Children and Young People: Managing their Participation in Broadcast

Issued: 11 April 2011

Status of Guidance Note

This Guidance Note, authorised by the Managing Director, is provided to assist interpretation of the Editorial Policies to which the Guidance Note relates. Guidance notes provide advice to assist in the interpretation of the Editorial Policies, which contain the standards enforceable under the ABC’s internal management processes and under the ABC’s complaints handling procedures.

It is expected that staff will normally act in accordance with the advice contained in Guidance Notes. In a given situation there may be good reasons to depart from the advice. This is permissible so long as the standards of the Editorial Policies are met. In such situations, the matter should ordinarily be referred upwards. Any mandatory referrals specified in Guidance Notes must be complied with.

Key Editorial Standards

Excerpts of key editorial standards relevant to this Guidance Note are set out below. Other editorial standards may also be relevant, depending on the specific circumstances applying in each case.

8 Children and young people
8.1 Take due care over the dignity and physical and emotional welfare of children and young people who are involved in making, participating in and presenting content produced or commissioned by the ABC.
8.2 Before significant participation of a child or young person in content produced or commissioned by the ABC, or in interactive services offered by the ABC, consider whether it is appropriate to obtain the consent of both the child/young person and the parent/guardian.
8.3 Adopt appropriate measures wherever practicable to enable children and young people, or those who supervise them, to manage risks associated with the child/young person’s participation with, use of and exposure to ABC content and services designed for them.
8.4 Take particular care to minimise risks of exposure to unsuitable content or inappropriate contact by peers or strangers.

12 Commercial references
12.3 Take particular care to minimise commercial references in content designed for children.
Mandatory referral

Where parental or guardian consent has been refused, withdrawn or is inappropriate to obtain, and the item is of sufficient public importance or the child's appearance is absolutely necessary to the content, the matter must be referred to an appropriately senior ABC person designated for the purpose, before taking any decision to proceed.

Scope of this guidance note

This document provides guidance about the creation of ABC children’s broadcast content and the management of children’s participation in it. A separate guidance note is available on Children and Young People: Managing their Participation Online.

For the purposes of this guidance, a child or young person is an individual under the age of 18.

Content for children

The ABC presents content for children of all ages. Material for young audiences is extensive and designed to reach different target groups in accordance with their needs, age and level of maturity.

In providing enjoyable, enriching and culturally relevant content for children, the ABC does not wish to conceal the real world from them. ABC content can help children make sense of the world and understand and deal with situations which may include violence and danger. Children's content should be relevant to children, rather than imposing adult concerns and expectations about children's behavioural standards.

Special care should be taken to avoid stereotypes and discrimination in content designed for children.

Management of commercial references

Our audiences value the ABC’s role as a non-commercial broadcaster and its non-commercial style. While the ABC acknowledges that reflecting the real world in our content may involve referring to commercial products, organisations and services, we must balance this with the need to maintain the ABC’s integrity and independence as a non-commercial broadcaster.

This is particularly relevant to ABC children’s content which parents appreciate as a non-commercial space for their children. Commercial references should be kept to a minimum, always be contextually relevant and not overtly frequent or prominent. The ABC should take particular care about including commercial products in content that are also highly covetable items for children, such as mobile phones, games, mp3 players etc. Should such products be required as props or set dressing, be aware of how their inclusion may influence children and ensure references don’t appear to be an endorsement of a particular product or brand.
Protection of children

The ABC has a responsibility to protect children from potential harm that might arise during their engagement with the ABC and its content. Children’s interests and safety must take priority over any editorial requirements. We must ensure that children are not caused unnecessary anxiety or distress as either contributors or consumers of content.

We must balance our responsibility to protect children and young people from unsuitable content with their rights to freedom of expression. Classification and use of tailored viewer advice information assists children and parents to make decisions about the suitability of content e.g. in some situations G content may be targeted to teenage audiences rather than pre-school children.

Special care should be taken to ensure that content which children are likely to watch or access unsupervised should not be harmful or disturbing to them. Images of domestic violence and violence against children or animals may be particularly upsetting for children. Where violence is part of a story, and children can make sense of the narrative, it is less likely to upset them.

Participation and consent

Children and young people can be involved in ABC content in a number of ways: as actors, interviewees, participants, subjects and as content makers themselves.

A child's consent to participate in content should be sought and their refusal to take part respected.

Consent of a parent or guardian is usually required before involving a child in the production of ABC content and there would need to be good reason for not seeking such consent. In the case of very young children or when the subject matter is sensitive, consent is essential. In particular children should not be asked for views on subjects likely to be beyond their capacity to answer properly without consent.

Consent may take various forms, depending on the context and the nature of the child’s participation. For example, where a child is featured prominently in content, parental and child consent should take the form of a standard written release. For a child’s participation in a street vox pop sequence or interview, verbal consent would be appropriate.

When filming groups of children, consideration should be given as to whether, in the circumstances, the identity of individuals should be protected.

If children are to take part in content-making during school hours, consent may be obtained from the school authorities.

Where parental or guardian consent has been refused, withdrawn or is inappropriate to obtain, and the item is of sufficient public importance or the child's appearance is absolutely necessary to the content, the matter must be referred upwards before taking any decision to proceed.