

## CHILDREN

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Children and young people are very important to the BBC. We aim to provide them with challenging, educative, enjoyable and interesting content to help them make sense of the world in which they live. They also interact with us in many different ways – as contributors, actors, presenters and via our online and interactive services.

It is not always easy to strike a balance between the competing interests of the children who participate in our output, and the views and ambitions of their parents or our audiences. But we must always safeguard the welfare of the children and young people who contribute to our content, wherever in the world we operate, which includes their right to speak out and to participate.

For the purposes of the BBC Editorial Guidelines, a child is someone under the age of 15 years. Young people are those aged 15, 16 and 17. However, these are not legal definitions. See BBC Child Protection Policy below and Section 16 Law – Children and the Law.

## **CHILDREN EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES**

- We must ensure that the physical and emotional welfare and the dignity of people under the age of eighteen, and in particular children under fifteen, are protected during the making and broadcast of programmes and online content, irrespective of any consent given by them or by a parent, guardian or other person in loco parentis.
- We must ensure that children and young people are not caused unnecessary anxiety or distress by their involvement in programmes or by their broadcast. Their involvement must be clearly editorially justified and support should be given to them where necessary.
- We must balance our responsibility to protect children and young people from unsuitable content with their rights to freedom of expression and freedom to receive information.

## **BBC CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

We should apply the principles of the BBC Child Protection Policy in our dealings with children and young people. In this context, children and young people refer to people under the age of 18. The welfare of someone under the age of eighteen is our paramount consideration. This means their interests and safety must take

priority over any editorial requirement. All children and young people, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religious belief and sexual identity have a right to protection from harm or abuse.

**In the course of our work if we suspect a child may be at risk, or we are alerted by a young person to a child welfare issue (including allegations against BBC staff) the situation must be referred immediately to the divisional manager with responsibility for the Child Protection Policy.**

**Any incident of suspected “grooming” online must be referred to Executive Producer, Communities Group, New Media Central who will be responsible for reporting it to BBC Investigations and to the police.**

### **CHILDREN AND CONSENT**

We should normally seek the consent of parents or legal guardians, or other persons of eighteen or over in loco parentis, before interviewing children or young people, or otherwise involving them in our output. The younger and more vulnerable the child, and the more sensitive the subject matter, the more likely it is that consent is essential. In particular, children should not be asked for views on matters likely to be beyond their capacity to answer properly, without consent.

Content producers who are featuring children and young people in their output must:

- ensure that the child and, when necessary, the parent/guardian, or other person of eighteen or over in loco parentis, understand the nature of the programme and are able to give informed consent.
- obtain the consent of the child or young person and respect any refusal to take part. In deciding whether a child can give consent, the stage of development and degree of understanding as well as their age should be taken into account.
- normally obtain the consent of the parents/guardians/other person in loco parentis to the child’s participation or contribution. An exception may be when recording vox pops with children on non-controversial subjects such as pocket money or favourite singers.
- **refer any refusal of parental consent to a senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor, who should**

**also consult Editorial Policy.** Any decision to proceed without parental consent is normally only editorially justified on the basis of a clear public interest or the freedom of the child or young person to express themselves, including their right to speak out.

- ensure that any reasonably foreseeable consequences of the child's participation are made clear, for example the possibility of bullying.
- not give any financial inducement to the child or parent/guardian to secure consent. The payment of expenses is acceptable as long as they are reasonable and legitimate.
- obtain permission from the head teacher for filming or interviewing on school premises or during school hours. In law, Local Education Authorities license all child performances during school hours.

**When we ask children for personal information online we need to consider what degree of parental consent is appropriate.**

**Any proposal to reveal a child's personal information to a third party without consent, for example if we suspect child abuse, must be referred to a senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor, who may consult Controller Editorial Policy and Programme Legal Advice.**

**When we invite children to interact with us via the telephone we must tell them on air to obtain the consent of a parent or bill payer before making the call.** If, in exceptional circumstances, calls last more than a minute, the message needs to begin by telling children that consent should be obtained. Call cut offs must be used for all children's services and the cost of calls for children's services should not normally be more than the cost of writing in.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**We must consider carefully the impact and possible consequences of any material which involves a child,** both during the production process and once the material has been broadcast. This applies whether or not we have secured parental consent.

**Children are often eager to contribute to our output but many lack the judgement necessary to assess the longer-term impact it may**

**have on their lives.** We should consider consulting experts about the best way of approaching interviews and minimising distress, when featuring anti-social, harmful or illegal activity amongst children, such as illegal drug use, abuse, eating disorders, and bullying.

**It is also often advisable to have a third party present, such as a relative, family friend, or teacher, when sensitive issues are being discussed with a child.** This ensures there is someone there who is familiar to them and who can help safeguard their interests.

**We should ensure children and young people are given a voice** but we must also be alert to occasions when children exaggerate, try to please or report gossip or hearsay as fact. Criminal or anti-social behaviour should not go unchallenged.

### **ANONYMITY**

**Difficult ethical issues arise when we consider whether identification or anonymity of children involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour is in their best long-term interest.** We should not normally identify children when featuring such behaviour to illustrate a practice, unless there is a clear editorial justification. Always seek advice from a senior editorial figure, or for Independents the commissioning editor, if you are unsure how to proceed.

Any queries about whether it is possible to identify a child with an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) should be referred to Programme Legal Advice.

The decision to involve, feature or identify children whose parents are engaged in anti-social or criminal activity should only be made if the welfare of the child will not be harmed and if it is clearly editorially justified. This is particularly important when children may be at risk because, for example, they are living with an alcoholic parent or being forced to work as couriers of illegal drugs.

### **ONLINE CHILD PROTECTION**

We aim to ensure that children and young people taking advantage of our changing technologies understand the possible risks they face and how to minimise them. The online protection of children is a shared responsibility between the BBC, parent/guardian and the child. See Section 8 Harm and Offence – Radio and Online.

Private online space where strangers can routinely meet and exchange personal information is not suitable for children until a reliable method of digital identification is available. This is because it cannot be monitored to safeguard child users. **Any proposal to the contrary must be referred to Director, New Media and Technology.**

We should be careful about how much personal information we collect, reveal and retain about children anywhere on the BBC site. Publication of too much information may put a child at risk.

### **CHILDREN, ONLINE CONTENT AND LINKS**

We should ensure that websites which are likely to appeal to a high proportion of children and young people carry appropriate content. In particular:

- any material on the BBC home page must be suitable for a general audience, including children, and the first click from the BBC home page should not normally lead straight to a page which includes material unsuitable for a general audience.
- we should not link from a site whose associated radio or television programme is designed to attract a child audience to one whose associated radio or television programme contains material which is clearly unsuitable for children.
- any live streaming of TV pictures on the web which is trailed on the home page should normally be suitable for a family audience.
- we should check the content on third party sites and take care about where it might lead.
- we should not link to unmoderated chat rooms for an audience of children.

We pre-moderate sites designed to appeal to children and where user-generated content is published as well as areas which invite users to email pictures for publication.

**Any proposal to use any other form of moderation will need to be able to demonstrate that this offers a high level of child protection and should be referred to Editorial Policy.**