



CRIN
CHILD RIGHTS INFORMATION NETWORK

Media Toolkit

This toolkit, as with all CRIN documents, will be updated as new information comes to light. In the meantime, please let us know if you have any suggestions or comments. Email info@crin.org

This guide has been compiled with two goals in mind: to help organisations with media activities and communications, and to help organisations in submitting information for CRIN. The toolkit is arranged under several headings:

- **Submitting articles and reports to CRIN**
 - **Submitting events**
 - **Submitting job adverts**
- **Turning a press release into news**
 - **Writing emails**
 - **For journalists**
- **How to write for the Web**
 - **Speaking to the media**
- **How to get letters published in the media**

Submitting articles and reports to CRIN

[For a members guide on how to submit resources straight onto CRIN's website using our 'Content Management System', visit: <http://crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=15170&flag=report#ge>]

We very much value your experiences and knowledge here at CRIN, where our goal is to disseminate the information you provide so that others, ultimately children, may benefit from your expertise. As such, we hope the following guide to submissions will not deter you from sharing information. Rather, it is intended to make the best use of your time.

Above all, have in mind **who** is likely to be reading the information, and **what** they may find interesting and/or helpful. Below are some dos and don'ts:

DO check that the item is not already on the CRIN website.

DO send recent news about child rights. For example law being discussed, policy changed, plan implemented, advances achieved, a neglected area of child rights highlighted

DO send reports about child rights (recent if possible)

DO send us your feedback and ideas

DO send information you think may be helpful for child rights organisations

DON'T send information which is only relevant to a particular organisation or small group of people eg. Fundraising event, annual report

DON'T send personal opinion pieces which do not offer anything new

BBC news style guide: <http://www.bbctraining.com/pdfs/newsstyleguide.pdf>

Events

DO send us information about public events

DO include who, what, where, how and why. In other words, what is happening? Who are the organisers? Where is it happening? etc

DO include contact details, and where people can find more information

DO send us follow-up information about the event, outcomes etc

DON'T send information about events which will only be relevant to a narrow group of people, for example an organisation's fundraising event, or annual general meeting.

DON'T send information about an event which is less than a month away

BEWARE fraudulent events. Criminals are using more and more sophisticated techniques to advertise non-existent events which they charge people to 'attend'. You may receive an email directly addressed to you, and there may even be a link to a website which looks perfectly genuine. For more information, visit: <http://crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=8463>

Job adverts

We are happy to publish job adverts (relating to child rights) in our CRINMAILS.

They need to:

- Be a maximum of three paragraphs long (and not more than approx. 100 words)
- Include a deadline for applications
- Include all relevant contact details
- Include a short description of the post
- Include a brief description of the organisation
- Indicate where applicants may find further information

Please note we do not include details of salary, or person specifications.

Job adverts are not posted on the website, although they can be found on the page where CRINMAILS are archived.

Turning your press release into news

The first question to ask yourself is: **what is the story?** Journalists publish stories, not just information about your organisation. The better the story, the closer it will be to the front page. So make sure the information is newsworthy, and ask how you can make it of interest and relevance to readers. Can you issue the press release to coincide with a more recent news event?

Know what you want to say. This may seem obvious, but if you are not clear what it is you want, or want to say, the press release will reflect this.

Who are you writing for? This will affect how you write and what you say.

Once you are clear about the content of the press release, you can concentrate on **how to write it**, with our five-step guide.

1. **Keep it simple.** Good, clear writing could be crucial and an otherwise interesting press release may be snubbed if it is written badly. Keep asking yourself: what is it I am trying to say? Then write as if you are recounting a story to a friend or family member.

Eg. DON'T say: "The National Group for the Protection of Child Rights has decided to integrate its strategic plan into national protection mechanisms through a process of consultations beginning with an event this September." DO say: The National Group for the Protection of Child Rights is hosting a conference on 17 September 2007 on the subject of child protection in Swaziland. Avoid jargon and 'UN-speak'.

2. **The What, Who, Where, When, Why, How rule.** In other words, what is happening/happened? Who is/was involved? Where is it/did it happen? etc. This information should be in the first three paragraphs of any story.

E.g. "The Kenyan Commission for the Prevention of Discrimination Against Children is set to release a new report on children and disabilities.

Called "Kenya's Forgotten Children", the report will be officially launched at 11am, at Nairobi Town Hall, Cole St, Nairobi, tomorrow, 23 May 2007.

The report will address the growing problem of discrimination towards children with disabilities in schools."

Or, "Five children under the age of ten have been discovered working at a shoe factory in New Delhi. The children, whose names cannot be revealed because of reporting restrictions, were found at 4pm yesterday (23 May 2007) by members of the Indian Coalition Against Child Labour who were carrying out a routine inspection.

The children said they had been working eight hour days in exchange for basic food and bottled water.

For other examples, visit the BBC website www.bbc.co.uk

3. **Keep it short.** Use short sentences and short words. Is each word in the press release absolutely necessary? For example, 'policymaking process' can just be 'policymaking.' **Weighty words lengthen sentences and bulk out content.** Use leaner substitutes instead, e.g.

- Advantageous.....Helpful
- Consequently.....So
- Endeavour.....try

The press release should never be longer than one page.

4. **Make it accurate.** Check for grammar and punctuation, and keep it factual. Avoid exaggeration.

5. **Include ALL contact details:** address, email, telephone, website, fax etc. If issuing a call for information, applications etc. Double check you have included the correct email address.

BBC Action Network: how to write a press release: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/A4288944>

BBC Action Network – the A to Z of campaigning:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/campaignguides>

The Economist style guide: <http://www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide/>

BBC news style guide: <http://www.bbctraining.com/pdfs/newsstyleguide.pdf>

Emails

The principal rule is: Be **clear, concise** and **direct**. As with press releases, think about what you want to say, and do not over-complicate. Remember that people may be receiving many different emails, and might not have time to read all of them properly.

The subject line:

DO give a short, clear indication of the email eg. 'Application for project grant'

DON'T make the title vague or too long e.g 'submission from the Nigerian Coalition Against Child Discrimination for assistance with...etc etc'.

Attachments

DO include an attachment if it contains important information in line with the purpose of the email

DON'T include the whole email as an attachment – opening it gives the reader something extra to do, and gives them more reason to reach for the delete button. Also, there can sometimes be problems receiving attachments.

DON'T add endless attachments, particularly organisation logos or graphics. These can carry viruses and may take too long for people to download, particularly those who work with 'dial-up' internet.

The person you are writing to

DO find out a contact person that you can address the email to.

DO make the email as polite and warm as possible

DON'T make the email look like you have sent it to a hundred people. Someone is more likely to read and consider an email if it is addressed to them, or at least the organisation they work for.

DON'T write the address, telephone number etc of the recipient at the top of the email (like in a letter). It is not necessary and can look overly formal.

Font and style

DO use simple, standard font.

DON'T use large font, different colours, capital letters or pictures/photos unless necessary/relevant. It can look unprofessional, and can take time to download. Bright colours can render the email difficult to read for people with visual impairments.

Contact details

DO make sure you have included the correct details! You may be surprised how often the email address is misspelt or does not work, for example.

DO include: the full name of the organisation, a postal address, telephone and fax number (if applicable), web address (if applicable) and an email address.
If the email contains information for publication, make sure you are happy that these details are made public. If not, say so.

DO find out the language the organisation you are writing to works in. If it is not your first language, try and get someone who speaks the language well to check for mistakes. Note that you can send emails to CRIN in English, French or Spanish.

DON'T include inaccurate information, or details you want to keep private. If an email contains sensitive or confidential information, do make this clear.

The content

DO write in a simple way, explaining clearly what you want or are offering.

DO keep the email as short as possible – certainly no longer than one page

DO use short, simple words (see above: press releases)

DON'T fill the email with lots of irrelevant information which the reader may not have time to read.

BEWARE fraudulent emails. For examples, visit: <http://www.419baiter.com/>

Guidelines for interviewing and reporting on children

Reporting on children and young people has its special challenges. In some instances the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatisation.

For journalists

Media portrayal of children has a profound impact on attitudes to children and childhood, and is an important influence on adults' behaviour towards children.

Media depictions provide role models for young people, influencing their attitudes and expectations. The way in which the media represent, or even ignore, children can influence decisions taken on their behalf, and how the rest of society regards them.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, the media's portrayal of children perpetuates a collection of myths:

- Families in developing countries, children living in poverty and victims of war and disaster lose their individuality and humanity. They are often portrayed as helpless sufferers, unable to act, think or speak for themselves.
- Coverage of children's issues tends to focus on the sensational while ignoring the broad array of issues confronting children, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Media reports about children are often once-off stories, with little or no analysis or follow-up.
- Children's confidentiality is not always respected.
- When children do feature in the news, they are often portrayed as stereotypes such as 'starving children in Africa' and 'irresponsible teenagers'.

Stories of child abuse, children involved in crime and street children tend to dominate, while the broader issues of children's rights, such as the right to play, recreation and sport, or the right to be free from discrimination, are often not regarded as newsworthy. The result is an unbalanced impression of

‘children as victims’, or ‘children as dangerous’.

Gabriel Kessler, sociologist and researcher at Argentina’s National Scientific and Technical Research, says: “The media give scant thought to the important role they play, to how they can generate fear among society. I wouldn’t say that the media’s largely irresponsible coverage of juvenile delinquency is the primary cause of the excessive punishment meted out by the police. But it seems to me that the press outlets operate through hypotheses, completely discredited by scientific studies, that in some way lend support to that legitimization. They report from the perspective of the lost youth, hooked on drugs, unemployed, a career offender, and this can legitimate – even it is not explicitly mentioned in the coverage – the perception that the offending youth needs to be removed from society.”

Guidelines

Interviewing

1. Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.
2. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.
3. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.
4. No staging: Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.
5. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.
6. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for photographs. The request should be made in his/her language and, where possible, permission should be in writing. They should understand the article may be distributed locally, nationally and internationally and permission should not be coerced.
7. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable, and without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

Reporting

1. Do not further stigmatise any child; avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.
2. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.
3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
 - a. A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
 - b. A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
 - c. HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless there is informed consent
 - d. Charged or convicted of a crime.
4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as a current or former child combatant, or an asylum seeker, a refugee or an internally displaced person.
5. In certain cases, using a child's identity - their name and/or recognisable image - is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatisation or reprisals.

6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.
7. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.
8. Verify the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children;
9. Do not make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.

[Compiled from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children: <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?index=192&Language=EN>]

Resources (click on resource to go directly to website)

- UNICEF's Principles for Ethical Reporting of Children: http://www.unicef.org/media/media_tools_guidelines.html
- Putting Children in the Right: Guidelines for Journalists and Media Professionals. Visit: http://www.unicef.org/magic/resources/childrights_and_media_coverage.pdf
- Journalists Talk About Media Violence Against Children (Save the Children Norway)
- The Media and Children's Rights: a Resource for Journalists by Journalists (UNICEF)
- Interviewing Children. A Guide for Journalists and Others (Save the Children UK)
- Children's Rights Centre, South Africa - has produced a check list on child-friendly media

Organisations and websites

- International journalists' network
- Bangladesh children's news agency
- Media Wise - 'for better journalism' (UK)
- Press - Save the Children Norway
- Youth Media and Communication Initiative (YMCI) (Nigeria)
- Ghana Media Advocacy Programme
- Child Rights Alliance for England (UK)

How to write for the web

Studies of how users read on the Web found that they do not actually read: instead, they scan the text looking for key words and sentences.

Make it short

- Use at least 50 per cent fewer words than if you were writing on paper.
- Use the 'inverted pyramid' style, by placing the most important information at the top (like newspaper articles).
- Is it necessary? Do not put content on the website 'just because you can'. Ask yourself if the information is relevant and should be on the website at all.

Make it easy on the eye

- Do not use large blocks of text. Instead, **use bullet points, sub-headings and summary paragraphs** where possible. E.g. <http://crin.org/themes/ViewTheme.asp?id=5>

Make one point per paragraph and then expand on it for the rest of the paragraph. If your first sentence doesn't grab a reader they are likely to skip the whole section

Keep the writing simple

- Avoid exaggeration and jargon. Long words lengthen sentences and bloat content. (See section on press releases).
- Use objective language and a neutral tone. Very biased language (e.g. “CRIN has been doing outstanding work to improve...”) puts people off.

Highlight and hyperlink

- Hyperlinks split up information on your website so pages are shorter. They are often underlined and in a different colour, so stand out.
- Search Engines use hyperlinks to categorise websites, so hyperlinked keywords help to rank your site too.
- Use bold or different colours to highlight key words. Such words stand out and **catch the eye** on a page filled with text. Remember though that too many of these, or different fonts, might be confusing. They may also create problems for people with visual impairments.

And finally...

Check, check and check again. It is rare for a first draft to be mistake-free. First edit the writing yourself, then ask someone else, and finally check it again yourself considering each of the points above.

Speaking to the media

Speaking to the media can be daunting, but these tips can ensure the report reflects what you really want to say.

DO prepare. Know your subject, and think about the questions you might be asked.

DO be assertive. Seize the opportunity to drive your message forward, as well as answering questions

DO say if you don't know the answer. Say you can get back to them.

DO take your time to think about your response.

DO focus on what you want to say. Speak briefly and to the point.

DO return to your messages. Repetition is OK.

DON'T use NGO speak (e.g. global impact monitoring, monitoring and evaluation). Use language understandable to the media.

DON'T repeat negative language. Try and turn negative language into positive.

DON'T let the reporter put words into your mouth. If you are unsure, go back and clarify.

BEWARE of "Off the Record." From the time you meet the reporter till the time she leaves, anything you say may be recorded.

How to get letters published in the media

Here are some guidelines for writing to the press based on talking to journalists and the editors of letters pages.

When writing to the press, try to make sure your letters are:

- **Accurate** - make sure that the information is correct. We demand it of journalists, and should therefore demand it of ourselves. Where possible, support your argument with facts.
- **Prompt** - the speedier the response, the more chance it will get published.
- **Brief** – the shorter the better. Many newspapers receive hundreds of letters a day, so you will have more chance of getting published. Try and focus on one major point, and make your point as early on in the letter as possible.
- **Clear** – any letter must make sense. Be aware that readers may not know as much about a subject as you do.
- **Personal** - letters are often more likely to be published if they contain personal knowledge or experience.
- **Constructive** - remember to praise coverage that you appreciate as well as that which you dislike.
- **Polite** – newspapers will not publish letters that are offensive.

Remember:

There is massive competition for space, so your letter may well not get published. Do not get disheartened. However, letters are passed to reporters, so a well written letter can still make an impact. And if a number of letters address the same issue, at least one of them is more likely to get published.

Always include your contact details in the letter, and if it is hand-written, make sure that it is legible.

For more information, contact CAABU at: caabu@caabu.org, or visit their website: <http://www.caabu.org/index.asp>

If you have any questions or comments on this toolkit, please email info@crin.org.

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