

## Media Guide for Reporting on Child Abuse

Reporting on child abuse is a difficult, but important, duty of journalists. This guide was created to help reporters, producers, and editors make informed decisions concerning their coverage of crimes involving children.

The sensitivity of the topic, the graphic nature of allegations, and the public outrage that accompanies a case can be overwhelming. However, media professionals have a unique opportunity to impact public awareness on the issue of child abuse. Each story is your chance to help your audience understand that fewer children will experience abuse or neglect when communities work together to prevent it.

Together, we can champion and strengthen the global response to child abuse by stimulating positive social change in our own communities.

When reporting the facts of crimes against children, it is important to discuss the impact of public disclosure of the details. Below are some issues to consider:

- Will details of the report inadvertently disclose the identity of the victim? (1, 2, 3, 4)  
(Ex. John Doe is charged with sexual abuse. Investigators say the victim is his step-daughter/niece/girlfriend's son.)
- Will revealing a child's identity, even with the permission of the parent or guardian, adversely impact the child in the future? (1, 2, 3, 4, 6)
- What is the viewer benefit of knowing all the facts of the case? Are some details too heinous? (5)
- Are you using the correct, legal terminology for the crime? (8)

Nobody is talking.

It's the phrase every reporter dreads saying and every producer detests hearing. It is rare for someone directly involved with the case to agree to an interview.

In order to keep the story in the news cycle without compromising the case, consider expanding the story to include the impact of abuse and possible solutions. For example:

- How is the community working to prevent child abuse?  
Talk to your local Children's Advocacy Center, to Child Protective Services, and/or law enforcement.
- How could this type of abuse impact a child later in life? How does therapy help children heal from abuse?  
Talk to a mental health professional who specializes in childhood trauma and evidence-based treatment.
- Who is covered under mandatory report laws in your state?  
Talk to a local legal expert, have them explain who is covered, why, and what can happen to those who violate this law.
- Does the area have a survivors' network?  
Talk to a spokesperson about the resources available for the victim and the victim's family.
- What is the prevalence of this type of crime in your community?  
Talk to the local police department/sheriff's office or prosecutor about the number of cases they see in a year or a month.

## Self-Care

Every experienced journalist will, at some point, be personally impacted by a story. The details that are revealed in testimony or court documents show the ugliest side of humanity. Secondary Traumatic Stress is real and can lead to long-term issues including PTSD, depression, and substance abuse. The Dart Center provided these tips for dealing with trauma on the job. (7)



Defuse with someone you trust.



Maintain normal activities and routines, but slow down.



Monitor for delayed reactions.

Seek professional help if distress continues 3 to 4 weeks after assignment.

If an assignment leaves a journalist feeling too vulnerable, management should support the journalist's decision to request an unrelated assignment.

## References

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