

Writing a news release



A news release is a short summary of an event or other piece of news. This is one of the best and easiest ways to alert the media about specific events you are organising. You might choose to issue a news release to advertise an awareness week, inform the public about new medical information or to publicise a special event.

The most important feature of a news release is that it needs to be topical. It should be made very clear what is new or what the forthcoming event is. A well written, succinct news release can save a journalist an enormous amount of time and effort. With deadlines to meet that can mean the difference between using your item or not.

Do not completely rely on the media taking up your story. If it is vital that your information is published make sure you have alternatives. Consider organising some advertising.

Once you have built up a rapport with a journalist or editor, a news release may not be appropriate or needed. A telephone call or personal visit may be more suitable. Often positive personal contact can mean the difference between a short item of news and a full length feature.

What should be in the news release?

- The title should be short, but should say what the news release is about and should contain the keywords.
- Write a short introductory paragraph which includes the five 'W's' - What - Who - Where - When - Why. This may be the only part of the news release the editor may read so be sure to include all the main details.
- Stick to simple facts in descending order of importance - editors short of space may cut from the bottom upwards.
- Include a quotation to make the news release more personal, for example: Professor Bloggs said, 'We hope that this discovery will lead to a practical procedure that will help children affected by Any Syndrome'. Even though the rest of your release is edited, it is quite likely that this quotation will appear in the final version, if only to give the impression that a reporter has interviewed the person concerned.
- Give the contact details for the group which you want the paper to include in the article.

contact a family

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Tel 020 7608 8700 Fax 020 7608 8701 Web www.cafamily.org.uk e-mail info@cafamily.org.uk
Helpline 0808 808 3555 or Textphone 0808 808 3556 Freephone for parents and families

- A note to editors at the end of the news release giving them brief details about the group.
- Date the news release so that editors know how current it is.
- The name and telephone number (day and evening) of someone who can be contacted for further details.
- Try not to include:
 - jargon
 - abbreviations
 - unnecessary information

Tips on writing a news release

- Find out when deadlines are.
- Type the release with double line spacing and wide margins (easier to edit) onto one sheet of A4 headed notepaper as other pages can get lost.
- If you need more room use the back of the sheet (typing 'more follows...' at the bottom of the first side).
- You should aim to use just one side - certainly no more than 300 words.
- No sentence should be longer than 20 words.
- No paragraph should be longer than 6 sentences.
- Write as factually as possible - it is the journalist's job to think of an 'angle' for the story.
- Stick to a single topic; don't be tempted to include information on other forthcoming events in with details of your current activity.

Sending your news release

Before you send it out

- Make sure the news release is agreed by all who need to see it.
- Check you have permission to use any quotes.
- Double check dates times and contact details.
- Inform any interested parties, e.g. doctors or other professionals, families mentioned etc. about the release before you send it out to journalists.
- Decide who you want to target: families only or professionals as well? People from which geographical area?

Who should you send it to?

- Read the papers you are considering and get a feel for them: would they be interested in your story?

- Phone the papers and ask for the name of the most appropriate journalist. Send your release straight to this person.

How should you send it?

Post and fax: make sure the letter or fax is clearly addressed to the named journalist. Follow up with a phone call.

Email: put a brief title in the subject line that summarises the story. Include the press release in the body of the message not as an attachment. Follow up with a phone call.

The addresses and telephone numbers of your local newspapers, radio and television stations can be found in the Yellow Pages/Thomson Local.

Either search the internet or phone the paper or TV station for an email address.

Always ring to follow-up and check that the news release has been received.

The golden rules of writing a news release

- include the four 'Ws' – who, what, why and when – in the first two paragraphs
- put a date on it
- double space and use generous margins
- be brief and to the point – keep to one side of A4 if possible
- quote a real case (with permission)
- quote from an authority figure, such as a paediatrician
- include a contact name and number, both day and evening

Be sure that anyone you quote from is willing to be interviewed by the media.

A sample news release

10.12.2003

To: The Editor, Midland Express

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES CALL FOR MORE RESPITE CARE

Parents representing ten Middlemarch parents' groups will rally at the Town Hall on Thursday evening (14.12.2003) to demand adequate respite care for their severely disabled children.

Figures published by Middlemarch City Council reveal that there are 7,000 children with disabilities in the city, yet only 30% of families currently receive a break once a month.

Some families receive a weekly three hour break when the voluntary organisation,

Brookside, provides a volunteer and yet the Council is cutting its grant to Brookside by 25%.

The parents calculate that it would cost the Council £x000 to fund a break for each family – compared to £xxxx for placing a child in a residential school when the family can no longer cope.

Mary Peters, mother of Daniel, aged nine, says “Daniel is as helpless as a six week baby and needs turning several times a night. He often cries for hours during the day. I rely on a worker to give me a break once a week so I can shop and spend time with my other two young children. Now I have been told that because of Council cuts this will be reduced to once a month. I just don’t think I can cope.”

Dr Keith Smith, consultant paediatrician who will address the rally, says “Parents are being driven to breaking point by the inadequacy of the present respite care. It’s not a lot to ask, just a few hours of normality now and then.”

The parents are also planning a delegation to MP John Wickers, and will maintain their pressure on the Council.

- ends -

Notes to editors

1. For further information contact Sally Brown, Middlemarch Parents’ Support Group Federation, telephone 123 4567.
2. You are invited to send a reporter to the rally which takes place at 7.00pm on Thursday 14 December in Middlemarch Town Hall.
3. Middlemarch Parents’ Federation represents ten parents’ self- help groups from across the city.

This guide is part of the Contact a Family Group Action Pack. For more information please visit **www.cafamily.org.uk** or telephone 020 7608 8700.

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