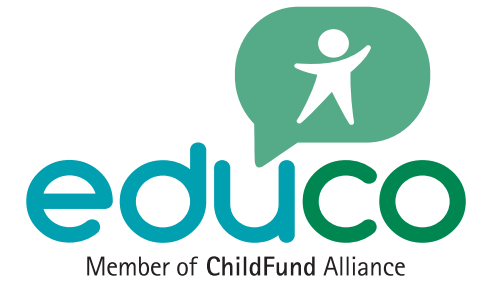




Educo Guide to

INTERVIEWING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS USING A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH



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Guide to interviewing children and adolescents using a rights-based approach

Educo 2019

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Introduction

The media reflects our reality, but it also shapes it. As agents of socialisation, the media possesses an undeniable influence on the way we perceive the world, and that is why the responsibility of communicators and journalists is so important for addressing the complexity of the reality of children and adolescents.

Journalistic coverage that is coherent with human rights and children's rights requires knowledge, commitment, responsibility and ethical management on behalf of journalists and communication professionals.

Presenting news items or information related to children and adolescents is fundamental for giving their situation visibility and promoting their participation. However, an inappropriate approach could lead to the violation of their rights and a risk for their wellbeing.

In order to support journalists and professionals in the communications sector in their reporting, we have elaborated this guide which aims to be a simple tool for consultation and guidance for using a rights-based approach in interviews.



**Reporting about children and adolescents
has specific challenges.**



Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1959, the United Nations approved a Declaration on the Rights of the Child, however it was not enough to protect children's rights, because it was not legally binding. In 1978, the Polish government presented a provisional version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to the United Nations.

Years later, on 20th November 1989, governments from around the world, religious leaders, NGOs and other institutions approved the final text for the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, whose fulfilment is compulsory for all the States that ratify it. This framework also includes the work of journalists in relation to children and adolescents, which should be based on the principles of the CRC. This means:

- 1. Best interest principle.** In any decision or measure taken which concerns or involves a child or adolescent, their rights, interests and needs will be given priority.
- 2. Non-discrimination principle.** Every child and adolescent will be treated equally, regardless of their origin, race, religion, sex or personal situation, and will have the same opportunities. On the other hand, any child or adolescent in a vulnerable situation should receive special attention with measures that prioritise their position as a rights holder.
- 3. Participation principle.** Every child and adolescent has the right to express their opinion, according to their age and stage of development. The participation of children and adolescents should take place in a respectful environment and on equal terms. This principle emphasises that participation does not just allow children and adolescents to express themselves, but also ensures that their opinion is taken into account for all the issues that concern them.
- 4. Right to life, survival and development.** Every child and adolescent has the right to a dignified life that respects their integrity and for society as a whole to guarantee their integral development in a protective environment.

Using these principles as a foundation, the following is a series of recommendations for journalists working with children and adolescents.



Recommendations prior to interviewing children and adolescents

Before deciding to interview a child or an adolescent:

As well as complying with the laws regarding children's rights in the country the journalistic product or communication will take place in, we recommend that you follow these guidelines:

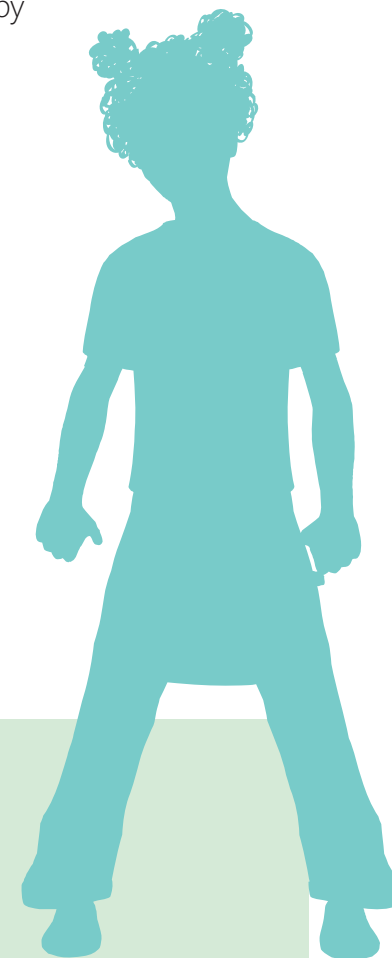
1. Remember that the dignity and rights of the child will need to be respected at all times, and their interests and needs must take priority over any other consideration.
2. Assess the possible repercussions of the proposed action: could this activity put the child, adolescent or their surroundings at risk or harm them in any way? If you have any doubts, check with the staff from the Educo country office and the people closest to the child.
3. Any action or activity must be carried out with the informed and written consent from the child or adolescent and their parent or guardian. It is important to ensure that the child or adolescent and the adult accompanying them are aware that they are talking to a journalist.
4. The child or adolescent must know the purpose of the interview, photograph or video, and the planned usage. **Remember that they have the right to decide not to participate in the interview.**
5. Guarantee that the work that is going to be carried out respects the confidentiality of the participating child or adolescent's personal information. Similarly, the right to confidentiality should also extend to the members of the child or adolescent's family; their surroundings (the school they study at, their home and neighbourhood, images of their parents or guardians, etc.) so that no information exists which could be used to identify their location. Otherwise confidentiality will be immediately compromised.
6. Avoid interviewing a child or adolescent in a vulnerable situation (living on the street, in foster care or in a violent situation), especially when the identity of the person being interviewed or their guardians need their identity to be protected. These situations could harm the person further or affect their image, integrity and dignity.



What to do during interviews with children or adolescents

- 1.** It is advisable to carry out a preparatory visit to get to know the children and adolescents and to introduce yourself. This visit will generate trust and demonstrate the interviewer's commitment. In cases where the contact is managed by a third party, like an NGO, the organisation can help you to manage this preliminary contact.
- 2.** If equipment like cameras and microphones are going to be used during the interview, explain to the children and adolescents how they work and what they will be used for.
- 3.** When choosing children or adolescents to participate, do not discriminate on the grounds of sex, race, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, education or physical aptitudes.

If possible, try to carry out the interviews in spaces related to the topic to be addressed, or leave it to the children or adolescents to choose the most appropriate place.



Guidelines for interviewing children and adolescents

At the start of the interview

1. It is important to take the time to introduce yourself. Explain who you are, what you do, where you work, and the reason for the interview. Allow the child or adolescent to do the same, and always respect the confidentiality of the information given.
2. Before starting the interview, agree what kind of questions will be asked with the child or adolescent. Take their opinion into account and ask them if they want to include or change anything.
3. Ensure that the child or adolescent feels comfortable and free to express their own opinion, without any kind of external pressure, including that of the interviewer.
4. The questions should be clear and open, which will allow the child or adolescent to express themselves in the most relaxed manner possible.
5. With regards to the length of the interview, if there is not much time, it is better to ask two or three specific questions, without curtailing the essence of the answers or pressuring the child or adolescent that is being interviewed.

During the interview

1. Do not oversimplify the questions, speak clearly, naturally and use words that are easy to understand according to the culture and context.
2. Make sure your body language is not intimidating or threatening for the child or adolescent being interviewed. It is recommended that you place yourself in front of the person you are interviewing, at their height, and make eye contact, to convey a feeling of security and equality.



3. Do not hurt the child or adolescent's sensibility: avoid questions, opinions or comments which make them feel criticised, judged or ones which are insensitive to their cultural values. It is also recommended that you do not show that you are overwhelmed or astonished by what you hear. Avoid re-enacting or staging: do not ask them to relate or interpret things that could revictimize them, make them relive a painful situation or reactivate the memory of a traumatic experience.
4. The length of the interview will depend on the proposed objectives, but, most importantly, the predisposition of the child or adolescent. **Respect the child's right to stop the interview at all times.**
5. In the case of questions that are not understood, it is recommended that you try rephrasing them so that the child or adolescent understands them and can respond appropriately.
6. If the interview is carried out with the help of an interpreter, make sure that he or she translates exactly what the child or adolescent says, without summarising their answers.

Once the interview is over, thank the child or adolescent for their participation, remind them of the next steps involved and how the interview will be shared, and try and answer any questions or doubts the interviewee or their parents or community have about your work.

**Establish a respectful,
equal relationship.**



How to present information about children and adolescents

The way in which a news item, interview or report is presented will determine the message the audience receives, so the following are some recommendations for writing the interview or report:

1. Never give information that could lead to the identification of the interviewee, like their name, address, where they study, the name of their parents or guardians, or excessive details about the violent situation to avoid exposing them to violent situations or discrimination.
2. If the interview or report is carried out in contexts in which children and adolescents are participating (congresses, movements, organisations, etc.) it is possible to give some information like age and area, but without giving away their location (and always with written authorisation). Remember that the less information provided to the general public, the safer the participants will be.
3. It is important to bear in mind that interviews about violence against children and adolescents must only be carried out with someone who has **overcome** the violent or abusive situation. Accompany the interview with reliable information about the situation, contextualise the information by citing public policies and specific legislations, and most of all do not exploit the situation for commercial purposes. We would like to reiterate that interviews should not be carried out with people **who are experiencing** a violent or abusive situation, as this would be tantamount to repeating the violence, and therefore revictimising.
4. When choosing supporting images and sounds, try to always use ones which support the opinion or story expressed by the child or adolescent, and not those which could distract the audience from the main theme or narrative.
5. Use friendly, positive, inclusive language, which makes it possible to refer to all the people who participate in the activity with respect within the rights framework, with a gender-based approach and avoiding all types of stigma and demeaning terms such as “teenage delinquent” or “handicapped”. When choosing the terms it is important to take into account that the language used should not classify the person, but the situation they are/were in.

For example: it is incorrect to use the term “raped” to refer to a child that has suffered sexual violence. The language should refer to the situation using the term “child victim of abuse or sexual violence”.

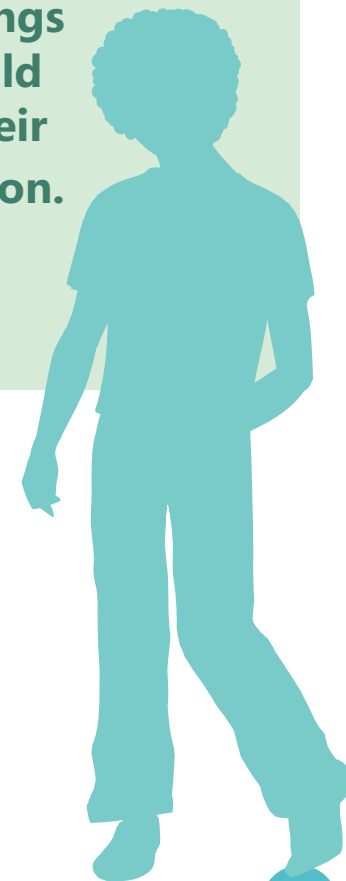


Photographing and filming children and adolescents while respecting their rights

An interview or report often also includes photographs or videos of the interview. For handling images of children and adolescents we recommend:

1. Obtaining the relevant informed consent. Explaining clearly to the child or adolescent and the adults responsible for them what the photographs or videos are for and where they will be published.
2. Presenting the children and adolescents as rights holders, and in a positive light, even if they are in a vulnerable situation.
3. Being respectful when capturing images. Make sure it is as natural as possible, do not ask for them to pose, re-enact or repeat actions which means they are acting.
4. Whether or not the face and surroundings of the child or adolescent appears, as we mentioned, depends on the context and contents of the interview or report.
5. Use alternative ways to illustrate information about children and adolescents in vulnerable situations without using photographs, even if the images are blurred.
6. Avoid stigmatising children and adolescents through the images used.

News items or reports on situations of violence should NOT use images of children or adolescents or their surroundings if this could lead to their identification.



And finally...

If you have the chance, once you have completed the interview, edition and public presentation, talk to the adults responsible for the children and ask for the relevant permission to meet the child or adolescent again to show them the results.

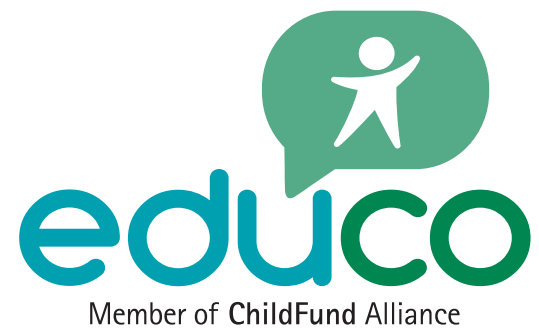
This new meeting must **ALWAYS** be organised and in the presence of a parent or guardian and respect the interests of the child or adolescent.

Finding out the opinion and feelings of the interviewees can be very useful for journalists and communication professionals and will give the child or adolescent the sense that they were part of a process and not just an instrument in a news item.

Journalists and communication professionals have a transcendental role in constructing the public's views and perceptions. Information provided by the media is often not questioned or doubted, so the way a story is presented will be understood as valid by the person that receives it.

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR RESPECTING EVERY CHILD'S
RIGHT TO A DIGNIFIED LIFE FREE FROM ALL KINDS OF
VIOLENCE.





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