ETHICAL REPORTING ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

A JOURNALISM HANDBOOK



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ETHICAL REPORTING ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
A JOURNALISM HANDBOOK

Peer-reviewed by:

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

The Global Center for Journalism and Trauma

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Pour une couverture médiatique éthique de la violence sexuelle à l'encontre des enfants Manuel à l'usage des journalistes

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This publication is an English translation and international adaptation of the original Spanish guide "*How to Communicate About Sexual Violence Against Children: A Guide for Journalists*". The guide was developed by Sonia Ruiz Fresneda, Marina López Llorente and Lourdes Collado Rodríguez (Plataforma de Infancia) as part of the Joint European Union – Council of Europe Project "Strengthening child-friendly justice among Barnahus-type services in Spanish regions." Its content was informed by consultations with journalists, opinion leaders, and civil society organisations, drawing on codes of ethics and best practice guidelines in the Spanish context.

The organisations listed below endorse *Ethical reporting on sexual violence against children – A journalism handbook* and recognise its value in strengthening the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Their endorsement is given in their own capacity and does not constitute an endorsement by the Council of Europe of those organisations or their activities.

- The Brave Movement
- ECPAT International
- Plataforma de Infancia
- The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
- The Global Center for Journalism and Trauma
- The International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE)
- The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
- Missing Children Europe
- Save the Children Finland
- To Zero

This document uses (with permission) and recommends the "Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse"



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About this handbook

Ethical and professional responsibility are essential when reporting on sexual violence against children. Media coverage not only raises awareness but also shapes public attitudes, motivates action, and can encourage victims and survivors to seek support or disclose their experiences. Careful use of language and imagery helps ensure that reporting promotes help-seeking while minimising the risk of secondary victimisation or further harm.

This handbook supports ethical reporting that serves the public interest without compromising children's rights. Upholding children's rights in media coverage is vital for child protection and a healthy democracy. Respectful and accurate media reporting builds public understanding and action and fosters a culture where children's rights, in particular to be protected from sexual violence, are a collective priority. In this way, all actors involved in the production and dissemination of media content play a crucial and positive role, actively becoming part of the solution.

This document aims to be a practical toolkit for journalists and other media actors, providing actionable guidance rooted in 10 key principles for ethical reporting that put children's rights at the centre. The principles highlight, among others, the importance of understanding sexual violence against children within its broader context, being familiar with the legal framework and the nuances of "consent," using inclusive and appropriate language, sharing resources and engaging in specialised training.

Inside, journalists and other media actors will find:

- Strategies for conducting sensitive and ethical interviews with adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood, those in a child's environment, and expert sources;
- Guidance on responsibly incorporating children's perspectives;
- Best practices for using language, headlines, and visual materials in ways that avoid stereotypes, sensationalism, or disclosure of identity;
- Practical resources, including key definitions, lists of specialist organisations, official data sources, and pre-publication checklists.

This handbook is intended for everyday newsroom practice. Whether journalists and media actors are interviewing an adult survivor, seeking expert analysis, selecting an image, or preparing a headline, it offers step-by-step recommendations to help them make informed and responsible choices and to be a force for positive change.

This document has been translated and internationally adapted from "*How to Communicate About Sexual Violence Against Children: A Guide for Journalists*", taking into account contributions from States Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), the Australian Government National Office for Child Safety, the Brave Movement, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, ECPAT International, the Global Collaborative, Missing Children Europe, Save the Children Finland and To Zero. It has been peer-reviewed by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the Global Center for Journalism and Trauma, appropriately incorporating the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, together with a trauma-informed approach.

National authorities, regulatory bodies, civil society and journalists and other media actors are encouraged to translate this handbook and adapt it to the respective national context. For support, please contact children@coe.int.

Why this handbook

Parties to the Lanzarote Convention are required to encourage the media to provide appropriate information on all aspects of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, while respecting the independence of the media and press freedom. States must also prevent disclosure of any information that could identify victims.

As of November 2026, 48 countries are Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, including all Council of Europe member states, as well as the Russian Federation and Tunisia. The Convention is open to accession by countries worldwide.

The Committee of the Parties (Lanzarote Committee) monitors how the Convention is implemented, interprets its provisions, and supports state parties through capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

In its implementation report "Protecting children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: Legal frameworks" (adopted on 3 July 2025), the Lanzarote Committee called on Parties that have not already done so to adopt legislative or other measures to prevent the public dissemination of any information, notably by the media, that could lead to the identification of any child victim of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse.

This handbook was launched at the occasion of the 18 November Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse – 2026 edition.





1. What is sexual violence against children?

Sexual violence against children is a serious violation of human rights. In Europe, it is estimated that up to one in five children are subject to sexual violence. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrator is known to the child.

Any child, regardless of their characteristics or circumstances, can be subjected to sexual violence. Likewise, perpetrators of sexual violence against children can be of any age, sex and background.

For the purposes of this handbook, "sexual violence against children" refers to any form of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse against a person under 18 years old. It includes child sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material, child sexual exploitation, exploitation of a child in sexual performances and causing a child to witness sexual activities as defined in the Lanzarote Convention (see principle 3). The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) also criminalises sexual violence against girls. Depending on the national framework, sexual violence against children might also encompass other sexual offences, such as genital mutilation, trafficking or child forced marriage.

According to the Lanzarote Convention, a "victim" is any child subject to sexual exploitation or sexual abuse, irrespective of whether a court has established the facts. States must provide prevention, protection and support measures for victims, regardless of whether a criminal conviction has been secured.

Sexual violence against children may occur in any context, such as within the family or the "circle of trust". It can occur in combination with other forms of violence and includes acts committed in the digital environment, such as solicitation of children for sexual purposes or grooming, acts related to child sexual abuse material (including images or videos generated or altered using artificial intelligence) and other forms of abuse.

Sexual violence can negatively affect all areas of the child's life and often results in trauma that will also impact their health and well-being as adults. Victims of sexual violence are statistically more likely to experience subsequent victimisation, either soon after the initial abuse or later in adulthood (re-victimisation). In addition, following the initial victimisation, victims and survivors might suffer re-traumatisation or "secondary victimisation" through the response of institutions and individuals after such an experience.

Many children endure years, if not decades, of suffering before disclosing their abuse, if they disclose at all. Consequently, most cases remain unreported to the authorities. Addressing sexual violence against children appropriately in public discourse can help encourage victims to come forward and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Victim or survivor?

Throughout this handbook, the term "victim" is used where it reflects legal obligations or the language of international and national legal frameworks, especially as depending on the national context, these provisions may also apply to adults.

Outside legal and medical contexts, it is important to note that people with lived experience may choose to identify with the term "victim" or "survivor" or another term. This document refers to the term "victims and/or survivors" outside the legal context to be as inclusive as possible. It is recommended to use the term that an individual prefers when engaging with them.

The circle of trust

The "circle of trust" comprises home, larger family context, caretakers, including teachers and other professionals in schools, childcare professionals, sports coaches or other professionals working in sports facilities and events, religious workers, health and social professionals, adults in charge of extra-curricular activities, tutors, guardians and other persons with whom children may have close relations, including their peers.



2. Principles for ethical reporting

The following principles articulate the ethical values that underpin this handbook. Together, they provide a foundation for understanding and applying the reporting practices and practical resources that follow.

1. Apply a child-rights perspective

Children are entitled to special protection. Media reporting on violent acts involving children - whether as victims, alleged perpetrators, or witnesses - should be handled with utmost care.

Sexual violence against children is one of the worst forms of violence a child can be subjected to. Media coverage can help the public understand that sexual violence against children is a structural and social problem and not isolated or exceptional incidents.

A child-rights perspective recognises children as rights holders, not merely as passive recipients of protection. This approach prioritises the child's best interests, considers their needs and developmental stage, respects their right to be heard, and ensures their protection from all forms of violence.

Media reporting should assess the potential impact of the crime on the child victims' rights, dignity and well-being, ensuring their identity is safeguarded and secondary victimisation is avoided. Each case should be presented within its wider social context, considering children not simply as victims but as rights holders.

2. Frame sexual violence against children as a systemic problem

Research conducted by *the To Zero initiative to end childhood abuse* in partnership with *Spitfire Strategies*, reviewing over 400 news articles on childhood sexual violence published across six continents, found that coverage is dominated by three recurring frames:

1. individual "monsters" rather than systemic patterns,
2. institutional cover-up rather than prevention, and
3. punishment of the perpetrator as the primary (or only) policy response.

Reporting that focuses only on individual cases can risk presenting sexual violence against children as isolated events, rather than as a complex issue shaped by wider social, cultural, institutional and structural factors. Providing context on patterns, risk factors, systems of prevention and failures in protection can help audiences better understand how it occurs, why it remains underreported and what measures can help prevent it.

Where appropriate, reporting on sexual violence against children can also include information about prevention, available support and evidence-based responses. Providing context on how it can be prevented, recognised and addressed helps audiences understand that sexual violence against children is not inevitable and that there are effective ways to protect children.

Complement information from police or judicial authorities by consulting a diverse range of sources. Engaging with experts in children's rights, psychology, health or gender-based violence, dedicated NGOs and adult victims and survivors and their organisations can add valuable context, depth, and perspective to media actors' work. It is always advisable to cross-check information with competent institutions.

For practical resources on specialised organisations and official sources, see section 4.

3. Be familiar with the legal and ethical framework

The fight against child sexual exploitation and abuse is anchored in key international instruments. Article 34 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) included a state obligation to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2000, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography further strengthened the legal protection of children from sexual violence, dedicating an entire legal instrument to the prevention of and protection from these offences. The Lanzarote Convention (2007) is the most comprehensive, legally binding treaty providing a holistic response to sexual violence against children. It requires countries to prevent abuse, protect victims, prosecute offenders, and promote cooperation, with oversight by the Lanzarote Committee. The Convention is open to accession by countries worldwide.

Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography obliges European Union member states to criminalise sexual abuse and exploitation of children, with provisions for victim support, prevention, and international cooperation. Additional European Union directives further reinforce protections for victims of trafficking and ensure procedural safeguards for children.

News reports on sexual violence against children frequently cover criminal proceedings. When these cases are ongoing, it is essential that reporting is conducted with particular caution to avoid influencing the outcome, such as by refraining from interviewing children or disclosing sensitive information. Legal terminology may not always fully capture the seriousness or impact of these offences. Journalists are encouraged to be mindful of such nuances, reflecting both the legal framework and the broader social and personal consequences these offences have for children.

It is important to take into account the national regulatory framework, together with the self-regulatory frameworks, including the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists and national or regional charters or codes of ethics for journalists or media actors. Every journalist has an ethical obligation to "show particular consideration to inexperienced and vulnerable interviewees" and to ensure that the dissemination of information or opinion does not contribute to hatred, prejudice or discrimination.

For practical resources on press councils and bodies for self-regulation in journalism, see section 4.

4. Do not imply a child's consent or reciprocity

Consent refers to the free, voluntary, informed and conscious expression of a person's will to participate in an act, including a sexual act. Consent-based definitions of sexual violence, as referred to in the Istanbul Convention, are only relevant where a person is above the minimum legal age for sexual activities as defined in the national legislation (commonly referred to as "age of consent") and where none of the factors listed below in relation to child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse apply.

In general terms, a child below the national legal age for sexual activities cannot legally consent. Even when a child above this age appears to consent, sexual activities may still be criminalised in some contexts. According to the Lanzarote Convention, intentionally engaging in a sexual activity with a child under the nationally defined legal age for sexual activities is considered sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. In addition, intentionally engaging in sexual activities with *any* child under 18 is also considered sexual abuse or sexual exploitation where use is made of coercion, force or threats, abuse is made of a recognised position or trust, authority or influence over the child (including within the family) or abuse is made of a particular situation of vulnerability of a child. The production, offer, distribution, procuring, possession and knowingly accessing child sexual abuse material of *any* child under 18 by an adult should also generally be criminalised, with some exceptions possible. Consent is therefore irrelevant in all these contexts and is not a constituent element of the relevant crimes.

In general, children should not be criminalised for consensual sexual activity with their peers and consensual taking or possession of sexual or nude images of themselves.

Therefore, when reporting cases of sexual violence against children, it is essential to avoid euphemisms such as "non-consensual sexual relations", "sex with a child" or "relationship/affair with a teenager". These terms wrongly imply reciprocity or voluntariness, downplaying the criminal nature of the act and failing to recognise that some children cannot legally give consent or that any purported consent is irrelevant. Language suggesting romance or mutuality misrepresents the violation of children's rights and the violence involved.

5. Protect the identity of the victim

States have the legal obligation to prevent the public dissemination, notably by the media, of any information that could lead to the identification of victims. Even if certain details appear in official documents (such as court decisions or witness statements), it is essential not to disclose any information that could lead to the direct or indirect identification of the child victim or the adult survivor, including personal data, images, social media accounts, family relationships or geographical references, such as the school, neighbourhood or home address of the child. The privacy and safety of child witnesses and children in conflict with the law shall also be protected.

The fact that a child's identity is already known to the public, or that a child wishes to speak publicly, does not in itself justify the publication of images, videos, personal details or other material that identifies the child or reinforces their identification as a victim of sexual violence. Where a child wishes to participate in awareness-raising or public advocacy, this should, where possible, take place with the support of a specialist child-rights or survivor organisation.

Adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood may choose to identify themselves or speak publicly about their experiences, including through survivors' organisations. Their decision should be respected, but it does not remove the media actor's responsibility to obtain free, informed and continuing consent, to discuss the intended use and dissemination of the material, and to consider the possible short- and long-term consequences of publication.

To this end, the media should carefully balance the right to privacy and the public's right to information, prioritising the safety, well-being, and dignity of the child in all reporting. If confidential, data must be stored in secure locations or networks. It is important to inform the victim or survivor of the precautions taken to protect their identity according to the national data protection legislation.

The media must also ensure that these rules apply to their archives. These ethical principles call on publishers, for example, to take into account requests from victims and survivors for their identities to be anonymised in archived journalistic productions.

6. Avoid secondary victimisation, victim blaming and sensationalism

Secondary victimisation can be caused by the way a victim or survivor of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse is treated after such an experience. Media actors should ensure that their reporting and interviews do not cause additional harm, retraumatise victims or survivors, or perpetuate stigma through sensationalist language, graphic detail, or inappropriate images.

Coverage should instead prioritise accuracy, respect, and context, protecting the dignity and privacy of the child, avoiding victim-blaming language, and highlighting available support and systemic prevention. Headlines and articles should inform the public using rights-based language and structural analysis, never turning suffering into a spectacle or perpetuating harmful myths and stereotypes.

In media coverage of such cases attention may sometimes focus primarily on the child victim, their experiences or their behaviour, which can inadvertently make them feel responsible or guilty. It is important to shift the focus towards the perpetrator, or towards the system that enabled the sexual violence or failed to act. When another child is the perpetrator, it is important to remember that they are still children and should be referred to in a manner that respects their specific rights. Children who run away, go missing, or appear involved in exploitative situations may themselves be victims; language should never imply they are responsible for the exploitation or abuse they endure.

Ethical reporting can help fight the social attitudes and contexts that foster guilt or silence on the part of victims and survivors. By shedding light on power imbalances, breaches of trust or institutional negligence, ethical reporting can help audiences to understand the structural nature of the problem and avoid narratives that individualise, attribute responsibility to or blame those who have suffered.

Descriptions of sexual violence against children should always be guided by a clear public interest purpose. Graphic details or unnecessary descriptions can shift attention away from the broader issues at stake, risk causing further harm to victims and survivors, and contribute to voyeuristic rather than informative coverage. Where details are included, they should be carefully considered for their relevance, accuracy and contribution to understanding the issue.

For best reporting practices about the use of audiovisual language and on headlines and section placement, see section 3.

7. Use inclusive and appropriate language

When addressing sexual violence against children, the chosen words and the way the phenomenon is described influences public attitudes and shapes the reality. The main reference is the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Second Edition, March 2025), available in different languages.

Inclusive language, which avoids prejudiced, stereotypical, or discriminatory expressions, is crucial for fair and accurate representation. Its use broadens perspectives and recognises the diversity of people being referred to. Inclusive language should be sensitive to each national context, steering clear of generic masculine forms that obscure gender perspectives or foster discrimination.

Applying a gender and intersectional approach acknowledges how overlapping inequalities influence children's experiences, their families, and access to support and protection. These factors can not only be exploited by offenders but also affect the forms of violence, likelihood of disclosure, access to justice, and societal responses. It is encouraged to highlight situations of vulnerability (children with disabilities, children in alternative care, migrant and refugee children, children belonging to minority groups or children who go missing), avoid stereotypes and include diverse voices when seeking contributions and present disaggregated data.

For a complete reference on key terminology, further explanations and practical examples, see section 4.

8. Use a trauma-informed approach

Victims and survivors who experienced sexual violence during childhood may be profoundly affected by trauma, and its effects can shape how they think, remember, communicate and respond long after the abuse has occurred. Research shows that traumatic experiences can affect memory, emotional regulation and behaviour, meaning that victims and survivors' accounts may be fragmented, disclosed over time or expressed in ways that differ from common expectations. These responses are normal reactions to trauma and should not be interpreted as signs that a victim or survivor is unreliable, inconsistent or responsible for the crimes committed against them.

A trauma-informed approach encourages journalists and other media actors to understand the impact of trauma when gathering, interpreting and presenting information about sexual violence against children. By recognising the effects of trauma and avoiding assumptions based on myths or stereotypes, journalists and other media actors can produce reporting that is more accurate, ethical and respectful, while reducing the risk of causing further harm to victims and survivors.

Interviewing children who have been subjected to sexual violence should in principle be avoided. By giving adult victims and survivors agency, journalists and other media actors also contribute towards redressing power imbalances. Before considering an interview, please seek complementary information from different sources, including experts in children's rights, appropriate NGOs and associations of survivors.

For best reporting practices on interview strategies and on incorporating children's perspectives, see section 3.

9. Share specialised resources for those seeking help

Reporting on sexual violence against children may prompt distress, disclosures or help-seeking behaviour not only among victims and survivors and their families, but also others affected by the issue, including audiences engaging with the content. By including information on appropriate support services alongside reporting, journalists and other media actors can help disrupt and minimise harm.

Ethical reporting can facilitate access to help and support for victims and survivors by referring to available support services, reporting portals and helplines. Examples include national child helplines 116 111 or the websites of official bodies. National short- and long-term support services for child victims of sexual offences, such as Barnahus (Children's Houses) or other child-friendly, interagency and multidisciplinary services, shall also be included. Specific resources for adult victims or survivors, if any, could also be included.

10. Follow specialised training

Media owners, management and journalists' unions and associations are encouraged to provide training for media actors, including journalists and editors who report on children to fully understand sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

The Council of Europe comprehensive course on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse is available in many languages. It is available free of charge upon registration to the HELP platform and participants receive certification upon successful completion of the course.

The Global Center for Journalism and Trauma also provides resources on how to cover children in vulnerable contexts and guidance on trauma-informed reporting and interviewing.

Journalists and other media actors may also wish to consider the potential impact of reporting on sexual violence against children, including the risk of secondary trauma. This impact may be heightened when the subject matter relates to their own experiences or those of people close to them. For example, if they have experienced similar violence, know someone who has, or identify with aspects of the experience through their role as a parent or caregiver. If reporting affects their well-being, it may be helpful to seek appropriate support, such as speaking with a colleague, taking time to decompress, accessing training or professional support, or recognising when it may be necessary to step back from the assignment.



3. Best reporting practices

Interview strategies

Interviewing children who have been subjected to sexual violence should in principle be avoided, as it requires specific considerations, training and safeguards. In general, it is recommended that media actors engage with victims or survivors who share their experiences voluntarily as adults, with people in the child's immediate environment and with platforms and specialised organisations. The urgency of reporting should never override respect for personal recovery, and in many cases, the most ethical option is to avoid directly interviewing child victims but rather to co-ordinate with their legal advisor or expert sources.

Including the testimonies of adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood and input from professionals and platforms can enrich journalistic coverage of sexual violence against children, making hidden issues visible and fostering empathy. However, these accounts must be handled with ethical care, ensuring informed consent, protecting against harm or sensationalism, and maintaining a child-rights-based and gender-sensitive approach.

Interviews with adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood

Interviewing adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood requires a high level of sensitivity and journalistic ethics. It is not merely a matter of collecting a testimony, but of recognising the value of their account as a contribution to making a social problem visible. These interviews must always be conducted with absolute respect for the person's dignity, avoiding any risk of secondary victimisation, ensuring their free and informed consent and remembering that the well-being of the interviewee must always take precedence over the media actor's needs.

Before the interview, consider the following best practices:

- **Research the case thoroughly:** As far as possible, ensure you are well-informed about the case, its context, and any ongoing or previous court proceedings or protective measures.
- **Acknowledge victims' and survivors' contributions:** Frame the interviewee as a person with agency, strengths and resilience, rather than defining them primarily by the violence they were subjected to. Recognise that victims' and survivors' time and expertise carry real value, and ensure their contributions are meaningfully and tangibly acknowledged.
- **Check with the persons concerned, or the organisation supporting them, how they want to be referred to**, for example as victims, or survivors, or persons having being subjected to sexual violence in childhood, or simply by their name.
- **Define your approach and that of your media outlet:** Clearly determine the purpose and direction of the interview, aiming to enhance understanding rather than create sensationalism.
- **Be trauma-informed:** Work with the victim or survivor to identify their needs and support required in order to create an enabling environment and establish the boundaries for the interview. Respect their right not to speak and be aware that you may need to interrupt, postpone, or cancel the interview at their request.
- **Avoid asking for details**: Some questions can trigger the victim or survivor and make them relive the circumstances of the assault. In principle, no question is off-limits, particularly if a relationship of trust has been established between the interviewer and the interviewee, but the journalist always has a responsibility not to cause harm to the person they are interviewing through the questions they ask.
- **Obtain informed consent:** Make sure participation is voluntary, informed, and continuous. Clearly explain the purpose, publication details, and context of the interview, and let them know they can withdraw consent at any time.
- **Protect identity and dignity:** If anonymity is requested, ensure no identifying audiovisual content or details that could give away the person's identity (such as geographical location, physical characteristics, etc.) are included and always respect the interviewee's dignity.

- **Create a safe environment:** Choose a setting, time, and format that help the interviewee feel secure and respected. Offer the option for someone they trust to accompany them and make it clear that the interview can be paused or stopped at any time.
- **Manage expectations and be transparent:** Adult victims and survivors may want their experience shaped in a particular way. Media actors are encouraged to be careful in managing expectations and be upfront and transparent about the approach, purpose, editorial process and outcome of an article. If the publication allows it, the journalist deems it appropriate, or the interviewee explicitly requests it, consider sharing the final version of the interviewee's quotes and article context before publication, allowing them to review it, and request corrections and changes, if possible.
- **Be prepared for withdrawal:** While an interviewee may not prevent a journalist or media outlet from covering a news event deemed to be of public interest, nor may they prevent any journalist from gathering information from other sources, they may decide not to have their experience publicised. In that case, consider whether the piece can go ahead without the testimony and ensure essential context is still provided.

Interviews with people in the child's immediate environment

When interviewing non-offending individuals from the child's circle of trust (e.g., family members, carers, teachers, or close friends), apply the same careful consideration as you would when interviewing adult victims or survivors. In addition, take the following best practices into account:

- **Protect the privacy of the child**: Remember that disclosing the identity of a person close to the child may lead to the victim being identified. Consider using pseudonyms for those close to the child in addition to the child to keep victims safe and avoid publishing identifiable information.
- **Respect timing and flexibility:** Be sensitive to the interviewee's emotional state and personal circumstances, allowing flexibility in scheduling interviews to accommodate their needs.
- **Foster trust and transparency:** Create an open, non-judgmental environment where interviewees can speak freely without feeling blamed or scrutinised.
- **Recognise emotional impact:** Remember that these individuals may also be deeply affected by the situation. Approach interviews with empathy and care, acknowledging their feelings as well as their insights.
- **Avoid bias and blame:** Prepare questions in advance, ensuring they are guided by ethical principles and are non-judgmental. Refrain from questions that imply negligence or blame.
- **Limit questioning to what is necessary:** Avoid probing, if you are unsure about the details of the case, and you think the details may be triggering for the person.
- **Assess whether the information provided could undermine the rights and interests of the child victim or survivor:** Consider the potential risks or impact on them, especially if they are still under 18 years of age. Media should thoroughly scrutinise all information if there are grounds for suspecting that interviewees are acting without the awareness and consent of the child victim or survivor (if appropriate), attempting to use media coverage to serve their own interests or in a way that undermines the victim or survivors' rights, interests and well-being. In that case, the interview should not be undertaken.
- **Be transparent about use:** Clearly explain the purpose of the interview, how the information will be used, and the interviewee's rights regarding anonymity and withdrawal. Allow them to express limits regarding the use of their image, voice, or specific content.
- **Edit with care and integrity:** Ensure statements are not taken out of context or edited in a way that could misrepresent or harm the interviewee. Whenever possible, offer them the chance to review their contribution before publication.

Interviews with experts and other relevant stakeholders

Consulting experts and organisations specialising in children's rights and sexual violence is a good practice, ensuring reporting takes a child-centred and rights-based approach. Expert input provides valuable context and complements victim or survivor accounts, though most experts and organisations will address the broader issue rather than comment on specific cases. These organisations may also be able to share the views of victims and survivors without the need for direct engagement between the media and victims and survivors.

Digital platforms and service providers, public administrations and other relevant stakeholders -including schools, sports clubs, institutions and service providers- may offer useful information about their role and response in relation to a case or broader pattern of offences. When reporting on technology-facilitated sexual violence against children, journalists and other media actors are encouraged to identify the relevant digital environment or platform, where appropriate, and invite it to comment on the circumstances and its response.

Before the interview, consider the following best practices:

- **Select relevant sources:** As far as possible, choose experts and organisations that have a child-rights and gender-sensitive perspective. Ensure they recognise intersectional factors and avoid oversimplified interpretations.
- **Consult a range of professionals:** As far as possible, interview legal, psychosocial, health and social intervention experts to provide balanced and thorough reporting.
- **Consult organisations working with survivors**: Seek guidance from civil society organisations that work directly with survivors, who can help prepare for the interview, identify the interviewee's needs, and provide referrals for psychosocial support if needed.
- If you are consulting an expert, a social organisation, platforms or public administrations, **raise the issue of the forms of stigma to be avoided:** Remember that sexual violence is committed everywhere, not only in certain areas or among certain social classes.
- **Contextualise expert input:** Introduce the expert's role and relevance clearly and present their statements in context to prevent alarmism or misinterpretation.
- If the crime takes place in the digital environment, **name the platform where the harm occurred, and seek, if possible, comment from them.**
- **Use clear, responsible language:** Request explanations for specialised terms and avoid language that could cause secondary victimisation. Frame sexual violence as a violation of rights, not as "a family tragedy", "an obscure case" or using similar phrasing.
- **Ask about solutions, not only the problem**: Seek out experts' insights on evidence-based prevention and response strategies, and concrete examples of what works, to help audiences understand that this violence is not inevitable.

Incorporating children's perspectives

As noted above, **directly interviewing children who are victims or witnesses of sexual violence is not recommended**, especially if they are in the process of recovery or do not have specialised support. Interviews with child victims or witnesses undergoing a criminal proceeding shall be avoided, to prevent interfering with forensic interviewing and with the pre-trial investigation in general, with all its legal safeguards. This section offers alternatives for incorporating children's perspective without violating their rights:

- **Use excerpts from accounts that have already been shared:** For example, some reports by children's rights organisations, court judgments or firsthand accounts issued by the victims or survivors including verbatim statements from children (provided these do not promote secondary victimisation and are carefully selected). These excerpts may be used as long as they are anonymised and contextualised with journalistic rigor and ethics.
- **Use fictionalised narratives based on real cases (with consent):** In some journalistic or artistic projects, first-person voices are constructed from several real accounts, under professional guidance.
- **Prefer symbolic or artistic representation:** Through drawing, writing, play or audiovisual creation, children who have already undergone criminal proceedings can express emotions without recounting the case itself. When carried out with specialised teams, these forms of expression can be integrated into news coverage using a child-centred approach.
- **Collect accounts through trusted intermediaries:** Work alongside teams of psychologists, educators or community figures who can convey the feelings or reflections expressed by victims or survivors without exposing them directly.
- **Engage with "victim or survivor advocates":** Some victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse engage in public advocacy to raise awareness and promote positive change. They will usually

have invested time and resources in personal healing to be able to engage publicly with policy makers and be well informed of gaps and solutions needed to better protect children. When engaging with child victims and survivors who engage in public advocacy it is strongly recommended to seek the support of a specialist child rights organisation. It is important to note that such advocacy focuses on systemic or societal issues and not the specific details of the sexual violence.

- **Include their opinions:** Some children's rights organisations have participatory processes in which young people express their views on different issues of concern to them, such as sexual violence. Incorporating their perspectives and input (as reflected in reports and documents already published) can be highly valuable.

Use of audiovisual language

Audiovisual language, through sound, images, and icons, shapes how we perceive and interpret reality, carrying strong sociocultural impact. Alongside written language, it plays a key role in ensuring communication with an inclusive child's rights perspective. Careful consideration of audiovisual choices is essential to avoid secondary victimisation.

Consider the following best practices:

- **Limit detail to matters of public interest** to explain the nature and gravity of the offending.
- Ensure that all images and audiovisual elements **contribute to reporting these events in a respectful manner**.
- **Protect the identity of children (victims, witnesses or in conflict with the law)**. This duty applies even where the child's identity is already known publicly or the child has expressed a wish to speak. As a general rule, do not publish or republish faces, voices, locations, school uniforms, social-media material or other audiovisual elements that could identify a child as a victim or survivor of sexual violence.
- Adult victims and survivors and individuals may choose to appear publicly or to disclose their identity. In such cases, obtain explicit, informed and continuing consent for the specific use of their image and voice.
- **Avoid sensationalism in reporting**: Do not use explicit graphic recreations, morbid depictions, sexualised images or staged scenes of violence.
- **Maintain a respectful tone in music and editing:** Refrain from using dramatic effects or music that is gloomy or overly sentimental.
- **Take particular care to avoid stereotypes:** Do not portray perpetrators as "monsters" or "predators"; recognise that they are individuals who are part of society. Avoid depicting victims and survivors solely in situations of vulnerability.
- **Consult with experts when using symbolic imagery to ensure it does not contribute to secondary victimisation:** The choice of symbolic images should also reflect a child and gender perspective and avoid clichés such as broken dolls, shadows, or covered mouths. While these images are often intended to convey situations of vulnerability or silence, they can reinforce stereotypes of children as passive, damaged or voiceless, and may contribute to sensationalised representations of sexual violence. Where possible, visual choices should help audiences understand the issue without reducing children to their victimhood.
- When adult victims or survivors or non-offending individuals are to appear, **ensure they have been properly informed about how their image and voice will be used, and obtain their explicit informed consent.**

Headlines and section placement

Headlines play a crucial role in shaping how audiences perceive news about sexual violence against children. Unethical, false or inaccurate headlines can reinforce stereotypes, blame or expose victims and survivors, and trivialise or normalise abuse, while ethical ones raise awareness, emphasise perpetrator responsibility, ignite informed debate, and promote prevention and protection.

The challenge is to create accurate, engaging headlines without resorting to sensationalism or violating children's rights. Reporting must frame sexual violence as a structural violation of children's rights, not as an isolated or anecdotal event. If possible, consider where the piece of news will be placed in your media outlet.

Sections that focus on crime reinforce the idea of isolated incidents, while coverage in the society or family section may actually bring light to what is a systemic issue.

Best practices for headlines and section placement:

- **Avoid focusing on the victim or assigning them responsibility for the crime:** Do not suggest consent, recklessness or responsibility on the part of the child.
- **Focus attention on the perpetrator or on the existence of sexual violence, without dwelling on graphic details, and within its systemic and structural context:** It is recommended to use active instead of passive language. For instance, "man abused a child for years" instead of "girl abused for years".
- **Do not use lurid, sensationalist or stigmatising language:** Expressions such as "terrible story", "horrific case", or similar phrases that seek only to shock should be discouraged.
- **Protect the identity of victims and survivors**, except in cases where adults themselves make their identities public. Do not include details that could identify them (exact age, place of residence, school, etc.).
- **Place the event within a broader social context** (e.g. "a growing number of cases", "adds to national data on sexual violence against children") rather than presenting it as an isolated incident.
- **Reinforce the ideas of detection, protection and reparation.**
- **Use inclusive and respectful language**: Avoid gender stereotypes and adult-centric or paternalistic expressions.
- **Do not turn violence into a spectacle**: The headline should inform, not provoke voyeuristic curiosity, trivialise the issue or seek clicks (clickbait).
- **Ensure coverages are not placed next to trivial or sensationalist content**: Maintain careful editorial context and layout.

Below are examples of good and poor practices, using **fictional headlines** based on real news cases published by different media outlets.

Good headline practices

Sports coach sentenced to 12 years in prison in a case of sexual violence against adolescents

The headline places responsibility on the perpetrator (sentenced… for sexual violence), not on the victims; by mentioning the individual's profession, it shows that the person held a position of trust or responsibility over adolescents. It helps make visible that certain settings (sports, education, leisure) require protection protocols, without stigmatising all professionals in the sector. Correct terminology is used: sexual violence, sentenced.

More than 40% of judicial proceedings for sexual violence against children last more than three years, according to a Save the Children study

This headline is based on data from a study by a recognised child-focused organisation; it highlights institutional shortcomings in protecting children; and it uses inclusive language and accurate terminology.

More than 75% of children have experienced sexual violence through screens, according to a study by the Mutua Madrileña Foundation in collaboration with the Central Women and Children Teams (EMUME) unit of the national police.

This headline reports on a specific study by relevant institutions; it uses "children" instead of minors; it is informative and data-driven without being alarmist.

It is recommended to use "being subjected to sexual violence" instead of "experience".

Bad practices in headlines

A minor reports abuse that allegedly occurred at El Limonero school in X city

This headline uses the term minor instead of girl or child. It identifies the name of the school and the city, which compromises the victim's protection; the action "reports" is presented as the initiative of the girl, which may shift responsibility for the investigation onto her rather than onto the judicial procedure; the headline does not indicate that there is an alleged perpetrator or that an investigation is under way, and therefore lacks context.

Proposed alternative headline: Investigation underway into a case of sexual violence against a girl in a school of the region of Y.

Young woman takes her uncle to court for sexually abusing her since childhood and prostituting her to his friends

The action is placed on the young woman ("takes to court"), when in fact responsibility for the judicial process lies with the Office of the Prosecutor General, the judicial authority and the justice system, not with her; it exposes a family relationship (uncle), which may facilitate identification of the victim; it includes lurid details ("prostituting her to his friends") that are not essential for a headline and may cause secondary victimisation; in cases involving children, there is no prostitution – there is sexual exploitation – using the term "prostitute" normalises and trivialises the violence; the wording seeks impact rather than precise and respectful information. The term young woman would only be appropriate if the person were an adult; otherwise, it may be misleading.

Proposed alternative headline: Trial begins against a man accused of ongoing sexual violence and exploitation against a girl within his family environment.

Four taxi drivers 'drove' the gang rape of a 15-year-old girl by 10 men in the smallest town in X region

The wordplay involving the perpetrators' profession creates an almost spectacle-like narrative that trivialises the violence inflicted on the girl; it mentions the exact age and the location of a very small town, making it easy to identify the victim; referring to a "gang rape by 10 men" instead of sexual violence reinforces voyeurism and sensationalism; the headline focuses on the organisation of the crime rather than on sexual violence as a violation of rights.

Proposed alternative headline: Ten men arrested in X region for the sexual exploitation of a girl; Ten men under investigation on charges of committing sexual violence against a girl."





4. Resources for journalists and other media actors

Key terminology

When reporting on sexual violence against children, it is essential to use a clear and consistent conceptual framework. The main reference is the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Second Edition, March 2025). Developed in co-operation with nearly forty international organisations, these guidelines offer guidance on the understanding and use of the different terms that professionals and international agencies use in their work on child sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring clarity and consistency across all contexts.

To apply these guidelines effectively, it is important to be familiar with key terms such as the ones introduced in section 1 of this handbook, among others.

TERMS TO BE USED WITH CAUTION OR TO BE AVOIDED

Child or adolescent, not "minor": The word "minor" is an adjective that conveys inferiority and presents children as objects rather than as subjects of rights. In certain contexts, such as the legal context, it may be necessary to use "minor", "person under 18" or "minor of a certain age".

Recommended usage: It is recommended to instead refer to "child" or "adolescent" or "person under 18 years of age", as appropriate and when the context requires emphasising this condition.

Children in situations of vulnerability, not "vulnerable children": The term "vulnerable children" may suggest that vulnerability is an inherent characteristic of the child, rather than the result of circumstances, discrimination, unequal access to services or other structural factors.

Recommended usage: Refer to "children in situations of vulnerability", and, where relevant, specify the circumstances involved, such as children with disabilities, children in alternative care, migrant and refugee children, children belonging to minority groups or children who are missing.

Sexual violence against a child, not "non-consensual sexual relations" or "sex with a child" or "relationship/affair with a teenager": Used as a euphemism for sexual violence, thereby softening or downplaying the crime, and failing to take into account that consent is not a constituent element in cases of sexual violence against a child (see principle 4). Language suggesting reciprocity or romance should never be used when describing sexual violence against children.

Recommended usage: Case of sexual violence against children; child sexual abuse and/or child sexual exploitation.

Offender, not "alleged perpetrator" (when there is a conviction or evidence), "predator", "monster", "bad apple", "paedophile" or "child sex offender": In news reporting, the term "alleged" is often maintained even when there is compelling evidence or a court conviction. While it is correct to use "alleged" during the investigation or trial phase (presumption of innocence), continuing to use it after a final conviction or sufficient evidence generates misinformation and may favour the perpetrator. In addition, the terms "predator", "monster" or "bad apple" can be sensationalist, oversimplify the issue and overlook the context behind the offender's actions and possible evidence-based solutions, making the problem appear insurmountable. "Paedophile" is often used inaccurately as a synonym for a person who has sexually offended against a child, despite it referring to a psychiatric condition rather than a criminal offence. In the terms "child sex offender" or "child sexual violence", the qualifier "child" may cause confusion with regard to who (a child or an adult) has committed the offence.

Recommended usage: Convicted perpetrator; person convicted of sexual abuse; or simply offender, where there is verified evidence. If the case is still in the preliminary investigation or trial phase, in addition to alleged perpetrator, terms such as "accused of", "suspect", "under investigation for", etc. may be used. Where children have committed sexual offences, it is encouraged to use person-first and child-centred language that avoids defining a child by their behaviour or offence, such as "child who has displayed harmful sexual behaviour", "child who has committed a sexual offence", or "child in conflict with the law for a sexual offence".

Sexual exploitation of a child, not "child prostitution": Often used to describe situations in which children are sexually exploited in exchange for money or favours. Use of the term "child prostitution" implies that the child has consented and risks shifting blame onto the child victim. The term "child prostitution" perpetuates secondary victimisation, places responsibility on children, and obscures the responsibility of those who exploit them. Language that suggests a child chose, participated in, or benefited from the exploitation shall be avoided.

Recommended usage: Sexual exploitation of a child. This language acknowledges that it is a crime and a serious violation of rights.

Child sexual abuse material not "child pornography": Commonly used to refer to the creation, distribution or consumption of sexual images or videos depicting children. However, the term "child pornography" should be avoided. Using it to refer to images or videos of children reduces the perceived seriousness of the crime and obscures the fact that such material is the result of sexual violence against children. It is essential to place victims at the centre; this helps to convey that behind every image there is a child subjected to violence. It also reinforces the criminal responsibility of the offender.

Recommended usage: Child sexual abuse material, child sexual exploitation material.

Sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, not "child sex tourism": "Child sex tourism" may inadvertently give the idea that this is a legitimate form of tourism and excludes other types of travelling offenders beyond tourists. Similarly, those who commit such crimes should not be referred to as "tourists".

Recommended usage: "Sexual exploitation of children in (the context of) travel and tourism" reinforces that the child is being exploited and broadens the focus from the actions of offenders to a wider perspective on the settings in which the exploitation takes place.

Secondary victimisation, not re-victimisation. Re-victimisation refers to a pattern wherein the victim of abuse and/or crime has a statistically higher tendency to be victimised again, either shortly thereafter or much later in adulthood in the case of abuse as a child. This is not the correct term to use to refer to the victim-blaming attitudes, behaviour, and practices, which result in additional trauma for victims or survivors of sexual violence or the negative social or societal reaction or consequence of the primary victimisation.

Recommended usage: Secondary victimisation. The term re-traumatisation is sometimes used as a synonym to secondary victimisation, referring to the fact that the child victim is traumatised again during the (mis-)handling of their case.

Human rights violation, not "scourge", something that "happened" to the child or just "stories": Sexual violence against children is often referred to as a "social scourge". However, this term lacks a rights-based perspective, as it does not help to understand the true scale of the problem or to identify its structural causes. Moreover, it tends to present violence as something inevitable or detached from collective responsibility; its use is therefore discouraged. Avoid characterising the crime as something that simply "happened" to the child, as such offences are preventable and not inevitable. Reframing the narrative helps reduce stigma and places emphasis on the crime itself. Similarly, avoid using the term "story" due to its association with fiction, which can undermine the credibility of victims and survivors.

Recommended usage: Public offence, public health problem, structural violence, human rights violation. Example: Sexual violence against children remains a serious violation of human rights.

List of organisations specialised in children's rights

Consulting specialised sources on sexual violence against children is considered a fundamental good practice, particularly when a child-rights perspective is incorporated into news coverage. To that end, it is advisable to broaden perspectives and draw on a wider range of sources, including professionals in psychology, education, healthcare and social work, as well as child-focused organisations and human rights experts, going beyond police and judicial versions of events in order to offer a broader view and an approach centred on violations of children's rights.

The following organisations are specialised in children's rights at international level:

- The Brave Movement
- Child Rights Connect
- Child Rights Information Network (CRIN)
- ECPAT International
- Eurochild
- The Global Collaborative
- Hope For Children - CRC Policy Center Cyprus
- INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines)
- International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates (AIMJF)
- Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
- Missing Children Europe
- Barnahus Network
- Protect Children (Suojellaan Lapsia ry)
- Safe Online
- Save the Children International
- Terre des Hommes
- Together for Girls
- SOS Children's Villages
- WeProtect Global Alliance

Official sources for finding relevant data

Journalists and other media actors are encouraged to consult official sources for relevant data, including national authorities such as judicial, law enforcement, education, health, child protection agencies, and official statistics, research, and media organisations.

The following international organisations, bodies and independent institutions can be consulted for relevant data and information related to children's rights:

- Council of Europe, in particular the Children's Rights Division, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY). The implementation reports adopted by the Lanzarote Committee, resulting from its monitoring rounds, serve as a key source of information and analysis on various aspects of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
- Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI)
- European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC)
- European Union, in particular the European Parliament, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and EUROPOL.
- International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- United Nations, in particular the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, the International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- World Health Organization (WHO)

Press councils and bodies for self-regulation in journalism

When faced with any moral dilemma or ethical uncertainty, journalists are encouraged to seek advice from their press council or the journalistic self-regulatory body in their country or region. These bodies sometimes have case-law that may provide guidance. It is also useful to consult the presscouncils.eu website, where one can find numerous codes of journalistic ethics that address the issue of how the media should cover stories involving children.

Bibliography and supplementary materials

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- Brave Movement, *Basic media tips for speaking to journalists,* available at https://www.bravemovement.org/resources/basic-media-tips-for-speaking-to-journalists
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- Brave Movement, *Listening to a disclosure from a survivor/victim (over 18)*, available at https://www.bravemovement.org/resources/listening-to-a-disclosure-from-a-survivor-victim-over-18
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Checklists

Key principles: A checklist to ensure ethical reporting

- ☐ **Apply a child-rights perspective:** Are children presented as rights holders who must be protected in all coverage?
- ☐ **Frame sexual violence against children as a systemic problem:** Does your reporting highlight that sexual violence against children is a structural issue and a human rights violation, not just an isolated incident? Have you highlighted solutions and appropriate courses of action to offer perspectives on prevention? Are relevant experts, institutions and official sources consulted to ensure accuracy and sensitivity?
- ☐ **Be familiar with the legal and ethical framework:** Are you aware of the international and national legal and policy frameworks that protect children's rights? Are you aware of the code of ethics of journalism regarding children, victims and survivors of abuse? Have you been mindful of the impact of reporting on criminal justice proceedings?
- ☐ **Never imply consent or reciprocity:** Is it clear that, in general, children below the legal age cannot give consent to sexual activities with adults, and that consent is never valid when given under coercion, force, threats, in a situation of abuse of trust, authority or influence, or a situation of vulnerability, regardless of age? Is language that suggests responsibility on the part of the child avoided?
- ☐ **Protect the identity of the victim:** Is the identity of any victim or survivor fully protected, with no identifying information, images, or descriptions published, irrespective of the inclusion of such details in official documents?
- ☐ **Avoid secondary victimisation, victim blaming and sensationalism:** Are all aspects of the reporting designed to avoid triggering, shaming, discriminating or further harming victims or survivors? Does the coverage focus attention on the responsibility of perpetrators and systemic responses, rather than on victims or survivors? Does your reporting avoid unnecessary graphic details?
- ☐ **Use inclusive and appropriate language.** Does the language used avoid blame, sensationalism, and irrelevant detail, remaining respectful and inclusive throughout? Is a gender and intersectional perspective included, making visible any inequalities or overlapping of situations of vulnerability?
- ☐ **Use a trauma-informed approach:** Are you approaching this coverage with an understanding of how trauma can shape a victim's or survivor's responses, disclosures and behaviour?
- ☐ **Share specialised resources for those seeking help:** Have you included, if available, contact details for the national child helpline and other official support services, or information on where to seek help or report abuse?
- ☐ **Follow specialised training:** Have you followed any specialised training on children's rights to fully understand child sexual exploitation and abuse?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for interviews with adult victims or survivors of sexual violence in childhood

- ☐ Have you thoroughly researched the case and its context, including any legal proceedings or protective measures?
- ☐ Is your interview approach clear and aimed at understanding and providing context?
- ☐ Have you asked the interviewee how they would like to be referred to (e.g. as a victim, survivor, person subjected to sexual violence in childhood, or simply by their name/pseudonym)?
- ☐ Has the interviewee's time and expertise been acknowledged?
- ☐ Is the interviewee ready and comfortable to participate?
- ☐ Have you obtained fully informed, voluntary consent and explained the right to withdraw at any time?
- ☐ Will you protect the person's identity and dignity, avoiding any identifying details if requested?
- ☐ Is the interview environment safe and supportive, with the option for accompaniment or interruption if needed?
- ☐ Will the interviewee have the chance to check their contribution before publication?
- ☐ If necessary, could the experience be reported without the victim's or survivor's account?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for interviews with people in the child's immediate environment

- ☐ Have you clearly explained the purpose of the interview and how it will be used?
- ☐ Does the person agree to participate freely, without pressure?
- ☐ Have you considered whether their testimony could affect the child's privacy?
- ☐ Have you offered the option of their remaining anonymous or concealing their face and/or voice?
- ☐ Are you prepared to receive their intense emotions with respect and empathy?
- ☐ Do your questions mainly focus on their experience rather than on details of the sexual violence?
- ☐ Do you avoid making judgments or suggesting responsibility on the part of the victim or survivor for the crime?
- ☐ Do you have their authorisation to use specific excerpts of the testimony?
- ☐ Have you offered the possibility for the person to be accompanied by a professional or someone from their environment during the interview?
- ☐ Have you taken care of editing so as not to decontextualise or overexpose the testimony, while respecting its original purpose?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for interviews with experts and other relevant stakeholders

- ☐ Have you considered, if possible, contacting experts working with a child-rights perspective, and with a gender and intersectional approach?
- ☐ Do you know which field or role they represent (health, legal, community, academic, institutional, etc.)?
- ☐ Have you researched sufficiently to ask relevant and responsible questions?
- ☐ Are your questions focused on understanding the phenomenon?
- ☐ Do you promote the use of language that is clear, accurate and free of unnecessary technical jargon?
- ☐ If helpful, have you sought guidance from organisations that work directly with survivors?
- ☐ If the crime takes place in the digital environment, have you named the platform where the harm occurred and, if possible, sought comment from them?
- ☐ Do you diversify expert voices and avoid an exclusively institutional approach?
- ☐ Do you contextualise and present their testimony?
- ☐ Will their testimony contribute to public understanding rather than voyeuristic interest, or fear?
- ☐ Where possible, have you asked about evidence-based prevention or response strategies, not only about the scale or nature of the problem?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for incorporating children's perspectives, if applicable

- ☐ Have you refrained from directly interviewing children who are victims of sexual violence, especially those who are currently undergoing a criminal proceeding, in recovery or lack specialised support?
- ☐ If engaging with child victims or survivors involved in public advocacy, have you sought the support of a specialist child-rights organisation, ensured their participation is informed and voluntary, and focused on systemic issues rather than the details of sexual violence?
- ☐ Have you used anonymised statements from existing reports or court judgments with care to avoid potential secondary victimisation?
- ☐ Have you collected insights through trusted intermediaries, such as psychologists or educators, to protect children's privacy?
- ☐ If using fictionalised narratives based on real cases, have you obtained consent of the individuals that inspired the narrative and have you avoided misrepresentation?
- ☐ Have you used symbolic or artistic expressions focusing on emotions and not explicit details?
- ☐ Have you incorporated children's opinions as reflected in published reports by professional organisations?
- ☐ Throughout, have you prioritised the rights, well-being, and dignity of children?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for the use of audiovisual language

- ☐ Are all images and audiovisual elements respecting the dignity of represented persons, reflecting a child-rights and gender-sensitive approach?
- ☐ Is the identity of children (victims, witnesses or in conflict with the law), adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and individuals in their immediate environment protected, with no identifiable details shown (such as schools, homes, neighbourhoods, uniforms, family members or social media profiles)?
- ☐ Is sensationalism avoided (no graphic or staged depictions of violence, unnecessary dramatisation)?
- ☐ Does music and editing avoid dramatic or overly sentimental tones?
- ☐ Have stereotypes been avoided, both in depicting perpetrators and victims or survivors?
- ☐ If using symbolic images, have experts been consulted, where possible and where appropriate, to ensure these do not cause secondary victimisation or rely on clichés?
- ☐ If victims or survivors appear in the audiovisual material, has informed and explicit consent been obtained for their image and voice?

Checklist: Best reporting practices for headlines and section placement

- ☐ When reporting on individual cases of sexual violence, does the headline focus on the perpetrator or alleged perpetrator rather than on the victim or survivor?
- ☐ Has all degrading, sensationalist or stigmatising language been avoided?
- ☐ Is the identity of the victim protected (no identifying information)?
- ☐ Has the possibility of placing the headline in a dedicated or specialised section been considered?
- ☐ Is the Society section considered as an alternative to the Crime section, if no more specific section exists?
- ☐ Has it been ensured that the article does not appear alongside insensitive, trivial content or content that trivialises sexual violence?

How sexual violence against children is reported matters. Ethical media reporting can raise awareness, shape public attitudes and encourage victims and survivors to seek support.

This handbook is primarily for journalists and other media actors, but may also be a useful resource for anyone working with and for children. Grounded in ten key principles of ethical reporting, it offers practical guidance on conducting sensitive interviews, incorporating children's perspectives responsibly, and choosing language, headlines and images that avoid stereotypes, sensationalism and the disclosure of victim's identity. It also contains practical resources, including key definitions, specialist organisations, official data sources and pre-publication checklists.

This English-language edition is an international version and has not been tailored to any specific country. National authorities, regulatory bodies, civil society organisations, journalists and other media professionals are encouraged to translate it and adapt its guidance to their national contexts.

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