



VICTORIA POLICE

# MEDIA GUIDE FOR FAMILIES & LOVED ONES





VICTORIA POLICE

# MEDIA GUIDE FOR FAMILIES & LOVED ONES

## CONTENTS

Why are the media interested?	5	What should I do if I do not like a media report?	8
How can I plan for the media?	6	Will you provide a copy of the eulogy?	10
Why speak to the media?	6	Will a family member or representative address the media after the service?	10
Who will be your spokesperson?	7	Will media be allowed to film or record the funeral?	10
Media interviews	7	Contact information	10
Statements	8		
Deciding not to speak	8		

## INTRODUCTION

When a loved one is missing, has died, or suffered serious injury, the furthest concern in a family's mind is how they may be affected by the media.

The nature of news reports and/or media attention in general can sometimes add to the distress already felt by families as they attempt to navigate through difficult times.

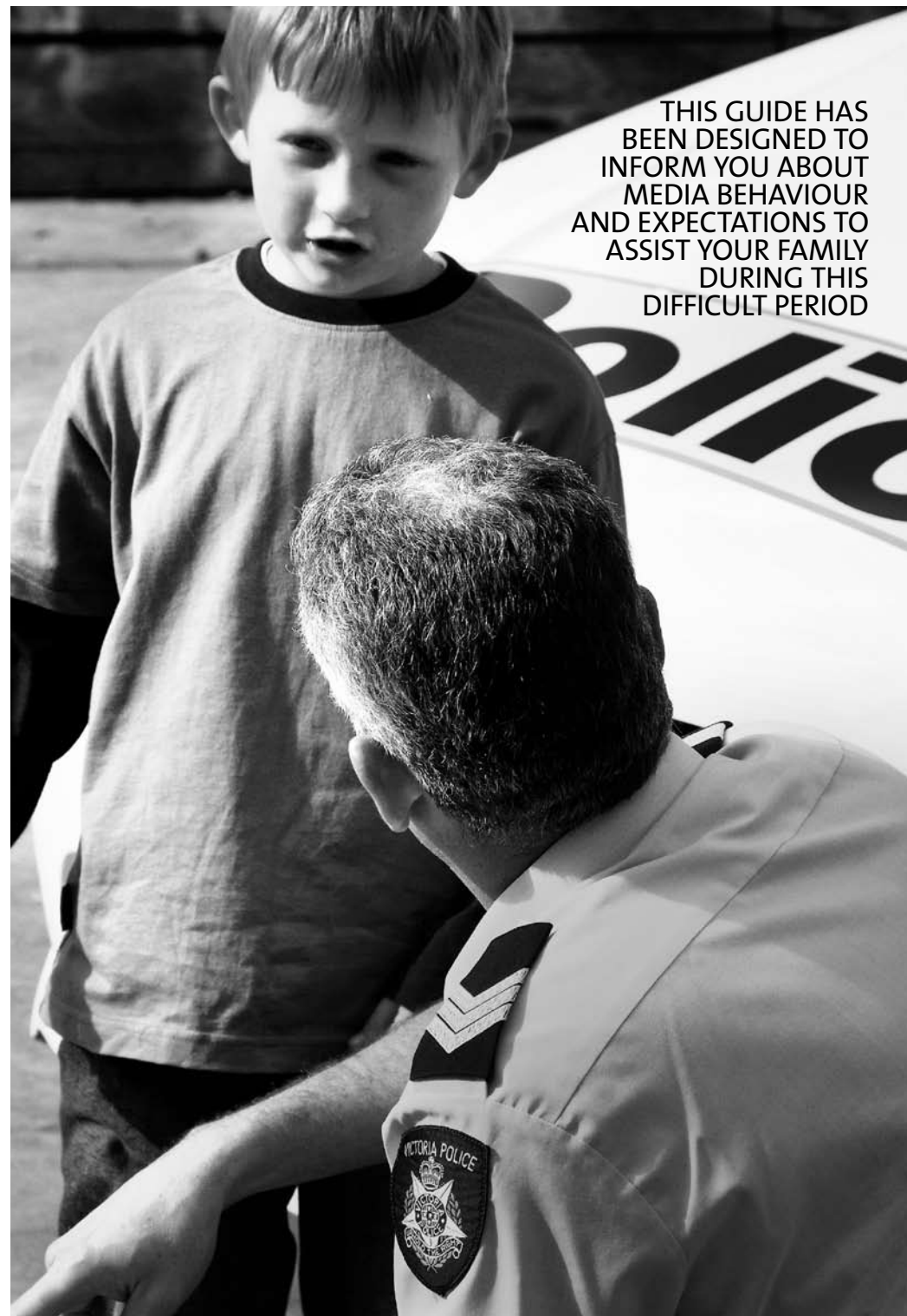
Understanding why the media want to speak to you and the type of information

they are looking for can help your family better manage the situation and grieve in a manner that is most appropriate for you.

It is not the intention of Victoria Police to either encourage or discourage people from speaking to the media about their loved ones.

Rather, this guide has been designed to inform you about media behaviour and expectations to assist your family during a difficult period.

THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO INFORM YOU ABOUT MEDIA BEHAVIOUR AND EXPECTATIONS TO ASSIST YOUR FAMILY DURING THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD



### WHY ARE THE MEDIA INTERESTED?

The media will always be interested in reporting information when people die or suffer serious injury as a result of unusual or unexpected circumstances.

Media are interested in reporting these incidents because the public are interested in knowing how the situation unfolded, if there is something they could or should be doing to avoid a similar fate and, most importantly, if they know the person or persons involved.

When media approach family members, they most often do so because they want to paint a picture of the deceased or injured person.

They want to know:

- How old were they?
- What were their interests?
- Did they have a job?
- Did they have children?
- What were they looking forward to in the future?
- What type of personality did they have? For example, happy-go-lucky, quiet, outgoing, family focused etc.

The media may also ask you how you are coping and how this has affected your family. This type of questioning is not meant to be insensitive or uncaring. Rather, it is an attempt by the media to show their audience the often devastating effects of an unexpected death or serious injury.

Media will also often ask for a photograph of the deceased or injured person. The reason they are interested in obtaining a picture is because it creates a human element that their audience can relate to. Pictures have a profound impact on storytelling and can often convey a much stronger message than words alone.


It is important to remember that if a picture is not provided, the media will often try to source images from other means such as MySpace, Facebook or YouTube, sporting associations, school yearbooks and from other friends and associates.

Sometimes choosing a photograph together as a family and having control over how your loved one is portrayed or remembered in the community is a far better option than leaving the media to their own devices.

While the Victoria Police Media Unit does not release the name of a deceased or injured person without the permission of next of kin, the media has other ways of accessing this information. For example, journalists may locate the name in the death notices, speak to neighbours, or interview people gathered at the crime scene.

It is unlikely the media will stop reporting incidents of public interest, even when there has been requests to do so. From past experience, it can be in your best interest to engage with the media at some level. Providing a brief statement and releasing an image can reduce pressure and intrusion.

Developing a plan and deciding early on what you are comfortable sharing will help to avoid upsetting media situations.



MEDIA ARE INTERESTED  
IN REPORTING THESE  
INCIDENTS BECAUSE THE  
PUBLIC ARE INTERESTED  
IN KNOWING HOW THE  
SITUATION UNFOLDED

### HOW CAN I PLAN FOR THE MEDIA?

First, you must decide whether or not you wish to speak to the media at all. This is not an easy decision to make and requires careful consideration and consultation with all family members.

You need to be mindful that even if you do not speak to the media they may continue to report the story without your input. This can add to your distress as they may broadcast incorrect information that they sourced from other means.

### WHY SPEAK TO THE MEDIA?

As part of your decision-making process, it may be helpful to consider what value your family may gain by engaging the media. For example:

1. Speaking to the media allows you to paint the picture of your loved one the way you would like them to be remembered.
2. Speaking to the media gives your family an opportunity to correct inaccurate information previously reported.

3. Speaking to the media provides a unique opportunity to perhaps send an educational or warning message to the wider community so that others may avoid a similar fate.

If you decide to speak to the media, you need to think about how available you will make yourself to them and there are several options you may wish to consider.



### WHO WILL BE YOUR SPOKESPERSON?

Understandably some families find the thought of speaking to the media during such a strenuous time too difficult to contemplate but would like to have some input into the coverage surrounding their loved one.

In these circumstances we would recommend that you nominate a family member or trusted friend to speak to the media on your behalf. Ideally this person would be close enough to convey your thoughts, stories and concerns, but removed enough so as to perform the task without being unduly distressed.

We recommend this person remains the sole spokesperson for all media so as to prevent the media from 'shopping around' to get a different response. Once they realise that one person is speaking on behalf of your family, they will begin to direct their inquiries to that individual. This helps relieve the pressure on other family members who do not wish to speak.

### MEDIA INTERVIEWS

There are occasions where there are overwhelming demands from the media to speak to a family member or representative.

If you decide to conduct an interview, we recommend that you do a one-off, 'all in' press conference, rather than several interviews with all the individual outlets. This relieves the pressure and burden of having to go through the distressing details over and over again and ensures media get the same information. Again, this helps to deter them from 'shopping around' for comments and upsetting other family members who do not wish to speak. You can also request a single camera interview which can be distributed to all media if you do not feel up to a press conference.

The Victoria Police Media Unit can help arrange any media interviews and conferences for you.

We advise that the interview not be conducted at the family home if possible. This will assist in keeping your address private and discourage media from returning for follow-up interviews down the track.

An interview can be conducted at the Victoria Police Media Conference Room at the Victoria Police Centre on Flinders Street, Melbourne, at a friend's house, at your local police station, or at the deceased or injured person's favourite place or sporting ground etc. We will work with you to decide the most appropriate and convenient location.

If your loved one is injured and you do not wish to leave the hospital, we can, in consultation with the hospital, arrange for interviews to be conducted on the premises.

The Victoria Police Media Unit will work with the nominated spokesperson to help them prepare for the media's likely questions and how your family may wish to answer them.

If the death or serious injury of your loved one is subject to an ongoing police investigation, special care must be taken to ensure any comments do not jeopardise future criminal prosecutions. We strongly advise you speak to the Victoria Police Media Unit and the police members investigating the case before conducting any interviews to avoid the legal ramifications of sub judice and contempt of court.

**IF YOU DECIDE TO SPEAK TO THE MEDIA, YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT HOW AVAILABLE YOU WILL MAKE YOURSELF TO THEM**

### STATEMENTS

If you do not feel up to a media interview, an alternative is to release a brief statement addressing key points of media interest and outlining your wishes to grieve in private.

The Victoria Police Media Unit can assist you in writing a statement and disseminating it to all media outlets.

Keep in mind that television stations often cannot use a statement on its own and may request a spokesperson or family member to read it out on your behalf so they have footage and audio to accompany the story.

### DECIDING NOT TO SPEAK

If your family does not wish to engage the media there may be some precautions you need to take to avoid distress caused by persistent media.

First, contact the Victoria Police Media Unit and we can advise the media of your wishes, although some media may still attempt to contact you. If you find a particular journalist confronting or upsetting, our office can contact their editor or chief of staff and raise these issues on your behalf.

The media may also call your home or place of work direct. You may wish to get an answering service to screen your calls or get a friend or family member to perform this task for you. This will help prevent you from being caught off guard by inquiring media and allow you to return the calls you want.

Advise your family, friends, school and co-workers of your wish not to engage the media. If the media cannot speak to you directly they will often try to get comment from other people you know. These other sources may, albeit with the best of intentions, inadvertently say something that may cause you distress. Making your intentions clear from the outset will help minimise any further unnecessary anguish.

Be prepared that media may turn up on your doorstep or place of work in a bid to get a comment. If you have made a decision not to speak to the media it is important that you stick to it no matter how often they ask you to make a comment. Any throwaway comment you make will only encourage the media to continue this line of behaviour in the hope that they can get you to say a little bit more next time.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DO NOT LIKE A MEDIA REPORT?

If you are upset at a particular media report about your loved one, there are several options you may wish to consider.

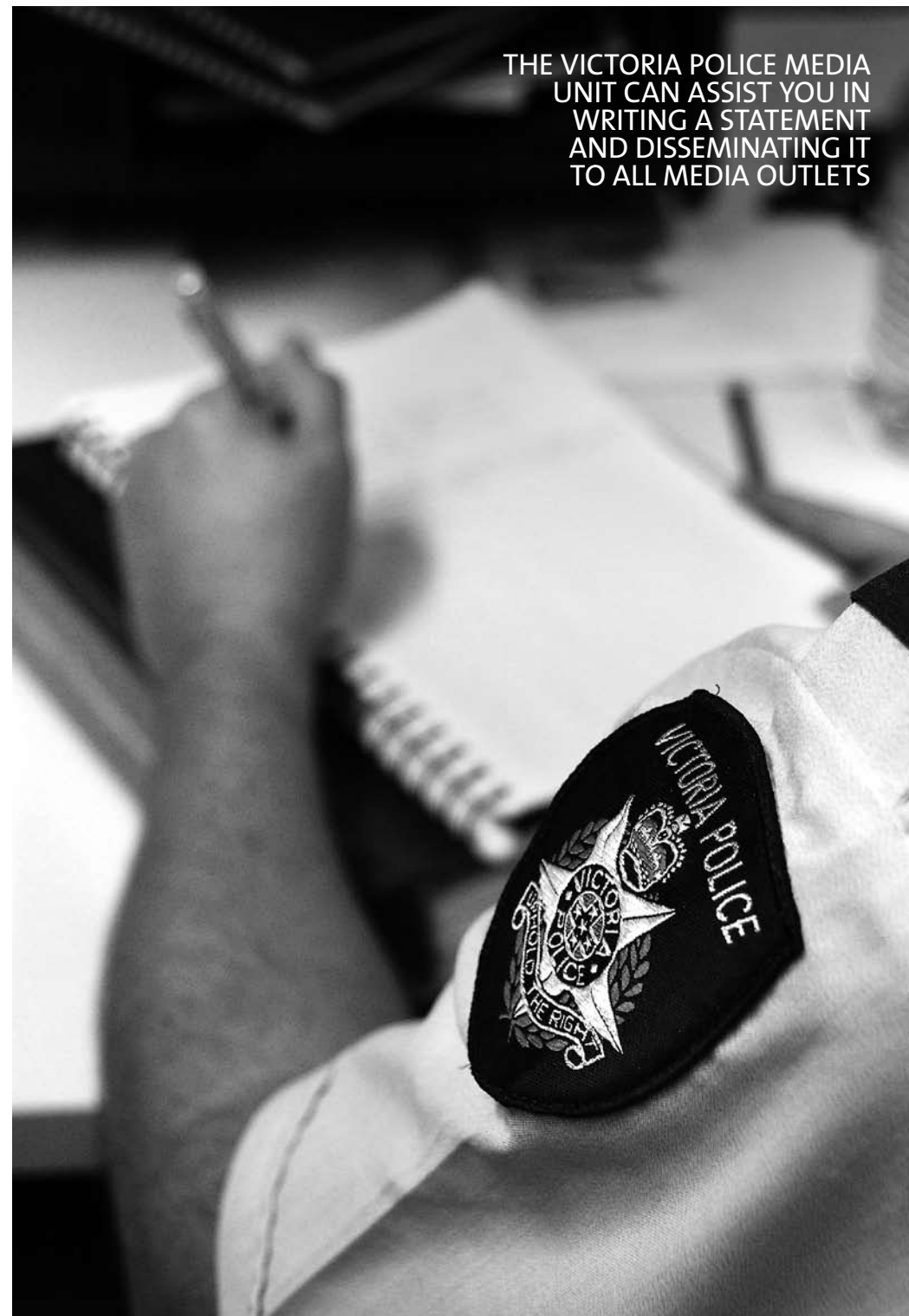
The Victoria Police Media Unit can contact the media outlet on your behalf and advise them of your concerns.

If the report is from a newspaper article you may wish to write a letter to the editor. Again, the Victoria Police Media Unit can assist you with doing this as it is important the letter does not state information that could affect ongoing police investigations or future criminal prosecutions.

If you feel a journalist has acted in a highly unethical manner, you may wish to make a formal complaint to the Australian Press Council.

You can do this by visiting [www.presscouncil.org.au](http://www.presscouncil.org.au).

THE VICTORIA POLICE MEDIA  
UNIT CAN ASSIST YOU IN  
WRITING A STATEMENT  
AND DISSEMINATING IT  
TO ALL MEDIA OUTLETS



## FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

It is common for media to request to attend funeral services where the circumstances surrounding the death have previously been reported. The Victoria Police Media Unit can help you prepare for the expected presence of media at the service of your loved one.

If you do not wish media to attend your loved one's funeral, we can assist you in drafting a statement advising media that the funeral is a private affair and they are not invited. Media may however attempt to obtain long range footage and report from outside the funeral's location.

The following may need to be considered.

### **Will you provide a copy of the eulogy?**

Media may get it from friends and associates but it is sometimes useful to provide one as a means of negotiating more privacy. For example, "we do not want to make a statement but we will instead give you a copy of the eulogy".

### **Will a family member or representative address the media after the service?**

This is a common request made by media and can be facilitated either by conducting

an interview or reading out a statement on your behalf. However, most media outlets are aware that the funeral service is a particularly distressing time for families and will generally not approach families for a comment if they have been forewarned that nobody will be speaking.

### **Will media be allowed to film or record the funeral service?**

Some religious denominations allow this, but others do not. If you are comfortable with having the media film the service you will need to check with the church or venue first.

A suitable compromise may be that a 'pool arrangement' is agreed to. A pool arrangement is where one cameraperson is allowed to film the service for all television stations.

This is much less intrusive than having cameras present from every station. You may wish to request that certain family members are not filmed, such as children, during the service.

Some media may ask if they can record the audio during the service. This has sometimes been a useful compromise whereby a speaker is set up in the foyer or outside the service and the media are able to gather around it, record the proceedings and/or take notes.

It is important to note and be prepared for the possibility that even if you do not agree to any of the above considerations, the media may still attend and film and report on the funeral.

The Victoria Police Media Unit will assist you in conveying your wishes to all relevant media.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

The Victoria Police Media Unit operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and can be contacted on **9247 5205**.

The Victoria Police Victims Advisory Unit can be contacted on **9247 6555**.

THE VICTORIA POLICE  
MEDIA UNIT CAN HELP  
YOU PREPARE FOR THE  
EXPECTED PRESENCE OF  
MEDIA AT THE SERVICE  
OF YOUR LOVED ONE





VICTORIA POLICE

VICTORIA POLICE MEDIA UNIT  
TEL: (03) 9247 5205/06 FAX: (03) 9247 5210  
EMAIL: [policemedia@police.vic.gov.au](mailto:policemedia@police.vic.gov.au)  
WEBSITE: [www.vicpolicenews.com.au](http://www.vicpolicenews.com.au)