



Tips and guidance: Informed consent

The following document provides some guidance on informed consent, how to obtain it, and how to protect children when communicating their stories.

What is informed consent?

Informed consent puts children at the centre of decisions about how they will be depicted. Children and parents/guardians should be informed:

- Why the picture is being taken
- What the image will be used for and who is likely to see it
- They can withdraw their consent at any time without repercussion or adverse consequences. Reassure the child that is okay to say 'no'!
- They can choose to have their name changed and their identity concealed if they wish to
- The photo/story will not make reference to the actual location where it was taken. No child's exact location should be made possible by the publication of photo or story.

Obtaining informed consent: guidance and caution

- Children are taught from a very early age how to obey adults. This might make it difficult for a child to refuse to have their photo taken. Pay attention to a child's body language – consent may be verbally given but a child may still be uncomfortable.
- Consent should be given freely and willingly. Make sure that children are not pressurized, coerced or deceived into giving consent by any stakeholder – be it family, local partners or other staff members.
- Anonymity should be described in a way that children will understand – reassure the children that personal or physical information that could be used to identify them will not be published.
- Children who are mentally unstable, or who have been through a highly traumatic incident and may be suffering from post-traumatic stress are not likely to be ready to tell their stories. Use your judgment about whether the child in question has the capabilities to give informed consent.
- Informed consent is an ongoing process – it is important to regularly remind children that they can change their mind at any point in the process, or after the process has taken place, and there will be no repercussions.

Telling children's stories: Key principles

- **Children should be able to give their own accounts as much as possible** rather than letting others speak on their behalf. Efforts should be made to seek out first-person testimonials.
- When writing/amending a case study, ensure you are delivering an **accurate and balanced** portrayal of the child, with an accompanying **emphasis upon their dignity**.

- **Avoid representations of children that depict them as passive victims or that sensationalise the experiences they have been through.** Emphasise children's 'agency': i.e. children's ability to take action to improve their own situations.
- **Names of children should always be changed** by the person generating the case study/picture and remain consistent with any caption accompanying the picture, unless the child is adamant that their real name is used and there are no perceived risks to the child with using their real name.
- **Locations should be generic.** There should be no detailed information that might enable a third party to independently locate a particular child from a case study based upon the information
- If a photo is used with a case study, **the child should not be identifiable if any information in the story could criminalise or stigmatise the child in question.** You can use silhouettes, cropped pictures or side-shots instead.