



# SPOKESPERSON TRAINING



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
**SAMHSA**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

S O C I A L M A R K E T I N G T A T E A M



# What it Means to be a Spokesperson

A spokesperson is someone who anticipates the need to be the public face and voice for their organization in a variety of in-person speaking engagements (community events, conferences) and media settings (broadcast radio/TV, print newspaper/magazines, or online podcasts/blogs/news outlets/social media platforms, including live video engagements).

As a spokesperson, you serve as a liaison between the system of care and the community. Being a spokesperson is a great responsibility, and also a great opportunity to share the work of systems of care with the media, decision-makers, and other community members. In a way, spokespeople are the “face” of an organization.

Spokespeople are important to a system of care, as they provide a human touch that is often more effective than data alone in changing the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of an audience. Research suggests that personal contact can effect a positive change in an audience in terms of the way the audience views the speaker and their cause, as well as the likelihood that the audience will succumb to stereotypes.<sup>1</sup> A parent addressing the PTA or an education advocate testifying before the school board are examples of individuals using this strategy when educating others about children’s mental health.



## An Effective Spokesperson:

- Uses clear, audience-centered key messages with compelling supporting evidence;
- Understands their audience’s perspective;
- Practices their talking points and messaging to become a disciplined communicator;
- Is comfortable presenting messages to the media including via online settings;
- Uses techniques for staying on message including when handling tough questions;
- Understands their rights and how to use them to effectively to communicate their perspective in media interviews and public-facing meetings, as well as respond to questions with confidence; and
- Is familiar with the social media policy for their system of care and has a social media plan in place. Remember, anything you tweet, post, or share lives on the internet forever!

<sup>1</sup> Corrigan, P. W., & Penn, D. L. (1999). Lessons from social psychology on discrediting psychiatric stigma. *American Psychologist*, 54, 765–776.

# The Benefits of Getting Out There

Why should you spend the time and energy being a spokesperson for systems of care through in-person, print, and online settings?

- **The foundation of systems of care is the community.** Systems of care cannot work unless everyone in the community not only understands the concept, but also does their part to help it succeed. Connecting with the community and spreading the word is the best way to do that.
- **People need to know that issues surrounding children’s mental health affect real people in their community.** One-on-one communication (in-person speaking engagements or online) is the most effective form of communication. Audiences are able to interact and ask you questions, and your issue becomes humanized and real to them.
- **Connecting with the community at-large shows that you are part of that community.** Once you’re actively engaging with the community, people will know more about you and realize you are a part of their world. Your work and issue won’t live in the shadows.
- **Long-term support for systems of care and children’s mental health issues depends on policymakers.** By speaking to the community through print/online media or in-person and raising awareness and action, you are working to build grassroots support that can influence decision-makers and community leaders. When more people are aware of children’s mental health programs, they are more likely to voice their support for them.

# Know Your Audience

Critical to the success of any presentation is knowing your audience. It is essential in helping you determine the most skillful way to communicate your main points. For example, you may need to emphasize certain information if you are presenting to a small company or local organization versus a large conference or media representative. Likewise, if your audience consists of young people, you don't need to spend time discussing issues that are important to older people. To help you better understand your audience needs, answer the following questions:

1. Who is your audience?

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2. What is the business or mission of the audience or group?

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3. What do you know about the audience's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as they relate to children's mental health?

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4. What else do you know about this audience? How do they spend their time? Who influences them? What might make them listen to you or motivate them to change?

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## Know Your Audience (*continued*)

5. What change in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors do you seek for this audience?

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6. How does your message fit with the culture of the audience or group?

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7. What is the organization or group's reputation within the community?

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8. What are the needs of the audience or group?

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9. How could you collect information about the characteristics of this audience? (For example: interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.)

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Finally, always consider two issues before speaking:

10. What is it that you want to say to the audience?

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11. What does the audience want to hear from you?

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If the answers to these questions are different, you will need to think strategically about how to reach this audience. Where is your common ground? You will want to find it and emphasize it when speaking to this audience.

# Remember Your SOCO

We've all experienced the speaker who presents way too much information—most of it over our heads. Or we've seen a TV talk show guest who has two minutes to get a point across but loses the opportunity because the interviewer led him or her on a tangent, ignoring the core message.

Studies have shown that an audience retains one, maybe two, key messages from a speech or presentation. Taking this into consideration and recognizing the inherent time limitations on all presentations, you must maximize the time you have to present your information.

To use your time efficiently and ensure that your audience understands and will remember your key points, develop a SOCO—single overriding communications objective—for your presentation.

Your SOCO:

- Will help you organize your thoughts. After that, if necessary, you can develop a more focused set of messages that tie your SOCO to an individual speech or presentation.
- Is the reason you do a presentation or interview. If you stay true to your SOCO, there will be no doubt in the audience's mind about what you stand for, how you want them to think, and what you want them to do.
- Can help you apply the "KISS" principle—Keep It Short and Simple. Only a small percentage of what is heard is retained. Make sure what you say is brief and to the point.



# Prepare Your SOCO

1. Who are you? (Your name, occupation, title/position, geographic area in which you work and reside.)

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2. What have you witnessed in your work, community, or personal life that illustrates the need to raise awareness of children’s mental health?

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3. What is currently going on in the world of children’s mental health? How might this frame your presentation today? As appropriate, tie your message to a new study or related news story.

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4. What do you want your audience to do? (You may want to review your answers to questions 10 and 11 of the “Know Your Audience” exercise.)

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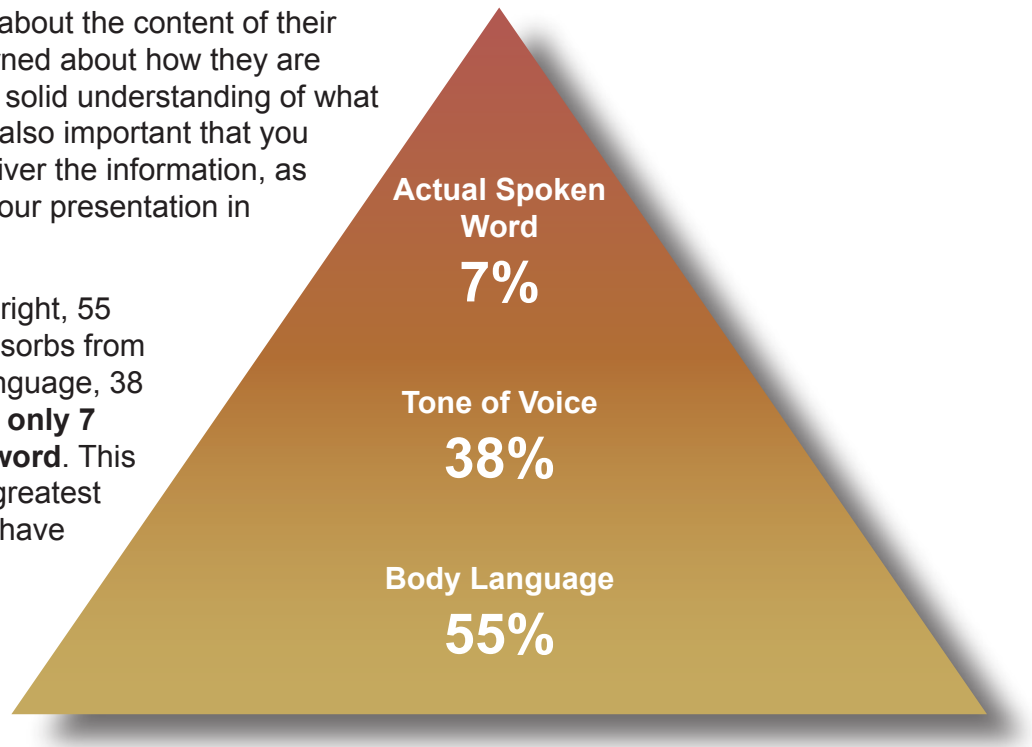
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# In-Person Speaking Engagements: How Does Your Audience Pay Attention?

Often, presenters are concerned about the content of their presentation, and are less concerned about how they are going to deliver it. While having a solid understanding of what you want to say is important, it is also important that you practice how you are going to deliver the information, as your audience pays attention to your presentation in more than one way.

As you can see in the pyramid at right, 55 percent of what your audience absorbs from your presentation is your body language, 38 percent is your tone of voice, and **only 7 percent is your actual spoken word**. This demonstrates that even with the greatest content in the world, you need to have an effective method of message delivery in order for your training to be engaging. In other words, you need to brush up on your presentation skills.



# In-Person Speaking Engagements: Tips on Delivery

- **Content.** Share information about yourself up front. This personalizes you to the audience. The introduction should be 15 percent of your speech, the discussion about 75 percent, and the closing 10 percent.
- **Eye contact.** The reason you maintain eye contact with your audience is for feedback. The only way you'll know if your audience is getting the message is through eye contact. Look for heads nodding with you.
- **Smile.** Did your body language say you were approachable? It did if you smiled (at appropriate times).
- **Body language.** A picture is worth a thousand words. Crossed arms, a closed-off stance, or stiffness all exhibit defensive, negative body language. Positive body language is seen through openness, gestures, moving away from the podium (unless you can't take your microphone with you), and taking off your jacket, if appropriate.
- **Facial expression.** It is impossible to hide your feelings when you talk about something you really care about. The kind of passion people feel and exhibit when they talk about their loved ones, their mate, or their children is the same passion that should be conveyed when talking about your issues. That kind of passion gives off energy, and energy makes you convincing.
- **Gestures.** Gestures help tell the story. Remember, about 50 percent of what people retain is through your body language. Gestures reinforce and highlight your story and give you energy in your delivery.
- **Voice.** You have six different octaves—use them. Try to avoid saying “uhms,” “ahs,” and “you knows.”
- **Pauses/silence.** There are four good times to pause: 1) when you move from one subject to another; 2) when you want the message to sink in; 3) when you want or need to collect your thoughts; and 4) when you receive laughter or applause.
- **Use of humor.** Jokes and anecdotes make for an entertaining speech, but make sure you practice them. Choose material carefully—if you think a comment or joke could be taken the wrong way by even one person, don't say it.
- **Avoid distractions.** Don't fiddle with your hair, shuffle your feet, sway back and forth, jingle change in your pockets, or play with your eyeglasses.
- **Don't use the podium as a crutch.** In fact, don't use the podium at all if you can help it. Let your gestures and body language tell your story and give your audience a break from the other speakers who may have used the podium.
- **Get set before you start to speak.** Most of us feel we have to rush right in and say something to our listeners to capture their attention. The audience needs and wants a little time to visually process a new speaker. If you start too soon, they will feel anxious and rushed and may initially tune you out.
- **Talk with—not at—your listeners.** Keep thinking of your audience as individuals, not a large impersonal group.

- **Don't forget that being nervous is normal.** Try to “reframe” your fear into excitement and enthusiasm. A little nervousness indicates you care about what you're doing.
- **Practice.** Practice, practice, practice. If possible, spend time alone just prior to your speech; take some deep breaths and think about your central theme.

**Remember: You are the expert on this topic. People have come to hear you talk about what you know.**

# In-Person Speaking Engagements: Parts of an Effective Speech

Twenty minutes is a good benchmark for an average speech for an average occasion. If you need more time to make your point, don't be afraid to take it.

Listening to a speech is very different from reading one. Because your audience can't go back to your speech and review confusing parts, it's important for you to deliver a clear, organized presentation and to repeat your central points. Every speech needs a beginning, middle, and end. If you use this three-part structure, your speech will be clear, organized, and powerful.

1. **Tell them what you're going to tell them.** In the first part of your speech, tell your audience your themes and major points. This should take 1 to 3 minutes.
2. **Tell them.** In the middle part of your speech, illustrate all the points that support your theme. This should take about 20 minutes.
3. **Tell them what you told them.** At the end of the speech, recap. Be sincere, be brief, be seated. Allow 1 or 2 minutes.



## Sample timing for 20-minute speech

- Up to Minute 1: Introduce yourself; mention the occasion, audience, and agenda.
- Minutes 1-3: Give the grabber: a story, personal experience, videotape, news item, joke, quotation, etc.
- Minutes 3-18: Present the body of your speech.
- Minutes 18-20: Conclude your speech: story, song, quotation, allusion, refer back to opening.

# General Interview Tips

## You can:

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- Refuse an interview if you do not trust the person doing the interview or outlet they represent.
- Refer the interviewer to someone more knowledgeable on the subject.
- Wait until after the crisis is over to comment.
- Respect if you want to talk off the record.
- Have someone there that will be able to back you up.
- Be spoken to with respect and at a level that you understand.
- Refuse an interview if the interviewer will not inform you of which print or online platforms the interview will be published or posted on.
- Say no to an interview on any day because of your given crises.

## You should:

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- Make sure the positive issues are reported.
- Appoint a spokesperson and have that person represent your organization.
- Make sure you have several sources around the issues to assist with interviews.
- Give accurate information on the topic.
- Provide campaign-specific hashtags to the interviewer to be included in the piece (i.e., #HeroesofHope).
- Stick to your main point.
- Work with the reporter to make sure you tell your story but still meet the reporter's deadlines.
- Provide the media with a parent who has experience in the area in question.
- Participate in as many media interviews as you feel comfortable.

- Develop a Q&A and practice with a colleague before the interview.
- Provide a brief bio prior to the interview.
- Chat briefly with your interviewer; make sure he/she can pronounce/spell your name correctly and has your correct title. (But remember that you are mic'd before you go live.)
- State your name, spell your last name, state your title, organization, and the subject of the interview when testing the microphones, instead of saying "testing, 1-2-3."
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Talk conversationally.

## Special tips for TV:

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- Check yourself in the mirror right before you go on.
- Sit forward in your chair to show authority and interest.
- Leave your hands free to gesture. This adds vocal variety.

## Special tips for social media:

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- Ask if the interview will be for written use, recorded live, or for later material use.
- If the interview will be a video for social media, provide concise responses as social media videos tend to be no more than 2 minutes long.
- Provide a copy of stats, data, or infographics to be included in the social media content.

# An Interviewee's Rights

Agreeing to an interview with the media—any broadcast, print, or online outlet—does not mean waiving your right to courtesy and respect. Indeed, the vast majority of producers and reporters are professionals who appreciate your willingness to participate and will gladly agree to reasonable requests.

You have a right to:

**Determine the scope of the interview.** What topics will be covered? Is the interviewer interested in your personal views, or will he/she stick to the subject at hand?

**Know the show's format.** How long should answers be? Will you be sent the questions prior to the interview?

- *If the interview is with a broadcast outlet (radio or TV)*—is it recorded or live? Will there be a studio audience? Will there be call-in questions from the public, and will they be screened?
- *If the interview is with a print or online outlet*—where will the interview be published (print, online, or both)? If online, which online platforms will the interview be posted on? Will it be conducted live online via Facebook Live, podcast, or another platform? If it is live, will there be questions from the public, and will they be screened?

**Know the length of the interview.** If the show is live, you probably will be given an approximate length; if it is recorded, you have the right to know how much of the interview will be used. Knowing the length of the interview in advance helps you prepare appropriate answers to questions you anticipate.

**Ask the producer or interviewer what specific subject areas will be covered.** Understand that you may not be given all the questions. Producers and interviewers usually discuss the issues they will touch upon ahead of time. If not, be prepared for difficult questions.

**Pursue your objective.** When you agree to be interviewed, let the interviewer know of your objectives in being interviewed. If you are promoting a program or particular point of view, and time is getting short, you have the right to steer the conversation so that your concerns are met.

**Offer visual materials.** These will enhance your presentation. Producers and interviewers often welcome one or two visual items such as short film clips, photos, or infographics to provide context on the topic. Some stations in small markets are not equipped to handle such materials; others may reject them for format reasons. Most talk shows or online outlets, however, like visuals, which give you an excellent vehicle to illustrate your message. It is always wise to ask ahead of time if they can accommodate your materials.

**Monitor the “cut-away” questions.** Most recorded TV interviews are shot with one camera, so reporters record their questions after the interview is completed. Later, it is edited into the interview to give the impression that two cameras were used. Sometimes, a reporter alters questions. You have the right to be present while the questions are recorded and to object should they differ from the actual interview.

**State your message.** You do not need to wait for the interviewer to ask the questions that will lead to the message you wish to deliver. Take advantage of a pause in the interview to make a point. If interrupted before having a fair chance to answer the question, the interviewee has a right to complete the answer.



**Be polite but firm.** Use transitions to return to your message points.

**Take control of the interview.** Don't be intimidated by a big-name journalist or a network producer. It might be their show, but it's your issue. You are the expert, and you can make the interview compelling by being assertive and enthusiastic.

**Know who the other guests will be on a talk show and their order of appearance.**

**Ask for a recording of what was aired once the show is over.** Radio stations and podcasts may provide you with a CD or audio file of the program. You also can ask someone in your office or family to record the show.

# How to Stay in Control for All Interview Types

- **Your campaign messages should form the basis of the agenda** that you want to get across in your interview. Remember that you are the expert and you are in charge.
- **Listen to the question.** People speak 125–150 words per minute (wpm). The brain processes 400 wpm. What do we do with the extra time? We start formulating our answer. Focus on what the person is asking.
- **Personalize what you are saying** and try to be informal. If you must use technical terms, explain them, and try to provide an analogy that the interviewer—and the audience—can relate to.
- **If you don't understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat it.** This gives you time to think.
- **If you don't know the answer, say so.** But offer to get the information and then make an appropriate transition to your message point.
- **You can't be quoted if you don't say it.**
- **Point out any wrong information before answering the question.** Remaining silent can imply that you agree.
- **Never say, "no comment."** Translation: guilty as charged. Explain if material is confidential or refer to another agency, when appropriate.
- **KISS.** Keep It Short and Simple.
- **"Yes," "no," and "I don't know" are perfectly good answers.** Then transition to your information or reemphasize your message.
- **Don't answer speculative questions** unless you feel extremely confident about the future.
- **Multiple-part questions are the easiest to answer.** Answer those parts of the question you feel comfortable with and then move to the next question.
- **Don't volunteer more information than the question requires.**
- **If you know the interviewer's name, use it,** but not too often.
- **You don't have to answer a hostile question. Rephrase it and move on.** Don't repeat the negative (for example, "I'm not a crook.>").
- **If you make a mistake, stay calm,** admit it, and correct it promptly.
- **Don't allow yourself to be interrupted.**
- **Never answer for another person's organization.**
- **Have printed materials to offer** the interviewer that reinforce your message points.
- **Remember: You are in control of the interview.**

# Transitions

Phrases to get back to your talking points:

- The real issue is...
- But just as important is...
- But equally important...
- It's important to tell your viewers (readers, listeners)...
- I think it's equally important to know...
- I'm also frequently asked...
- Let me add...
- Another question I'm asked is...
- We might be overlooking...
- A common concern is...
- You can go a step further...
- For instance...
- I'm pleased to be able to tell you...
- For example...
- The facts are that...
- You should also know that...

Add your own transitions here and practice them:

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# Quotable Quotes: The Sound Bite

The sound bite is a product of the broadcast medium, where the day's news must be compressed into short segments that are strung together to give a brief overview of the day's events. Interviews, reporting, and coverage for news events and even lengthier programs are shortened to fit into tightly monitored time slots. With on-air time at a premium, the spokesperson who can convey a message in a lively sentence or two is more likely to be quoted than someone who rambles. It takes practice. Few people know how to talk in 12-second sound bites without practice.

In print or online interviews, memorable quotes and solid one-liners are more likely to appear than lengthy and lackluster explanations. Reporters, editors, headline writers, and social media managers like punchy lines and quotable phrases. Clichés and notable sayings are often used—check your local newspaper or favorite outlet's social media platforms to see how they use sound bites.

To help you become quotable, follow these eight tips developed by Michael Sheehan Associates, Inc. of Washington, D.C.:

1. **Avoid exaggerations or “puffery.”** Give specific examples.
2. **Use analogies**—the more homespun the better, especially on complex issues.
3. **Use one-liners.** Practice them and be prepared.
4. **Use absolutes, superlatives, and summary lines if you can back them up.** Reporters and editors love “the best...,” “the first...,” “the only...,” and “the greatest...”
5. **Use proportionate or approximate numbers** (“about one quarter,” “nearly a thousand”). If a reporter needs the exact number, he or she will ask.
6. **Use personal statements and anecdotes.** They reaffirm your authority and expertise and are difficult to challenge.
7. **Quote your “enemies”**—especially if they agree with you. Your friends will always be on your side. If your enemy agrees with you, you've got a story.
8. **Include a second-person perspective.** Let the reader know what will happen to him or her.

# Anticipating Tough Questions

Honestly and completely respond to the following:

1. The question that would potentially be the most challenging to my organization or cause is:

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2. The question that would be most challenging to me personally is:

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3. The subject I'd most like to avoid and why is:

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4. The question that would require the most research on my part is:

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5. Given the nature of my organization, the general climate within the field (or toward my viewpoint), and recent, pertinent news stories, the most logical question an interviewer could ask me is:

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6. A difficult question related to the current climate within the field and recent media attention is:

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7. As a background to set up the entire interview for the audience, the most likely question that will be asked is:

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8. A likely question about the most controversial aspect of my organization's activities is:

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# Be a Proactive Spokesperson

Today, there are endless opportunities to connect with your audience. It can be overwhelming, but when done wisely, it can be helpful for effectively and efficiently sharing your organization's message. Below are tips to ensure you are a proactive spokesperson who uses all available and pertinent promotional tools.

- Before you decide to post on your personal accounts, be familiar with the social media policy of your organization. What you put on the internet stays there forever.
- “News” is constant today, through traditional media platforms like print and broadcast, as well as online mediums like social media and blogs. Take your time to review content from pertinent outlets at a few points in the day to ensure you're up-to-date on happenings that impact your audience, allowing you to adapt messaging and approaches as needed. Setting up Google Alerts can be helpful to ensure you're receiving the latest and most important news.
- Stay up-to-date on relevant conferences and events that may be worth attending as a presenter or general attendee.
- Research appropriate hashtags you should follow on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram so you are following the latest content on specific topic areas. Often, vague hashtags like #mentalhealth are too expansive to collect pertinent information, so search the platform through a search engine like Google to pick the best hashtags to follow.
- Research appropriate media outlets to follow, including social media accounts and podcasts. This will help you maintain awareness of outlets that value your organization's mission so your team can potentially engage with them for promotional opportunities.
- Work with your organization's communications team to think through opportunities to position yourself as a spokesperson through your organization's own online platforms, including on a blog, YouTube channel, and social media platforms. Audiences enjoy engagement opportunities like Facebook Live Q&As, Twitter chats, and hearing from you via regular videos.
- There are various types of media trainings that you can take advantage of to enhance your promotional content as a spokesperson, including digital media strategy trainings for your organization and your personal accounts. The media landscape is always changing, so it never hurts to stay up-to-date on the latest best practices!

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