

Media Guide

A Guide for Media Professionals Reporting on Child Abuse

Child Abuse is a complex issue that can be difficult to report on.

The media are essential in reporting its facts accurately, especially at times of great tragedy. Journey Center for Safety and Healing offers this media guide to assist reporters, copywriters, headline writers, editors, and producers when covering stories that involve domestic violence through a more engaged and empowering lens.

In this media guide you will find:

- What is Child Abuse
- Do's and Do Not's When Talking About Child Abuse
- Ohio and National Media Resources

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failing to act, causing injury, death, emotional harm, or risk of serious harm to a child. There are many forms of child maltreatment including: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, and emotional abuse.

Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child. It can be an intentional act which results in harm to the child. It can also be an unintentional act in not meeting or responding to a child's basic needs.

Key Facts to Remember about Child Abuse

- Child abuse doesn't only happen in poor families or "bad" neighborhoods. Child abuse crosses all racial, economic, and cultural lines.
- Most abusers are family members or others close to the family.
- While it is true that abused children are more likely to repeat the cycle as adults- many adult survivors of child abuse have a strong motivation to protect their children against what they went through and become excellent parents.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years).
 - For example: experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, and witnessing violence in the home or community
- ACEs are common
 - About 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported that they had experienced at least one type of ACE, and nearly 1 in 6 reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.
- ACEs can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and opportunity.

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The Do's

- Think about the impact of reporting details of the story.
 - Will certain details disclose the victims' identity? Example: John Doe is charged with sexual abuse, investigators say the victim is his niece/step-daughter/etc.
 - Will revealing a child's identity – even with permission of the guardian – adversely impact the child in the future?
- If a victim isn't old enough to legally give consent, ensure your story reflects that.
 - Youth under the age of 16 cannot give consent in the state of Ohio.
- Be mindful of the language you use in your story.
 - Sexual abuse is not a relationship. Repeated sexual abuse is not an affair.
- Examine the factors that contribute to child abuse.
 - Explore community and societal factors: poverty, unemployment, lack of social support for parents, and violence in our community.
- Explore the long-term consequences of failing to prevent child abuse.
 - Examples: children who are abused are at a higher risk for health problems as adults. The total lifetime economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect was approximately \$124 billion in 2008.
- **Promote help seeking by displaying resources:**
 - *When appropriate, posting the local number, rather than the national number will decrease the number of people a victim will have to talk to in order to receive services.*
 - **Journey Center for Safety and Healing**
 - 24-Hour Helpline:
 - Call or text: 216.391.4357 (HELP)
 - Live chat: Journeyneo.org

The Do Not's

- Record/show video and/or pictures of Journey Center's Offices, clients, or staff that are not interviewed for the story

Warning Signs of Child Abuse

- **Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse:** Excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong. Shows extremes in behavior. Doesn't seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver.
- **Warning Signs of Physical Abuse:** Frequent injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts. Is always watchful and "on alert," as if waiting for something bad to happen. Shies away from touch, flinches at sudden movements, or seems afraid to go home.
- **Warning Signs of Neglect:** Clothes do not fit properly, not laundered, or inappropriate for the weather. Hygiene is consistently bad or poor. Untreated illnesses and physical injuries. Is frequently unsupervised or left alone.
- **Warning signs of Sexual Abuse:** Trouble walking or sitting. Displays knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to their age. Makes strong efforts to avoid a specific person, without an obvious reason.

How to Help

- **If a child discloses abuse:**
 - Remain calm. Avoid making facial expressions when the child is speaking.
 - Listen closely to what the child has to say. Limit questions or interruptions when possible.
 - Reassure the child they have done the right thing by telling.
 - Don't interrogate. Let the child explain to you in their own words what happened, but don't interrogate the child or ask leading questions.
 - Help make the child feel comfortable. Telling someone about abuse is difficult and uncomfortable.

Additional Resources & References

- [Journalists need more help than ever coping with work trauma](#)
 - *Columbia Journalism Review. August 12, 2019*
- [How journalists can take care of themselves while covering trauma](#)
 - *Poynter. May 29, 2019*
- [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)
- [ACEs](#)

Journalists can play a powerful role in helping build a society where fewer people make excuses for violent behavior, fewer people blame victims, and where all members of our community are informed and empowered to take action against domestic violence.