

Recommendations for responsibly reporting on disabilities

1. Communicate from the social paradigm of disability

It is convenient for audiovisual media to divulge representations and images of people with disabilities that go in line with the social model of disability and the human rights-based approach. It is necessary to promote positive perceptions of disability, as well as the abilities and contributions of people with disabilities. It is also crucial for reporting to help raise awareness of people with disabilities and to promote respect for their rights and dignity. This approach will contribute to responsible, non-stigmatizing visibility in the media.

2. Use the phrase “person with a disability” and avoid using other terms

It is advised not to refer to people in terms of their disability (“disabled”, “blind”, “deaf”, etc.), and to avoid expressions such as “people with special needs”, “patient”, “victim”, “invalid” and “cripple”. These expressions focus on a trait and communicate it as the identity of the person, strengthening stigmatization.

3. Avoid footage or images that focus on a person’s specific traits or the aids they use

It is crucial to portray people with disabilities in context and situations that they share with the rest of the community (at work, socializing and during their free time). It is necessary for their physical traits and/or aids (wheelchairs, walking sticks, hearing aids or specific ways of communicating, etc.) not to be shown in a spectacularizing and/or morbid way, nor to be represented as the person’s identity. In turn, it is important not to leave out or invisibilize disability. This contributes to conveying that people are not defined by their disability.

4. Incorporate people with disabilities as sources of information and opinion

It is fundamental to guarantee the full exercise of the right of people with disabilities to freedom of expression of ideas and opinions about issues that concern them. People with disabilities may and do want to talk about issues other than disability, so it is important to provide more spaces for expression as opposed to limiting them. Including these views might do away with stereotypes since it helps portray the person as a whole and strengthens a human rights-based approach in which people with disabilities are seen as subjects of right.

5. Interview people with disability in an egalitarian, respectful way

It is necessary to interview and dialogue with people with disabilities with respect, equality and focus, avoiding reporting in a fearful, apologetic and/or superior way. Moreover, it is convenient to ask them in advance how they wish to be addressed and respect their preferences. It is advised to ask open, non-invasive questions. It is important for this way of reporting to be used throughout the coverage: production, edition and promotion. In other words, if the interview is respectful and held in a context of parity, but when it is edited, its meaning is altered, the footage will strengthen stereotypes; or if voiceover is used too much, the positive sense of the report will be lost.

6. Avoid associating disabilities with stereotypes related to something negative or unusual

It is important not to resort to media representations that relate disability with inferiority, with physical, psychological and social dependence, with a limitation that affects the person's overall aspect and performance, or with monstrosity. What should also be avoided is relating disability with artistic, sport or other "gifts" that are suggested to derive from sensory or intellectual disability. Additionally, it is necessary to reflect on and transform the clichés proposed by fiction regarding people with disabilities, often portrayed as weak, sick people who need assistance and help.

It is convenient to avoid media representations of disability that focus on myths and on alleged negative or extraordinary aspects that do not convey anything specific about the person. These representations impact on social perception, possibly strengthening exclusion and a mistaken, limited understanding of the topic.

7. Do not use disability as a means to derogatorily describe people or situation, and/or to emphasize how dramatic an event is

It is important not to use disability as an insult or to highlight negative comments. In turn, it is advised not to resort to expressions that highlight negative opinions about this topic and which sometimes belong to other semantic fields (such as "they show bipolar behavior", "an autistic administration", "a deaf administration"). Moreover, it is important to avoid using disability as a resource to highlight how dramatic or moving a story is. These associations indirectly help strengthen dramatic, negative misrepresentations of disability.

8. Promote the autonomy of people with disabilities ensuring access to the set and to mobile units

It is crucial to provide physical and communicational access during an interview to ensure autonomy and participation. Choose a hurdle-free space for people with reduced mobility, Sign Language interpretation and color signals, among others, depending on what the interviewee needs.

9. Include in the agenda all the dimensions of disability

The results of the monitoring of free-to-air TV news programs of the city of Buenos Aires carried out by the Defender of the Public show the invisibilization of disability in the news. It is important for audiovisual programs to report on the realities of people with disabilities showing how they work, communicate, do sport, experience art, bond, study, etc. It is also important for the media to divulge relevant information regarding specific rights, how to make complaints and to do paperwork and how national and international bodies in the field work.

10. Foster the creation of literature using principles

In line with Law no. 26,522 (article 66), it is important for audiovisual pieces to be thought and produced taking accessibility as the starting point. This means using and producing pieces that are easily accessed (incorporating additional visual aids such as CC, sign language and audio description, among others), for people with sensory disabilities, senior citizens and other people that may find it difficult to access content.