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The BBC aims to reflect the world as it is, including all aspects of the human experience and the realities of the natural world. In doing so, we balance our right to broadcast and publish innovative and challenging content appropriate to each of our services with our responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

When we broadcast or publish challenging material which risks offending some of our audience we must always be able to demonstrate a clear editorial purpose. Such material may include, but is not limited to, offensive language, humiliation, sexual violence and discriminatory treatment. We must be sensitive to audience expectations, particularly in relation to the protection of children, as well as clearly signposting the material.

HARM AND OFFENCE EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

- We will not broadcast material that might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of children.
- We observe the television Watershed to ensure material that might be unsuitable for children is appropriately scheduled.
- We signpost and label challenging material to ensure our audiences have enough information on which to judge whether content is suitable for themselves or their children.
- We keep in touch with the expectations of our audiences for all our services.

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

We should judge the suitability of content for our audiences, including children, in relation to the expectations of the likely audience at a particular time on a particular day, and in relation to the nature of the service as well as the nature of the content. We should ask ourselves the following questions:

- what is the likely composition of the audience, including the likely number and age range of children in the audience taking into account school time, weekends and holidays? We should be aware that school holidays are different in different parts of the UK.

- does the talent, slot, genre or service carry pre-existing expectations which may be challenged by the content?
- is harm or offence likely to be caused by misleading the audience or in the inclusion of difficult or challenging material?
- has any difficult or challenging content been clearly signposted?
- are there any special sensitivities surrounding the slot, for example religious festivals and anniversaries of major events?
- what is the likely “pull-through audience”, i.e. what is the nature of the preceding content and what kind of audience is it likely to attract?

SIGN POSTS AND CONTENT INFORMATION

To ensure that our audiences are not taken by surprise, we must clearly sign post difficult content on all of our services using a combination of appropriate scheduling and content information which is simple, consistent, and factual. Whenever possible, this information should appear in press releases and other publicity, billings, Ceefax, trails, on air and online announcements, and electronic programme guides. See Section 9 Children. We must consider giving clear information about the content of some pre-Watershed programmes, programmes which start before the Watershed and run beyond it, and post-Watershed programmes, as well as for radio programmes broadcast when children are particularly likely to be listening.

SCHEDULING OF PROGRAMME TRAILS

Trails for radio and television programmes that are unsuitable for children must be carefully scheduled:

- trails scheduled next to programmes targeted at children or when children are particularly likely to be watching should be suitable for that audience.
- trails for post-Watershed programmes must be appropriate for family viewing if shown before the Watershed.

TELEVISION AND THE WATERSHED

Television scheduling decisions need to balance the protection of young people and particularly children, with the rights of all viewers, particularly those without children, to receive a full range of subject matter throughout the day. They must also be judged against the requirements of the Watershed.

The 21.00 television Watershed is used to distinguish between programmes intended mainly for family viewing and those programmes intended for an adult audience. However, the BBC expects parents and carers to share in the responsibility for assessing whether programme content is suitable for their children.

Programmes broadcast between 05.30 and 21.00 must be suitable for a family audience including children. The earlier in the evening a programme is placed, the more suitable it should be for children to watch alone. Programmes in later pre-Watershed slots may not be suitable for the youngest children. Only in exceptional circumstances can there be any departure from this rule, and then clear content information should be given, for example images that some children might find distressing in natural history programmes or in the 6 O'Clock News.

Programmes that straddle the Watershed, that is start before 21.00 and finish sometime after 21.00, must be pre-Watershed compliant throughout.

After 21.00 the post-Watershed transition to more adult material should not be abrupt and should reflect the nature of the channel and viewer expectation. The strongest material should appear later in the schedule. If sudden changes of tone are unavoidable they should be clearly signposted, for example giving clear information about scenes of a sexual nature, violence or the use of offensive language.

Interactive services connected with television programmes must observe the Watershed. This also applies where online users provide content to a live service associated with a television programme.

Programmes must be clearly commissioned for broadcast before or after the Watershed to allow careful judgements to be made during the production process about the suitability of content. Late changes to originally agreed transmission slots, particularly any proposal to broadcast a programme before rather than after the Watershed, may result in significant re-editing to ensure that the programme complies with these editorial guidelines for harm and offence,

particularly in relation to offensive language.

NEWS CHANNELS

The nature of news means that it is not always possible to avoid showing material that might distress some of our audiences before the Watershed. Our international news channels do not normally operate a Watershed policy because the news is shown live across different time zones around the world. Wherever appropriate we should provide clear content information to signpost difficult images, particularly those that may be distressing for children.

RADIO AND ONLINE

Radio and online do not have Watersheds. Our scheduling and publishing decisions need to be relevant to the audience expectations of each radio network and online service and informed by our knowledge of when children are particularly likely to be listening or whether online content is likely to appeal to a high proportion of children. For example, children are particularly likely to be in our radio audience at breakfast time, during the school run and school holidays, which vary throughout the UK. We should also take care to ensure that the transition to more adult material is not unduly abrupt. Decisions about online apply equally to user-generated content and third party websites as to content created by the BBC.

We should consider how far audience expectations are influenced by the platform on which user-generated content appears. Internet-based user-generated content which is also carried on television or radio may raise different expectations to the same material carried on personal computers.

We need to anticipate possible problems when broadcasting “live” radio programmes and deal with them promptly and sensitively if they occur.

We should normally play edited versions (“broadcast versions”) of music which would otherwise feature unsuitable material, including offensive language or violent content, for mainstream daytime audiences. At night and in specialist music programmes, the original “adult” version may be editorially justified.

We should consider using on air announcements to inform listeners about programmes which contain difficult or controversial material on our speech services such as Radio 4, Radio 5 Live, the World Service and other national and local stations’. These services are predominantly for adult listeners and their audiences expect to hear a full range of issues and events explored throughout the schedule.

Our live online services, where users provide content connected to a television or radio programme, **should take the same approach to harm and offence as the programme itself** and should reflect the sensitivities of the likely audience.

Websites linked to specific programmes should not contain material considered unsuitable for broadcasting in the associated programmes.

CHILDREN AND DANGEROUS IMITATION

Children can be influenced by what they see, hear and read. We must ensure that behaviour likely to be easily imitable by children in a manner that is dangerous, must not be broadcast before the Watershed or when children are particularly likely to be in our audience for radio, or online when content is likely to appeal to a high proportion of children. Very careful judgements are required about material which might lead to dangerous imitation, including the use of domestic objects in violent acts (e.g. knives, hammers and scissors). Such material must not be featured in output made primarily for children unless there is a strong editorial justification.

When hazardous activities such as rock climbing, snowboarding or white water rafting are portrayed before the Watershed, we must give warnings about the dangers of imitation without expert supervision.

VIOLENCE

Our audiences, particularly children, can be upset by the portrayal of both real and fictional violence and so we should normally clearly label violent content.

When real life violence, or its aftermath, is shown on television or reported on radio and online we need to strike a balance between the demands of accuracy and the dangers of desensitisation or unjustified distress. See Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies.

Our editorial judgements about violence need to consider a number of factors which, in combination, can increase the impact of violence:

- violence that is true to life and may also reflect personal experience, for example domestic violence, pub brawls, football hooliganism, road rage and mugging.

- violence in places normally regarded as safe such as the family home, hospitals and schools.
- unusual or sadistic methods of inflicting pain, injury or death.
- incidents where women and children are the victims.
- violence without showing the effect on the victim or the consequences for the perpetrator.
- sexual violence.
- verbal aggression, particularly the use of sexual swearwords.
- suicide, attempted suicide or self harm.
- broadcast reactions of others to violence, especially those of children.
- post-production techniques such as atmospheric music, slow motion, graphic close ups and sound effects.

We should take care to ensure that individual programmes, or programmes taken together across the schedule, avoid including material that condones or glamorises violence, dangerous or seriously anti-social behaviour, or material that is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour, unless clearly editorially justified.

VIOLENCE AND THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

We must ensure that verbal or physical violence that is easily imitable by children in a manner that is harmful or dangerous is not featured in programmes made primarily for children unless there is a strong editorial justification.

We should also ensure that material containing gratuitous violence, whether verbal or physical, is not broadcast in pre-Watershed programmes or when children are particularly likely to be in our radio audience or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children. Any portrayal of verbal or physical violence, or its after-effects, must be editorially justified.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ANIMALS

Audiences, particularly children, can often be distressed by images or scenes which show human violence against animals. If the scenes are graphic but we know that the animal suffered no harm, then we should consider saying so in an on air or online announcement or caption. See Section 7 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour – Recording Illegal Activities Involving Animals.

NUDITY

Nudity before the Watershed must be justified by the context.

SEX

In all BBC output the portrayal of sex, or the exploration of sexual issues, should be editorially justified and treated with appropriate sensitivity.

Programmes must not portray representations of sexual intercourse, unless there is a serious educational purpose, when broadcast before the Watershed/or when children are particularly likely to be in our audience for radio or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children.

Programmes broadcast pre-Watershed, or when children are particularly likely to be in our radio audience or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children, should not portray inappropriate sexual behaviour or contain explicit sexual discussion unless clearly editorially justified.

We should provide support when online interactive areas encourage teenagers to discuss their problems. This could include addresses of a range of relevant websites or the phone numbers of authoritative helplines.

We must be able to justify the frank and realistic portrayal of sex and the exploration of themes and issues which some people might find offensive in post-Watershed programmes.

The explicit portrayal of sex between children and adults is illegal and should not be depicted at any time on any of our services. See Section 16 Law – The Protection of Children Act.

LANGUAGE

Offensive language is one of the most frequent causes of complaint. It can be a particular source of offence in sub-titles or online.

Judgements about its use are difficult because they depend on tone and context. There is no consensus about words that are acceptable, when, and by whom. Different words cause different degrees of offence in different parts of the world. So a person's age, sex, education, employment, belief, nationality, and where they live, all impact on whether or not they might be offended.

We do not include any offensive language in pre-school children's programmes or websites (four years and under).

We must not include offensive language in programmes or websites made for younger children except in the most exceptional circumstances.

We must not include offensive language before the Watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children, unless it is justified by the context and then its frequent use must be avoided.

We must be able to justify the use of offensive language in challenging factual programmes, comedy and drama broadcast throughout the day on our speech radio stations. It will also generally require clear content information.

We must not include the MOST offensive language before the Watershed, or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children.

We must make careful judgements about the use of the MOST offensive language post-Watershed and ensure it is clearly signposted.

Any proposal to use the MOST offensive language (cunt, motherfucker and fuck) must be referred to and approved by a senior editorial figure or for Independents by the commissioning editor and the relevant output controller for television, radio, online and any other service. Chief Adviser Editorial Policy may also be consulted.

Language that causes most offence includes:

- sexual swearwords.
- terms of racist abuse.
- terms of sexual and sexist abuse or abuse referring to sexuality.
- pejorative terms relating to illness or disabilities.
- casual or derogatory use of holy names or religious words and especially in combination with other offensive language.

PORTRAYAL

We aim to reflect fully and fairly all of the United Kingdom's people and cultures in our services. Content may reflect the prejudice and disadvantage which exists in our society but we should not perpetuate it. We should avoid offensive or stereotypical assumptions and people should only be described in terms of their disability, age, sexual orientation and so on when clearly editorially justified. See Section 12 Religion.

ALCOHOL, SMOKING, SOLVENT AND DRUG ABUSE AND ILLEGAL DRUGS

We must balance the need to reflect the range of public attitudes and behaviour realistically, with the danger of encouraging potentially damaging or illegal behaviour, particularly amongst children.

The use of illegal drugs, the abuse of drugs, smoking, solvent abuse and the misuse of alcohol should not be featured in programmes made primarily for children unless there is a clear editorial justification.

Unless editorially justified we should not encourage, glamorise or condone the use of illegal drugs, the abuse of drugs, smoking, solvent abuse and the misuse of alcohol:

- **in pre-Watershed programmes or in post-Watershed programmes likely to be widely seen by under eighteens.**

- **on radio when children are particularly likely to be listening or when programmes are likely to be widely heard by under eighteens.**
- **in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children.**

We should also:

- ensure that contributors to programmes, including studio debates or chat shows, do not smoke. They can be reminded of this before recording or live transmission begins.
- deal accurately with all aspects of illegal drug use, solvent and drug abuse, smoking and misuse of alcohol including the consequences.
- ensure the legal and social context of our coverage is clear.
- avoid revealing too much detail of solvent abuse and illegal drug use and remember graphic close ups of injections upset some people.

SUICIDE, ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AND SELF-HARM

Suicide, attempted suicide and self-harm should be portrayed with great sensitivity, whether in drama or in factual programmes. Care must be taken to avoid describing or showing methods in any great detail and content producers should be alert to the dangers of making such behaviour attractive to the vulnerable. Both the on air and online factual reporting and fictional portrayal of suicide, attempted suicide and self-harm may encourage others. The sensitive use of language is also important. Suicide was decriminalised in 1961 and since then the use of the term "commit suicide" is considered offensive by some people; "take one's life" or "kill oneself" are preferable alternatives. We should consider whether to offer a helpline number or provide support material when our output deals with such issues. The Chief Executive of the Samaritans is happy to be consulted by content producers about the portrayal of suicide.

Any proposal to broadcast a hanging scene, portray suicide, attempted suicide or self-harm must be referred to a senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor, who should also consult Chief Adviser Editorial Policy.

SAFETY AND THE LAW

We should normally observe the law, both in the UK and other countries, unless there is clear editorial justification for not doing so. This includes ensuring that presenters, actors and contributors use seatbelts, fit child car seats correctly, use crash helmets and the correct mobile phone equipment when driving.

We should also show the commonsense use of safety equipment wherever practical unless there is clear editorial justification for not doing so. This includes using protective headgear and clothing for sports and leisure activities, particularly those popular with children, for example cycle helmets, knee and elbow pads and helmets for skateboarding, life jackets for water sports and eye protection for DIY activities.

TRAGIC EVENTS

The aftermath of a tragic event may require scheduling changes on television and radio or the alteration or removal of web pages. We should scrutinise all BBC content to ensure that we avoid widespread offence. Storylines in films and dramas, the subject matter of factual programmes, and jokes in comedy shows may be regarded as offensive in the light of a tragic event. Anniversaries of tragic events, for example rail crashes, bomb blasts or child abductions, also call for considerable sensitivity.

HYPNOTISM

The Hypnotism Act 1952 requires any demonstrations of hypnotism for public entertainment to be licensed. It prohibits demonstrations on people under eighteen and applies to any broadcast demonstration of hypnotism at, or in connection with, an entertainment which admits the public.

Although we have no evidence of harm or potential harm regarding the use of hypnosis on television or radio, we should still take steps to minimise any risk of inducing hypnosis and/or adverse reactions in susceptible viewers or listeners. In particular, a hypnotist must not broadcast his/her full verbal routine or be shown performing straight to camera. Hypnotism acts in entertainment programmes, particularly those designed to ridicule someone, should be treated with care. They might be both harmful and offensive to our audience.

Any proposal to feature a demonstration of hypnosis must be referred to the relevant senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor.

EXORCISM, THE OCCULT AND THE PARANORMAL

We must act responsibly when including material looking at any aspect of exorcism, the occult, the paranormal, divination or any related practices, particularly in pre-Watershed programmes, on radio when children are particularly likely to be listening, or in online content likely to appeal to a high proportion of children.

Demonstrations of such practices in factual programmes must be treated with due objectivity and in entertainment programmes they must be clearly labelled. Also they should not normally contain advice about health, finance, employment or relationships which could encourage people to make life changing decisions.

ACQUIRED PROGRAMMES

Acquired programmes must comply with our Editorial Guidelines on harm and offence. We should check them prior to broadcast to ensure the content is suitable for the proposed slot. A film classification is only a guide and special care should be taken with films rated as “18” certificate, which should not play before 21.00 on any service.

We should not normally broadcast a film or programme refused certification by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). For further details refer to rule 1.20 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.

We should not normally broadcast illustrative clips from a film or programme refused certification by the BBFC, without clear editorial justification.

FLASHING IMAGES, STROBING AND PHOTO SENSITIVE EPILEPSY

To minimise the risk to viewers who have photosensitive epilepsy we should follow the Ofcom guidance referred to in rule 2.13 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code. On rare occasions it may not be reasonably practicable to follow this guidance, as when flashing content is unavoidable, for example in a live news report and when it cannot be remedied technically but when it is editorially justified. In such cases our audience should be given a verbal and, if appropriate, a text warning at the start of the programme or programme item.

Any proposal to include flashing images or strobing sequences in recorded programmes which fail the Transmission Review technical checks must be referred to the relevant Channel Controller for approval through a senior editorial figure or for Independents through the commissioning editor.

IMAGES OF VERY BRIEF DURATION

The Agreement associated with the BBC's Charter states that programmes should not "include any technical device which, by using images of very brief duration or by any other means, exploits the possibility of conveying a message to, or otherwise influencing the minds of persons watching or listening to the programmes without their being aware, or fully aware, of what has occurred." **A producer who thinks their content might contain such images should consult a senior editorial figure or for Independents the commissioning editor, who may also consult Editorial Policy.**