



CARE USA Guidelines for Involving Children in Advocacy and Public Relations

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As an organization dedicated to fighting poverty by addressing its root causes and supporting people's efforts to help themselves, CARE frequently works with children¹ around the world. CARE believes that it is vital to involve children in ethical, humane ways that do not jeopardize their safety and security. To ensure this, CARE staff and partners can use the principles and checklist below for involving children in advocacy and public relations initiatives.

Principles²

1. The dignity, rights and safety of every child are to be respected and protected in every circumstance.
2. Children have a right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution. Children's right to have their views taken into account are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
3. The best interests of each individual child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights in general.
4. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the potential political, social and cultural ramifications for the child of any reportage.

¹ Children are defined as people between the ages of birth and 18 years of age, including adolescents.

² These principles were adapted from UNICEF's "Principles for Ethical Reporting on Children," available from http://www.unicef.org/media/media_tools_guidelines.html.

Checklist: Involving Children in Advocacy and Public Relations Initiatives³

Before you involve children in advocacy or public relations initiatives, make sure you have asked yourself these questions:

Consent

- Have we obtained consent for the child's involvement in our activity from:
 - The child him/herself, and
 - An adult whom we can be reasonably certain has the child's best interests in mind, such as the child's parents or guardians? It is also important to keep in mind that the child's right to refuse participation should be respected, even if caregivers agree to his/her involvement.

- Do the child and his/her parents or guardians know how we will use words and images, and where they will be published or displayed? Do they understand that these records are permanent, and are likely to be around when the child is an adult?

- Have we ensured the child's free expression without outside pressure?

Accuracy

- Are we providing an accurate context for the child's story or image? Have we avoided "staging" pictures of children or manipulating stories for our own purposes?

- Have we confirmed the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both?

Avoiding Stigmatization and Harm

- Have we avoided stigmatization through descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals, including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities or their governments? Have we avoided harming the child through questions, attitudes, or comments that are judgmental or insensitive to cultural values, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events?

³ This checklist was adapted from UNICEF's "Principles for Ethical Reporting on Children," available from http://www.unicef.org/media/media_tools_guidelines.html, and from "Five Key Questions to Ask Yourself about Children and Displays & Media Exposure."

- ☑ Have we used images and stories that show children in a good light (attractive, clever, able, confident) and avoided showing children only in a negative light (sick, unhappy or needy)?
- ☑ Have we made sure not to unfairly raise expectations of the children involved in our activity, and their parents or guardians? It is important to avoid exposing children and their families to vastly better circumstances than they face in their home environment, with little or no follow-up or benefits from the experience after they return to their everyday lives.
- ☑ Have we ensured that children involved in our work have the support of an accessible adult mentor (or adult mentors), particularly if they are being taken out of their home environment or are discussing difficult or painful topics? These adults could also be a source of continued support when the children return to their homes, and of continued advocacy for the children's needs.
- ☑ Have we sought out local psychosocial support services, if there is an immediate need?
- ☑ Have we made sure not to discriminate in choosing children because of sex, race, age, religion, status, economic and educational background or physical abilities?
- ☑ Have we changed the name or used the first name only (if this will not identify the child) and obscured the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
 - A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
 - A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
 - HIV positive or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent,
 - Charged or convicted of a crime,
 - A current or former child combatant,
 - An asylum seeker, a refugee or an internally displaced person?
- ☑ Have we determined if using the child's identity is appropriate in these special cases:
 - When a child initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and their right to have their opinion heard;
 - When a child is part of a sustained program of activism or social mobilization and wants to be so identified;

- When a child is engaged in a psychosocial program and claiming their name and identity is part of their healthy development;
 - When the child wishes to participate as an advocate in spite of the potential for stigmatization due to his/her HIV status or the HIV status of his/her family members?
- If in doubt about whether a child is at risk, have we reported on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story?