meeting can be an opportunity to provide background on your organization, your lead staff, strategic plans, expertise on industry issues, etc. It is primarily used with print media and doesn't necessarily lead to an article. But it provides a deeper understanding of your organization and positions it well for future opportunities, proactive and reactive.

Becoming a Source

Based on your credibility, accuracy and accessibility with reporters, you may become an expert source for reporters. When a story on the seniors housing industry or seniors market begins to develop, your media contacts will come to you for both information and for comment to make sense of the story. This relationship becomes a very valuable resource to your company as building relationships isn't just about being the subject of a story. Sometimes you help add context.

Bloggers

A blogger is basically an independent media outlet — usually a hobby, but more frequently a profit stream — enabled by the democratization of publishing through technology. The difference between a blogger and a reporter is that the former is traditionally not published by a media outlet (although many media outlets host bloggers, both independent and on-staff).

A blogger may not be as objective as a reporter is expected to be, nor is a blogger hampered by an editorial process. Importantly, a blogger may be just as influential as a reporter among interested audiences. There are hundreds of thousands of blogs that focus on every topic imaginable, including seniors housing. High-profile seniors housing blogs include transitionagingparents.com, insideeldercare.com, theinternationalcaregiver.com, whereyoulivematters.org/category/advice, seniorhousingforum.net, aplaceformom.com and fivestarseniorliving.com.

Contact them correctly. As with a priority media contact, really get to know their content, calendar and style. Many bloggers only do proactive work for pay or in-kind trades. That doesn't mean you will get a glowing article, but it will mean that coverage of your organization will get put into their editorial calendar.

making news

Reporters use a few lenses to determine what they may need/want to cover.

- Has something changed? Is it new?
- Is it timely?
- Does it affect or is it of interest to my audience?

Once past this initial screen, they then look for some basic information.

- Who is affected by this piece of information?
- What happened? (Is it interesting or dramatic?)
- When did it happen? (Did this just happen or is it about to?)
- Where did it happen? (Is it in my audience's geographic area?)
- Why did it happen? (Can we explain the reasons behind it to put it into context?)
- How did it happen? (Can we provide more details about what led up to it?)

Being good at media relations means being a good reporter, being able to answer all of the questions above. Give someone responsibility to find and determine the strength of your stories and announcements for an editorial calendar that

creates a regular rhythm of your news. If possible, align the pitching of your story ideas with key seasons, months or holidays as recognized by the public.

- Key staff changes
- New services
- Property enhancements
- Seasonal activities

Go to the media only when you're certain that the information you have is news.

Once you have a reporter interested, be ready with key components.

- Clean facts
- Staff experts prepared and available
- Resident perspectives lined-up, if available
- Supporting content such as images or video

pictures **& soundbites**

The media generally like to create their own content. But, as newsrooms have shrunk, fewer staff are available to generate original content, such as videos, graphics and images. Whether it's still photography for newspapers or video for television, media are more and more willing to accept and use provided content.

Images

When providing imagery to the media, always think about what makes the image compelling for them to use.

- **Composition** - one simple technique for success is to think about how your images are balanced or symmetrical
- **Emotion** - what is the image telling us in terms of tone?
- **Story** - try and make your images communicate something on their own
- **Faces** - a common mistake many make is capturing the backs of heads
- **Lighting** - make sure the subject is visible and be aware of bleaching
- **Resolution** - provide images that are a minimum of 150dpi but no more than 300dpi

Routine photos such as headshots are acceptable. Just be certain that the pictures are taken by a professional with proper lighting and setup, and make sure residents sign release forms.

Audio and Video

As noted previously, some broadcast and web outlets will take video. But when they do come to capture their own, be helpful. And that is true for all broadcast elements.

- Give television news ideas about where to shoot their video
- Make the location interesting
- Put the radio reporter in a situation where the background sounds help tell the story
- Make sure there is an opportunity or a space for quiet when needed

communicating **in social channels**

Controlling your message in social media channels is becoming increasingly difficult. But it is a necessary strategy as more and more people turn to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Snapchat not only to consume news, but to discuss it.

Social channels are key distribution vehicles to reach your audiences with news – both proactive and reactive. But there also are many perils if not handled correctly. You still will want a strategic social media plan to make the most of your efforts. There are plenty of websites, consultants and the social network sites themselves who can help you put together an effective plan.

Social media is only a “must have” in terms of owning branded communications real estate and to have an expected communications channel available. Protect your brand by registering on the common platforms listed above. When news breaks, especially during incidents of crisis, social channels become a primary source to track developments. So be ready.

Twitter

Nearly 70 million Americans have a Twitter account. A short-form social channel, tweets are now able to be up to 280 characters in length (double the original amount). During issues or crisis response, you will WANT broad viewing of your posts. You can use it to provide action updates or drive people to your web site or 1-800 number for more information.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is mainly used for professional networking. As of 2017, it had more than 130 million registered U.S. users, spanning 170 industries. This is a channel where your organization can further establish leadership credentials commenting on industry trends and issues, as well as post press releases. In times of crisis, it also can be used

to direct people to your web site or 1-800 number for more information.

Facebook

Facebook is the world’s largest social network with nearly 215 million users in the U.S. As much as LinkedIn is business-to-business-focused, Facebook is much more consumer facing for companies. During news events and crises, it can be a primary location to post action updates, press releases, or drive people to a designated web page or 1-800 number.

creating a crisis plan

People think of a crisis as a disaster — the occurrence of a cataclysmic event. A crisis is primarily a human trauma. Not just physical and not always dramatic, a crisis can seriously interrupt business, significantly damage reputation and/or negatively impact the bottom line.

Although it is impossible to prevent every potential crisis, it is possible and necessary to predict and prepare for likely scenarios. Through preparation and training, you can take actions promptly that prevent most incidents from becoming a crisis and minimize the consequences of those that do.

A crisis involves conflict and drama, and this is what attracts members of the media. Corporate and personal reputations that are years in the making can be severely damaged in a matter of hours by a crisis. Improperly handled, it can threaten the very existence of your organization.

The purpose of this section of the manual is to prepare you for crises that may happen. In any given crisis, audience priority is:

- Those immediately affected and their families
- Employees
- Stakeholders
- Public

Stages of a Crisis

Each crisis will likely go through the following stages of development. Knowing these stages in advance will allow you to be prepared to effectively handle each crisis you encounter.

Flash point

Most crises occur spontaneously and unexpectedly. It is this element of surprise that makes careful planning and practice essential to successfully managing and communicating through a crisis. In the Golden Hour, the first hour of awareness, it is critical that actions and communications work concurrently and in alignment. Activating the response plan must be done with urgency, and an initial public response, if appropriate, must be crafted based on standing content.

Providing steady and accurate information is critical to managing a crisis. Having too little information, or having the wrong information creates an information gap. To close that gap, the designated spokesperson must be ready to make an initial public statement and handle Q&A.

Escalation

As a crisis unfolds, events seem to build on each other. This makes it essential to control the flow of information between management, employees, residents, their families and the media. Minor inaccuracies can snowball into false reports that lead to greater confusion and more attention. This is not the time to tout your community's excellent operational record.

One point of comfort in crisis response is that, depending on the scenario, the authorities will play a lead role in response activities and decisions. They also may play a key role in communications. However, your organization is never out of the spotlight and needs to continue cooperative efforts and providing a voice to communicate organization-specific activities and resolve.

Resolution

In this stage, effective operations must bring the crisis to an end. At the same time, your communications must align to the actions. If your activities and your communications are not aligned, a powerfully negative net impression will harden. Maintain accuracy, provide appropriate detail, and express continued resolve.

Recovery

Once the crisis has subsided, your organization can begin implementing operational improvement measures. As support, you will want to proactively

communicate those steps and a return to normal operations to residents and families, staff, appropriate authorities and those with a vested interest. It is during this period when you can directly communicate any excellent operation record your community has.

Identify Potential Threats

There are many areas of exposure at your communities since you serve a potentially vulnerable population. You must therefore be prepared to deal with a variety of crises that could affect your communities.

- Death
- Accidents
- Fire
- Abuse
- Active Shooter
- Fraud/Embezzlement
- Natural Disaster
- Sexual Harassment
- Missing Resident
- Personnel Issues
- Complaints or Accusations

Prepared Action Items

To effectively handle potential crises:

- You must be ready to communicate effectively with your residents and their families
- You must be prepared to meet the needs of your employees
- You must be ready for a situation that places your community in the glare of the media spotlight
- You must prepare for a situation that could last for several weeks

Develop a standing response team:

It is important to plan well in advance, so your organization is ready to handle any crisis that may develop. Plan by determining which members of your staff will serve on your crisis team. The team may include the executive director, marketing director, care delivery supervisor, food service manager, communications director and other key staff members you identify.

Make sure that each crisis team member is clear on their role. You should consider the needs of the residents, family members, employees and media when you make your assignments. Walk through a potential crisis and have each member of the crisis team role-play their part. Scheduling a crisis drill is an effective way to practice and will allow each member of the crisis team to identify their responsibilities.

Draft standing response content:

Key messages need to reflect empathy, actions, cooperative efforts and resolve:

- [ORGANIZATION'S NAME]'s highest priority is the care and support of our residents and their families
- Everyone on staff has taken personal charge of our response to this incident
- We have committed every resource to support authorities in their response efforts and the investigation of this incident.

- We are committed to resolving this situation and making any necessary changes to our training or procedures

A holding statement should be brief and to the point. It is not necessary or advisable at this point to go into detail. Media members do not expect full disclosure; they are looking for the relevant information that will allow them to tell the story.

Prepare information distribution channels:

- Create a 1-800 number and crisis email account
- Create dark (designed, but not active) crisis web pages
- Create draft social media posts

Action Steps in a Crisis

Ensure resident safety and provide for residents' needs:

- Follow emergency procedures and make sure the situation is secure, and residents needs are met
- Temporarily halt all communications with traditional media and in social media channels
- When ready, post social media holding statements acknowledging a crisis incident
- Depending on the type of crisis, any advertising also should be suspended

Assemble your crisis team and make crisis team assignments:

- Establish an operation center and identify additional team members needed for the duration of the crisis. It is possible that the affected

community will not be open, and the crisis team will establish a location outside the community as a base of operation

- If you are working with a corporate team, establish a dedicated phone line to your corporate office to ensure constant communication and support
- As needed, activate the standing crisis 1-800 number and web page
- As needed, assign a telephone responder to handle incoming media queries
- As needed, assign a second person to handle calls from residents' families and route them to the proper person
- Resident needs are the priority, so at least one person should be assigned to make sure the residents have everything they need to be as comfortable as possible
- Consult your attorney. You may need the advice of legal counsel during the crisis. Your attorney should also review your media statement
- Identify potential third-party supporters or credible experts who can speak on behalf of the company. A trade organization, such as the American Seniors Housing Association, may be able to provide important context to reporters

Prepare your spokesperson for media engagement with a statement and Q&A content based on the standing content communicating:

- **Empathy**
 - Express concern for all residents, families and staff affected
- **Actions**
 - Inform public of response plan activities
 - Emphasize steps you're taking to ensure this is an isolated incident

- **Cooperative efforts**

- How you are working with authorities
- Express intent to keep the public informed

- **Resolve**

- Emphasize your commitment to bringing the crisis to an end quickly and safely

Control the flow of information to media:

- Clearly determine your organization's role in conjunction with any authorities
- If you receive media inquiries, advise reporters of set communications schedule
- Engage media with the designated spokesperson delivering a prepared statement based on the updated standing content. S/he also should be prepared to field questions
- Provide media an update schedule for new information as it becomes available
- All social media activities should be focused on the holding statement, driving people to the 1-800 number and/or the now live crisis information web page

Don't hide bad news, it only gets worse:

- Your credibility as a news source is built on honesty and trust with reporters
- Never speculate nor intentionally mislead the media

Communicating with Residents and Families

Effectively assisting residents and family members is a critical step in effective crisis communications. Family members who are kept in the information loop feel more assured your team is responding appropriately.

Meet with family members and residents:

- Make affected family members and residents a priority
- Include residents and family members from the beginning by bringing them up to speed on the situation and explaining steps you are taking to achieve a resolution
- Show your commitment to keeping residents and family members in the information loop by providing consistent updates even if there are no new developments

Express empathy and concern:

- A high priority needs to be put on expressing empathy and concern to family members. Let them know the situation is your top priority and that you are doing all you can to resolve it
- If a resident has been hospitalized, make sure a member of your community team visits the hospital to meet with family members
- Don't assign responsibility until all facts have been gathered and the situation has been resolved

working with media onsite

When talking to the media, you are talking to the public – including employees, family members, friends, and former neighbors of residents. It is critical to satisfy the public's right to know by providing timely, accurate and truthful information to the media. All decisions in a crisis should be made with the best interest of residents in mind.

When media arrive on site, designate a specific area for them to occupy. You and/or the appropriate authorities will then go to them at that location for any updates. Make sure to provide all reporters with additional information as it becomes available.

Deciding When Not to Talk

There may be times when you will not be able to speak to the media for legal or other reasons. If you decide not to speak to reporters about the incident, you should politely explain that you won't be making a statement at this time. However, most times you will still benefit from making your organization available and delivering messages of empathy, cooperation and resolve.

Calling a News Conference

In the case of a major news story with interest by a large number of reporters, it may make sense to call a news conference. This allows you to address the situation

with all reporters at the same time. You will need to carefully orchestrate the news conference, using a space that is large enough to accommodate all reporters. Invite all interested media outlets, giving them enough lead-time to attend. Determine in advance who will speak for your organization.

A news conference should only be used for a major event or when time doesn't permit multiple individual interviews.

potential crises and responses

The following outlines will give you sample response actions to a variety of scenarios.

Situation:

You discover that a resident has wandered away from your community's dementia unit. The police are conducting a search. Her daughter is accusing your community of negligence. She is angry and talking to the media. This is not the first time that there has been an elopement at your community.

“

Response Actions:

- | |
|---|
| ■ Meet with police and other authorities involved in search |
| ■ Assemble your crisis team and make assignments |
| ■ Explore suspending social media activity |
| ■ Determine actions to be taken by your community to aid in the search |
| ■ Draft key messages based on holding content |
| ■ Meet with family members and explain actions being taken by the community |
| ■ Meet with residents and explain the situation |
| ■ Issue a statement and speak to reporters, if appropriate |
| ■ Promise to update reporters as additional information is available |

Public Statement:

We are beyond regret for this situation, and our primary concern is that [NAME] be located as quickly as possible and is safe, healthy and comfortable. We are doing everything we can to assist in the search being led by [AUTHORITIES], including [EXAMPLE, EXAMPLE]. We also ask for any help from the community if there are sightings or clues they find. We take our responsibilities very seriously, and right now that centers on the safe return of [NAME].

”

Crisis

2

Situation:

A fire breaks out at your community and all residents are evacuated. No one is injured in the fire, but there is smoke and water damage throughout the building. All residents will have to be temporarily relocated.

Response Actions:

- Ensure the safety and comfort of residents first. Their safety and well-being should be your primary concern
- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Assign staff members to find temporary housing for residents
- Determine the extent of damage and cause of fire, if possible
- Draft key messages based on holding content
- Meet with family members to explain the situation and actions being taken for relocation
- Speak to reporters and tell them where residents will be housed temporarily, how the fire started (if known and if local authorities approve) and plans for recovery
- Refer questions about specifics of the fire to the fire department
- Populate social media channels with status updates and directions for more information
- Promise to update reporters as more information is available

Public Statement:

This is a devastating moment for all of us. Our first concern is our residents' safety, and we're quite relieved there were no injuries. We followed all our emergency evacuation procedures, and I am very proud of the response by our team members and our residents. We're in the process of ensuring all families are notified, as well as finding a comfortable place for our residents to stay temporarily while we repair and clean up damage. We are making every effort to restore the community to normal and return our residents back to their home as quickly as possible.

Situation:

The daughter of a resident comes to visit her father at lunchtime and finds him on the floor of his apartment. The resident appears to be physically unharmed. He is confused and thinks he fell overnight, but he is not sure. His daughter is angry and calls the local media, charging your community with neglect and abuse.

Response Actions:

- Determine injuries, if any, to the resident
- Determine with your staff exactly what may have happened to the resident
- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Determine what actions, if any, will be taken by the community
- Determine any immediate changes to policy or procedures, if any, that will be put in place during your investigation
- Draft key messages based on holding content
- Meet with family members and provide information
- Meet with other residents to explain the situation and new procedures in place
- Respond to any media queries expressing empathy and explaining the situation as well as any actions being taken, if necessary, to ensure there are no repeat incidents

Public Statement:

First and foremost, our residents' safety is always our main concern, and we fully understand the pain this is causing the [NAME] family. We are currently investigating what may have happened. We will share the results of our investigation with you, as appropriate, but only after we have brought closure to the family. What I can tell you now is that we do have staff and systems in place to ensure we aid residents as quickly as possible in the case of a fall.

Crisis

4

Situation:

A member of your staff made an error with the medication provided to a resident. As a result, the resident is hospitalized. Her family blames your community, and reporters are interested in the story. The resident is recovering in the hospital. This is not the first time that a medication error has occurred at your community. Your community was cited in your last state survey for medication management issues.

Response Actions:

- Determine with your staff exactly what may have happened to the resident
- Suspend any social media activity
- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Consult with the hospital to determine extent of injury and prognosis
- Draft key messages and a statement based on holding content
- Meet with family members
- Meet with residents to provide them with any information you think they may need
- Meet with reporters, and read the statement which should include an expression of sympathy and concern, an outline of what happened (if clearly determined), cooperative efforts with authorities and medical professionals, and what steps are being taken to ensure the situation will not be repeated

Public Statement:

We are deeply concerned about the events that led to the hospitalization of [NAME], and we are assisting the medical professionals at [NAME] hospital in every way possible to speed recovery. Our first concern is always for the safety and health of our residents. Everyone with a family member residing with us trusts us to ensure their loved one receives the utmost in care. Although we have systems in place to ensure that medications are provided properly to our residents, we clearly need to step back and closely evaluate them. We are currently investigating the situation to determine what happened. Once our investigation is completed, we will review those policies to make sure we are providing the very best care possible.

Situation:

Several residents have reported money missing from their apartments. Your investigation indicates that a housekeeper at your community may be responsible for the thefts. You have turned the case over to the local police, and the employee is suspended. TV and newspaper reporters have spoken to the police and are asking for information.

Response Actions:

- Consult with the police to determine the status of the investigation
- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Meet with family members and explain actions taken
- Meet with residents and explain the situation and actions taken to eliminate the problem
- Respond to media queries with a short statement
- Express sympathy for the victims and explain what is being done to meet their needs
- Refer reporters to police for questions about the investigation

Public Statement:

Our first concern is always the safety and well-being of our residents, and we are deeply sorry for all of the anxiety this is causing our residents. As this is an ongoing investigation, I can't comment on anything beyond confirming we have suspended an employee until authorities have completed the investigation. What I can tell you is that we have never had any similar issue with any of our employees, and we are reviewing our new procedures to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Situation:

The family of a resident becomes suspicious of your community after discovering a nasty bruise on the resident's forearm during a visit. She told her family it was from bumping into furniture, but they are not believing her. Their social media conversations have caused others to begin questioning the safety of their family members who reside there. That has captured the attention of the local paper which decides to do an in-depth piece on elder abuse – something your community has never been accused of – in seniors housing.

Response Actions:

- Determine with your staff exactly what may have happened to the original resident
- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Determine any immediate changes to policy or procedures, if any, that will be put in place during your investigation
- Draft key messages and a statement based on holding content
- Meet with family members
- Meet with residents to provide them with any information you think they may need
- Meet with reporters, and read the statement expressing concern

Public Statement:

Nothing is more important to us than the safety, health and dignity of our residents. We have a highly-trained, empathetic and vigilant staff, and they are the reason we have an impeccable record with regard to resident care. Everyone with a family member residing with us trusts us to ensure their loved one receives the utmost in care.

Situation:

When health status changes, families often push back on the additional costs for a higher level of care. And they face the prospect that the provider can't deliver a higher level of care, so a move may be inevitable. They go to the media with complaints that the resident is unfairly being evicted.

Ongoing communication with families updating them on changes in health and behavior status is critical, as is documentation.

“

Public Statement:

Our number one priority is the health, safety and comfort of our residents, whether they stay with us or move to a more appropriate setting.

We are very aware of the limits in our service capabilities. In some cases, there are legal limitations, as well.

We strive to avoid surprises by staying highly-focused on consistent and compassionate dialogues with our residents' families regarding health assessments and care capabilities.

”

Response Actions:

- Assemble your crisis team and make assignments
- Draft key messages and a statement based on holding content
- Meet with family members
- Meet with residents to provide them with any information you think they may need

Crisis #

8

Situation:

A reporter from the local newspaper has been reviewing the state survey records. His investigation uncovers a number of violations from your past surveys. He wants to meet with you and ask you about the violations.

Response Actions:

- Review your records so you know exactly what he is talking about
- Draft key messages and provide supports that address the changes made following each survey (cooperative activities with state authorities; actions items completed)
- Meet with the crisis team and draft a response to each violation in the survey reports
- Determine who your spokesperson will be
- Consider referring the reporter to the American Seniors Housing Association to provide context about the state survey process

Public Statement:

Our primary concern is always for the safety and security of our residents. We have worked very hard on our own and in cooperation with state authorities to both meet and exceed standards for excellent quality-of-life experiences and care for our residents. We take this process very seriously, and we have addressed each issue that has been brought to our attention to the satisfaction of the state.

tips for media interviews

- Set a time (within their deadline) to answer questions. Schedule time to make sure you provide the right information.
- Take the time to prepare your key messages. Think through your answers.
- When being interviewed, less is more. Answer the question, bridge to your key message and provide some context. Then stop talking. Silence is OK. If the reporter needs more information, they will ask follow-up questions.
- “No”, “I don’t know”, and “I can’t talk about that right now” are acceptable answers, however, you need to take the opportunity to provide a message and context you DO know and CAN share.
- No comment is not an acceptable answer.
- When being interviewed, answer the question asked. If you are unsure, ask for clarification.
- Don’t take any question personally or respond defensively.
- Dress in professional business attire for all media interviews.

tips for media relations

- | |
|---|
| ■ Always return reporters' phone calls. |
| ■ Respect deadlines. Ask when the reporter needs the information, then make sure you get back to them by that time. |
| ■ Remember that you are the authority on seniors housing. |
| ■ Do not assume that the media knows what you're talking about. Be prepared to explain the situation in lay terms. |
| ■ When you must explain a complicated subject, avoid jargon. |
| ■ Personalize your stories. Make it easy for the reporter by giving them an example, anecdote or illustration. |
| ■ Tell the reporter why they should be writing about your organization. Don't ask them if they are "interested." |
| ■ Follow the Golden Rule when dealing with reporters. |
| ■ Never lie. Never speculate. |

appendix

News Media Call Referral Sheet

This form is designed to help you to deal with requests and inquiries from news organizations.

Use this form to obtain information from reporters. This will help you decide if you want to participate in the news story and appoint an appropriate spokesperson. This will also give you time to formulate your responses.

Use this form anytime you receive a call from a member of the news media. When you receive a call, politely explain that you will be glad to have someone get back to the reporter and obtain the following information:

What is your name and what news organization do you represent?

What is your call back number?

What is your deadline?

What is the focus of your story?

DO NOT PROMISE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STORY.
DO PROMISE THAT YOU WILL RETURN THE CALL.

Vital Phone Numbers

This form should be made available to each community
and updated regularly

In the event of emergency, always call 9-1-1 first

Executive Director Home _____

Executive Director Cell _____

Food Service Director Home _____

Food Service Director Cell _____

Assisted Living Supervisor Home _____

Assisted Living Supervisor Cell _____

Maintenance Supervisor Home _____

Maintenance Supervisor Cell _____

Fire (non-emergency) _____

Police (non-emergency) _____

Electric Company _____

Gas Company _____

Poison Control _____

Telephone Company _____

Red Cross _____

Elevator _____

Emergency Call System _____

Fire Alarm Company _____

Security Alarm Company _____

Garbage Collection _____

Cable Company _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Crisis Communications Resources

The American Seniors Housing Association is available to assist you and make recommendations for resources during a crisis.

This crisis communication guide is designed to provide you with tools you need to handle many emergency or delicate situations you may encounter. We encourage you to become familiar with this material now so that you are better prepared to handle a crisis when it develops.

The way in which you respond to a crisis can have a lasting effect on your organization, either positively or negatively. The American Seniors Housing Association wants to be a resource for you, in all situations. Please call our offices if you think you need outside assistance with crisis communications. We will do our best to provide you with ongoing support or help you find it.

The American Seniors Housing Association also can assist by providing media representatives with information, research and data regarding the seniors housing industry. This perspective can be very useful to the media and is a resource we encourage you to use.

You can reach David Schless, President of the American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA), at 202-885-5560.

**AMERICAN
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