

Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse:

Empowering the Public
While Protecting the Child



International Centre™
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

ICMEC envisions a world where children can grow up safe from exploitation, abuse, or the risk of going missing. We believe every child deserves a safe childhood.



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As a journalist, you play a critical role in reporting on the issue of child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse tragically impacts children and families in every corner of the globe. By bringing this issue into the light, you play an active role in preventing future abuse.

Reporting can empower the general public to play an active role in preventing, detecting, and reporting sexual abuse and to make sure child sexual abuse and exploitation is seen as a crime.

It is important that accurate information is shared in a manner that does not put the privacy, safety, health, and well-being of a child at risk.

By following these 6 strategies, you will help others see how complex and prevalent child sexual abuse and exploitation is while protecting victims, avoiding revictimization or further trauma, and not disrupting the legal due process.

The International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC) has compiled key points to consider when reporting on child sexual abuse which have been developed from our experience over more than two decades in partnering and training professionals in the most effective strategies to prevent, investigate and prosecute online exploitation and supporting children who have experienced sexual abuse.

01 DO tell the story.

- By reporting about the realities of child sexual abuse and exploitation, you are removing stigma, showing victims they are not alone, and empowering the public with the knowledge and tools to help prevent and respond to abuse.
- Do analyze child abuse and sexual exploitation as a social, cultural, economic and legal issue.
- Don't use graphic detail about child sexual abuse when reporting on it.

02 Avoid images of the victim or graphic images.

- Don't use an image of the child, other children not related to the case, or an image that shows family members, schools, villages, neighborhoods or circles of friends.
- Avoid using a blurred image or partially blurred image of the child as it still is a risk to the victim and is not necessary to tell the story. Small identifiable characteristics can still show in these photos.
- If you are uploading your story to a platform, check to make sure your content and images don't violate the platform's policies.

03 Don't share information that could lead to the identification of the victim.

- Don't include the child's name or the names of the child's family members.
- Don't include the victim's exact relationship to the offender.
- Remove any location references, including village, street name and name of school.

04 Avoid triggering your readers.

- Consider adding trigger warnings to your content when appropriate. Reading an article about this topic can often trigger someone that has dealt with something similar.

05 Do help break myths and stereotypes that help create ongoing situations of vulnerability.

- Chose words carefully to avoid stereotyping. For example, avoid mentioning that the adolescent who was sexually abused had a history of gang violence. Or a child who was groomed online spent their day alone on the computer. These actions do not justify abuse.
- Use language that describes an experience rather than assigning a trait to the child's identity. For example, say "a child who experienced sexual abuse" rather than "a sexual abuse victim."
- ICMEC has an up-to-date glossary of terms available for your reporting at www.icmec.org/glossary

06 Do share support resources.

- Use your news report as an opportunity to highlight and provide links to resources in your community that support all victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Visit our list of Support Resources for Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse at www.icmec.org/hotlines-and-helplines/