



Consell
de l'Audiovisual
de Catalunya

GUIDELINES



GUIDELINES ON THE
**RIGHTS-BASED
MEDIA COVERAGE
OF CHILDREN AND
ADOLESCENTS**

March 2021

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced by the Catalan Audiovisual Council with the participation of the Catalan Department of Labour, Social Affairs and Families, the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (Journalists' Association of Catalonia) the Diomira Association, the National Council for Children and Adolescents of Catalonia and the Síndic de Greuges (Catalan Ombudsman's Office).

Children and adolescents are active members of society with their voice,¹ and this principle is the ground of this document. Therefore, these guidelines seek to become a guide to promote media treatment that respects children and adolescents' best interests, to ensure that no communicative action contravenes their universal rights. When children and adolescent participate in media or when reporting on them, media should carry out while focusing on their rights.

Society often addresses issues that directly affect children and adolescents without taking their opinions, points of view or ideas into account, whilst they have few opportunities to play an active role in social processes. Consequently, as a society, we should consider, at length, how to change this situation and remember that those under the age of majority also have rights.

The media can act as ambassadors for the rights of children and adolescents and contribute towards showing children and adolescents as people who gradually take charge of their lives and help their opinions to be heard in the decisions and processes that affect them. Moreover, their dignity, privacy and intimacy need to be assured, respecting the right to their image and to honour, as well as protecting their personal data.

These guidelines also address video-sharing platforms and social media sites, given the extensive consumption of audiovisual media via such channels and their collaborative nature. The ease with which messages can be created, disseminated and copied via these services can encourage the presence of harmful content to children and adolescents. Users and content generators share responsibility with the social platforms and media, the latter needing to establish mechanisms and measures provided for by the audiovisual regulations that govern such content.

The principles governing these guidelines are based on the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). In particular, on the following: **the best interests of the child** as a primary consideration that must prevail over any other (Article 3); the child has **the right to form and express their own view**, and this should be taken into account in all matters affecting them (Article 12); all

¹ The United Nations' [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) defines *children* as people under the age of 18. [Catalan Law 14/2010, of 27 May, on the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents](#), defines a *child* as an individual under the age of 12 and an *adolescent* as a person between the ages of 12 and the legal age of adulthood stipulated by law.

children have **the right to freedom of expression**, to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Article 13), and, ultimately, **the right to access information**. In this respect, the media fulfil a crucial social function in disseminating information for children, to promote their development and social and cultural well-being (Article 17).

The media's treatment of children and adolescents should be rights-based, both in its coverage of issues closer to home or issues further away. Children and young people are everywhere, and the media should contribute to the respect of their rights when producing and disseminating content.





GUIDELINES

01

Respect and promote the rights, interests and well-being of children and adolescents.

The best interests of the child prevail over any objective or interest regarding the media, advertising or audience. Their physical and emotional well-being is primordial and, before disseminating anything, the potential consequences of revealing a particular image, information or statement must be considered.

When in doubt as to whether a specific piece of information or focus could infringe their rights or harm a child, the general interest of the news story must be evaluated and the decision taken either not to publish or to take a different approach.

02

Include the perspective of children and adolescents in content.

On the whole, current affairs also affect children and adolescents. In this respect, it would be advisable to ask how children might perceive the story and whether the necessary elements are present to ensure they understand it.

On the other hand, it is also **advisable for the programming to include more news of particular interest to children and adolescents.** The coverage of such news stories must be appropriate for the age and maturity of the intended audience and must avoid an adult-centric view.

Similarly, and as far as possible, **children should be encouraged to take part in the news, to express their opinions and identify with the information published.** It helps to boost the recognition of children and adolescents as people with rights in society.

03

Contextualise and use expert sources.

To ensure news items are not over or understated, **carefully contextualise the stories, witnesses and images of children and adolescents**. If necessary, by using statistics as support.

In this respect, it is essential **to avoid generalisation and overly protective attitudes**. It should also be remembered that children and adolescents are not a homogeneous group: childhood and adolescence are different stages in every person's life and, like any other; they are affected by their circumstances and situations.

When producing information that could affect them, **it is advisable to consult experts and organisations related to childhood and adolescence, especially those in which young people take part and are represented**, such as councils for children and adolescents.

04

Use respectful and inclusive language.

The language used when talking to or about children and adolescents in the media should not help to stigmatise or discriminate them due to their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic group, religion, circumstances of their birth, social status, educational background or physical abilities.

In this respect, descriptions and adjectives should be avoided that could result in them experiencing rejection in their environment or possible psychological harm, as well as expressions or discourses that could create anxiety and/or agitation or ridicule them.

Special care must be taken when talking about children or adolescents in situations of risk, taking the many possible causes of vulnerability into account (poverty, mistreatment, abuse, etc.).²

Regarding language, the following is recommended:

- **Do not use the term *minor* because this suggests they are less significant.** It is better to talk about a *child, boy, girl, teenager, adolescent* or *young person*.
- **Avoid using colloquial or informal words or expressions that are not appropriate for a news context**, such as *kids, youngsters, rugrats, moppets*, etc. Avoid using colloquial or informal words or expressions that are not appropriate for a news context, such as *kids, youngsters, rugrats, moppet*, etc.
- **Employ non-sexist language with a gender perspective** and, whenever possible, use generic forms and collective nouns such as *children, adolescents, young people, teenagers, students, teachers, class, team, volunteers*, etc. As an alternative, both gender forms can be used together, such as *boys and girls*.

² For more information, see [Com informar dels maltractaments infantils. Manual d'estil per a mitjans de comunicació](#).



- **If it's not relevant, don't mention how the child was born.** In any case, regarding media practices about fertility, gestation or childbirth, it is advisable to avoid expressions such as *test tube* or *laboratory babies* or *surrogate babies*. Instead, expressions can be used such as babies born using fertility techniques (in vitro, artificial insemination, etc.) or via a surrogate mother.
- Regarding sexual abuse and prostitution, terms such as *child prostitution* should be avoided, instead of talking about *victims of sexual exploitation by adults*.

05

Avoid labels that refer to where children or adolescents come from, their parentage or guardianship.

If there is no direct relationship with the news story being reported, no mention should be made of the origin, parentage or guardianship of the child, such as adoption, assisted reproduction, surrogacy, under guardianship of the authorities or any other circumstance. Origin, parentage and guardianship should not become a reason to discriminate against a child or adolescent or to violate any of their rights.³

06

Encourage the active participation of children and adolescents in mass media and social media.

One way to include the perspective of children and adolescents in media discourse is to provide them with a voice and encourage them to play an active role in content related to news, entertainment, information, education, etc., which might affect or interest them.

To ensure such participation is appropriate, the medium in question should take the following preventive measures into account:

- **Their participation must be warranted, based on reasoned, argued editorial criteria, and must be appropriate for the age and degree of maturity of the child or adolescent.**
- **The child or adolescent must agree to take part and has the right to change their mind at any time and end their collaboration.** The medium must have the consent of a parent or a corresponding legal representative.
- **The medium must devote the necessary time to explaining, clearly and in a way that is easy to understand, the conditions of the collaboration, the context and subject of the content in which the child or adolescent is to take part,** and also the aim and intention of disseminating this content, as well as their rights. A suitable adult must accompany the child or the adolescent.

³ For more information, see [Medios de comunicación y adopción. Consideraciones sobre el tratamiento informativo de la adopción.](#)



- They should have **the chance to express their opinions in their own words.**
- They should **not take part in content that explains or represents sensitive, traumatic or upsetting situations.**
- **They should not be encouraged to imitate behaviour that could harm** or jeopardise their health or development.
- **Do not use the child or adolescent's personal or family conflicts in an instrumental or sensationalist way or as a spectacle.**
- Should audiovisual material be used to accompany the content, the medium must take into account the possible implications of these images or audios for the child or adolescent.
- It should be ensured that **the child's participation does not entail commercial exploitation of any kind.**
- In the case of delayed broadcast content, the child, adolescent or his/her representative should be able to opt see the material to be broadcast beforehand, to check their participation is in line with the conditions agreed and no changes have been made to the child's situation which could lead to its broadcast negatively affecting them.
- **The media should offer children and adolescents the chance to express their opinions through their participatory platforms and spaces on social media.** Forums should be moderated and messages checked to avoid disseminating content that may be harmful to those who have not reached the age of majority. Video-sharing platforms and social media sites should also apply the necessary mechanisms to deactivate such messages and content.

07

Establish suitable conditions to interview them carefully.

In addition to the recommendations contained in the previous point, the media should also take into account the following considerations when interviewing children or adolescents:

- **Use understandable and clear verbal language suitable for the age and maturity of the interviewee.** Avoid using infantile language.
- **Set up the conditions so the child or adolescent feels at ease with the person, location and pace of the interview.** The number of professionals present at the interview should be as few as possible.
- It is advisable to give the child or adolescent the list of questions before the interview and, if they do not want to answer any particular question, do not insist.
- The questions, attitudes or comments expressed by the media must be sensitive and respectful regarding the style and circumstances of the child's life, as well as their cultural, ethnic or religious values.



08

Protect the child or adolescent's right to intimacy and self-image.

The child or adolescent's right to privacy, intimacy and self-image must be respected, as well as protecting their personal data. In particular, media professionals must be extremely careful when reporting about children or adolescents at risk or in a vulnerable situation.⁴

The name, image or other personal data that could identify the child and/or adolescent should never be broadcast in those cases in which doing so might affect their rights, interests or well-being. Neither should isolated bits of information be disseminated that, added together, could identify them, even when limited to a local context. **When there are circumstances of risk or potential risk, there should always used methods to disguise the child or adolescent's identity, both visual and audio.** The media should, in all cases, ensure that a child or adolescent cannot be victimised as a result of any information published or broadcast.

Should a situation of risk be detected as the result of a journalistic action, the medium is obliged to report this to the relevant authorities.

09

Promote an increase in quality programming for children and adolescents, suitable for their age and maturity.

Children and adolescents have the right to access appropriate information and to be given appropriate entertainment and training. The media should provide content aimed at children and adolescents, adapted to their ability to understand and their degree of maturity. It would be fitting to offer good quality programming specific for all age groups.

It is also advisable to take the school holidays into account when programming more content aimed at children and adolescents.

Children and adolescents habitually consume and use online media services, video-sharing platforms and social media. For this reason, the amount of quality content aimed at different targets and ages should be increased

⁴ For more information, see [Guidelines on media coverage of children and adolescents under government guardianship](#).



10

10. Contribute towards the media literacy of children and adolescents.

Education in communication provides tools to ensure citizens are critical and engaged.

Children need to acquire the skills and knowledge that enable them to critically watch content, to distinguish between true and untrue information, and be aware of the risks they are exposed to regarding social and other media content that could harm them (e.g. gambling, male-based violence, sexist stereotypes, cyber-bullying and harassment, eating disorders, being encouraged to carry out actions that might endanger them, etc.).

The media play a key role in making people more media literate. It is recommended that they promote and disseminate initiatives and campaigns that encourage good media and technological consumption habits. These measures should be aimed at children, adolescents, and also at families and schools, as they are also key agents in the process of communication education.





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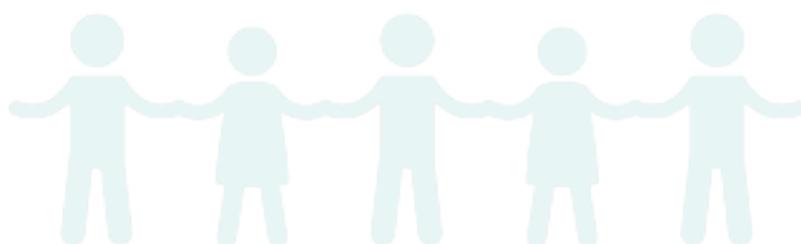
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