



time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Media Guidelines

Documentaries

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Research

If you are tasked with researching a documentary involving people with mental health problems, here are a few things to consider:

- Mental health conditions vary from person to person which means that symptoms and experiences will be very different, try to get as many different voices as possible as part of your research.
- Try and visit a mental health group or a project for an informal chat before you start recruiting contributors.
- There are lots of fantastic blogs out there that can inspire and educate on this subject look at bit.ly/ttcblogs as a starting point.
- Consider consulting those of us with mental health problems as part of your research, not just as case studies. We are experts on our own conditions.
- Mind and Rethink Mental Illness both have lots of information about different conditions on their websites. bit.ly/Mindinfo or bit.ly/Rethinkinfo

The researcher was able to dispel any concerns, to confirm what was to be expected and how this may affect me. Their transparency when explaining the positive and possible negatives of my involvement were pivotal to my wellbeing.

Paul, contributor on 'The World's Maddest Job Interview'

Working with contributors

When you are interviewing someone with mental health problems as part of your piece, you should consider the following points:

- Is the person genuinely prepared to be interviewed? Don't push someone into something just because they have a good story.
- Think about where to hold the interview. Meeting in a busy, public café can be daunting and may not encourage them to open up.
- Try not to contact contributors too early in the process it is better to wait until you have a firm idea of the production schedule.
- Give them an idea of the questions you are going to ask beforehand so they can consider the best way to share their personal experiences.
- Think about writing up a production contract before filming where information about specific needs can be written up and agreed.
- Respect the wellbeing of your contributors and their families.
- Is it possible for one member of the production crew to build and maintain a relationship with the contributor? It makes things far smoother and brings trust.
- Can you offer a 'get out' at every stage of the production process and make sure that people don't feel pressurised into becoming involved?
- Let the person know about the editing processes your story is likely to go through before it is broadcast. Warn them if it is likely that their clip may be dropped completely and explain why.
- Try and keep in regular contact between recording and transmission this can ensure that contributors feel at ease with the situation.

I found that by treating contributors with mental health problems as you would treat any other contributor, not defining them solely by their mental health condition enabled us to develop a warm and caring relationship, respect and to have fun. Jasmine, Presenter, My Hoarder Mum and Me

Filming/recording

- Think about the production team you are using. Do they have empathy/mental health awareness?
- Make sure you are clear with contributors about the possible intrusive nature of filming, the likely hours and the anticipated reactions from viewers of the show.
- Remember that mental health problems can and do fluctuate so put in place alternatives if your filming schedule is disrupted by a contributor becoming ill.
- Stress and uncertainty can be triggers for certain mental health problems so try and make the process as calm and clear as possible.
- Medications and certain mental health problems can affect people differently, for some the morning may be a write off! You may need to schedule filming around the contributors needs to get the best coverage.
- Don't provide an 'on air' diagnosis or encourage 'experts' to do so.
- Do ensure that you have experts on hand to support contributors through the process.

Don't get overly anxious about talking to people with mental health problems They have usually faced worse situations than a researcher asking a clunky question! Also, build up a relationship slowly, you don't need to hear the whole story in the first phone call.

Rachel, Series Producer, Boom Pictures

Footage

People with mental health problems come from all walks of life and will have much more going on than simply their mental health problem so make sure your footage reflects this.

- Most people with mental health problems will never be in-patients because of their condition, so using shots of a hospital ward can be misleading.
- In the same way you may show a range of people or crowd shots to illustrate a story about the general population, you can do the same with a story around mental illness, after all 1 in 4 of us has a mental health problem.
- If you are using footage of a case study then ensure that they understand how it will be used. Check they are prepared to be identified in the story this way.
- Think about filming interviews directly and down the lense. Contributors talking straight to camera may have more immediacy and impact for the viewer.
- Avoid using any footage that could be considered 'triggering' for people. Reconstructions that show how people self harm may lead to the imitation of self-harming behaviour by other people at risk. The Samaritans have some great media guidelines that deal specifically with suicide and self harm.
- Using footage from films such as 'Psycho', 'The Shining' or 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest' to illustrate mental health problems is inaccurate and may contribute to outdated stereotypes of 'mad, bad and dangerous'.

Tone and language

Choosing the right tone and language for the script or to publicise the show is really important.

- Try to avoid using sensationalist or tabloid language, particularly if titles or clips are likely to be viewed out of context.
- If you are making factual entertainment ensure that the entertainment side of the show is not exploitative or potentially harmful.
- It is fine to be light hearted but use humour with care, think about laughing with and not at those of us with mental health problems.
- Why not get your voice over script checked by a charity or by someone with a mental health problem?

Final tips

Remember you have the power to help improve understanding and attitudes towards mental illness by:

- Providing accurate information about mental health problems.
- Encouraging people in distress to seek help, for instance by providing helpline numbers.
- Breaking down myths about mental illness, encouraging openness and including the voices of people who have experienced mental health problems.
- Using people with mental health problems as experts all through the production process, not just as a talking head.
- Considering including recovery messages, don't just focus on how mental health problems emerge or the lows, also show how people can recover. Details about how someone recovered may help a viewer with their own problems.
- Remembering that anyone can get a mental health problem. They are not 'someone else' - it could be you, a friend, a relative or a colleague.
- Getting in touch with the media advisory service. We can offer fact checking, research and help recruiting.

Contact us to find out more

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@TTCMediaAdvice

<http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/media-advice>

About Time to Change

Time to Change is England's most ambitious programme to end the discrimination faced by people with mental health problems. It is led by the mental health charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, and funded by the Department of Health and Comic Relief.

We work with the media to encourage realistic and sensitive portrayals of people with mental health problems.