



Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs

Issues Communications

Navigating difficult issues within the IDD Sector
with clarity, integrity, and confidence

What We'll Cover Today

01 What Is Issues Management?

02 What Is Reputational Management?

03 When the Media Calls — Practical Tips

04 To Respond or Not? Weighing the Risks

05 Using Our Values as a Compass

06 Conducting an Effective Media Interview

01

What Is Issues Management?

*The process of identifying,
monitoring and addressing potential
challenges before they escalate.*

Identify

Spot emerging concerns early — before they become crises.

Assess

Evaluate likelihood, impact, and who is affected.

Plan

Develop response strategies aligned to your values.

Monitor

Track evolving issues and adjust your approach in real time.

02 What Is Reputational Management?

Our agencies reputation and high standing in the community has taken years to build.

Trust

Built through consistency between what you say and what you do. Your stakeholders — including the people we support, their families, our funders and government — see our values demonstrated everyday.

Narrative

Who tells our story? If we don't shape it, others will. Proactive communications keeps us in the driver's seat when public facing issues arise

Reputational management = the ongoing strategy to protect and enhance how your organization is perceived by all stakeholders

03 When the Media Calls

BUY YOURSELF TIME

1 "Thank you for calling. I want to make sure I give you accurate information — can I call you back within the hour?"

2 Ask for the reporter's deadline, publication, and the specific topic so you know what you're dealing with.

3 Never speak "off the record" until you've established trust and understand what that means in context. (Even then, don't.)

4 Consult your communications lead or leadership before responding to any issue. Review any previous media/agencies statements on the subject.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Stay calm

Your tone sets the mood. A calm voice signals confidence and control.

Always ask for deadline

Gives you a clear window to prepare and respond thoughtfully.

Don't fill silence

Silence is the reporter's tool. Make your point — then stop.

Everything is on record

Assume any conversation with a journalist can be published.

04

To Respond or Not: Weighing the Risks and Opportunity

Silence is not neutral.

Every choice carries consequences.

Ask yourself:

- Does this issue affect the individuals we support?
- Is misinformation already circulating?
- Are our stakeholders expecting a response?
- Could silence be interpreted as guilt or indifference?
- Does responding amplify a story that might fade?

RISKS OF RESPONDING

- Amplifying the story beyond its natural reach
- Introducing new angles, story lines
- Making commitments you cannot keep

RISKS OF NOT RESPONDING

- Appearing evasive, guilty, or indifferent
- Allowing misinformation to fill the vacuum
- Losing control of your own narrative
- Eroding the trust of families, funders and government who rely on your “voice”

When in doubt: acknowledge, don't ignore.

Activity : Case Study

THE SCENARIO

A family member of an individual supported by an OASIS member agency has posted on Facebook, alleging that their loved one was left unsupervised for an extended period and sustained a minor injury.

The post has been shared **47 times** and several commenters are calling for an investigation. A local reporter has just called your executive director, asking for a comment by **3:00 PM today**.

THE REPORTER'S QUESTION

"We've seen the Facebook post about a client being left alone and getting hurt at one of your member agencies. Can you confirm what happened, and what is your organization doing about it?"

YOUR TASK

As a table, draft a response to the reporter. You may assume you are the communications lead or a senior spokesperson. Consider:

- **Will you respond?** Why or why not?
- **What do you say — and what do you NOT say?**
- **What tone and values does your response reflect?**
- **What commitments, if any, do you make?**

 12 minutes

05 Using Our Values as a Compass

For member agencies, values aren't just words — they must be the foundation of every communication decision.

1

Name Your Values

What does your agency stand for? Dignity, inclusion, safety, transparency? Be specific — generic values offer no compass heading when the pressure is on.

2

Test Your Message

Ask: "Does this message reflect who we truly are?" If your response would embarrass your team or contradict your mission, rewrite it before it goes out.

3

Close the Gap

Families and funders trust agencies whose actions match their words. Your communications must reflect real commitments — not just reassuring language.

Values-driven messaging doesn't just protect reputation — it builds it.

05 (cont.) Building Your Values-Based Message

THE 3-POINT MESSAGE STRUCTURE

ACKNOWLEDGE

Show you understand the concern. Lead with empathy before facts - this means centring the experience of individuals and families first — never minimizing what they feel.

VALUE + ACTION

State the value that guides your response, then describe the concrete action you are taking. Example: “We are committed to the autonomy of the individuals we support this guides...”

FORWARD LOOK

Close with what comes next. A clear commitment to follow-up builds trust with families, staff, funders and regulators. Vague endings invite suspicion.

Tip: Write your 3 key messages BEFORE any interview. Bridge back to them no matter what questions come.

06

Conducting an Effective Interview

*You are always the author of your own story.
Don't let the interview author it for you.*

REMEMBER THE ABC

- A — Answer briefly
- B — Bridge to your message
- C — Close with your key point

Prepare, don't script

Know your 3 key messages. Practice them aloud, but don't memorize word-for-word — you'll sound robotic.

Bridge phrases

"That's an important point — what I can tell you is..."
"What matters most to the people we support is..."

Control your pace

Slow down. Speak in short sentences. A rushed answer sounds evasive; a measured one sounds authoritative.

Handle hostile questions

Acknowledge the premise if fair, correct if false. Never repeat negative language — you'll only amplify it.

Close strong

End every interview by landing your most important message. Don't let the last word be theirs.

Key Takeaways

Values-Based Issues Communications

- 1 **Issues management is proactive — identify and plan before crisis hits.**
- 2 **Reputation is your most valuable asset; protect it with consistency.**
- 3 **When media calls: buy time, get informed, then respond with purpose.**
- 4 **Weigh the risks of both responding and staying silent — neither is neutral.**
- 5 **Let your values be the filter for every message you send.**
- 6 **In every interview: prepare your messages, bridge deliberately, close strong.**



oasis