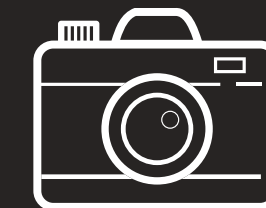


GUIDELINE



# CHILDREN FIRST

How to amplify the voices often left in the shadows, **while** ensuring that every visual resonates with the dignity and rights of children? Explore these tips in our guide.

FEB 2024

by Tinyhand in collaboration with ICFJ



# About

A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when it's an image of a child victim of war and conflict, or a child rescued from **debris**, bewildered and terrified, crying as they search for their parents who might have perished in **bombings**.



Photo by: Maysun Abu khdeir



Photo by: Khalil Ashawi

But not all images and videos are **appropriate** for publication; **as children have** rights and privacy that must be **honoured**. In this guide, developed in collaboration between Tiny Hands and ICFJ, we have attempted to compile tips and steps, **incorporating insights** from **field specialists**, on **responsibly** covering **topics concerning** children in war and conflict zones.

By Hadeel Arja



TOBY FRICKER

COMMUNICATION, ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS AT UNICEF



# THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

Children **enduring** conflict are **the world's** most vulnerable. The **profound** impact of conflict on young lives **exposes** the true face of the horror of war, **leaving enduring physical and mental scars**. Covering and telling their story is critical, **especially since narratives often overlook the voices, visuals, and experiences of children and youth**.

Children's stories are important to tell but also demand a specific and deliberate approach that is **both** sensitive and ethical. **Presenting** visual **narratives** of children in conflict comes with serious responsibilities to ensure no further harm to the child and / or children portrayed.

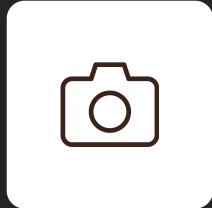


UNICEF-SoP/2023/

TOBY FRICKER

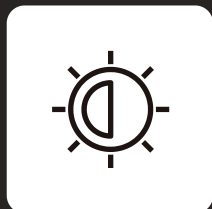
COMMUNICATION, ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS AT UNICEF

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

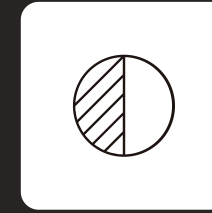


The overriding approach must be to **DO NO HARM** – to not put children at any more risk – and to cover children’s visuals and stories with the best interests of the child as paramount.

When trying to **determine the best interests** of a child, make sure children can have their views considered in accordance with their age and maturity.

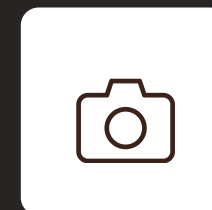


It’s important to **consult those closest to the child's situation** and best able to assess it about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any images and reportage.



### Images of **injured or clearly distressed** children

And their potential use is often governed by the relevant media’s guidelines. The practical action of taking such images needs to be approached with **extreme caution** and **common sense** considering the child will often have no agency in consenting to such an image. In some cases, **it may be deemed the power of the image is for the common good**. Capturing such images must consider how sensitive can you be? What angles can you use, is there a way to maximize depth of field etc. to humanize the situation without not telling the real issue or being exploitative or sensationalist.

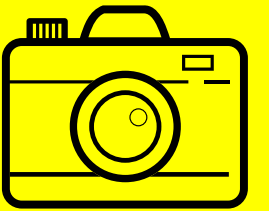


A powerful image alone, without the **right context**, can be used inadvertently to visualize other issues. Any image of a child must ethically be used within the context it was captured, particularly in today’s world where images and information spread rapidly online.

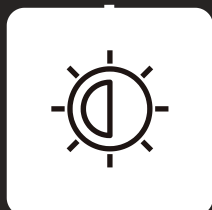


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**Avoid re-traumatizing** when speaking with children and family members affected by conflict. Pushing children to recount their horrors in intricate details can trigger and re-traumatize them. At the same time, interviewing family members recounting horrific stories in front of children can also re-traumatize adults but also the children present. In most cases, such heavy detail is not required, the images and story around that if told well can be powerful enough.



The use of **sensational and overtly simplistic images** portraying children as either violent – with weapons – or simply as victims should be always avoided.

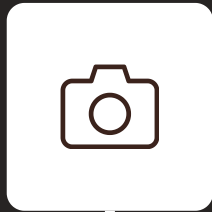


The **identities of children** currently or formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups must never be **disclosed**, whenever this may **jeopardize their safety**. Child soldiers returning to their families and communities often face great challenges reintegrating into civilian life and are often scarred by traumatic experiences. Images today across digital and social media platforms live on and can impact such children not just in the immediate but longer-term.

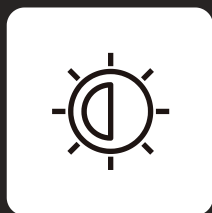


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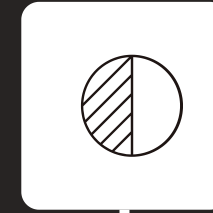
COMMUNICATION, ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS AT UNICEF



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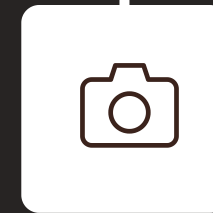


When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, **report on the general situation** for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.



We have a responsibility to not only report when children's rights are being violated but to do whatever we can to **uphold their right to privacy, dignity, and protection.**

Children have **voices and agency** in the situation too, they should not be portrayed as passive agents. Portraying children with dignity and with a stake in the situation are important considerations when taking visuals of children in conflict and other situations.



Always **explain who you are**, your role and how the images may be used to a child, as you would to an adult. For the youngest, be clear about your intentions to the parent/s and / or caregivers.

You should ask the question would I want **my children**, or **myself when I was a child**, to be portrayed in such a way?



JAMAL SAIDI

FORMER CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER IN THE LEVANT REGION FOR OVER 30 YEARS AT **REUTERS**.

# Sensitive Story

Photographing in war and conflict zones means working in a place filled with sensitivities, where the journalist finds himself, herself faced with choices of what to capture and what not to capture due to **professional and ethical considerations**.

The sensitivity lies in capturing images of dead children or those screaming in pain, fear, or distress due to severe injuries. Photojournalist Jamal Saidee, who covered various wars, including the Lebanese Civil War, shares that he avoided photographing **dead children** during conflicts.

Having served as the head of the photography department at Reuters for over 30 years, Jamal covered different wars, including the Lebanese Civil War, **witnessing** massacres of mothers, children, and infants targeted simply because of their affiliation to a specific sect.



Photo by: Jamal Saidi



## JAMAL SAIDI

FORMER CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER IN THE LEVANT REGION FOR OVER 30 YEARS AT **REUTERS**.

While photographers may be compelled to capture images and videos of such scenes for **documentation**, it is crucial not to exaggerate. When covering such events, photographers should refrain from close-up and portrait shots. Instead, they should focus on capturing **general view images**.

"Sensitivities are abundant, and each war brings about **new rules** in media coverage. Wars differ in the shocks they leave behind."

Images that violate the privacy of children, in my opinion, do not convey reality; instead, they fuel hatred and animosity. **Such images do not stop wars**. One can rely on expressive photos that leave an impact, such as a shot of a mother carrying her child in Shatila camp.



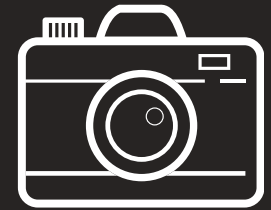
**Photos by: Jamal Saidi**





KHALIL ASHAWI

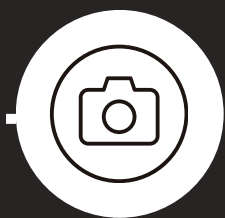
AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER AND FOUNDER OF **FRONTLINE IN FOCUS**



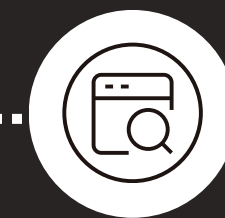
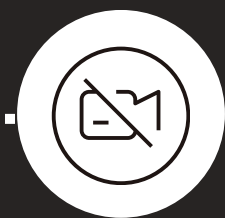
# How to cover a sensitive story?

**Avoid capturing** images of a deceased individual covered in blood or another person in the process of dying. **Respecting the privacy of the deceased** is paramount and should be upheld with utmost sensitivity and professionalism.

Capturing **general images** that convey the situation without direct focus on individuals' faces is a recommended approach.



Carefully examine the location. Is the time and place suitable for entering with the camera and capturing images? Are there any **privacy considerations** that require caution? For example, the targeted location may involve a significant number of women, and the female element requires great sensitivity.



In some cases, when there is an individual **profoundly affected** by the event being photographed, among other sensitivities, the photographer should step back and refrain from approaching for close-up shots.

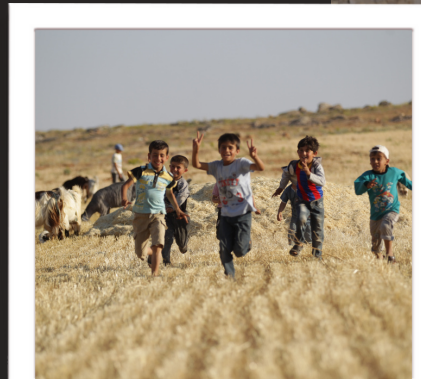


**KHALIL ASHAWI**

**AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER AND FOUNDER OF FRONTLINE IN FOCUS**

In documenting a massacre through photos and videos, you can capture symbolic images that convey the gravity of the situation without revealing identifiable details of deceased individuals. This can include photographing a hand or foot, clothes stained with blood, toys, or children's shoes, along with general images and videos of the location where the massacre occurred.

You might find a wall with a print of a blood-stained hand and other symbols that help convey the harsh reality without compromising the dignity and privacy of the victims and their families. Additionally, **drone shots** play a significant role in highlighting the extent of destruction and disaster in a specific area.

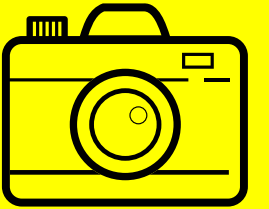


**Photos by: Khalil Ashawi**





IRENE CASELLI  
SENIOR ADVISOR, EARLY CHILDHOOD JOURNALISM INITIATIVE, DART CENTER FOR  
JOURNALISM AND TRAUMA, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



# HOW TO INTERVIEW A CHILD

**1** When considering an interview with a child, first **ask yourself whether the interview is absolutely necessary**. Can you obtain the information and quotes from an adult? Do court documents or social workers have information that may avoid an interview?

**2** Your primary concern should be **avoiding harm**, especially when discussing traumatic incidents.

**3** Once you have established an interview is necessary, **plan ahead**.

**4** Check that the child is **ready** and **willing to talk**. Get informed consent from the responsible adults. Select **a safe, private, and comfortable space** to create a non-intimidating atmosphere. Tailor questions based on the child's age. Give the child as much agency as possible – interrupt the interview if they change their mind halfway through.



©MAYSUN Abu khdeir

Award winning Spanish - Palestinian **independent visual journalist**

# Balancing sensitivity and objectivity

As a photojournalist documenting war zones for twenty years, I navigate a delicate balance between sensitivity and objectivity. It's imperative to **honour the lives and experiences of the people**, especially **children**, whom I portray while maintaining journalistic integrity.

Photographing from their **eye level honours their dignity and humanity**, allowing me to connect genuinely while avoiding a condescending adult gaze.

Sometimes, it means being less explicit, photographing shadows, reflections, or objects belonging to them (like their toys or their homes) to convey their reality without exposing them to further harm. **It's a delicate equilibrium between truthful storytelling and safeguarding their well-being**, amplifying their voices without exploitation. My work holds the weight of their trust. It's my responsibility to honour it



Photo by: Maysun Abu khdeir



©MAYSUN Abu khdeir

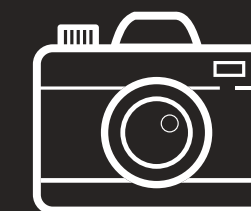
Award winning Spanish - Palestinian **independent visual journalist**

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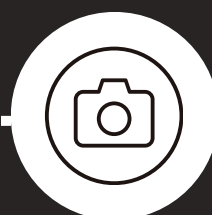




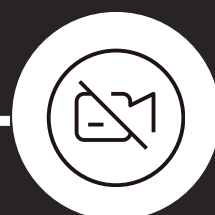
# Avoiding Exploitation: Ensuring Dignity in Children's Stories

Despite the challenging circumstances and living conditions we always aim to **show the strength and positivity** of the children we profile in our stories. Often these are children our audiences can identify with, children that inspire through their personalities, hobbies and hopeful outlook on the future.

It is crucial that the children we interview really want to tell their story and feel relaxed about it. **never try to convince anyone**, it has to be their own choice. Pushing or convincing a child to be interviewed would never work.



Show their daily lives – things that may seem very common to the local camera team could be so special when watched abroad. Playing football, cooking, hanging out with friends or siblings and doing sports – things our viewers recognize. Often it works very well to **interview the children while doing some of those activities** – rather than sitting in a chair with a feeling that this is a very formal event.



**It is a top priority to ensure that none of the children we feature are upset or traumatized. It's simply not worth it. Before filming, it's crucial to spend time talking to the children, gaining their consent, and understanding the experiences they've endured. This helps us avoid asking overly sensitive questions or prompting them to relive painful experiences they'd rather forget.**

DAISY MOHR  
MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT AT NOS

# Avoiding Exploitation:

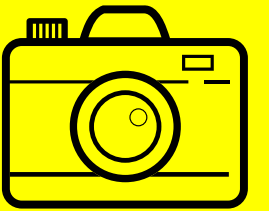
Ask **simple and open questions** so they can choose many ways to answer – in the way they like and makes them comfortable. They are then free to decide what they would like to share with us. Children in war zones may have experienced unimaginable things. **We have to be very careful with our questions** so as not to revive certain traumatic events that they don't wish to share. **The questions should never be political.** It could get them into serious trouble later. While of course their parents/guardians can be around when the interview takes place, they shouldn't feed the children with the answers they hope the child will give. We would like to really catch the story and the thoughts of the children and not of their parents/governments/ngo's or become part of any propaganda.



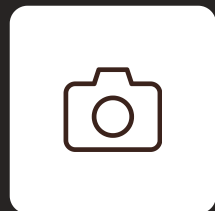
Photo by: Khalil Ashawi



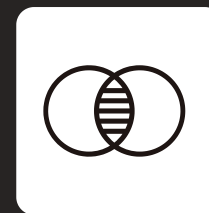
DAISY MOHAR  
MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT AT NOS



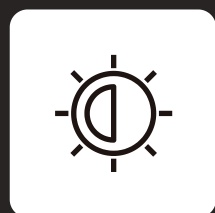
## AFTER THE INTERVIEW WITH THE CHILDREN



Make sure to send them a link to the story afterward, with the hope that they can keep it as a positive memento for later in life.



Check up on them or their families a few days after the story to inquire about their experience.



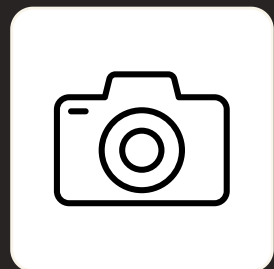
This experience should be a positive one, not something that makes their already difficult lives harder.



Ammar Abd Rabbo

Photographer covering conflicts in **Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon**

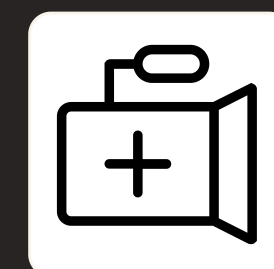
## Impact of visuals



The poignant images of children evoke a range of emotions, from empathy and sorrow to indignation. Yet, regrettably, these visuals alone **do not bring about an end** to the documented tragic circumstances or alleviate the suffering endured.



The images **document events** in a way that leaves no room for skeptics to deny the news and facts. In the future, no one can claim, "I didn't know."



The manipulation of images has become a pervasive practice, where photographs from Gaza, for example, are often repurposed to depict events in Syria and vice versa. In truth, the audience shares a degree of responsibility, as they tend to **believe content that supports their biases**.



Photos by: Ammar Abd Rabbo



**Ammar Abd Rabbo**

**Photographer covering conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon**

**In this context, there's a raised concern regarding the effects of utilizing graphic images depicting corpses. While such imagery is typically declined by traditional media outlets, it's frequently disseminated by individual accounts on social media platforms..**

**Personally, I don't believe there is any merit in publishing such harsh images. I don't think we uphold the dignity of the deceased by sharing such photos, and I don't believe the audience needs to see these images to empathize more with our causes.**

**For instance, the conflict in Syria has been extensively documented, capturing numerous photos and videos illustrating bombings, detentions, torture, and killings. However, despite the abundance of such media, it has not succeeded in eliciting broader international public sympathy for the plight of the Syrian population.**



**Photo by: Ammar Abd Rabbo**



**IRENE CASELLI**

SENIOR ADVISOR, [EARLY CHILDHOOD JOURNALISM INITIATIVE](#), DART CENTER FOR JOURNALISM AND TRAUMA, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



# TRAINING FOR JOURNALISTS

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma runs the [Early Childhood Journalism Initiative](#) (ECJI), which provides resources and training for journalists who are interested in focusing on young children and their caregivers, or want to add an early childhood perspective to their journalistic beats.

On this page, you will find [examples of stories](#) that have been published with their grants, which can serve as an inspiration for other reporters. There are resources online, including [a guide](#) to report on early childhood, which is due to be translated in several languages.

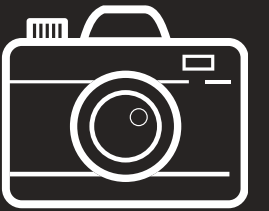
Moreover, UNICEF has detailed [guidelines](#) on how to report on children, and they often provide or fund ad-hoc training on a country-by-country basis.



Photo by: Sami Sultan



# THANK YOU



Appreciation to all the expert voices actively contributing to the development of this guideline.



**TOBY FRICKER**  
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**Irene Caselli**  
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©**MAYSUN Abu khdeir**  
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**TINYHAND**



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