

# Media Training for Sex Worker Advocates



## Susan Wright, MA

Susan is the spokesperson for the **National Coalition for Sexual Freedom**. She has 20 years experience in crisis management and in dealing with the media, and has given over a thousand interviews with TV, newspaper and Internet media outlets. She trains groups and individuals on how to give media interviews and control their own messaging.

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# **Outline of Media Training**

- 1. Media Tips**
- 2. Interview Tips**
- 3. Clips**
- 4. Q&A**

# Sex & the Media

**Giving an interview about sexuality can be challenging:**

- Tendency to repeat stereotypes
- Reinforcement of mainstream, conservative views
- Inherent bias towards sensationalism

# Goals

What are your goals in being interviewed?

- Self-promotion
- Advocating for sex positive values
- Protecting a group or business
- Others?

# Style

- **Proactive**  
Publicity efforts via press release or PR firm
- **Reactive**  
Responding to unwanted media exposure
- **Expert Source**  
Providing background info for story

# Types of Media

- Print – newspapers and magazines
- Online publications – Salon, The Atlantic, blogs
- Podcasts – audio and video
- Radio
- Television

# Types of Media

- Sex-Positive – Salon, Slate, BuzzFeed
- Sex-Negative – Fox News, Christian Network Services
- Local – Fox and Network affiliates, weekly alternative paper
- National – NY Times, USA Today, Reuters, PBS
- Cable – CNN, MSNBC, Daily Show



# Research

*Always Google the Reporter!*

- Hard news
- Lifestyle articles
- How-to articles

# Start Slow

1. Ask if you can get written questions prior to the interview
2. Do phone interviews with sound bites in front of you
3. Do radio interviews with sound bites in front of you
4. In-person interview with print journalist
5. Remote recorded interview on Zoom with sound bites in front of you
6. In-person recorded interview

# Media Kit

Create a Media Kit to attract the kind of media you want

- NCSF's Media Package-  
<https://ncsfreedom.org/2023/02/08/ncsf-media-package/>

# Interview Tips

- **Trigger Warning for offensive content**

# Sound Bites

- **Create your own Sound Bites in your own words.**

# Interview Tips

- **You don't have to answer the interviewer's exact question.**

# For example...



- The reporter asks:

“If we legalize prostitution, then won’t more people be sex trafficked and abused?”

- You can say:

“Sex work involves exchanging sexual services for something of value. People involved in sex work make a decision to do this work out of choice or life circumstance, the way people choose any type of work. There are various types of sexual labor, ranging from stripping to prostitution to adult film to fetish work.”

# Interview Tips

## Keep repeating your Sound Bites

- In a 30-minute interview, they will include 1 or 2 quotes
- Keep your sentences short
- Educate the reporter and give background info



# For example...



- If reporter repeats:

“But what about sex trafficking? Isn’t that something we should all be concerned about?”

- You can say:

“Traffickers engage in isolation, invisibility, abuse of power, physical and/or sexual abuse as ways of exercising control over survivors. Decriminalizing sex work would give the power back where it belongs, to the sex workers who need to protect themselves.”

# Interview Tips

- **Don't repeat negative or inflammatory phrases.**

# For example...



- If reporter asks:

“FOSTA stops sex trafficking – surely that’s a good thing? What about the poor people who need help? And what about the children who are trafficked?”

- You can say:

“It has always been illegal to traffic people, in person or on websites. FOSTA does not take any practical steps towards identifying exploitative situations, assisting victims, or in prosecuting traffickers themselves. In fact, this law makes it harder to help victims because websites are self-censoring or have shut down, so those left are less traceable or accountable.”

# Interview Tips

KEY:

*It's an interview, not a conversation!*

# For example...



- A reporter may push:

“Surely it’s a good thing that Craigslist is gone because of FOSTA?”

- You can say:

“FOSTA-SESTA affects the safety of sex workers, making it more dangerous for everyone.”

# Interview Tips

- **Universalize the questions to keep from being taken out of context.**

# For example...



- The reporter asks:

“Why did you get into sex work? What do you do with Johns? Have you ever been hurt by one?”

- You can say:

“I’ve been a proud sex worker for over 10 years, ever since I was getting my degree. I wish my industry was decriminalized so that I could access the same social services that any other worker in American can get.”

# Interview Tips

- **Remember your quote can be taken out of context**



# For example...



- The reporter says:

“A lot of people support sex work nowadays. I think there’s too many people hiding behind religious morality and that’s the problem.”

- *Don’t say:*

“So true! Some of my clients are very religious. They come to see me, but then after they get off, they’re busy pretending they’re so righteous at their Bible study class.”

# This is how it will appear...

Sex workers are trying to make it legal to sell sex on the streetcorners and perhaps even in residential neighborhoods in our city.

State Assemblyperson says sex work will never be legalized in our State. “We have to protect the children! What if they want to set up a brothel next to my church?”

A sex worker advocate insists, “Some of my clients are very religious. They come to see me, but then after they get off, they’re busy pretending they’re so righteous at their Bible study class.”

# Alternate example...



- The reporter asks:

“A lot of people support sex work nowadays. I think there’s too many people hiding behind religious morality and that’s the problem.”

- *Do say:*

“We know that much of sex work is already legalized. Decriminalization of prostitution would allow us to establish regulations that everyone could live with.”

# Interview Tips

- **If you need a moment, ask them to clarify their question.**

# Interview Tips

- **Don't do or say anything you don't want to appear in print or on TV.**

# For example...



- The reporter asks:

“[Big Name Sports Figure] was arrested in a sex worker sting but not charged. What do you think of that kind of double standard?”

- *Don't say:*

“[BNSF] has a problematic history. I read somewhere that he was accused of sexual assault but the DA refused to press charges. There's privilege for you.”

# Instead you can say...



“The risk is almost always on the sex worker’s side. Since FOSTA, sex workers have had to vet new clients in person, placing them in potentially dangerous situations. That’s because ties to vetted and established clients have been severed by the shutting down of adult websites.”

SOAR

# Interview Tips

- **Your appearance will affect the perception of what you say.**



# Interview Tips

Reference other experts:

- Surveys and academic publications
- Advocacy organizations –  
SOAR, Woodhull, Decriminalize Sex Work, SWOP  
and National Coalition for Sexual Freedom

# Interview Tips

Manage the comments after the interview is published:

- Stick to your soundbites
- Don't get led astray by trolls
- Stay in touch with reporter to get comments removed
- Ask friends and colleagues to comment

# Interview Tips

Things to stay away from:

- Humor and context control (or lack thereof)
- Tax dollars for college sex education
- Anything about under 18 year-olds
- Others?

# Interview Tips

Practice, Practice, Practice!

- To desensitize your fear
- To know your material instinctively
- To free your attention to think on your feet
- To anticipate the most disruptive questions and create suitable responses

For additional information, contact  
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