The media has an important job to do in reporting stories of child abuse and neglect. The Department of Human Services also has an important job in protecting children who are victims of abuse and neglect. Media coverage can improve the public’s understanding of the issues surrounding child abuse and the work of child welfare agencies. But children who would be the subject of these stories deserve to have their identities and their futures protected.

DHS and the media can work together to tell these important stories while protecting innocent child victims and keeping the public informed of issues surrounding child abuse and neglect.
Associated PRESS
*Best Practices for Covering Children and Teens YOUNGER than 18*

Associated Press policy is not to identify minors who have been subjected to abuse. The AP advises the standards of respect for the child be balanced with news value. When it concerns interviewing children and youth, the AP’s anonymity policies apply. The AP advocates that it may make even more sense to grant anonymity to protect a young source, to use a first name only or not to show the child’s face. Cases may include children who have done something illegal, are crime or abuse victims, or otherwise fear retaliation or ostracism. See more at: [www.ap.org “Standards and Practices-Privacy”](http://www.ap.org).

The RADIO and TELEVISION
Digital News Association: *Guidelines for IDENTIFYING JUVENILES*

The RTDNA have guidelines and questions journalists should consider when deciding whether to identify a child or juvenile. According to the RTDNA, juveniles deserve a special level of privacy protection, and crime victims and children below the teenage years deserve more protection because of their vulnerability. See more at: [www.rtdna.org, “Guidelines for Identifying Juveniles”](http://www.rtdna.org).

The DART CENTER for Journalism and Trauma (a product of the Columbia Journalism School): *Covering Children and Youth: A Dart Center Tip Sheet for College Media Advisors, Editors and Student Journalists- Jul 31, 2014: [www.dartcenter.org](http://www.dartcenter.org)*

Things to **CONSIDER BEFORE** Identifying a Surviving **CHILD** or Youth **VICTIM** of Child Abuse or Neglect

**MOTIVATION**
Carefully examine the motivations of people seeking to publicize a child’s story, what they have to gain, and if the information can be verified.

**NEWsworthINESS**
Determine if there is any newsworthy reason to identify an innocent child by name or image and if that outweighs the child’s right to privacy.

**STIGMAtISM**
When telling stories about child abuse or neglect, avoid descriptions that further
stigmatize children, possibly exposing them to additional physical or psychological harm, or to discrimination by their local communities.

**CHILD DEATHS**
When a child dies from abuse or neglect, the child is typically identified in stories about the circumstances leading to his or her death. If there are surviving brothers or sisters, the identities of siblings should continue to be protected.

**IDENTIFICATION**
Do not name, and obscure the visual identity, of any child who is:

1. A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation
2. HIV positive or living with AIDS (unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent)

**Helpful WAYS to Present INFORMATION**

**BROADER ISSUES**
Media play an important role in reporting about the broader issues of child abuse and neglect, which includes analysis of policy, practice, research, rates and trends, and other areas of public interest.

**CHALLENGE MISCONCEPTIONS**
Covering child abuse and neglect sensitively and accurately can challenge public misconceptions and myths about child welfare involvement, increase community awareness and encourage discussion and prevention activities.

**IDENTIFY SIGNS**
When the public understands how to identify signs of possible abuse and neglect and how to report it, children can be better protected and potential tragedies can be averted.

**PERSONAL STORIES**
Personal stories such as youth who have overcome an abusive childhood or foster parents who have made a positive difference in a child’s life can promote hope and may encourage others to get involved.
When it’s **OK** to **IDENTIFY** a **CHILD**

In certain types of stories, using the child’s or youth’s name or recognizable image is in his or her best interest. However, these children and youth must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatization or reprisals.

Some examples of when it’s OK:

- When a youth initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise his or her right to freedom of expression and the right to have the opinion heard
- When a child or youth is part of a sustained program of activism or social mobilization and wants to be so identified
- When DHS helps children to find adoptive families through television waiting child series such as “Wednesday’s Child”

If it is determined necessary and appropriate to identify a child or youth in a story:

**CONTEXT**
Always provide accurate context for the child’s story or image.

**ACCURACY**
Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, or preferably with both.

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