

I acknowledge that informed consent is complex, can change over time and may not always be possible

Script

Welcome to the second week of our OverExposed Campaign Resource videos. In this second video, we will explore our second pledge:

acknowledging that informed consent is complex, can change over time and may not always be possible. In collecting stories and images of children, the process of 'informed consent' has been held up as an example of better practice in the sector.

But what makes consent "informed"? And what are the limitations of this practice?

In line with Dignified StoryTelling Principle 4, we must understand that consent is much more than just paperwork. The general principles to informed consent when applied to children's organisations are that the contributors of this content know:

- **Why** the content is being gathered and for what purpose: This could be fundraising, campaigning, donor reporting or advocacy.
- What the communications will **actually be**. This could be an advert on television, a research publication, a banner visible to the general public, a case study for the organisation website, or as part of campaign material.
- The contributor should know **how and where** it will be communicated - through what channels and platform and to **who**
- **How long** their image and other personal information will be kept and stored.
- They should know they can **withdraw** their consent for the use of their image and story at any time and for any reason and be given the correct and up to date contact details for this to be enacted.

Both in practice and reality, we know that when working with children the process of informed consent becomes increasingly complex, particularly when children are in disadvantaged, disempowered and ever-changing contexts. Often children are not even asked to give their consent: Instead, it is their parents and carers, or adults acting in loco parentis. In this context, do the children we are taking photos of have any agency in the process if this conversation bypasses? Does this uphold a child rights to be heard and to participate?

A Save the Children research as part of 'The People in the Picture' Project in 2017 indicated that even with a 'multistage and thorough' consent process, some participants had a 'vague' understanding of how their picture would be used. For children furthest away from the digital sphere, the complexities of ownership, intellectual property and replication or removal once their image is on the internet cannot be understated, nor ignored.

Firstly, a static over 'active' process of gaining informed consent can put children further at risk.

The process of gaining consent is often done once; a literal tick box exercise on paper in which the image may or may not be filed alongside the consent form and may or may not be used as intended. If we decide not to 'check in' before the end of agree usage period, in addition to unregulated or insecure storage systems and staff turnover,

can we claim to be able to stay true to our assurance to those children that the image will only be used in the originally intended way? What if those children grow up, and change their mind? In situations where children are part of activism or advocacy activities, an ever-changing political context can mean what was safe to share in one month is not the next.

Secondly, key to the last principle of informed consent is withdrawal of that consent.

We may find ourselves telling communities they can withdraw their consent at any time - but do we really consider the complexities of this happening in practice? Are these communities really made aware of the impact of putting their image on the internet, especially those who are further away from the digital sphere?

Do we meaningfully explain the reality that we might lose control and ownership of this image as soon as its online, or on social media - and do we understand this ourselves?

What are the limitations of our promises to 'delete' images or stories online, and do we have the team capacity and knowledge to execute a withdrawal process in the first place?

Lastly, whilst we may strive to gain consent before publishing pictures and stories, the unquestionable power dynamics that govern the relationship between these organisations and the people in their stories cast serious doubt on the fullness of consent. We will explore this area in much more detail in Week 5 as we reflect on the power we hold.