

Sightsavers Ethical Content Policy

1. Introduction

Content from our work plays a huge role in fundraising and raising awareness about the issues we work on. We have a duty of care to protect the people who give us their time and personal information from harm or offence, ensuring they have a positive experience during the content collection process, and that they are represented accurately and respectfully for as long as we hold their content.

Ethical content practices go far beyond a signature on a permission form. This document outlines processes for staff to feel confident they are acting responsibly, protecting Sightsavers' reputation and complying with the safeguarding policy. (Extracts from our safeguarding policy are highlighted in blue throughout this document).

Although there are procedures that are specific to children, ethical practices must be applied when capturing content about anyone related to Sightsavers activity. Following these processes is mandatory when the subject could be in a vulnerable position or their information is sensitive i.e. beneficiaries or participants in our services and their families. And preferable when working with staff, partners or volunteers.

'Content' refers to any information about a person, including personal details, a person's story, photos, video and audio. 'Images' refers to video and photography.

2. Collection preparation and informed consent

Where possible people should be prepared for interviews prior to being interviewed.

Sightsavers representatives will ensure that appropriate consent is obtained before images or stories of children or adults are captured or shared.

Prior consent to use information collected in interviews and / or images of children should be obtained from children themselves (if they possess the maturity to do so) and from their parents and/or guardians

2.1 Advance agreement

If you're bringing a photographer/videographer, and/or you're expecting to take up a significant amount of someone's time, subjects must be asked in advance if they are happy to take part and prepared for your arrival. This applies to individual families as well as community leaders, heads of institutions like schools or hospitals and local government where applicable. Ask programme teams to get in touch with the relevant people, making it clear that the visit is not compulsory and has no influence on programme work, positive or negative.

2.2 Explain the purpose, process and context of your activity

Before starting any content collection, dedicate time to a full explanation, including:

- Introductions for everyone in the team (if you're talking to a visually impaired person ask everyone to say something so they can recognise voices)

- Who Sightsavers are, and our relationships with the partners they have direct contact with
- Who you and the team are
- What content is used for and why it's so useful
 - i.e. demonstrating challenges and impact, generating support for our work
- What will happen during the content collection process
 - Length of time you'll be with them
 - What you'll ask of them
 - Asking some personal questions
 - How you'll document them (photo, video, audio, interview)

2.3 Informed consent

Informed consent means subjects understand all implications of allowing their content to be used by Sightsavers. The form should be the last part of the process and by the time they sign it they should understand:

- Where their content could be used and who could see it, making sure they understand the scale and exposure of mass communications
- How they could be portrayed, depending on the channel and use
 - i.e. emphasis might be on challenges, showing them as more vulnerable, suffering or needing support. Or on the positive impact, showing them as someone who has benefited from support
- What channels content is used in
- Where content is used – potentially in their own country or internationally
- Reiterating they have control over the process and can decide what to take part in or not, with no repercussions or need for an explanation. And that content collection is entirely separate from project activity.
 - If they don't want to do anything or want to stop at any time, to let you know
 - Nothing they say, do, or decide not to do will have any impact – positive or negative - on the support they receive
 - They can revoke consent at any time

Depending on the level of information provided you can vary the detail of your explanation – for an image of someone in a hospital ward you can be brief. If it's someone's in depth story, or a photo that shows someone in a sensitive situation, take more time.

The specifics must be explained in the subjects' local language, ideally through an independent, professional translator. Translators must be briefed on informed consent and be able to judge whether someone has fully understood what they're agreeing to.

2.4 Evidence of consent

Even if people locally don't feel informed consent is important, Sightsavers does. The permission form provides evidence we are following an ethical procedure. The form caters for a variety of circumstances:

- Parental or guardian permission for children under 18 (co-signing for children over seven, who must also give their consent). In schools, teachers must inform parents in advance of the visit, giving them a chance to opt out, and a teacher can sign on their behalf

- Group permission for communities or people in the background where it's not possible to get everyone's written consent. A person in authority (community leader, head teacher or hospital head) can sign on a group's behalf, as long as people verbally agree or are given the chance to move out of the photo

Low literacy subjects can sign with a thumbprint or give audio or video permission, with their response audibly translated. Alternatively, a reliable witness can sign to confirm informed consent was given.

Consent is not needed for unrecognisable people (faces and all other identifying features obscured). In busy places or large crowds you can make a judgement call – ask yourself “Would I want this image of me and/or my family to be used as a marketing, fundraising, or communications tool for an organisation in another country?”

3. Documenting stories

All interviews and image taking is undertaken with sensitivity in order to safeguard the individual's rights to dignity, identity, confidentiality and privacy.

A parent or guardian should be present during interviews with children, or their permission sought before-hand for a professional adult with agreed responsibility (such as medical or educational professionals) to be present on their behalf.

3.1 Story context

To avoid stereotyping, it's important give someone's story as much context, balance and personal detail as possible, and to let someone describe their own situation:

- Ask questions about someone's family background and life experiences to show them as a rounded person, not just a beneficiary
- Ask about what led to someone being in their current situation, and factors that have prevented them getting support previously
- Provide a balanced narrative, recording positives as well as negatives e.g. if an area is clearly very poor but also beautiful, or if someone shows great strength and resilience as well as showing distress, describe both sides
- Ask local project staff for more detail on the local context
- Be sure to include details of things people have done or choices they made to change their own life, rather than solely relying on Sightsavers to 'save' them
- Be aware of the language you use, being careful not to disempower people or insinuate sight loss or disability is the sole cause of a person's difficulties – it's the situation they are in rather than their condition

3.2 Accurate representation

- Accurately record what you are told – a Dictaphone helps avoid mistakes and allows you to use someone's words so they tell their own story
- If an answer or situation is unclear, or a story changes, always ask for clarification, checking with other family members or project staff if necessary
- Monitor translation – notice if your translator is elaborating too much (or not enough), and ask project staff to listen in to the first interview to confirm accuracy

- Ask project staff to confirm the exact extent of Sightsavers' role – we can't claim responsibility for things we haven't done
- Accurately and objectively document conditions you see, without exaggerating, assuming how someone feels, or imposing your own feelings on a situation (you can describe how you feel observing a situation, but you can't directly attribute feelings or judgements to a situation that haven't been expressed by the subject e.g. their situation is hopeless vs 'I feel hopeless')

3.3 Conduct interviews sensitively

To demonstrate need you may need to ask people difficult or delicate questions. Be compassionate, patient and sensitive and be aware of your subject's feelings. E.g.

- Request permission to ask what could be an upsetting question, and reiterate that they don't have to answer. Never push someone to tell you something they're not comfortable with
- If someone tells you something highly sensitive, double check whether they're happy for it to be included
- Notice when people become tired, uncomfortable or upset. If a child becomes upset, stop the interview. With an adult, ask them if they want to carry on, or take a break.

4. Capturing images

All interviews and image taking is undertaken with sensitivity in order to safeguard the individual's rights to dignity, identity, confidentiality and privacy.

Pictures should be decent and respectful and should not stigmatize community, family or individual.

People are properly dressed (both girls and boys, should wear decent clothing appropriate to the local custom) and are not depicted in sexually charged poses or in ways which characterise them as entirely reliant on the viewer.

Ensure the use of the 'Two Adult Rule'. This means, when interacting with children or at-risk adults in a work context I will ensure that another adult is present or within reach.

4.1 Working with photographers, videographers or journalists

All external consultants must sign the code of conduct before being allowed to visit project activity. External staff must never spend time with children without supervision.

You are responsible for helping external staff act in an ethical way. Discuss the Sightsavers approach with them before shooting and monitor their behaviour, correcting if necessary.

4.2 Respect and image permission

Where possible, always ask people before taking their images. Never take a photograph of a child without the full understanding and permission of the parent(s)/guardian(s). If spontaneous or natural images are necessary, as soon as the image is taken show the subject explain the purpose and get consent. If they refuse consent, it must be deleted.

Be aware of how much you're asking people to do – take advice from family members, local medical and project staff on what is reasonable and take age, physical capability and health into account. If someone becomes very upset, showing them close up could violate their privacy. Take care to give them space and check whether they are happy for images to be taken.

The same principles apply for your personal photos in project settings – how you act affects opinions of Sightsavers, field staff and future travellers. If you're on your own and don't speak the language you can communicate to people by showing them your camera/phone.

4.3 Depiction

Everyone must be depicted in a dignified way, especially people who may face discrimination or exclusion. Images must show a true and accurate account of the way people live:

- Images must only be taken of people's typical activities, actual challenges and the story that they relay in their interview
- Get your subject involved, especially with children, ask them for ideas on how they would like to be shown
- Although children may be naked when you meet them, they cannot be photographed naked from the waist down or older female children naked from the waist up. Ask them to put on clothes they would usually wear
- Be culturally sensitive in what you ask people to do – what's acceptable in one place might not be in others. If you're in any doubt, ask local programme staff to advise.

Consider how framing and angles can affect how someone is depicted:

- Try not to take images from above as this appears disempowering. Images should be taken at the same level or looking up at a subject, particularly when showing the need
- Limit cropping or framing which makes people look more vulnerable than they are. Try to include context in a photo, showing someone's home or the hospital environment
- Children must not appear isolated if they are being cared for by family members
- Don't manipulate or set up a situation to make it look worse than it is e.g. if a child is being held by their mother, this is the image you should take, don't ask her to put them down.

5. Remuneration

As a general rule, payment or remuneration is not given in exchange for taking photos, however there may be situations where it is appropriate e.g. cultural expectations of visitors, compensating for loss of income. Project volunteers helping you may require a per diem. Always refer to local staff for appropriate behaviour and type of remuneration.

If it is deemed appropriate, this should not be communicated or given until the end so as not to sway their accounts.

6. Content sharing and storage

Pictures, materials and personal information will be held in a secure database and according to the appropriate Sightsavers data security protocols. Access to these materials will be employees and trusted third parties only, through a password protected system. The misuse of images accessed will be treated in the same way as other breaches of this policy. Applicable data protection laws for all stored images will be followed.

6.1 Storage

All content collected must be uploaded to ivillage which is a password protected system. Images must always be uploaded with the relevant consent form and accompanying information - a caption containing names and brief contextual information at the very least - so images can always be used with relevant context.

In almost all circumstances, where written or recorded permission does not exist, images must not be uploaded. Where it was absolutely not possible to get evidence of consent, or forms have been lost, the person responsible for gaining consent can confirm that there has been verbal agreement, ideally with verification from someone else present at the time.

Prior to upload, content must be stored on Sightsavers servers or your personal sharefile folders, which are also password protected. Content must be removed from personal devices. If guidelines in sections 3 and 4 are not followed and you receive content that may contravene the safeguarding policy you must delete this immediately.

6.2 Sharing

Content must never be shared by email. File transfer sites like Dropbox or Wetransfer should be avoided where possible.

Content can only be shared with external people through ivillage - a lightbox, or on occasion approved third parties can be given a login. They must be notified about our code of conduct in advance of receiving the content, and they will have to sign it when they agree to the ivillage terms and conditions, which contains the code of conduct.

Lightboxes must be deleted and external ivillage access removed once the requirement is over. Access to ivillage will be reviewed annually. Contact Benjamin Thompson for ivillage access.

If images need to be sent before ivillage upload, or if a photographer or videographer is delivering images from an assignment, this must only be done via sharefile or encrypted hard drive.

- To encrypt a hard drive [guidelines to follow]
- To give an external user access to a sharefile folder, select 'Add People to Folder' and click 'Create new user'. They will receive an email notification with a link to login to the folder and add files

7. Use of content

Sightsavers and its partners are committed to carefully guard any information about individuals who feature in their publications, ensuring that their personal data are used appropriately. This also applies when material is made available to third parties.

Full names should never be provided alongside other identifiers such as date of birth (age) or community – the nearest big town or district name can be used

I will: Respect people's dignity and their need to be safeguarded at all times when taking photographs, filming or writing reports for public relations work.

Content must be captured responsibly, sensitively and accurately, however if this isn't the case it is the responsibility of the person using the content to make sure anything that contravenes sections 3 and 4 is not used.

Any complaints or concerns about inappropriate or intrusive images of children must be reported and recorded in accordance with any other child protection concern (See child protection policy).

7.1 Misrepresentation

It is understood that content needs to be shaped to fit the relevant channel and audience. But stories or images must not be altered to misrepresent the true situation:

- We must never imply people are suffering from things they aren't, or exaggerate a situation or the risk someone faces
- Content must relate to the situation being described e.g. a photo from Kenya can't be used when talking about work in Zambia, or a photo of someone who's had a cataract operation cannot be used in a story about trachoma
- Quotes cannot be wrongly attributed and must not be edited or used out of context to imply a different meaning to the original
- We cannot imply someone will be helped, or that we are working / will work in a certain area when it's not true (but we can use images of people we are not helping to explain the need in a situation, as long as no connection is made to our support)

7.2 Upholding dignity and respect

To avoid perpetuating stereotypes of people living in the developing world, we must show a true and accurate account of the situations people live in:

- We present our beneficiaries and participants as dignified, rounded people by including personal details including their name, age, country, details about their family, work or personal likes and dislikes, and the circumstances of their situation with all image use
- We must not show people as helpless or victims, incite pity or imply they are entirely reliant on donors or agencies e.g. we cannot say £10 will save someone's sight, rather £10 could help save someone's sight
- We show the role people play in changing their own lives, that they are capable of helping themselves when the right structures are in place e.g. showing people seeking out healthcare, travelling long distances to screenings, fighting for their own rights
- We must not oversimplify a situation by implying that issues are simply a question of money that donations alone can solve. We should illustrate the wider causes as well as the effect. E.g. We don't just state that someone is too poor to get health care, we describe all the reasons it's difficult to access healthcare in their region
- We must not depict Sightsavers or donors as 'saviours', but rather facilitators working with local actors who play key roles in driving change
- We should show people living in difficult circumstances as one side of a country or region rather than a universal truth, and show a variety of perspectives about a country

7.3 Content usage period

Unless there are exceptional circumstances (see appendix 1), content should not be used for more than five years after the original collection date. The present tense can only be applied to content for the first 18 months of its use.

7.4 Image manipulation

Images must not be significantly altered from their original form:

- Colour manipulation and enhancements must not alter the concept of the image e.g. dulling or sepia to make it look worse. We do not use black and white images (excluding historical)
- Cropping must not alter the context of an image

- Editing footage must not change the reality filmed. Edited pieces should always accurately represent the story
- Images should not be flipped – this does not represent the picture taken
- We do not create composite images unless for publicity stunts where it should be obvious its set up
- We do not use stock images

7.7 Third parties

Our photographers and videographers usually have shared copyright over the images they take. They must follow these guidelines whenever using images, and offer us the chance to review external use before publication to ensure it does not contravene the policy.

Appendix 1 – extenuating circumstances

Where there is a need for use, or continued use of content that is more than five years old, the following process should be followed to assess potential reputational risk:

- Contact country office to get an update on the relevant individual(s). If they are no longer alive, or their situation has worsened to the point they are not benefiting as claimed (e.g. their sight has deteriorated, they are not able to attend school or find employment) the content cannot be used
- Documented assessment of pros and cons of use among the public communications group, taking reputational, ethical and financial factors into account
 - If the relevant individual cannot be located by country office, the case study should be perceived as higher ethical/reputational risk
- If it's agreed the case study should be used, a set of FAQs should be developed in case any queries are raised.