

## Impact of Media Coverage

There are a range of issues that will confront a family who is suddenly thrown into the negative attention of the media through a family member's offending behaviour, at both a local and state level.

These issues include:

- Losing control of their sense of privacy. They no longer get to decide who knows information about the situation, how much people know and also the context that it is provided in. As we are all aware, media reporting of 'facts' is often skewed towards the most interesting story rather than the 'real' story.
- The potential that families will also learn 'new information' that they were previously unaware of. Sometimes the media have very close links with the police and received information that the offender has not provided to (or has hidden from) the family. Alternatively, the family has to struggle with deciding what of this 'new information' is factual.
- The media are free to print the home addresses of the offenders although this generally only occurs in major crimes such as murder and sex offences.
- Media generally only targets major crime; from major theft and fraud to murder and assault.
- The family often become the target simply because the offender may still be in custody.
- Family dealing with the increased community scrutiny as a response of the media attention. Neighbourhoods, streets, schools, work places can become entwined in anything ranging from gossip through to community shunning and abuse.

### How can families be supported in these situations?

- Prepare the family for the potential media involvement so that it isn't a shock.
- Help them understand the ad-hoc nature of the media. If it is a low news day, they are likely to be front page news; if there are lots of other things happening, they may not get coverage at all.
- Help them to find examples of how similar crimes have been portrayed in the media. This will give them some understanding of what to expect.
- Assist them to choose who they would like to know so that they can make a plan of actions to inform these people themselves before they hear it on the news.
- Help them work out their potential method of protecting the children (as best they can). For example: do they want to spend time preparing the kids themselves, do they want to include school, childcare etc so that they are all aware of the potential community backlash?
- Help them stay in the moment. If they get too far ahead they will become overwhelmed by the enormity and lack of control of their situation