

Children's Rights & Media: Guidelines & principles for reporting on issues involving children

These guidelines were adopted by journalists' organisations from 70 countries at the world's first international consultative conference on journalism and child rights held in Recife, Brazil, on 2 May 1998.

Preamble

Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is a key element in any media strategy for improving the quality of reporting concerning human rights and society. The daily challenge to journalists and media organisations is particularly felt in coverage of children and their rights.

Although the human rights of children have only recently been defined in international law, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child is already so widely supported that it will shortly become the first universal law of humankind.

To do their job of informing the public effectively, journalists must be fully aware of the need to protect children and to enhance their rights without in any way damaging freedom of expression or interfering with the fabric of journalistic independence.

The following guidelines for journalists have been drawn up by the International Federation of Journalists on the basis of an extensive survey of codes of conduct and standards already in force across the world.

The purpose of this draft is to raise media awareness of children's rights issues and to stimulate debate among media professionals about the value of a common approach which will reinforce journalistic standards and contribute to the protections and enhancement of children's rights.

Guidelines

All journalists and media professionals have a duty to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards and should promote within the industry the widest possible dissemination of information about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for the exercise of independent journalism.

Media organisations should regard violation of the rights of children and issues related to children's safety, privacy, security, their education, health and social welfare and all forms of exploitation as important questions for investigations and public debate. Children have an absolute right to privacy, the only exceptions being those explicitly set out in these guidelines.

Journalistic activity which touches on the lives and welfare of children should always be carried out with appreciation of the vulnerable situation of children.

Journalists and media organisations shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs and, in particular, they shall:

1. strive for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;
2. avoid programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;
3. avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;
4. consider carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children and shall minimise harm to children;

5. guard against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;

6. give children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind;

7. ensure independent verification of information provided by children and take special care to ensure that verification takes place without putting child informants at risk;

8. avoid the use of sexualised images of children;

9. use fair, open and straight forward methods for obtaining pictures and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of children or a responsible adult, guardian or carer;

10. verify the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children;

11. not make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.

Journalists should put to critical examination the reports submitted and the claims made by Governments on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their respective countries.

Media should not consider and report the conditions of children only as events but should continuously report the process likely to lead or leading to the occurrence of these events.

Source:

http://www.mediawise.org.uk/display_page.php?id=792



Principles for ethical reporting on children

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Ethical guidelines

Principles for ethical reporting on children

Reporting on children and young people has its special challenges. In some instances the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatization.

UNICEF has developed these principles to assist journalists as they report on issues affecting children. They are offered as guidelines that UNICEF believes will help media to cover children in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner. The guidelines are meant to support the best intentions of ethical reporters: serving the public interest without compromising the rights of children.

I. Principles

1. The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.
2. In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is to be paid to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.
3. The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
4. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child's right to have their views taken into account are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

5. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.

6. Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.

II. Guidelines for interviewing children

1. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.

2. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.

3. No staging: Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.

4. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.

5. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually only ensured if the permission is obtained in the child's language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.

6. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

III. Guidelines for reporting on children

1. Do not further stigmatize any child; avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.

2. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.

3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:

- a. A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
- b. A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
- c. HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent,
- d. Charged or convicted of a crime.

4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:

- a. A current or former child combatant,
- b. An asylum seeker, a refugee or an internal displaced person.

5. In certain cases, using a child's identity - their name and/or recognizable image - is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatization or reprisals.

Some examples of these special cases are:

- a. When a child initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and their right to have their opinion heard.
- b. When a child is part of a sustained programme of activism or social mobilization and wants to be so identified.
- c. When a child is engaged in a psychosocial programme and claiming their name and identity is part of their healthy development.

6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.

7. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.