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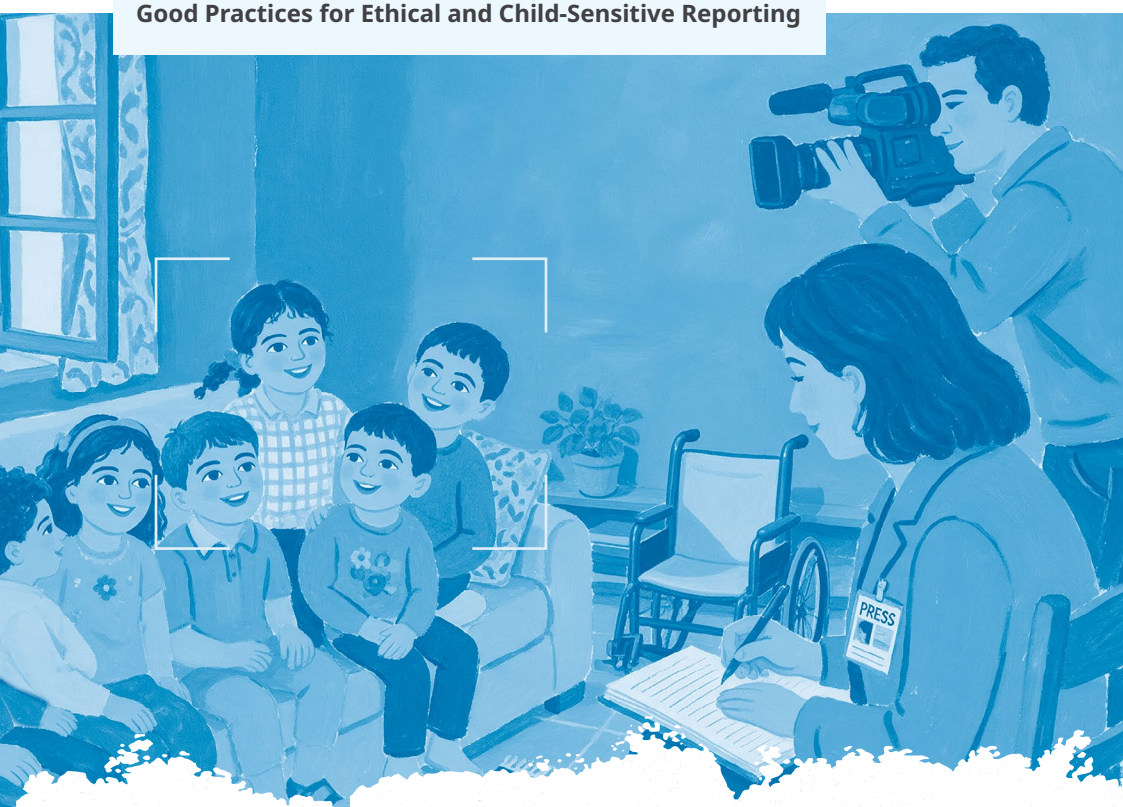
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

Good Practices for Ethical and Child-Sensitive Reporting



Before publishing any story, image or interview, put the child's safety, dignity and best interests first.

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INTRODUCTION

Media coverage can give children a voice and draw attention to the issues affecting them. But it can also expose them to stigma, harm, breaches of confidentiality and privacy, or even retaliation.

UNICEF developed this guide to support media coverage of children and young people and to help journalists adopt approaches that respect children's privacy and are appropriate to their age and evolving capacities. Its purpose is to support reporting that serves the best interests of the child while upholding their rights.

Every story involving a child should begin with one simple question: Does this coverage serve the child's best interests and protect their rights?

Before publishing any story, image or interview, put the child's safety, dignity and best interests first.

If there is any doubt about whether a particular form of media coverage could expose a child to additional risk, report on the broader situation of children rather than focusing on an individual child, regardless of the news value of the story.

Note: These guidelines focus particularly on media engagement with children in vulnerable situations or children at risk. This does not mean that every child requires the same level of protection or that every child's identity must be concealed. Each situation should be assessed individually, balancing protection with empowerment and the child's right to express their views.



GUIDELINES

1- Protect the child's identity



Always protect a child's identity and their right to have their story told in a way that keeps them safe, particularly when the child is a survivor of abuse, violence, exploitation or another rights violation; has experienced trauma; or could face stigma, retaliation or any other form of harm if identified. Children in these situations require heightened care and privacy.

Protecting a child's identity may be necessary even when the child and their parent or guardian have consented to photography or filming, if disclosure could place the child at risk.

Also protect:

- **The child's full name.**
- **Home address.**
- **School.**
- **Location.**
- **Family members.**
- **Any details that could lead to the child being identified.**

2- Obtain informed consent from the child and their parent or guardian

Obtain informed consent from both the child and their caregiver or legal guardian before taking photographs, recording video or conducting an interview. Discuss any potential risks and, where possible, how they can be mitigated. Make sure they understand that they are participating in a media story that may be published locally and globally, and that they may withdraw their consent at any time before publication.

Where risks cannot be adequately mitigated, consider reporting on the issue more broadly rather than interviewing the individual child.

Provide the consent form in a language the child and their parent or guardian understand, and clearly explain the purpose of the content and how it may be used.



Note: Consent is an ongoing process, not a one-off decision. A child or caregiver may withdraw from participation or decline to answer a particular question.

- ✔ **A child may say**, "I don't want to answer," or refuse to be photographed or filmed. This must be respected.
- ✖ **Never use your position of power**, pressure, persuasion, incentives or embarrassment to secure participation. If a child is uncomfortable, stop.

3- Use images that preserve dignity



Show children actively participating in their environment in ways that reflect their resilience, agency and capabilities, rather than portraying them primarily as victims or reinforcing stereotypes. Do not depict a child as helpless or pitiful simply to attract attention.

When selecting photographs that uphold children's rights and other human rights, choose images that:

- Respect the child's dignity.
- Reflect reality accurately.
- Do not exploit suffering.
- Do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Present the child as an individual and a rights holder.

Example:

- ✖ Instead of using a close-up image of a crying child to illustrate "suffering",
- ✔ consider an image showing the child in a safe, dignified activity, where appropriate to the story.



4- Create a safe space for interviews

Conduct interviews in a safe, comfortable setting and limit the number of people involved in the interview and filming. Give the child space to express themselves freely and without pressure. Consider what the visual and audio background may reveal, and ensure that showing the child's home, community or location will not expose them to risk or harm.

5- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the interview



- Introduce yourself and the media organization you represent.
- Explain why you are conducting the interview.
- Explain where and how the story may be published.
- Explain the nature of the child's participation to the child and their parent or legal guardian.

Example:

✖ **Instead of saying**, "We want to ask you a few questions,"

✔ **say**: "I am a journalist with [name of organization]. We are working on a story about education and would like to hear about your experience. The interview and photographs may be published on our website and social media platforms."

6- Be sensitive when asking questions



When interviewing children who have survived traumatic events, violence or other rights violations, remember their right to privacy.

Do not ask a child to:

- Re-enact a traumatic event.
- Repeat an embarrassing situation.
- Retell the same experience multiple times.
- Describe details that may cause further distress.
- Pretend to be afraid or sad.
- Recite a story that is not their own.
- Act out something that did not happen.

When needed, seek support from a social worker or child protection specialist.

Example:

✖ **Do not ask,** "Why didn't you tell anyone what happened?" or "How did you feel when this happened to you?"

✔ **Instead ask:** "Is there anything about your experience that you think is important for people to know?"

7- Give all children a voice



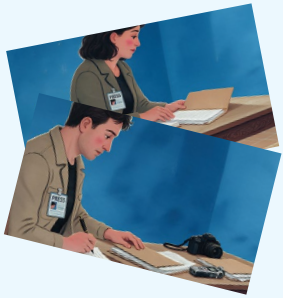
Do not discriminate between children on the basis of sex, disability, nationality or background, social or economic status, place of residence or any other status. Give children equal opportunities to express their views. Allow them to speak naturally and avoid scripting their answers or asking leading questions.

Example:

✖ **Instead of asking**, "Can you tell us how the project changed your life?"

✔ **ask**, "Can you tell me about your experience with the project?"

8- Verify information



Verify information and stories through multiple sources, such as community representatives or caregivers, while safeguarding the child and protecting their identity.

When using figures and statistics to describe the broader situation, draw on:

- Reliable official studies and data.
- Reports from United Nations agencies.
- Specialized international organizations.
- Specialized civil society organizations.
- Relevant national institutions.
- Child protection experts and specialists.

Example:

✖ **Instead of saying,** "Reports suggest that violence against children is increasing,"

✔ **say,** "According to data from [reliable source], reported cases increased by …"

9- Safeguarding and referral responsibilities



If you suspect that a child is experiencing abuse, exploitation, violence, serious neglect, another rights violation or an immediate risk, do not attempt to investigate or manage the case yourself.

Instead:

1. Report the concern to the relevant official authorities or child protection service in line with established procedures, and help ensure that the child can access appropriate care.
2. Keep information confidential.
3. Do not confront the suspected perpetrator.
4. Do not attempt to collect evidence yourself if doing so could place the child or anyone else at risk.

Why?

Direct intervention by someone without the appropriate expertise can lead to:

	• Poor case management. • Further risk to the child. • Interference with protection or investigation procedures. • Risk to the journalist, the child, caregivers or others.
10- Never place a child in confrontation with an alleged perpetrator	Never bring a child together with the person alleged to have harmed them. **Do not ask the child to**: • Confront the person they have accused. • Comment on the person in their presence. • Retell their experience in that person's presence. • Take part in a media confrontation. **The child's safety comes first.**



11- Protect information



Information about children is not ordinary archive material.
Securely store all information that is:
- Written.
- Audio-recorded.
- Photographic or video material.
- Digital.
- Related to the family or the child's personal circumstances.

Share information only when necessary, particularly when doing so is required to protect the child from harm and uphold their best interests.

12- Think before reusing archive material

Consent to publish a story does not automatically mean consent to reuse it in every context or at any time.
Before reusing any photograph, video, audio recording, personal story or previous interview, check whether the original consent covers the proposed use. Obtain renewed consent from the child and their parent or legal guardian when needed.
Remember:
Context changes. Risks can change with it.
An image that was safe to publish a year ago may be sensitive today.



The Golden Rule

A child is not simply a story, nor do they belong to the public.
Every child has the right to privacy, protection and care.
Ethical reporting does not mean silencing children's stories.

It means:
Listening to them.
Amplifying their voices.
Respecting them.
Protecting them and their privacy.
Telling their stories without causing unintended harm.

> Do not hesitate to consult a child protection specialist when needed.


PRESS

REFERENCES

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Convention on the Rights of the Child- https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Guidelines for Ethical Reporting on Children, https://www.unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines.

UNICEF Lebanon and KAFA, Child Protection Policy in the Media: Ethical Principles to Ensure the Best Interests of Children, June 2021. Ethical reporting guidelines | UNICEF.

ANNEXES

Annex A: International observances and days that can provide entry points for stories and reports on children, their rights and the issues affecting them.

Month	Observance	Potential story angle
January	24 January – International Day of Education	Right to education; school dropout; inclusive education; the future of schools
March	22 March – World Water Day	Safe water; child health; schools, water and sanitation
April	2 April – World Autism Awareness Day	Inclusion; inclusive education; tackling stigma
	7 April – World Health Day	Child health; health care; prevention
May	15 May – International Day of Families	Family support; childcare; positive parenting
June	4 June – International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression	Protection of children in conflict and crises
	5 June – World Environment Day	Children and climate change; pollution; healthy environments
	12 June – World Day Against Child Labour	Child labour; education; social protection
July	15 July – World Youth Skills Day	Skills; vocational training; school-to-work transition
August	World Breastfeeding Week – 7–1 August	Breastfeeding; infant and young child nutrition; support for mothers
	12 August – International Youth Day	Youth participation; skills; education; employment opportunities
September	8 September – International Literacy Day	Literacy; learning loss; lifelong learning
	23 September – International Day of Sign Languages	Deaf children; inclusive education; access to information
October	10 October – World Mental Health Day	Child and adolescent well-being; mental health and psychosocial support
	11 October – International Day of the Girl Child	Girls' education; child marriage; violence; opportunities

Month	Observance	Potential story angle
	11 October – International Day of the Girl Child	Girls' education; child marriage; violence; opportunities
	15 October – Global Handwashing Day	Hygiene; health; water and sanitation
	16 October – World Food Day	Child nutrition; food insecurity; poverty
November	18 November – World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence	Child and adolescent well-being; mental health and psychosocial support
	20 November – World Children's Day	Child rights; participation; children's voices
December	3 December – International Day of Persons with Disabilities	Children with disabilities; inclusion; education and services
	5 December – International Volunteer Day	Youth participation; volunteering; community engagement

Annex B: Pre-publication checklist – 10 questions

- [ ] Have I introduced myself and my media organization and explained the purpose of the interview?
- [ ] Have I obtained consent, in writing or on record?
- [ ] Have I avoided unexpected or potentially harmful questions?
- [ ] Have I respected the child's right not to answer or to stop?
- [ ] Have I conducted the interview in a safe and appropriate setting?
- [ ] Does the image protect the child and preserve their dignity?
- [ ] Have I avoided asking the child to re-enact events or traumatic experiences?
- [ ] Have I verified the information using reliable sources?
- [ ] Could the story or image cause any harm to the child now or in the future?
- [ ] Have I protected the child's identity and removed any details that could reveal who they are or where they are, where necessary?

If you are unsure: Stop. Do not publish. Reassess the risks and consult a specialist.

Annex C: Informed Consent Form for Photographing, Filming and Interviewing a Child

Media organization: .....
Programme / news report: ..... Topic: .....

1. General information

• Child's full name: ..... Age: .....
• Parent / legal guardian's name: .....
• Legal relationship to the child: [ ] Father - [ ] Mother - [ ] Court-appointed guardian
• Current residential address in Lebanon: .....
• Contact telephone number: .....

2. Declaration and consent of the parent / legal guardian

I, the undersigned, as the child's parent/legal guardian, authorize the media organization's team to interview, photograph and/or film my child for the media content described above.

I consent to the material being broadcast or published through the station's terrestrial and satellite television services, website and official social media accounts.

Right to withdraw: I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time before the material enters final production and is broadcast or published, by notifying the media organization's management.

Voluntary participation and compensation: I confirm that this consent is given voluntarily and without pressure, and that no financial or in-kind compensation is provided in exchange for the interview.

Disclaimer: The media organization is not responsible for misuse of the published material by third parties after its official publication, including the re-editing of video or sharing from unofficial accounts.

3. Safeguarding measures

The media organization commits to complying with Lebanese ethical and legal standards for the protection of children and undertakes the following measures, as agreed with the parent/legal guardian:

• [ ] Blur face: Fully obscure the child's facial features and alter their voice when broadcast.
• [ ] Protect identity: Use a pseudonym and do not disclose the family name or detailed home address in order to prevent identification.
• [ ] Preserve dignity: Do not depict the child in a degrading situation, exploit their vulnerability, or expose them to stigma or harassment.

Journalist / media organization representative signature:

.....

Date: .... / .... / .....

Parent / legal guardian signature:

.....

Date: .... / .... / .....



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If you are unsure: Stop. Do not publish. Reassess the risks and consult a specialist.

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