

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOURNALISTS ON HOW TO INTERVIEW CHILDREN



All interviews with children require special attention from the press. Besides the relevant legislation (such as the limited use of images and sound recordings, mandatory parental consent) it is important to act with extra sensitivity in all such cases.

**Therefore, we would like to request the media to keep in mind the following recommendations:**

**1. When selecting interviewees, always keep in mind the goal of involving a child in an interview.**

If you have any doubts that the report may cause harm to a child, then this doubt is probably a real risk. In such cases, you should rather focus on the general state of the child as an individual regardless of how exciting the story is.

**2. Do not use the child but voice his/her view.**

The topic of the conversation should be relevant to the specific child, he/she should be concerned. Ask the child only about topics he/she can speak about authentically. The participation or presentation of each child should be relevant to the subject, children should not be used as decoration or tools.

**3. Ensure equal opportunity to participate in interviews.**

No distinction can be made among children on the basis of their gender, race, age, religion, nationality, status, educational background, physical characteristics or any other aspects.

**4. Consider whether protecting or disclosing the child's identity serves the child's interests best.**

- The child's right to privacy must always be guaranteed.
- Always change the names and distort the recognizability of children who have become victims of sexual abuse or exploitation, perpetrators of physical or sexual abuse, who have been charged with or have been convicted for committing a crime, who are vulnerable due to their mental and health condition, are or were child soldiers and have a gun.
- If there is a risk of harm or retaliation, change the child's name and distort the recognizability of asylum seeker, refugee, or integral migrant children.
- In certain cases, using a child's identity (name, recognizable image) serves the child's best interest. Again, in such cases, the child should be protected from possible harm and stigma in this case, too. Some examples for the above cases:
  - a. When a child contacts the journalist and wants to enjoy his/her freedom of expression.
  - b. If a child is a member of an activist group or a social movement and wants to make his/her identity public.
  - c. If the disclosure of the child's name and identity serves his/her healthy development.
- It is important to keep in mind that it is also a violation of privacy if a child becomes recognizable (based on his/her neighborhoods, school, or other characteristics), even if the child's face is covered and his/her name is not made public.

**5. Make sure that the child and the parent have given their free, voluntary, real and informed consent to the interview based on complete information.**

Ensure that the child's parent or guardian is aware of the child becoming an interviewee, know about the topic the child will express his/her opinion about and how this opinion will be used (and ensure that the parent or guardian has given his/her written consent to it).

Make sure the child understands the aim and topic of the interview and where and how his/her opinion will be used. Tell the child how long the final interview will be, how he/she will be cited and referred, who else will be present in the specific report as well as when and where the report will be broadcast.

This usually can only be achieved if the permission uses a language that children can understand, and the child makes the decision after having discussed it with an adult he/she trusts.

**6. Inform the child about the process and topic of the interview in advance.**

It is important to discuss with the child in advance how the interview will happen, how long it will be, who will be present, whether it is possible to re-record if there will be a recording made and whether the child can ask back or say no if he/she does not want to answer a question.

If the child can get to know the topics and questions of the interview, it may help prepare and get in the mood. If the child can see what he/she will be asked about, it may result in more detailed responses. If you can, send the questions to the child or his/her contact person before the interview.

**7. Dedicate time for getting to know each other before the interview.**

In addition to basic information, some warm-up questions may help to ease the mood.

**8. Do not forget that each child may react to an interview situation differently.**

Basic information cannot be omitted even if somebody seems to be relaxed and experienced.

**9. Consult with the staff about child protection aspects.**

Discuss how you can ensure that the child interviewed feels safe during the interview, and the recording made respects his/her rights.

If you cannot talk with the child before the interview (for example, in case of a live show), ask one of your colleagues to do so.

**10. Always provide the right atmosphere for the child and his/her story.**

Plan how to make the recording by protecting the child's identity at the same time and whether the child's face can be shown. If a video is recorded of the child, ensure that an appropriate visual background is provided suitable for the child.

In the case of video and radio interviews, take into consideration that background images and music can affect the child, his/her life and the story. Make sure that showing the child's home, community or location will not harm or endanger the child.

Try to make the interview at a place where the child feels good and comfortable and can tell his/her story without external pressure.

**11. Decide about the frame of the interview.**

Determine the maximum number of interviewers and photographers. Only those people should be present who are absolutely needed for the child to feel safe with you.

Do not make too long interviews. Take a break, consult with the child.

**12. Pay attention to what and how you ask.**

Make sure you do not hurt the child. Avoid questions, behavior, and comments that are critical, judgemental, or insensitive to cultural values, questions that could play off, endanger, humiliate the child or intensify the child's pain or sadness after a trauma. Do not ask the child to tell stories or anything that is not part of his/her personal story. Ask questions that the child can respond in a self-identical and authentic way.

**13. Respect the child's opinion and point of view.**

Always keep the child's best interests in mind when writing, editing and cutting. If you suspect that a part of the interview or the whole interview may endanger the child, make sure you omit it from your report.

**14. Make sure that publishing the final interview or recording will not endanger the child (either in his/her family or in his/her immediate environment or community).**

Avoid presenting a child in a stigmatizing way.

Present the child's story in the proper context.

The child's name and face cannot be disclosed if the child has been abused, in particular, if the child has been the victim of sexual or physical abuse.

Never stigmatize any children. Avoid categorization or descriptions that expose the child to negative effects, including physical and mental harm, life-long abuse and discrimination by the child's own local community.



## Principles

1. Always respect children's dignity and rights.
2. Pay special attention to protect children's rights - including the right to privacy, right of expression, right to be involved in cases concerning them, and the right of protection against violence or the threat thereof in reports and interview about children.
3. The child's best interests should prevail in all cases.
4. The child's opinion should be considered with regard to his/her age and maturity in cases the child is affected by.
5. In the case of each report, the closest people to the child and those who can best assess the situation of the child should be informed about the possible political, social and cultural effects of the report.
6. It is forbidden to use a story or photo that could endanger the child, his/her siblings or mates, even if the child's identity is changed, distorted or made unidentifiable in any other way.

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