



napac

The National Association for
People Abused in Childhood

Media guidelines for reporting
non-recent childhood abuse

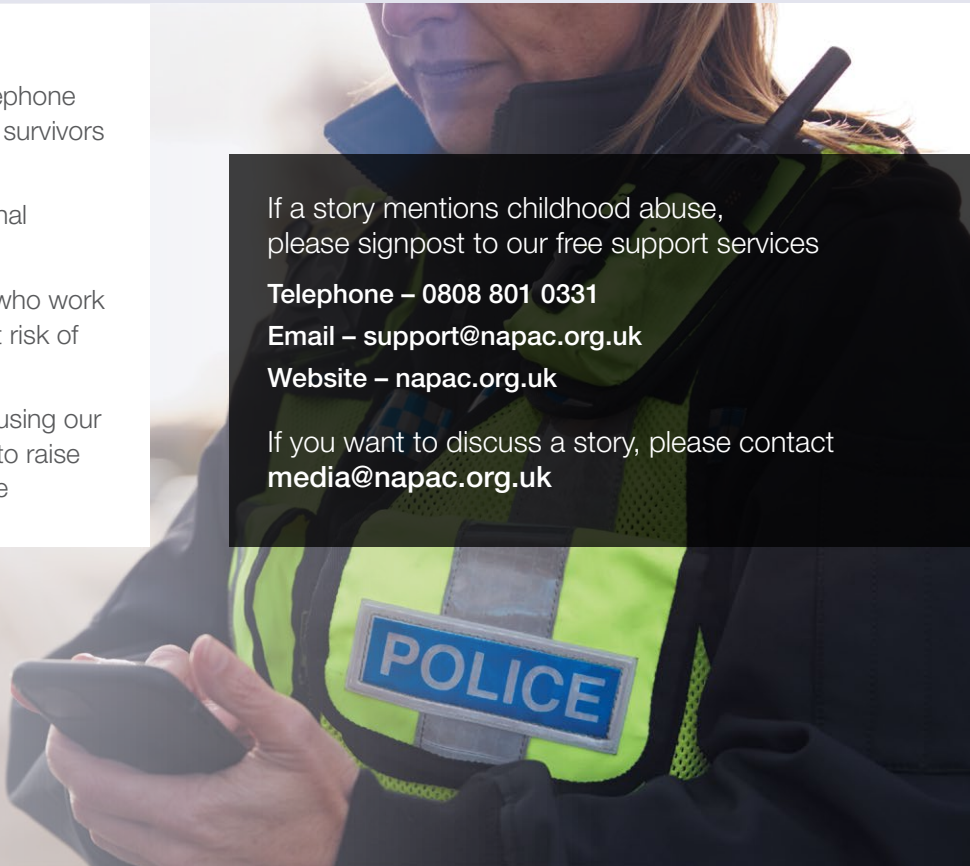


About NAPAC

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) offers support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. NAPAC provides the only free support services for adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse across the UK.

We have four main services:

- We run the UK's only free national telephone and email support service for all adult survivors of any kind of childhood abuse
- We deliver intensive psycho-educational support groups for survivors
- We provide training for professionals who work with survivors of abuse and anyone at risk of vicarious trauma
- We conduct research and advocacy, using our own data and working in partnership to raise survivors' voices in policy and practice



If a story mentions childhood abuse, please signpost to our free support services

Telephone – 0808 801 0331

Email – support@napac.org.uk

Website – napac.org.uk

If you want to discuss a story, please contact media@napac.org.uk

Trauma-informed reporting



Whether you are a journalist, producer, or write storylines for soaps, we hope that these guidelines will help you to be more aware of how media coverage can affect survivors. These guidelines apply NAPAC's trauma-informed approach to media work with survivors and their stories.

Good reporting can:

- Reduce the stigma faced by survivors
- Start positive conversations around disclosures
- Improve understanding of how abuse happens
- Help to make society safer for children today and in the future

The principles of reporting on childhood abuse:

- Survivors' voices are integral to the story. We appreciate that in many instances they may not want to speak publicly about the abuse they experienced, but they should always be consulted if it is their story that is being told.
- Sensitive media coverage with a positive message (i.e., positive outcomes and empowered survivors) is often extremely helpful to other survivors who have not yet disclosed.
- In the event you are commenting on an ongoing legal case, be aware of any reporting restrictions in place, mindful of the impact of speculation and considerate of how the survivor may be feeling at this time.
- Media coverage and dramatizations often focus on stories involving celebrities or institutional settings, but most abuse is perpetrated by a relative or somebody known to the child.
- Language is powerful. Childhood abuse is not a topic that needs to be sensationalised or stigmatised. Where possible report in factual terms and signpost to support services for anyone who may be triggered by the story or be inspired to disclose.



Language

'Childhood abuse' is a broad term. When adults are physically or sexually assaulted or raped it is described as serious crime using those terms. When the victim is a child, you should still refer to the crime using the correct legal terminology. If you are referring to the rape of a child, call it a rape, rather than abuse. It is important that these crimes are depicted in a straightforward and true manner as 'softening' the language can obscure the severity of these crimes.

In some media it may be necessary to adjust the terminology used, to be appropriate for a younger audience for example, but the terms used should still be accurate.

Remember that not all abuse is sexual or physical. Emotional abuse, neglect and witnessing domestic abuse and violence in childhood can also have lasting impacts into adulthood.

Avoid using	Use instead	Why?
'victims'	'survivors'	NAPAC recognises that in a legal context 'victim' is the correct term as this is used in legislation. However, many adults prefer to be known as 'survivors' in recognition of surviving a traumatic crime. Survivors are diverse and individuals will have their own preferred terms.
'historic' or 'historical'	'non-recent childhood abuse' or state the decade in which the abuse happened	No other serious crimes are described as 'historic'. Survivors are living with the consequences every day. Many cases are successfully prosecuted decades after the abuse occurred, and reporting this accurately can help more survivors disclose.
'child porn', 'kiddie porn' or 'child pornography'	'child abuse images' or 'indecent images of children'	'Child pornography' makes a comparison with adult sexual imagery. This only serves to diminish what is a gross and criminal violation of children. Children cannot consent to abuse. All child abuse images are pictures of crimes.
'affair' or 'fling'	'child sexual exploitation'	A child who is in a sexual relationship with an adult is being exploited. Using the terms for consensual adult relationships can embolden abusers and harm adult survivors and current child victims.
'rent boy' or 'child prostitute'	'sexually exploited child'	These terms stigmatise and blame children who have been exploited by adults for profit. Children cannot consent to sex work and their exploitation is a crime.

Working with survivors

believe in yourself

Survivor testimonies, case studies and quotes can bring a story to life and put a face to the statistics. There are five key points to consider when working with a survivor on their case study.

1. Vulnerability and anonymity
2. Detail and evidence
3. Active cases
4. Avoid leading questions
5. Accuracy

1. Vulnerability and anonymity

- a) Think about the different risks to a survivor when sharing their story publicly. Talk these through with the survivor so they can make an informed decision about what to share and if they want to remain anonymous.
- b) Consider legal advice for yourself and the survivor if they choose to identify themselves, especially as this may also identify perpetrators. Even if remaining anonymous, they may also want to have a friend or professional there to provide emotional support.
- c) If you agree to protect someone's identity, ensure the protections are completely effective for their voice, appearance, and location.
- d) Don't try to persuade someone to waive their right to anonymity, particularly ahead of a court case.
- e) Where possible, share a preview with the survivor, allowing them time to request edits.

2. Details and evidence

- a) When reporting on abuse avoid publishing details about exactly what took place and how it happened, as this is distressing for survivors and emboldens perpetrators.
- b) Even if a survivor remains anonymous, avoid describing locations, methods of offending, and personal details that identify an individual.
- c) Take extra care when writing a story about a potential or current criminal case as sharing details can undermine the prosecution by contaminating evidence.
- d) If there is an ongoing police investigation, recommend the survivor seek advice from the officer in charge of their case first to ensure working with you won't jeopardise their case.
- e) Survivors who are going through the legal process are entitled to practical and psychological support.



3. Active cases

- a) When a legal case is ongoing, take care to avoid language that assumes guilt or sensationalises allegations, as this can interfere with the case.
- b) Do not offer a survivor or whistle-blower rewards that could be interpreted as coaching or influencing the accuracy and authenticity of the evidence.
- c) Perpetrators of abuse can have multiple victims over many years. Sometimes the police want to work with the media to help find victims of known offenders.
- d) Be mindful of the potential for future legal proceedings and our responsibility to protect other adult survivors and current child victims.

4. Avoid leading questions

- a) Let the survivor speak about their experience in their own words. Ask open questions. Do not ask leading questions, make assumptions, or suggest answers.
- b) Acknowledge the survivor's feelings and responses and thank them for trusting you. Offer to take breaks and give them the option to stop.
- c) Use compassionate, open questions, such as "If you are comfortable, can we talk more about how you felt after the case concluded?"
- d) The abuse of children is not logical or rational, and how a survivor feels about their experiences will likely be complex.

Include signposting to NAPAC so those affected by a story know who to contact for support



5. Accuracy

- a) Inaccurate or manipulative reporting can lead to survivors being perceived as unreliable.
- b) Malicious or false allegations are extremely rare whether evidence is presented by children or by adult survivors.
- c) Sometimes defence lawyers use ‘false memory’ and other discredited and fabricated theories to undermine the credibility of a survivor’s testimony. Avoid mentioning them.
- d) Accurate reporting can help survivors feel able to seek support and make a disclosure, challenge the isolation many feel, and provide opportunities to start conversations in a positive way.



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