

# CRISIS RESPONSE AND MEDIA SUPPORT

## IS THIS A CRISIS?

Beta Theta Pi is committed to responsible member development and holds a low incident rate within the fraternal world. However, no fraternity is exempt from the reality that accidents happen and poor choices are inevitable both in and out of the chapter house, on the intramural field, at social events or elsewhere.

Even in the midst of a crisis, the Fraternity has a host of obligations to our members and chapters, their legal rights and considerations such as Title IX compliance. While daunting, chapter leaders and volunteers should be prepared to effectively engage all constituencies in a time of crisis. This guide serves to assist in communicating with one of those groups — the media.

A crisis is considered **any incident in which a serious accident or death occurs, or if the situation is of a public relations nature.** The following guidelines may help to more clearly establish when a crisis has occurred, although the list is not definitive. Therefore, good judgment on the part of the chapter's leadership is paramount in determining when to implement crisis protocol.

### IF THE CHAPTER EXPERIENCES AN ISSUE THAT HAS AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS, IT IS A POTENTIAL CRISIS:

- ▶ Incident that may publicly affect the reputation of Beta Theta Pi
- ▶ May generate a public response from the campus community, university leadership, legislators or higher education influencers
- ▶ Chapter faces closure and/or serious sanctions by the university
- ▶ Incident that originates on social media
- ▶ Media coverage is anticipated.

### EXAMPLES OF A CRISIS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- ▶ Major injury or death of a member
- ▶ Violence (including sexual assault)
- ▶ Severe hazing complaint or allegations filed against the chapter
- ▶ Intolerance-related incident (i.e. racism, anti-LGBT, misogyny, etc.)
- ▶ Lawsuit filed against the chapter
- ▶ Any direct request from the media for comment, statement, interviews, etc.

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### INITIAL (TEMPORARY) MEDIA STATEMENT

Chapter leadership should be prepared in the event a reporter makes in-person contact before consulting with the Administrative Office. If this happens, a simple statement should be used: **"We are aware that an incident occurred and are fully cooperating with police, university officials and our General Fraternity to determine the facts and advance any necessary investigations."**

This initial statement should be used exclusively until local leaders can work with the Administrative Office to craft an official response. Spokesmen should not engage in an extensive discussion of what has occurred, or give in when reporters ask the same question in several different ways.

## ▶ MEDIA PROTOCOL

The Administrative Office is available to assist chapters with managing media requests in a responsible and timely way.

If a media inquiry is received, **don't panic.** The following steps will help to navigate the media engagement process for the chapter president:

### STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE THE REQUEST

Within minutes, acknowledge the reporter's request and thank them for their inquiry. Request time to gather your thoughts before making an official statement and determine the reporter's:

- ▶ Name
- ▶ Media outlet
- ▶ Contact information
- ▶ Deadline

Request to receive their questions in writing, if possible.

### STEP 2: CONTACT THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Immediately contact Communication Department staffer [Justin Warren](#) (214.909.4849) with details of the inquiry. He will promptly work with you to craft an official statement or interview response.

### STEP 3: PLAY BY THE RULES

The Fraternity has one goal in media engagement: ensuring the safety of our members and protecting the operation and reputation of the chapter.

To do this, spokesmen should abide by the following rules of engagement:

- ▶ Be quick. Be helpful. Be honest.
- ▶ Decline on-camera, telephone or live interviews, unless approved by the Administrative Office.
- ▶ Never answer a question with "no comment." It's perfectly acceptable to say "I don't know" (if it's true).
- ▶ Do not draw conclusions, speculate, lay blame or admit liability.
- ▶ Avoid mentioning names.

