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Handbook

FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

*How to handle an invitation
to appear on the media*



FOLLOWED BY

Ten ways to being proactive with the media
even if you haven't washed your face

AND BY

Short notes on visibility and the media

WITH A POSTNOTE ON

Children and visibility



How to accept an invitation by the media interviews, reporting, debates, radio and TV programmes, etc

10 THINGS YOU MUST DO BEFORE SAYING “YES”

- 1 — Take your time. In 99% of the cases you will not be required to accept the invitation on the spot. You can ask time to think about it: a couple of days or at least a couple of hours. If the journalist insists too much for you to make up your mind on the spot, that is not a good sign unless the programme or article is due to be released on the same day.
- 2 — Don't let your mind run wild thinking of the worst! Don't think that the media only want to simplify or trivialise issues, make people teary or eat up LGBT people alive. There are journalists that have built strong relations with the LGBT community.
- 3 — Look up as soon as possible former episodes of the programme or older copies of the publication, etc. It is often easy to find on TV, youtube, the internet, etc material that will assist you to have an idea of what the programme or interview it is going to be like. Such material will give you an idea of the political leanings of the programme or interview, so you will extra information in addition to what the individual journalist you have been dealing with says to you. In particular, look at material dealing with same-sex parenting, if there aren't any, look at how they have dealt with homosexuality in previous issues of the magazine or TV programme., If there aren't any, it may be sufficient to see how they have dealt with other topics in order to give you an idea.

4 — Before accepting the invitation, find out how the interview or report is going to be “structured”. If the interview is for the printed press, will there be an editorial next to it? You may not be able to ask to read it in advance but you may ask who will be the author, then you can do some research on the author, for example in google, and then if you find out that the editorial will be written by someone hostile to LGBT issues, you can decline the invitation at that stage.

5 — If the invitation is to appear on TV, you may ask if the interview is going to be recorded and then if it is going to be followed by a live debate in the studio. As far as possible, always try not only to be a knowledge object but also a knowledge subject. If the clip that they recorded about an ordinary day in the life of your family is going to be broadcast, then you can ask to be invited to the studio when the the guests will comment on it. In particular, this is highly advisable if you have reservations about the quality of the guests invited to the debate.

6 — If the invitation is to participate in a debate, find out in advance who are the other guests. Ask who else has been invited and whether there will be a debate against people who hold opposite positions. If they tell you that “the other guests have not been confirmed” it may not mean that the journalist wants to mislead you - often the producers work until literally the last minute trying to find the right mix of guests as usually some hesitate or are unable to make it. However, you can always ask to be told, as soon as possible, who the others guests will be and you can always say that your attendance will depend on who else is on the debate. In addition, you may suggest the list of guests yourself for example, proposing the names of experts that you already know that are supportive of LGBT families. If you are not aware of any, you may want to liaise with other organisations or activists that know experts such as psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers and even clergy that have positive views about LGBT families. The producers will be forever grateful to you because by doing this you will have done their job for them: you find thm find other guests who are well-prepared, who in turn will be willing to take part because they are reassured by your commitment to the interview, and you feel reassured that these friendly experts will be there on the stage with you.

7 — Prepare in advance with some useful information to have up the sleeve. Don't panic! Nobody will ask you to give a professional opinion if you are not a researcher in a given area. If a journalist needs someone to discuss a topic with some sociologists in a panel, then the journalist will get in touch directly with the right person. However, it can be useful to have a quote or some facts ready in case it becomes necessary. For example: the number of members in your LGBT parents association, the estimate of LGBT parents with children in your country, the statements of the associations of psychologists or other professionals in relation to children growing up in LGBT families, etc.

8 — Prepare an anecdote. They are always well received in particular if they deal with the children... and you are likely to have a few!

9 — Practise in advance. If you are nervous about the prospect of the interview, do a mock interview with a friend. It can be useful and a lot of fun: “now it is my turn to play the homophobic politician!”

10 — Notify everyone! Tell your association (and the person in charge of media liaison, if there is one) and ask for help if you need any. Tell all your contacts through the mailing list of your association, facebook, etc when the article is going to be published, or the interview will be broadcast.

11 — Relax. You will never have 100% guarantee that everything will be perfect. If you feel like taking part, at some point you will need to decide to trust them.



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10 THINGS YOU SHOULD DO LIVE ON THE INTERVIEW OR DEBATE

1 — Be prepared of last-minute changes. Be lenient towards the producers who often may have to face last minute hitches. But remember that if they bring in a guest at the last minute that you were not expecting and who is known for their hostile or derogatory discussion of LGBT families, or the producers do not want to comply with certain conditions that you had previously negotiated and they had accepted, , then you are not at all under an obligation take part.

2 — Sign the disclaimer. In some countries and for certain things (for example, for the use of footage, before or after it is produced) they will asked you to sign disclaimers of your own and on behalf of your children. The latter may be signed by both parents or if in your country only one of you is the legal parent, and you wish to make a statement, you may decide that the parent that is not legally recognised may sign it. This is a statement of principle, , which may not have concrete results, but it may give you some personal satisfaction. Signing the disclaimer may trigger in those who are media newbies some degree of anxiety about visibility. This is a topic to be discussed further.

3 — Expect very trivial questions. Usually, these are always the same.

4 — Always rembermer to name your association of LGBT parents and NELFA. In some cases, the the producers of the programme or the editor of the newspaper will allow you to provide the web address of your association, Nelfa's is www.nelfa.org.

5 — Think in advance about short sentences of great impact. For example: *Love creates a family* always works. Television, but also to a certain extent also other media, is not capable of developing arguments in depth. Speaking on TV requires very concise language and ideas that are simple and direct.

6 — Never take written material to read aloud on TV or radio, there may be some exceptions, ask in advance.

7 — Keep the language simple and accessible. If you prefer to use terms that are not widely known such as -MAP, medically assisted procreation, remember to provide the definition in advance *Medically assisted procreation, which is known by the acronym "MAP" is* However, in certain contexts for instance a debate on TV, it may be useful to simplify by saying *in a situation like mine... or in this type of situation, etc.*

8 — Refer to the latest news, even if they may seem out of context! People who work in the news have always two things in their minds: which are the very core of journalism: what is happening now and the unexpected connections between two completely different issues. For example, a journalist dealing with Rainbow Families for an interview may not expect to find much excitement in this task, the journalist may think that that the topic is a social issue, not really new, and it is a very specific issue. For this reason, If you manage to refer in the interview to the latest news, if possible using accurate information, having checked the facts, it is very likely that the journalist will not cut you off.

If, for instance, the latest news is about about tax breaks, something if you say something like: *Today the Minister for Families announced that they are seeking to implement tax breaks to assist families through the recession, but the Rainbow Families will continue paying full tax because we are not treated like other families. This is a very unfair situation!*

If the latest news is about the FBI spying on European government leaders, you could use that piece of information and link it with the issues affecting Rainbow Families, for example: *Nowadays, everyone is obsessed with the Datagate scandalon breach of privacy, for the Rainbow Families, our concern is completely the opposite, we want to make our families even more visible because (etc.).*

9 — If you are inspired to tell a joke, go ahead!

10 — Avoid under any circumstances to fly off the handle. Avoid television programmes where the aim is to upset the guests and incite them fight.

5 THINGS TO DO AFTERWARDS APART FROM BREATHING

1 — If you are dealing with an article, ask that they send it to you for reading before it is published. Of course, make this request only if you feel the need to do it. As a general rule journalists do not show their article before publication and it is fair that they should keep their independence. Anyone choosing to engage with a journalist should allow them the freedom to express their own opinions, whether we like it or not. In the experience of many Rainbow Families dealing with the media, journalists have often made an exception and (upon request of a family) the journalists have allowed the family access to the article before publication. This may be because same-sex parenting is still a fairly recent topic and often there are factual mistakes to draw to the attention of the journalist. Please bear in mind that any journalist wanting to get to know the Rainbow Families, usually is very accommodating in relation to Rainbow Families and a potential allied.

2 — If you haven't done it before, ask for all contact details (name and surname, , email, also telephone numbers) of the people you have had dealings with (journalists, editors, and also the other speakers at a debate, if you feel that they are interested in the topic) and provide that information to the Media Officer withing your Rainbow Families' Association.

3 — Spread the news immediately! Send out the article to the mailing list of your Rainbow Families' Association, post it on the social networks, link it up on Facebook, ecc. (Remember that newspapers disappear quickly!)

4 — Don't get bogged down!. It is normal for things not to go smoothly. In addition, people who are not used to dealing with the media are often disproportionately disappointed by the small inaccuracies or mistakes or may feel the interview went terrible. Often it is not like that. You may not be a stage performer, but you will find that your openness and your courage have compensated for your lack of training: everyone will confirm that you were fantastic!

5 — Call the journalists, editors, presenters and thank them!

10 WAYS OF BEING PROACTIVE WITH THE MEDIA EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T WASHED YOUR FACE

Apart from accepting the invitations made to us by the media, there are many things we can do using our own initiative. Without having to show your face, or just slightly!

- 1 — Open up a Twitter account (it is very simple!) and either twit away the messages of others or twit your own, there is a maximum of 140 characters!
- 2 — Create a blog, either a personal one or a group blog. Otherwise, organise yourselves to create an 'official' blog of your group of LGBT parents. Writing a blog is easy and a lot of fun, and it is up to you how visible you want to be (many bloggers use a nickname). In some countries there hundreds of blogs written by LGBT parents. In other countires, very few.
- 3 — Spread the logo of your association, and also NELFA's logo in websites, blogs, social networks, etc. You can make inquiries with your association's webmaster. In relation to the logo of NELFA, you can send an email to info@nelfa.org.

- 4 — Collect contact details of journalists and bloggers (names and surnames,, email, also telephone numbers) and send this information to the Media Officer in your association. Personal contacts tend to be the most valuable because it is more likely to lead to working together. In addition to the ones you already know, you may get more contacts through LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. Also collect contact details from politicians and activists in other LGBT organisations but not only.
- 5 — Very important! Prepare a brief document (a couple of pages) with useful information for anyone having to deal with the media on behalf of your Rainbow Families' Association, such as: information about your association; statements by scientific bodies on LGBT parenting; research undertaken in different countries; legislation in force in your own country and around the world; brief and efficient responses to the most common questions, etc. The same document, or a customized version, could be sent out to any journalist that is researching the topic to write an article. This does not need to be a lot of work because probably you already have most of this information in your inbox. You need to organize it and update it!
- 6 — Write! In the associations of Rainbow Families there are usually some members who have a talent for writing and perhaps don't even realise that they can produce testimonies and articles reflecting on LGBT parenting of good quality. Write letters to the newspapers. Respond to comments made to the News online. Send your articles and photographs to the newsletter of your LGBT Families' Association. Write to the newspapers to invite them to run an article on LGBT parenting, or to You could even propose to the newspaper to write an article "2.000 characters long" - characters include spaces and in all wordprocessors nowadays there is a function that automatically counts the number of characters. (for your information, 2.000 characters is about a page of text.). If the newspaper agrees, you will have an almost absolute control on the final version of the article to be published, and you will be able to convey the warmth and depth of your own personal experience. In the best case scenario, the newspaper could even suggest to comment about other news related to the same topic.
- 7 — Collect information as to the availability of other members of your LGBT Families' association. Prepare a document for the Media Officer with the contact details of those families willing to appear on TV or radio, or to meet a journalist for an article in the press either at the local or national level. Please note that there are families very competent in navigating through a talk show but who may not fare so well in an in-depth interview , others may be perfect for a radio interview but not for a live debate. Therefore, recognize the talent that people have and the situations where they shine and maximize on that.
- 8 — Collect information on the competence and skills of the members of your Rainbow Parents' Association. Prepare a document for the Media Officer with contact details of those members able to write a press release, able to keep and update an address book, maintain a media / clippings file, and those members who are journalist, graphic artist, copywriter, and who work in advertising, IT, etc.

9 — Contribute to keep and strengthen contact with other LGBT organisations.

10 — Offer to help co-ordinating the best ways to attract media interest to the most important events of your LGBT parents' association such as conferences, meetings of LGBT families and the Gay Pride. These are occasions where the association's Media Officer usually cannot cover everything alone.

BRIEF COMMENTS ON VISIBILITY AND THE MEDIA

Visibility is a concept that moves along two ends of the spectrum, on one hand, the proven efficiency of visibility from a social and political perspective (even in relation to the private domain, but particularly in the public domain and media) and on the other hand, the protection of one's privacy.

For some Rainbow Families, the issue can seem even larger, this is because on one hand they may seek to protect their children's everyday life from media intrusion, and on the other, these families bear testimony of the huge changes in society in recent years, thanks to the activism and media presence of some families. It is an established fact that without visibility, the movement of LGBT families would not be where it is today. In a practical sense, many families would "not exist" because often the idea of becoming parents stemmed from watching other LGBT parents on TV or reading about it on the internet.

In order to be in a better position to choose, it is useful to bear in mind the following points:

- Often it is possible to agree with the journalist that they will not disclose your surname, or the town where you live, or where you work, or even that the article has no photographs of yourself or your children. There is nothing to feel embarrassed about! This is already a good start.
- If you have never appeared on the media, it is advisable to start in a 'protected' environment, for example, in a television or radio programme that openly supports Rainbow Families, or in a discussion with the journalist but one in which there is no debate with other parties opposing your views.
- Please be aware that some families may prefer to start working with their local media rather than national newspapers, radio or tv. At first sight this may seem to be limited exposure, and in fact the number of readers is smaller. However, it is not, because the number of readers is concentrated on the same geographical space, where the LGBT family releasing the story lives. Perhaps it is better to appear on national media as this (bizarrely) gives a certain air of objectivity and authority to the choice of telling one's own story.
- News and photographs nowadays travel quickly, by the same token they are easily forgotten and replaced by more recent news. The notorious 'fifteen minutes of glory' last just fifteen minutes, and afterwards just ends up in some file on the web.
- It is often thought that visibility is an irreversible step, an 'either or' situation, like coming out, you are either in or out of the closet. However, many LGBT parents have managed to successfully dictate themselves the speed and extent of their visibility by choosing when and how becoming available for the media.
- On the other hand, there are similarities with doing your coming out. Ask yourself whether your coming out has been a positive step – do you regret it?
- Visibility may trigger irrational fear. Try to picture in your head what could be the concrete consequences of you accepting to do an interview, do a reality check to ascertain the probability of any negative effects actually occurring; how do you live your daily life in relation to the probability of it being affected by an (im)probably catastrophe?
- If you are thinking about appearing on a TV or newspaper interviews with no face picture, please take a minute to think about the effect that those first appearances of gays and lesbians had on you when they appeared on the tv in the 1970s and 1980s giving their back to the camera, in the shadows or with a hood covering their faces.

- Ricordate che un volto nuovo è per noi un valore aggiunto enorme. Se nei media compaiono sempre le stesse quattro-cinque famiglie, finiscono per 'bruciarsi'. Come ha detto una volta una giornalista di Repubblica a una di queste famiglie: *Voi non siete più testimoni, siete testimonial*. E non ha pubblicato l'intervista.
- Va detto che, in qualche raro caso, le nostre immagini sono ricomparse in rete in contesti offensivi e aggressivi. Casi simili mostrano che qualcuno vuole intimidirci, renderci invisibili, noi e le nostre famiglie: e questo è inaccettabile. Del resto le foto sono scomparse dopo una denuncia alla polizia postale. Ad oggi, mi sembra che non ci sia mai stato in Italia un atto di violenza omofobica nato dal reperimento di immagini su Internet.

LA VISIBILITÀ DEI MINORI

La paura principale, ovviamente, riguarda l'esposizione dei bambini. E qui più che mai, ognuno fa a modo suo. Pensate però che è lo stesso tipo di paura manifestato da alcuni genitori etero (per fortuna pochi) che non vogliono che i loro figli siano 'esposti' a famiglie come le nostre. In altre parole, a volte le paure per i bambini sono soprattutto paure dei genitori. Per i bambini comparire nei media è uno spasso. Siete sicure che ne risentirebbero? Forse rispetto all'esposizione mediatica occorre tutelare l'adolescenza, molto più che l'infanzia?

Sul piano giuridico la visibilità mediatica dei minori è sottoposta a una regolamentazione abbastanza dettagliata, esposta nella Carta di Treviso. L'ultima revisione (2006) si può leggere qui: www.odg.it/content/minori. Sono norme che mirano soprattutto a tutelare la privacy di minori coinvolti in fatti di cronaca nera, conflitti familiari, povertà, sfruttamento, e varie forme di strumentalizzazione. C'è però una riserva importante: *Le disposizioni che tutelano la riservatezza dei minori si fondano sul presupposto che la rappresentazione dei loro fatti di vita possa arrecare danno alla loro personalità. Questo rischio può non sussistere quando il servizio giornalistico dà positivo risalto a qualità del minore e/o al contesto familiare in cui si sta formando.* Insomma, in questo caso l'obbligo di riservatezza non sussiste più. Scegliere se mostrare i bambini o no dipende dunque da un'autonoma valutazione di merito da parte della giornalista: il 'contesto familiare' è buono o no?

Certo la scelta è fortemente influenzata dall'identità politica (e religiosa) della rete o testata, cioè dal livello di omofobia tollerata. Ma c'è sempre un margine di trattativa, in cui le giornaliste possono sostenere le proprie scelte, e le famiglie a loro volta possono farsi valere con forza.

Ovviamente, più i nostri bambini appaiono nei media, più sarà difficile sostenere che il loro contesto familiare è assimilabile a quelli dei casi di cronaca nera.