



The Three Acts of Trauma News

with Dr. Frank Ochberg

*This lesson plan can be used in journalism, English, ethics, media studies, and photography classes.

Overview and Rationale:

This lesson plan was created to complement the **Poynter KSU Media Ethics Workshop session titled “Coping with Cruelty: Q&A based on the Three Acts of Trauma News.”** It serves as a post-workshop lesson. The workshop content and lesson plan can be used to make journalists aware of the phases (or acts) of trauma reporting. This awareness can guide journalists in their ethical decision-making process and help define their purpose in trauma reporting.

Goals & Objectives for Learning:

- Students will define and explain the “Three Acts of Trauma News,” phases of news coverage after traumatic events.

Objective – After reading the handout on the “Three Acts of Trauma News” and watching the workshop session, students will be able to discuss those acts/phases using coverage of current events.

- Students will learn how the media has the potential to revictimize victims in trauma reporting and will learn steps they can take to prevent this from happening.

Objective – Students will be able to define revictimization and discuss ways to prevent it from happening in their reporting.

Essential Questions:

- What are possible ethical concerns in covering a traumatic experience?
- Can I clearly and fully justify my ethical decision?
- What is revictimization and can I prevent it?

Procedures:

*Before class, students should have attended/viewed the Poynter KSU Media Ethics workshop session “Coping with Cruelty” and read the handout “Three Acts of Trauma News Reporting.”

Step 1: (5-10 min.)

DEFINE & DISCUSS REVICTIMIZATION

At the start of class, define and discuss the concept of revictimization as discussed at the ethics workshop and outlined in the “Three Acts of Trauma News Reporting” handout.

Step 2: (20 min.)

TRAUMA REPORTING ANALYSIS ACTIVITY

(computer and internet access needed for this activity)

Have students use credible news websites to find examples of each Act of Trauma News Reporting as indicated in previous reading. They should focus on one news story and find examples of stories written in each trauma act.

Example – use the Virginia WDBJ-TV shootings as a topic and have students find a story from each trauma act on that topic.

- As a class, discuss the newsworthiness of each story, as well as the potential harm each type of story could cause victims.

Step 3: (15 min.)

GROUP WORK – EMPATHETIC INTERVIEWING

- Divide students into groups and have them read and review the following...
 - “Covering Breaking News: Interviewing Victims and Survivors” - <http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-breaking-news-interviewing-victims-and-survivors#.VeiMY9NVhHy>
 - “Empathetic Interviewing Techniques” - <http://dartcenter.org/content/self-study-unit-1-journalism-trauma-2#.VeiTgNNVhHx>
- Assign reporting scenario (outlined below) and have students come up with questions they would ask the source. Also have students discuss when it would be appropriate to interview sources.

Reporting scenario – The student publication you work for just received news of a tragic shooting of a student. The student was shot at her house by her boyfriend and her little sister saw it happen. She is in the hospital in critical condition and they are not sure she will survive. Your student publication staff needs to decide the following...

- Who or whom do we interview for this story?
 - How can we prevent revictimizing the victims of this story? Explain.
- As a class, discuss responses and come up with a list of ways of preventing revictimization in reporting on traumatic events.

Assessment:

- Class discussion and participation
- Empathetic interviewing questions

Materials & Resources used:

- Poynter KSU Media Ethics Workshop video & content - <http://mediaethics.jmc.kent.edu/>
- Handout “Three Acts of Trauma News” - <http://www.giftfromwithin.org/pdf/threeact.pdf>
- “Covering Breaking News: Interviewing Victims and Survivors” - <http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-breaking-news-interviewing-victims-and-survivors#.VeiMY9NVhHy>
- “Empathetic Interviewing Techniques” - <http://dartcenter.org/content/self-study-unit-1-journalism-trauma-2#.VeiTgNNVhHx>