

There may be occasions when incidents arise that could result in negative press for Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland (Rotary). This document provides guidance and essential phone numbers for use in a crisis situation.

**A possible scenario could be:**

A Rotary club has sponsored an exchange student from another country or hosted a Group Study Exchange (GSE) team. The student or one of the GSE team members encounters an emergency. While club leaders work with authorities and relatives to resolve the situation, the media get wind of the crisis and the club is suddenly bombarded with interview requests. The resulting news coverage generates more attention and raises sensitive issues within the community. This scenario is familiar to many clubs worldwide.

Other scenarios could include alleged criminal activity from a Rotarian or an accident during a Rotary event.

When a media crisis arises or is likely to arise, information should be cascaded as follows:

- Rotarian to contact Club President and alert them of the situation.
- Club President to contact District Governor.
- District Governor to contact Rotary PR Team. (See Appendix D on Page 9)
- The District Governor may have a media crisis committee within the district that they may wish to inform. It is vitally important that only those who need to know are informed and also advised that information is of a confidential nature and not for wider discussion
- For information only - Rotary PR Team will advise the District Governor that they will contact and inform the Media Crisis Committee, including the District Marketing, PR and Communications Chair.
- However, the District Governor is fully entitled to request a limit on how many people are made aware of the crisis at this stage.
- Equally, if Rotary is not directly impacted by the crisis at this stage, the number of people who know may be further reduced.

**What to do next:**

- Gather all the facts. Record these carefully - what happened when, who said what to whom and what is due to happen next. This must be an accurate record of events as it will be needed to refer to later, to prevent confusion. It may be the case that it is an internal matter, which does not affect the public, or even a situation which has no connection to Rotary. If it is a legal matter, be sure to record everything accurately to avoid misinformation.

Following discussions with the Rotary PR Team and the District Governor:

a) Appoint a local spokesperson who will receive all media enquiries. This should be someone who is on top of the issue, communicates well and is comfortable interacting with the media. The Rotary PR Team will advise what to say to the media.

**Or**

b) If the story is likely to go beyond local media boundaries and has potential to damage the reputation of Rotary, media crisis management will be assumed by the Rotary PR Team who will also handle all media queries and work with the Media Crisis Committee to support your club or district on the best course of action.

Brief your club members about the situation and tell them not to talk directly to the media, asking them to refer all media calls to the elected spokesperson.

In most cases, when the media are not yet aware of the situation, producing a reactive statement will be the most efficient course of action. This statement should be held by the spokesperson and **only** released if the media requests it. The statement should accurately state the facts, express Rotary's position and convey the appropriate tone (sympathy, apology, commitment etc). Update as needed. The Rotary PR Team will assist with this.

**What to do if contacted by the media:**

Do something to buy a little time and try not to be drawn into a conversation with the journalist. Assure the journalist that you will pass the enquiry on at once to an informed spokesperson who will call them back quickly.

**Never answer** ‘no comment’ as it makes Rotary look suspicious.

- Ask:
  - Who is calling – including job title
  - Which publication or programme they are calling from
  - Their direct line phone number
  - What they want to know
  - When their deadline is due
  
- Respond to all media calls promptly. Ignoring media can contribute to unnecessary speculation. A media interview is a good opportunity to convey the facts and Rotary’s position to the public.
  
- Monitor media coverage of the issue for accuracy and tone. If Rotary is misrepresented, let them know via a polite call or a letter to the editor. Do not be defensive or discourteous even if you may feel Rotary is being very unfairly represented.

**Do not panic.**

By centralising all information and contact through the Rotary PR Team, we can ensure that consistent messages are given out in a controlled fashion and that all relevant parties are kept well informed.

It also limits the amount of work and responsibility you and your club have to endure and you will receive support from the Rotary PR Team at all times.

### Checklist

Action Required	Yes/No?
Contact the District Governor and ensured the Rotary PR Team has been informed?	
Decide on the strategy you want to take, both short and long term? This will be decided with the District Governor and Rotary PR Team.	
Know who the appointed spokesperson is, as agreed with the Rotary PR Team and District Governor?	
Decide, in conjunction with the spokesperson and the Rotary PR Team on the key messages?	
Brief club members, if appropriate, on the situation and advised them what to do if they are approached by the media?	
Be aware of the statements compiled by the spokesperson and Rotary PR Team?	
Pass any media enquiries on to the spokesperson and Rotary PR Officer?	

### Rotary Media Crisis Committee 2017/18

The following people may be briefed by RIBI if there is a media crisis. This is in case of media queries or if a response or other action is required.

Name and title	Landline	Mobile	Email
Rotary PR Team	01789 765411 (option 3)		pr@rotarygbi.org
Eve Conway (Immediate Past President)	020 8504 8555	07850 357842	eve.conway@rotarygbi.org
Denis Spiller (President)	01634 244735	07785 778410	denis.spiller@rotarygbi.org
Debbie Hodge (Vice President)	01923 673638		debbie.hodge@ntlworld.com
Amanda Watkin (RIBI General Secretary)	01789 765411 (option 4)		secretary@rotarygbi.org
Mike Thorn (Public Image Committee Chair)	01737 212720	07810 881622	2015rotary@gmail.com

## APPENDIX A

### What the spokesperson should say:

- Be completely honest, truthful and sure of what you are saying. Do not cover up or make excuses. As previously mentioned, the situation may not even require a statement as it is not a Rotary matter or may be an internal matter and not relevant to the public.
- As a spokesperson, you represent Rotary. When you speak you are Rotary. Avoid personal observations or speculations. A better response is to say "I don't want to speculate on that" or "I would prefer not to deal in hypotheticals. What we do know is ....."
- Release as much information as you can about the crisis in a statement. Be careful to avoid potential contempt of court situations if it is now a legal matter. If that is the case, it will not be appropriate to make a comment but you can reassure that more information will be forthcoming when it is appropriate to do so. Put on a human face. We care, show sympathy, concern and understanding; maybe even regret.
- Offer reassurance that there is no further danger. Show that it is an isolated incident. This is appropriate in the case of incidents involving injuries,
- Explain what you are currently doing to control the situation and that you are investigating the causes of it.
- Accept the fact that the journalist's job is to ask difficult questions. Remain pleasant and be as accommodating as possible.
- It is acceptable to ask about what the line of questioning is likely to be and even the first questions before the interview starts although there is no guarantee that they will stick to the plan.
- Organise your thoughts and speak in short, simple sentences. Think of each as a headline, supported by facts and examples. Headline: "The safety of Youth Exchange participants is our top priority". Support: "Every student completes a detailed orientation programme; background checks are required for all adults in the programme; etc."

- Strengthen your main message with a personal, relevant story: “As a parent of a student who has gone on an exchange, I know what it’s like to worry about a child thousands of miles away.”
- If the situation involves a police investigation or other formal proceeding, emphasise that Rotary is cooperating fully and that it would not be appropriate to comment further due to the fact that legal proceedings are underway.
- Control your voice tone and body language to avoid coming across as defensive, nervous or hostile.
- Always thank the reporter for his or her time and offer to be available for follow-up questions.

## APPENDIX B

### **Mistakes to avoid, whether speaking to media, public or Rotarians:**

- Avoid off-the-record comments, especially when you think the interview is over; the interview is not over until the journalists leaves. If you don't want something reported don't say it at all.
- Avoid rumour, especially when dealing with serious topics and court cases.
- Avoid Rotary jargon and acronyms (DG, GSE, RYLA, District 1234) that the general public will not understand.
- Avoid repeating the negative portion of a question. If the question is: "Did your club fail to adequately protect the student?" consider an answer such as: "The safety of exchange students is our highest priority."
- Avoid the term "no comment" because it carries a negative connotation. When possible, explain why you can't answer a particular question "Sorry, that information is not available at the moment" or say why you cannot comment. It could be because an official investigation is in progress; a lawsuit has been filed, and therefore it is not appropriate to make comments on the matter. Then bridge back to the important point or key message which may include reassurances that the matter is being dealt with.
- You might have several points to make, but remember that the audience (readers, viewers and listeners) will not remember more than two or three items at the most. Also, although the incident is the most important story for you at the moment, it may not be the most important for them and the aim is to contain the situation, not turn it into a media crisis.
- State clearly to the media when and where further information will be made available.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Agreed Rotary facts:**

- Rotary is a community based organisation serving local, national and international communities.
- Rotary is active in nearly 200 countries and geographical regions and has 1.2 million members in over 33,000 clubs.
- In UK and Ireland, there are over 1,800 clubs with more than 51,000 members.
- Rotary is non-political and does not discriminate on grounds of age, sex, creed or religion.
- Rotarians are actively involved in educational and humanitarian programmes using their professional and business skills.
- Rotary is trusted by major International partners to deliver large scale health, education and humanitarian programmes.
- Rotarians live by a code of ethics and are united world-wide to create a better environment for all in which to live.
- Programme involvements are in the main areas of Water, Literacy, Health & Hunger and Polio Eradication.
- Rotary, working with the World Health Organisation (WHO), has immunised over 2 billion children against Polio. It is the largest public health campaign the world has ever seen.

## APPENDIX D

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