



napac

The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood

Media guidelines for  
reporting child abuse

# About NAPAC

NAPAC is the only national organisation offering support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

- We run a free national support line for adult survivors of child abuse
- We run support groups for survivors.

- We train professionals who have frequent contact with survivors of child abuse in the course of their work, such as police, the prison service, housing officers, mental health professionals and addictions workers.
- We advocate on behalf of survivors in the media and elsewhere.

## Media contact

Tel 020 7614 1814 [media@napac.org.uk](mailto:media@napac.org.uk)

**PLEASE INCLUDE DETAILS OF SUPPORT AT THE END OF YOUR PROGRAMME**

## Support Line

NAPAC's Free telephone support line for adult survivors of child abuse, **Support Line 0808 801 0331**  
[napac.org.uk](http://napac.org.uk)

If you come across information which indicates that current children are at risk of harm, seek advice from local Children's Services or the police.

**If in doubt, report.**



# Why read these guidelines?

## Good reporting can:

- **Improve understanding about how child abuse happens**
- **Reduce the stigma facing survivors of child abuse**
- **Assist police investigations**
- **Bring about discussions which will help to make society safer for children today and in the future.**

Whether you are a news reporter or write storylines for soaps, we hope this will make you more aware of how media coverage may affect survivors.

Media coverage often focuses on celebrities or abuse in institutional settings, but the majority of people are abused by a relative or somebody known to them.





# Language

Avoid using	Instead try	Why?
'victims'	'survivors'	Many adults who were abused as children prefer to be known as 'survivors' rather than 'victims' in recognition that they have survived what they have been through, and that they are not permanently stuck in that place of abuse as a 'victim'.  Survivors are a diverse group and so are opinions on this. Some prefer 'thriver' or 'abusee'. NAPAC recognises that in a legal context 'victim' is the word that has to be used, given that this is the terminology that exists in legislation.
'historic' or 'historical'	'non recent child abuse' or state the decade in which the abuse happened.	Rapes are not referred to as historical, nor are child murders or even bank robberies that happened years ago. Survivors may be living with the physical and mental consequences of abuse every day. There is nothing historic about it for them.
'child porn', 'kiddie porn' or 'child pornography'	'child abuse images' or 'indecent images of children'	'Child pornography' makes a comparison with adult sexual imagery and almost normalises it. This only serves to diminish what is a gross sexual violation of children – all child abuse images are crime scenes. Children by definition cannot consent to their own abuse
'affair' or 'fling'	'child sexual exploitation'	A child who is in a sexual relationship with an adult is being exploited and there is likely to have been grooming, coercion or deception involved.
'rent boy' or 'child prostitute'	'sexually exploited child'	These outdated terms stigmatise and blame children who have been exploited by adults for profit.

'Child abuse' is a broad term. When adults are violently raped or tortured, it is described as serious crime. If you are referring to child rape, call it rape rather than abuse. Refer to sexual assaults and sexual crimes. Pre-watershed shows may have to avoid such specifics, because of younger viewers.

Not all abuse is sexual or physical. Emotional abuse and witnessing horrific domestic abuse in childhood can have terrible impacts into adulthood.

# Working with case studies

**Case studies bring a story to life. Although there are some common themes in survivors' experiences and responses, each case is individual, so please do not generalise or make assumptions about the impact of child abuse on an individual survivor.**

## Do's and don'ts

### 1. Vulnerability and anonymity

- Don't try to persuade someone to waive their right to anonymity, particularly ahead of a court case.
- If you agree to protect someone's identity, ensure that the disguise is completely effective.
- Think about all possible risks to a survivor whose account may become exposed to the public.
- If someone chooses to be identified, they may want a lawyer to be present to protect their rights to privacy. Make sure they have psychological support, too.

### 2. Avoid excessive detail

- When reporting on court cases, avoid publishing excessive detail about the abuse, as this can add to the distress of the victim, who may be in a vulnerable state.
- Survivors who are going through the legal process are entitled to receive psychological support.
- Excessive detail may upset other survivors and can trigger flashbacks for those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It can also be stimulating for offenders.



# Working with case studies

## Do's and don'ts (continued)

### 3. Contaminating evidence

- Locations, methods of offending, descriptions or personal details may enable friends, family, communities and perpetrators to identify individuals.
- Sharing too much information can also undermine a potential prosecution, by contaminating evidence.
- If there is an ongoing police investigation, the person should seek advice from the officer in charge of the case.

### 4. Do not compromise legal proceedings

- Child abusers may be serial offenders, so naming an accused person in the media can help bring perpetrators to justice by enabling other witnesses to come forward.
- Their evidence might be an account of what happened to them or corroboration of another survivor's account.
- Take care not to make assumptions of guilt, sensationalise reporting of allegations or interfere with the legal process.
- Do not offer a survivor or whistle-blower rewards which could be interpreted as coaching or influencing the accuracy and authenticity of the evidence.
- Be mindful of future legal proceedings and the responsibility to protect current child victims.



# Working with case studies

## Do's and don'ts (continued)

### 5. Don't ask leading questions

- Let the survivor speak about their experience in their own words. Ask open questions. Do not ask leading questions, make assumptions or suggest answers.
- Throughout an interview you should quietly acknowledge the survivor's feelings and emotional responses. For example, "I can see that this is very difficult for you to talk about, but it would help me to understand a bit more about what happened if you explained if anyone else was present at the time".
- Child sexual abuse at its core does not make sense, so how a survivor feels about it may be complex.

### 6. Accuracy

- Inaccurate or manipulative reporting may lead to survivors being portrayed in the media as unreliable.
- Malicious or false allegations are extremely rare and no more likely with child abuse than for any other type of crime whether evidence is presented by children or by adult survivors.
- Take care not to make assumptions of guilt, sensationalise reporting of allegations or interfere with the legal process.
- Sometimes defence lawyers and media use 'false memory' and other theories as a way of dismissing genuine accounts. This adds to the fear of speaking out for some survivors and reaffirms a belief that there is nobody out there they can trust.





A close-up portrait of a man with short, light brown hair, looking upwards and slightly to the left with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a dark blue or black polo shirt. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some architectural elements like a door frame.

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