MINISTRY OF
JUSTICE
Tāhū o te Ture

Guidelines for the Media
Attending Hearings under
the Care of Children Act 2004

Attendance in court by "accredited" news media reporters

Only accredited news media reporters have the right to attend a Family Court hearing. Accredited news media reporters are those employed or contracted by an organisation that has been **accredited** by the Ministry of Justice on behalf of the Family Courts.

The Ministry will accredit a news media organisation if it is subject to a code of ethics or professional standards and has a relevant complaint procedure. This is both to encourage a professional standard of reporting and to ensure that there is an appropriate process for dealing with complaints about inaccurate or unbalanced reporting.

Attendance by non-accredited reporters

Reporters from news media organisations that have not been accredited have no right to attend court hearings. However, they may be permitted to attend by the Judge in individual cases. If you consider you have a legitimate reason for attending a particular hearing but are not accredited, you should seek the approval of the Judge through the court staff.

Arriving at court early

You should arrive at court about 15 minutes before the hearing to ensure that court staff are able to verify your credentials.

Verifying your accredited status when you arrive

When you arrive at court you will need to verify that you are an accredited news media reporter by producing identification or a standard form letter from your organisation that introduces you as a bona fide member of the organisation's staff or, if you are a commissioned writer, a bona fide representative.

Court staff will check the name of your organisation against a list of accredited news media organisations held by the Ministry of Justice.

Reporters who are not able to verify that they are accredited will not be allowed into the Courtroom.

The court list

Court staff will, on request, allow accredited news media reporters to have access to the Court list to assist them to carry out their duties. The information contained on the list is subject to the same reporting restrictions as information produced at the hearing.

How news reporters are to be identified in court

You will be given a sticker to wear, bearing the word "Media" and the day's date, which authorises you to attend court on that day.

The sticker will also identify you to the parties and others involved in the proceedings. It is designed to protect media from further need to identify themselves to other staff and to ensure participants recognise accredited news media reporters have a right be present.

Seating

Some courtrooms may be too small for a separate media bench. In those cases there may be a shortage of seating. Seating for reporters will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Proceedings involving more than one Act

The right of accredited news media reporters to attend hearings applies only to proceedings under the Care of Children Act. When proceedings also involve another Act, you will only be permitted to attend with the express permission of the Judge.. You should speak to the court staff about how to obtain the Judge's permission.

Restrictions on reporting court proceedings

There are strict limitations on what you can report. You cannot publish the names or any information that would be likely to identify:

- the children

- the parents

- others involved in the case, such as support people for the parents

- witnesses

- speakers on cultural issues

without the express permission of the Judge who presided at the hearing.

Requests for permission should be made in writing to the Registrar.

Penalties for breaching the reporting restrictions

There are severe penalties for those who breach the reporting restrictions for cases under the Care of Children Act 2004, namely:

- for individuals, either a prison term of up to three months or a fine of up to $2,000, or

- in the case of a company or other corporate body, a fine of up to $10,000