‘Getting It Right’

Teaching notes to accompany the DVD

DART CENTRE ASIA PACIFIC
THE JOURNALISM SCHOOL AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

‘Getting It Right’
Teaching Notes

These teaching notes accompany a DVD Produced by the Dart Centre Asia Pacific in collaboration with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (19 minutes, 54 seconds).

www.dartcentre.org/asia-pacific

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INTRODUCTION:

This DVD has been developed by the Dart Centre to supplement teaching materials already provided to educators seeking to improve the quality of Australian journalism.

It is strongly recommended that this resource – dealing with the treatment of news sources – be used in tandem with the Dart Centre DVD, *News Media and Trauma: Stories from Australian Media Professionals about Reporting Trauma* which deals with self-care among journalists.

In this new resource, seven families impacted by trauma have shared their stories of dealing with the media in an attempt to help journalists better understand the difficulties that witnesses, survivors and relatives of traumatised people face.

Each person was asked a series of questions by freelance journalist and former senior reporter for The Age, Gary Tippet and Dart Centre Asia Pacific psychologist Cait McMahon about their media experiences, why they decided to engage with the media and how the media behaved towards them. Some praised the media for good practices, but most raised issues about the manner in which the media behaved before stories about them or their loved ones were printed or broadcast. Specifically they were asked about the media’s respect for grief and privacy, the media’s accuracy, making an informed decision to take part, and if dealing with the media at that time helped or added to distress. Finally, all were asked what lessons, if any, should journalists and camera operators learn from the way they were treated?

SECTION 1:

Background information about the interviewees in the *Getting it Right* DVD (not in order of appearance).

1. Vanessa Robinson

Brothers Chase and Tyler Robinson, aged nine and seven, were found dead in their Mooroopna home in late May 2010. Their mother Vanessa Robinson was also found, ill, distressed and disoriented, and taken to hospital.

Initial police media releases described the deaths as "suspicious" and said a woman "was helping police with their enquiries". As a result public suspicion fell upon Vanessa. At least one report said she had been arrested.

It said "Scott Robinson was being treated for shock and his estranged wife, Vanessa, 29, was being assessed under police guard. The deaths of the two brothers, which has stunned the small town of Mooroopna, is believed to have come after a bitter separation ..." It added "... there were reports she tried to harm herself". A resident said: "I think the community needs to rally around the family and not be judgmental, we don't know the full details of what happened. It just goes to show it happens in the best of streets and the worst of streets."

A TV news report on 31 May reported "the suspected murder" of the two boys and its reporter said: "police won't confirm suggestions she (Vanessa) may have tried to kill herself."

An opinion piece in The Herald Sun began "I don't care what difficulty you are going through as a parent, how depressed you might be or how much you hate your former partner. Get professional help but protect your kids at all costs "... all my good will evaporates when I hear of children who have been harmed. Sometimes mums kill their kids before killing themselves ..."

Transferred to St Vincent's in Melbourne, the mother became the focus of much media and social media speculation. She and her husband Scott had separated, but not "bitterly" as reported. There was no "estrangement". Nor had she harmed the children or herself in a murder-suicide attempt as was implied. Monsignor Peter Jeffrey, a Shepparton Catholic leader decried the "gross interpretation and innuendo" of much of the coverage. In fact police determined the children had likely died as a result of a leaking gas heater and that the leak may have occurred over several days, killing the boys and badly affecting their mother.

On 3 June her family wrote an open letter that said in part: "These past few days have seen our beautiful daughter and loving mother Vanessa tried and judged in a sensationalised media frenzy that did not give any credence to waiting for the truth to arise ... the family has been affected greatly by the insensitivity shown by the media in its grab for headlines.

Vanessa Robinson was unaware of the media assault on her home town of Shepparton. She was in hospital being treated for carbon monoxide poisoning and later shock, but recalls overhearing snatches of conversation that newspapers were reporting she was accused of her children's murder. No journalist spoke to her but a number left their names and phone numbers at the hospital because, as she remembers bitterly, "they were all after a story".

"I never wanted to speak to the media, nor have I spoken to them about the initial treatment (of the story)," she says.

She says the media had no respect for her grief or privacy. "They printed nothing factual; they continually had my children's photos paraded in the media. My home where the accident occurred had

a Google map directing people to the address, my car's license plate was on TV,
my family were hounded and it was an absolute nightmare on top of a nightmare.

"I was disgusted (by the media reports); I still can't look at them. I had reporters at my children's school the morning of the accident, telling them what I allegedly done to my children, to teachers and parents. They went all through Shepparton, shops, pubs, work to find out what sort of person I was, and if I had a nasty secret they could report. I was basically treated as a criminal and I felt that the media took away the fact that I was a good mother to my children, never negligent, me and my children were a happy little family and that was all taken away from me. It still affects me today."

Vanessa doubts survivors or trauma victims in similar situations can make informed decisions when initially dealing with media. "I have days when I'm still in a haze and struggling with facts and reality," she says. "I pity these people with such tragic events happening and the knee jerk reaction from the media these days."

The lesson she wants media professionals to take from her story is that they need to treat the people involved with respect and, most importantly, get it right. "This is not only a story but this is someone's life. People have to go back into a community and when someone's whole life has been used for public possession this makes it near impossible. Main thing is, get your facts right before printing … not from a 'friend of a friend' but from a credible source.''

2. Roger and Joy Membrey

Roger and Joy Membrey suffered countless disappointments in the years they have waited for someone to be charged with the murder of their daughter. Elisabeth, 22, vanished on December 6, 1994, after she finished a casual shift at a Ringwood hotel. Her parents were the first to suspect something was wrong, breaking into their daughter's unit the next day when she failed to keep a doctor's appointment. In the early days police only knew that she was seen arguing with someone at the Ringwood Aquatic Centre and that an old "dirty white car" was seen at her unit. The description of a man gave little away. He was about 183cm, in his late 20s, of muscular build with light brown hair. Homicide detectives took over the investigation in December 1994 after confirming blood had been found in her home and forensic evidence that someone had spent several hours cleaning blood from her unit before using her car to dispose of the body. A year later the State Government offered a $100,000 reward for information leading to an arrest. In 2006, $1 million was offered for information leading to the conviction of the killer.

As days turned into weeks, and months, and years, the Membreys lobbied inside and outside of the police department to make sure the case was not forgotten and conducted countless interviews for the media. They made a decision early on to take control of the media as much as they could. "We have taken the approach from the beginning that we would co-operate as best as possible with the media because we owed it to Elisabeth to get as much effective coverage as possible in order to provide leads for the investigation," the Membreys said.

In July 1996 they released to the media part of a daily journal of their thoughts and emotions as they waited for the police to find the person responsible. In December 1996 they were quoted after a public tribute to their daughter marking two years since her disappearance. In 1998 they formed a support group to help families dealing with the agony of a missing person called Missing Presumed Dead.

The Membreys say their most difficult moments were every time a body was discovered. At the time Mr Membrey was quoted in the *Sunday Herald Sun* on August 2 saying: "People find it very difficult to know what to say to you. They avoid you, they cross to the other side of the street; they feel they might say the wrong thing. That is so distressing for us because there is no such thing as the wrong word. We

just want to be treated normally." In August 2000 police search and rescue squad divers searched Ringwood Lake for her body. Her father told *The Age* that they had received several leads following publicity surrounding a coronial inquiry into Elisabeth's disappearance.

The Membreys have told the Dart Centre that even small mistakes in reporting can weigh large. Joy Membrey reported that they put a lot of time in naming Elisabeth when she was born and spell her name with an 'S' and not a 'Z', however when they see her name spelt with a 'Z' in the media they know on one level it is just a simple human error but on another level it causes further harm and a sense of "that journalist does not care enough to spell her name correctly".

In October 2000 police released an image of a man seen arguing with Elisabeth. Her parents were quoted saying they hoped "like mad that it is a breakthrough" and appealed to the man to contact police. In 2001 *The Herald Sun* teased that police were poised to make a breakthrough in her case, saying they had a suspect and had submitted a brief to the Director of Public Prosecutions. John Silvester wrote a long feature in *The Sunday Age* on 13 May 2001 about the case in which he detailed the investigation by a police cold-case crew. In it he wrote "unresolved grief is one of the cruellest things because it just goes on". The feature wrote in detail of the case surrounding several people, including the prime suspect and again appealed for public assistance. In 2002 a former hotel bouncer was identified as the key suspect in documents presented to the Melbourne Magistrates Court. The man had failed a lie-detector test. But in November the Membreys were again in the paper appealing for people to tell police what they knew about the case. "They're just completely spineless, they have no backbone at all. It just takes my breath away that they can be such a coward," Mrs Membrey was quoted saying.

The couple had to endure prank phone calls and hoax letters from people claiming to know where she was. "We know our daughter is dead. We don't need well-meaning clairvoyants trying to tell us otherwise." In December 2008 there was finally crucial new evidence that led detectives to Western Australia in the hunt to bring Elisabeth's killer to justice. A caller had contacted police leading them to interview former Ringwood resident Shane Andrew Bond. He was finally charged with Elisabeth's murder in 2010. Roger and Joy Membrey were at the court hearing and both kept their eyes fixed on Mr Bond. *The Australian* reported that they hoped police were closer to finding their daughter's body: "It is vital we get Elisabeth's remains. That is very important to her, and to us as parents, that she can have a funeral." Joy and Roger were in court when Shane Bond was committed in 2011 to stand trial for Elisabeth's murder, however on April 28, 2012 Bond was found not guilty of murder or manslaughter and released from custody. Her body has still not been found.

3 & 4. Pam O'Donnell and George Halvagis

Pam O'Donnell is the mother of Nicole Patterson while George Halvagis is the father of Mersina Halvagis. What unites them is that their daughters were both murdered by the same man, Peter Dupas, in April 1999 and November 1997 respectively. Their exposure to the news media, then, was as relatives of victims of the most serious crime. They did not lose their daughters in a car collision or a bushfire or to illness; their daughters were taken from them in the most brutal and intrusive way, as the seemingly random victims of a serial killer. Pam O'Donnell and her family, including former husband, Brian Patterson, current husband, Brian O'Donnell and her daughter Kylie and son Andrew sat through seven days of the murder trial for Nicole, in August 2000. Each day they were filmed entering and leaving the Supreme Court, in Melbourne's central business district, and almost every day they were asked by journalists, photographers and camera people, to comment on the day's evidence. The same applied for the day Justice Frank Vincent handed down his sentence: Dupas was to serve a life sentence, with no minimum period. Pam O'Donnell's relationship with the news media continued after the sentence was handed down as she became the figurehead of a campaign by *The Herald Sun* newspaper for the setting

of longer minimum sentences for rape and for tougher parole conditions. Dupas had been convicted and jailed on four previous occasions – in 1974 for rape, in 1980 for rape and other offences, in 1985 for rape and in 1994 for false imprisonment of a woman the evidence shows Dupas intended to rape. The sentences ranged in length from three years nine months to 12 years but in each case Dupas was released at the earliest possible time. For *The Herald Sun* campaign, each incremental news development, whether announcing the newspaper's call to readers to complete their sentencing survey, or the Victorian Attorney-General's response to it, included quotes from Pam O'Donnell about how her daughter would have been alive had earlier judges imposed longer sentences and parole boards rejected Dupas' applications for early release.

George Halvagis was the dominant spokesman for his family, and a continual, stoic presence in the long and convoluted legal proceedings. As Justice Phillip Cummins said in 2007 when finally convicting Dupas for the murder of Mersina: "You are a fine family. Through these 10 years, you have shown courage and love and loyalty to Mersina. You have never wavered". Mersina Halvagis, 25, was murdered while tending to her grandmother's grave in Fawkner cemetery, in November 1997, stabbed so often and so violently that "the bones of her sternum and a spinal vertebra were shattered" (*The Australian*, 28 August 2007) but for years the crime went unsolved. The murders of Mersina Halvagis and Nicole Patterson were linked not only by a common perpetrator but, by coincidence, the two families knew each other years beforehand when they were both living and working in country Victoria. Then they had been friends; now they were tied by their shared grief. When the trial for Nicole's murder was held, George and Christina Halvagis sat in the back of the court to watch, and support Bill Patterson and Pam O'Donnell.

The death of Mersina has continued to take a toll on the Halvagis family, who have visited her gravesite daily. Two years after Mersina's death her sister, Dimitra, said: "When you died so did our family. I lost my mum and my dad to their pledge to never rest until your murderer is caught and I long for the day when our focus can be taken off this monster who already has robbed us of so much". (*The Age*, 3 December 2000). George Halvagis has campaigned tirelessly for police to solve the crime and for politicians to change laws to allow police to interview prisoners about offences other than those for which they are in jail. That included Dupas, who had been jailed for the murder of Nicole Patterson but who had never been questioned about the death of Mersina Halvagis. He refused to answer questions, but eventually through persistent police detective work, and Dupas' confession in jail to a fellow prisoner (a former criminal lawyer named Andrew Fraser), he was brought to trial for the murder of Mersina Halvagis as well as another woman, named Margaret Maher, who had been killed by Dupas a month beforehand. Both Pam O'Donnell and George Halvagis attended the Maher trial with Maher's brother, Ingo. The trial for Mersina herself epitomises her father's persistence, coming as it did after Dupas had been sentenced to life imprisonment for the murders of Nicole Patterson and Margaret Maher. The decision to prosecute was made by the then Director of Public Prosecutions, Paul Coghlan, on the ground that despite the cost to taxpayers "For the Halvagis family it was important to see that justice was done" (*The Age*, 5 March 2011). The Halvagis family's relationship with the news media has extended well beyond a decade, through several investigations, coronial hearings, trials, appeals and parliamentary debates. They were interviewed in the first stages of grief, and have been interviewed repeatedly with each new development in the case. They have been filmed while attending to their daughter's graveside, and they have developed closer working relationships with a small number of journalists who have covered the case for many years.

5. Jim Ward

Jim Ward was at Esso's Longford gas plant, near Sale, when it exploded in 1998 and was subsequently made a scapegoat for the tragedy.

Mr Ward had worked for Esso for almost 19 years. On the day of the explosion, Friday, September 25, 1998, he was panel operator in the plant's control room. After the fire killed two workmates and injured eight others, he had activated the shutdown system and made the phone calls to trigger emergency procedures. For that he received a bravery medal. Yet in April, 1999, at the Royal Commission into the disaster, his employer turned on him. He had failed to correctly respond to a system failure "due to reasons peculiar to himself," the company said.

Jim was not hurt, though he has said: "All of us saw those things, smelt the smells, heard the noise and saw men burn."

But he suffered in a different but profound way after Esso publicly sought to blame him for the disaster.

Under intense pressure his personality changed and his 19-year marriage to wife Elizabeth collapsed. Jim and Elizabeth later received compensation under a section of the Sentencing Act, and, in 2003, his two children were awarded $100,000 compensation each for having suffered depression and continuing problems stemming from the marriage break-up.

Esso was subsequently found guilty by a Supreme Court jury of 11 criminal charges of breaching the Occupational Health and Safety Act at the plant and fined $2 million.

Of Ward, on the other hand, Justice Phillip Cummins said in 2003 that he had acted properly, responsibly and bravely. But, he added, "from a warm and loving and supportive husband and father he turned into a withdrawn, disturbed, troubled man".

Ward says on the whole he was handled fairly by the media. But he suffered under an intense spotlight and can talk about that sort of scrutiny. "I was confronted by polite aggression, a very competitive element to the process, particularly the broadcast media, trying to get an exclusive, and I felt completely uncertain about their agendas," he said. He was also concerned about how people were treated: "I'd say to journalists when dealing with traumatised survivors to constantly tell themselves … take them seriously … take them seriously."

6. Gary Brown

Gary Brown lost his son, Adrian, daughter-in-law, Mirrabelle and their children Eric, 8, Matthew, 7, and their sister Breille, 3 when the Black Saturday fire hit their home at Bald Spur Road, Kinglake on February 7, 2009.

In the moments before his death, Adrian was talking to his father Gary via a computer chatroom. Gary Brown was in Hong Kong on business. He rushed home the following day and some days later it was confirmed all five bodies had been found in their home.

He has joined a state-supported Bereaved Project Group to try to maintain focus and help others.

He has had some dealings with the media, again mostly positive.

7. Kimina Lyall

When the Asian tsunami hit on Boxing Day 2004, the South-East Asia correspondent for *The Australian* Kimina Lyall was at a Thai beach resort and on call for work. It was a few years after a serious assault by a deaf man wielding a knife on another Thai beach, but she was an experienced journalist. She'd been to

Port Arthur to cover the massacre of 35 people by gunman Martin Bryant, had worked the Olympics, covered the Bali bombings, The Australian Embassy bombing and tailed suspected terrorists and paedophiles from Cambodia to the southern Philippines. But it was the tsunami which changed her life and lead to her book, *Out of the Blue*, *Facing the Tsunami.* In it she describes how her partner JP was caught in the water while she was taking photographs. "JP threw herself into the water. She was swirled around, pushed under and banged up against trees," she is quoted saying. Miraculously they survived and after sheltering on higher ground until the next morning, Lyall realized that it was the biggest story of her life and she wasn't in the thick of the action. For the days, weeks and months after the tsunami she filed a stream of stories. "I had a huge amount of conflict. Who was I to be feeling pain because I didn't suffer like the people around me? I didn't lose my life, my job, my partner or my children. I hadn't lost anything except my sense of safety in the world," she said in the *Sunday Herald Sun* in 2006. Lyall has now left daily journalism after a PTSD diagnosis. She said the tipping point came from Hurricane Katrina. "I lost it completely. I remember watching the horrific images on television and I started crying and I didn't stop for six months or so. It was a dark time." She wrote in an article published on The Dart Centre's website that the fact that she was part of the tsunami story did not alter her responsibility as correspondent for *The Australian*. "Within hours of the wave hitting, the acting editor was on the phone, checking to see if I was OK to get on the reporting task. I answered yes, and truthfully, I could not imagine missing the story of a lifetime, but I – and, to be fair, she – had no idea that I would be hampered by grief and shock. So I spent the next few days in a daze, barely able to concentrate, let alone comprehend." On an ABC *Compass* program in 2007 Lyall discussed the incident with former ABC TV foreign correspondent Philip Williams. She described how she helped with the rescue operation in the aftermath but says the decisions she made in those days after the tsunami have haunted her and ultimately lead to the end of her career. "I felt the ugliness of the profession," she said. In the same television program another ABC correspondent Sally Sara is quoted saying: "We put on flak jackets to keep out the physical harm and yet we're naked in other ways; we have no protection at all."

SECTION 2:

Using the DVD in the classroom

Before playing the DVD remind the students that you are not a psychologist. It is not a teacher's job to counsel students and most universities have people employed on campus to provide professional assistance to students who require it.

However, you can help by ensuring the students have the university's counselling services contact details and/or an appropriate helpline phone number. This should be displayed for all students (either on the whiteboard, internal communication system, or via email).

You may wish to consider giving the students a reason to absent themselves from the room if they find the content of the DVD upsetting. Say something like "I know a few of you need to leave early, that's fine if you do, just send me an email later if you like".

Warn the students that the DVD contains interviews with real people discussing real events, some of which may have been witnessed by your students (ie bushfires, tsunamis) and may trigger strong emotions from them.

Remind the students that often the most important journalism comes from covering traumatic events, and while the video talks about what not to do, it is equally important that stories get told. Journalists, like police officers and firefighters, are often the first on the scene of an event. By learning about trauma journalists can write better stories, and better help society.

Students should be reminded that while it may, at times, seem unpleasant to cover these stories, for many victims and survivors it is essential that they have the opportunity to tell their stories, in a manner in which they have some control.

Before you press play on the DVD, ask the students to jot down issues that they'd like to discuss after the video.

Make sure that you allow time at the end of the lesson to bring closure to the lesson. You can ask students to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper and hand them in, or email them to you. It is important to follow up with students and ensure they have counselling advice.

Structure of the DVD

The DVD is broken down into 5 chapters. These chapters allow for easy classroom use. The DVD can be stopped with ease between each chapter allowing for discussion on each topic, or one topic at a time can be used for each class allowing for more in-depth discussion and teaching.

- The media scrum
- Trial by media
- 'Get the facts right'
- Informed consent
- 'We are not a commodity'

1. Questions for discussion

The interviews in the "Getting it Right" DVD raise numerous issues for students and aspiring practitioners to consider. Here are some; you or your students may have others.

I. Kerry O'Brien says in the introduction that journalists should respect their interviewees. What does he mean by "respect"? How can you show "respect" to an interviewee in a fast changing trauma story such as a flood or bushfire?

II. Kerry O'Brien says many people interviewed are not media savvy. Do members of your family understand the media process? Can you explain what happens in the news production process after an interview is conducted in the field?

III. Kerry O'Brien says journalists need to go to a story appropriately researched and with knowledge. How can this be done when a story is fast moving such as a bushfire or a flood? What about a few days later?

IV. Vanessa Robinson talks about people being "made to assume by the media", that she hurt her children. Why did the media leap to this conclusion? Could you write the story so this inference was avoided?

V. Joy Membrey and Pam O'Donnell both strongly object to being asked "How do you feel"? Is this a question that journalists should ask? One alternative question is "tell me your story". This allows the interviewee to answer with their own words and without being put in a position where they feel like they are being blamed. It does however, make the people re-live the day.

VI. Pam O'Donnell doesn't like the use of the word "closure". Can you think of another word? She suggests "justice".

VII. George Halvagis and Jim Ward talk about the distress of having reporters intrude by knocking on their front doors, following them, and landing helicopters near their homes. Why does knocking on the door of a grieving person cause such deep distress? Is there any other way of approaching people? Could you use a third party?

VIII. Gary Brown discusses how happy his daughter was to be able to view a finalized copy of a television story before it was aired? As a reporter, is this a promise you can realistically make to an interviewee in the field? What are your thoughts of giving your copy to a traumatised interviewee to read?

IX. Accuracy is a cornerstone of journalistic practice. For trauma survivors like Vanessa Robinson and George Halvagis even minor factual errors are deeply distressing. What do you make of that? How can you prevent even slight mistakes when rushing to meet a deadline? What is the best solution if you make one?

X. Kimina Lyall, a journalist and a survivor of trauma, says there is a point at which questions about the survivor's experience is no longer "the public's business". What does she mean, and what do you think of her view that it is our job as journalists to enable survivors to draw the line?

XI. Jim Ward bristled at being referred to as "our old mate" by a television breakfast current affairs host. How should journalists, especially those working in television, approach survivors of trauma? Is there a middle path between breezy matey-ness and remote formality? Can you think of other approaches?

XII. Kimina Lyall discusses the paradox that interviews with trauma survivors in the immediate aftermath of an event are, in many ways, easier than those done a few days later. Why might interviews conducted several days after an event be "ethically trickier"? How can you get 'informed consent'?

Journalistic independence is central to the craft of journalism: how is that balanced against the rights and, perhaps, the emotional needs of survivors of trauma?

I. Should there be different "rules of engagement" for journalists working with people who have power (such as politicians and celebrities) and "ordinary people" who have had little engagement with the media previously?

II. Some journalists argue that they are forced into unethical situations because of the pressures of the businesses to get the interview. Roger Membrey is adamant that he and his family are not "commodities", saying that journalists' behaviour "should not impinge on our ability to grieve". How do we as journalists resolve the tension between their experience and our need to shape that into a news story?

III. What are some of the approaches and strategies journalists have used that survivors of trauma have welcomed and appreciated? Why do you think they were successful? Do they suggest other strategies to you? NOTE: Research from the Black Saturday bushfires tells us that journalists who are truthful and upfront get more interviews.

IV. News media coverage of traumatic events captures only a moment in a person's life, says Kimina Lyall. "It's really nothing to do with who they are as a human being when someone is captured in a rage, or grieving". Do you agree? Does this mean someone is forever titled a "tsunami survivor" or does this title eventually get dropped? If so, when?

V. Some of the interviewees in the DVD were innocent bystanders while others were implicated in or accused, unfairly, of some kind of wrongdoing. Given that you might expect their experiences of the news media would differ markedly. Do they?

VI. What are the reasons the public has such a poor perception of journalists? Is it just the inaccuracies that the interviewees here allude to?

2. Examining media coverage of events discussed in the DVD

I. "Mum takes tough line", by Geoff Wilkinson, *Herald Sun*, 28 August 2000, page 2, and "Thousands back Nicole mum's plea", by Geoff Wilkinson, *Herald Sun*, 20 August 2000, page 11. These two news stories are about a campaign the newspaper ran for the Victorian government to introduce mandatory sentences for repeat offenders. Pam O'Donnell was quoted in the articles. Geoff Wilkinson, an experienced, award-winning crime reporter, wrote at least 13 articles about the need for mandatory sentencing in which he quoted Pam O'Donnell. Something to consider here is the balance between a newspaper's desire to campaign on an issue and the need to feed the campaign by repeatedly interviewing a survivor
of trauma.

II. "Father of the year, by George", *Sunday Herald Sun* editorial, 2 September 2007, page 82. This leader from Victoria's tabloid Sunday newspaper makes a strong, succinct case for George Halvagis to be named father of the year for his devotion to fighting for justice for his daughter.

III. "48 jurors found Peter Dupas was a killer. Now will the parents of Mersina Halvagis finally find peace"? by John Silvester, The Age, 5 March 2011, page 28. This article is one of Silvester's Naked City crime columns that run on the back page of the front section of the Saturday Age. In it, Silvester examines the Dupas case and its implications both for the Halvagis family and for the criminal justice system.

IV. "I am a serial killer. I have got a problem" by Gary Tippet and Ian Munro, in *Lives of Crime: The Melbourne gangland murders and other tales of true crime*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2008, pages 175-82. This article included in a true crime book examines how people like Dupas come to commit crimes that are truly shocking in their depravity.

3. Classroom activities

Remind the students that you are not a counsellor, and that if any of the classroom activities trigger strong emotions they should seek out the assistance from the university counselling service or an organisation such as Lifeline.

There are several activities here. A trauma awareness survey to measure the students' knowledge before they begin, an activity in which students are encouraged to think about the feelings that are aroused when discussing difficult matters, and thirdly an all-in press conference stimulation.

1) The Trauma Awareness Survey

This US survey of college students by Gretchen Dworznik and Max Grubb contains questions concerning student attitudes and beliefs about a future career in journalism. It can be used after a lecture and then revisited at the conclusion of classroom activities to prompt discussion and to check what the students have learned.

Please circle the number which indicates the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement by using the following scale:

1) Strongly disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neither Agree or Disagree 4) Agree 5) Strongly Agree

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I will have to cover a serious or fatal vehicle accident within the first six months of my career in journalism.

1 2 3 4 5

I may feel sad or upset after I cover a story in which someone has died.

1 2 3 4 5

I am comfortable with the idea of covering news events in which someone has been seriously hurt or killed.

1 2 3 4 5

I will cover a story that involves the death of a child within the first year of my career in journalism.

1 2 3 4 5

I will be able to deal with any emotions or stress I feel when covering a story in which someone has been seriously hurt or killed.

1 2 3 4 5

As part of my career in journalism, I will have to approach the friends and loved ones of someone who has died and ask them for an interview.

1 2 3 4 5

Victims may experience extreme emotional distress following a situation where they were either

seriously hurt of nearly killed.

1 2 3 4 5

Is it possible to cause emotional harm to victims when interviewing or photographing them.

1 2 3 4 5

I know how to interview or photograph a victim without causing him/her emotional harm.

1 2 3 4 5

I will feel comfortable interviewing or photographing victims immediately following a situation where they were either seriously hurt or almost killed.

1 2 3 4 5

My lecturers have taught me how to approach and interview victims of the families of victims of serious crimes or fatal events.

1 2 3 4 5

I will not have to cover any situations in which someone was seriously hurt or killed during my first year in journalism.

1 2 3 4 5

News workers do not experience feelings of sadness or emotional distress when covering events where someone has died.

1 2 3 4 5

As part of my career in journalism, I will have to interview the parents of a child who has died.

1 2 3 4 5

Editors do not send new reporters and photographers to cover fatal events such as murders and vehicle accidents.

1 2 3 4 5

My superiors and co-workers in the newsroom will help prepare me to interview victims or the families of victims.

1 2 3 4 5

I don't really like the idea of interviewing victims or victims' families as part of my career in journalism.

1 2 3 4 5

I don't know how to approach and interview friends or the family of someone who has died.

1 2 3 4 5

It is okay if I feel stress or emotional distress while I cover a story in which someone has been seriously hurt or killed.

1 2 3 4 5

It is okay for journalists in general to feel stress or emotional distress while covering stories in which someone has been seriously hurt or killed.

1 2 3 4 5

2) Asking Hard Questions

Before activity: Set some boundaries. You do not want to put students into a position where they may feel compelled to talk about events that are deeply distressing such as rape or the loss of a sibling. Provide some potential examples such as failing a subject in year 12 or lying to their parents about something or losing a favourite pet to guide the students' thinking. That way, students will not become unduly distressed and when you have run the discussion about their questions you can also point to the fact that they have not really touched bottom.

Activity: Set your boundaries (as above) then, ask all students in the class to take a moment to consider three questions that, if someone asked them, they would really not want to answer. Ask the students to write briefly write what it is that would make them reluctant to answer the questions. Tell them that they do not need to share this information with anyone, but you want them to understand the feelings of some of their interviewees. Put the students in small groups to discuss their feelings, and ask for a representative of each group to collate their responses and talk about the process to the class. Ask the students would they ever lie to a journalist?

Closing: Consider giving the students a short break to clear their minds. This helps students identify methods of self-care. Give them an outlet to share their thoughts.

3) The All In

Activity: Do a role playing exercise in covering traumatic events. After students have watched the DVD and read the background materials they can take turns in playing the role of the journalist and of the survivor of the traumatic event at a media conference. You, or a student, can volunteer, to play the role of one of the interviewees in the DVD while all the other students gather around them, playing the role of the journalists and asking questions about what has happened to their relative (Pam O'Donnell, George Halvagis, Roger and Joy Membrey), or to describe their experience (Jim Ward, Kimina Lyall) or to ask what they know about the death of their children (Vanessa Robinson). After a few minutes questioning, you can rotate the students so that a number of them get the opportunity to play the role of the survivor. Once a few rotations have been completed, ask students to discuss their experiences, on both sides of the camera or the notebook.

Closing: Ask them what questions worked. Were any harmful? Students can ask questions. If time remains, students should again write down thoughts, feelings and questions.

Note: It is always important after role play to ensure that everybody in the room is back 'in role' as themselves. At the end of the class ask everybody to go around the room and ask them by name, and using their name, one thing about themselves such as "Hasan, what is your favourite colour? Suzie, what are your shoes made of?" These types of questions ensure that people are present in themselves after potentially traumatic role plays.

SECTION 3:

Checklists, resources and further reading

1. Checklist

Dart's Dos and Don'ts of Trauma Interviewing:

- Ask Permission: Those affected by tragedy or disaster have a right to decline being interviewed, photographed or filmed. News professionals need to respect that right. Exercise the principle of doing no further harm.
- Clearly identify yourself, ask the subject something like 'Would you like to talk to me about it now?' If they decline, accept that. Perhaps leave a card in case they change their mind.
- Explain the ground rules, a sense of the parameters of the interview, what might appear, how long you'll be there.
- Don't make promises you can't keep: that the interview will make the front page or lead the bulletin or solve the crime.
- Do not coerce, cajole, trick or offer remuneration to get co-operation. Don't thrust the additional burden of negotiating an "exclusive" onto grieving families.
- Share control: Let the interviewee decide some of the conditions such as a preference for where they are interviewed or to have a friend or relative present during the interview.
- Include them in any decisions you can – for instance, read back their quotes or replay raw tape; allow them to suggest which photos of a deceased or injured relative should be used.
- Above all, be accurate and do not feign compassion – it can't be faked. Offer sincere condolences early on in considerate terms. Use a supportive phrase like "I'm sorry this happened to you," rather than the more abrupt "How do you feel?" or, worse, "I know how you feel." You don't.
- Avoid "devil's advocate" questions that might imply blame.
- Resist the "pack" mentality.
- Show empathy, not detachment, but be careful to control your own emotions.
- Do not expect any single reaction.
- Anticipate emotional responses. If someone cries it is not a sign the interview is over. Allow them time to compose themselves before asking "Are you ready to go on?"
- Silence is golden. Just because they pause or cry, do not fill that space.
- Resist the cliché of filming people in a distressed or emotional state.
- Allow vulnerable interviewees to tell you when they'd like to take a break, whether they want you to put your notebook down or turn off recording equipment so they can say something they don't want used. Check whether it's OK to ask a tough question.

- Treat these people as you would like to be treated if the situation was reversed.
- **Get it right.** Thoroughly check and re-check facts, names, times and places. Remember your story may be the last ever item in the scrapbook of a loved one's life. Errors are a second wound to people who have been traumatized by loss or tragedy.

2. Other Resources

News Media and Trauma: Stories from Australian Media Professionals about Reporting Trauma. Dart Centre Australasia. 2008. The Journalism School at Columbia University.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztntR0uFuBE

Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting About Victims and Trauma, by Roger Simpson and William Coté, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006. Particularly relevant is chapter 5, "The interview: assault or catharsis?", pages 98-113.

Out of the Blue, Facing the Tsunami. By Kimina Lyall. ABC Books 2006. ISBN: 9780733319051;

Lives of Crime: The Melbourne gangland murders and other tales of true crime, by Gary Tippet and Ian Munro, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2008.

Conducting safe, effective and ethical interviews with survivors of sexual and gender based violence
http://dartcenter.org/content/conducting-interviews-with-survivors-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-by-witness#.Ujp8qdJmj5V
co-produced by Witness http://blog.witness.org/ and Dr. Elana Newman of the Dart Centre

Australian tips on reporting on violence against women from the 'End Violence against Women' media awards
http://www.evas.org.au/index.php/reporting-on-violence-against-women-vaw/guide-to-reporting-on-violence-against-women

Dart Centre, Interviewing and reporting on children, *by Ruth Teichroeb*
http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-children-trauma#.Ujp-udJmj5U and tip sheet
http://dartcenter.org/content/interviewing-children-guide-for-journalists#.Ujp-9NJmj5U

Ten ethical questions in reporting – *Poynter Institute*
http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/everyday-ethics/talk-about-ethics/1750/ask-these-10-questions-to-make-good-ethical-decisions/

Strategies on reporting significant disaster (Sandy Hook shooting) *by ABC, Lisa Millar*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cJjGUKZQkw

Reporting on trauma: rules and responsibilities, by Jina Moore for the Pulitzer Center
http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/reporting-trauma-vulnerable-populations-violence-crime-journalism-ethics

Media ethics and disasters: Lessons from the Black Saturday Bushfires, *by Denis Muller, Melbourne University Press, 2011.*