

BRENT RENAUD ON VULNERABLE SOURCES - ADULTS

Rough Transcript

Another ethical dilemma that I'm often faced with is reporting on people with mental or emotional issues or addiction issues. And this can be tricky because you want to make sure that people understand exactly what you're doing as a journalist. They want to understand, you want them to understand that you're telling a story about them, where it will appear, how they will be portrayed to the world. And so you do the same thing that you always do when you get a release. You explain to people the outlet and your process and what you intend to do with the story, but you also want to make sure if they're under the influence or if they're mentally impaired for some reason that they completely understand the situation. So (it is necessary) to get a release for these sorts of people. But I try to take some extra steps.

Oftentimes if it has to do with someone who is addicted to drugs or has some other kind of addiction, I try to make sure that they signed the release and then I have the discussion with them about exactly what I'm going to do when they're not under the influence of any drugs so that they understand exactly what they're going into. The same can apply to some people with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. If they are on their medication, they are certainly capable of functioning in a very normal way. And you can have that discussion with them when they're on their medication so that you make sure that they understand the situation as well. But I try to go a step further when it comes to people with mental illness or these kinds of addictions. And I also try to get a family member or a close relative on board as well, and to get their blessing as well. Someone who is not addicted or does not have the same mental issues as the particular subject has one extra layer of understanding of exactly what's going on. And I just think that that helps ethically to deal with these sorts of situations.