



International Media Standard on facial difference and disfigurement

A guide on respectful, inclusive and
authentic representation



Photo credit: Rick Guidotti, Positive Exposure, May 2024

The International Media Standard supports responsible media organisations and professionals to show respect and care for individuals who live with a facial difference or disfigurement.

The media should avoid words or descriptions which could cause further stigmatisation and stereotyping. It should always:

VOCABULARY

- Use sensitive, non-stigmatising vocabulary.
- Name the condition or injury that causes a facial difference, and give an objective explanation of it.
- If in doubt a generic phrase such as, 'a person with a facial difference' tends to be preferred. This will differ according to location and personal preference.



Photo credit: Rick Guidotti, Positive Exposure, May 2024

SENSATIONALISM

Refrain from over-dramatising the condition or injury, and avoid parallels with non-human objects or characters from fiction or non-fiction who are defined adversely by their condition (ie: Joseph Merrick or Freddy Kreuger).

If the person's facial difference is irrelevant to the focus of the media piece, do not needlessly bring it into the story.



*Photo credit: Rick Guidotti,
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PERSONALITY

- Avoid portraying the person as passive, helpless, a victim, to be pitied or inept.
- Avoid words or phrases that suggest the person's facial appearance indicates anything to do with their personality (eg: that they may be a villain).
- Avoid asking readers or viewers to express an opinion on someone's face or attribute qualities to a person based on their appearance.

SYMPATHY

Avoid evoking sympathy purely because someone has a facial difference or disfigurement; any sympathy should be warranted by the context — for example, if someone has been mistreated.

MORE ON LANGUAGE

Language is constantly evolving. It changes from person to person and country to country, and can often be deeply personal.

At Face Equality International we tend to use facial difference or in some cases disfigurement which activists have coined as FD. This describes an appearance-affecting mark, scar or condition that an individual is born with or acquires, either permanently or temporarily. Many organisations and individuals that we make common cause with identify with 'visible difference' as a term that encompasses facial and bodily differences.

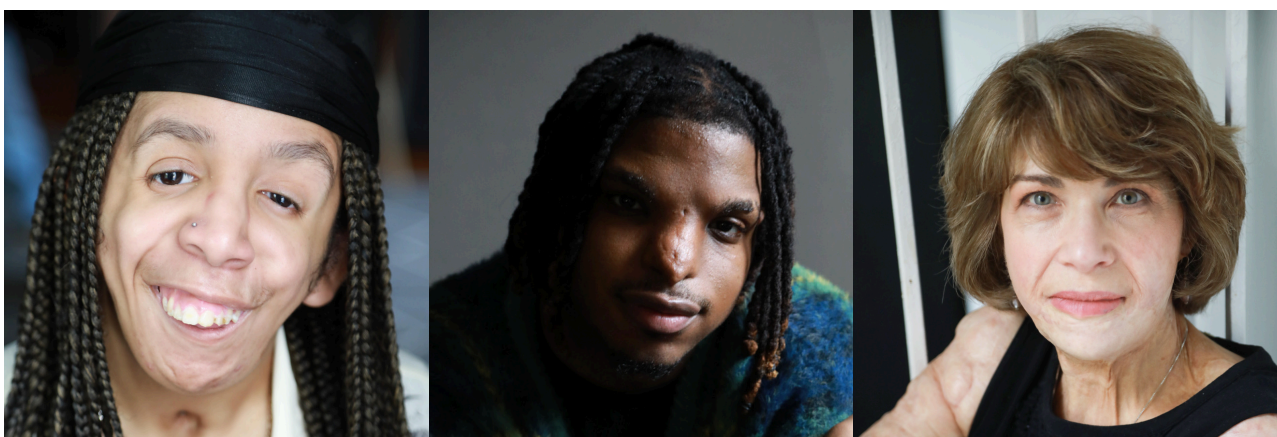


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EDITING

It is common to see editing that involves dramatic music, black and white or grey filters and other dramatic devices. Unless the subject matter justifies this, i.e hate crime or abuse, then the device creates sympathy without reason and further ostracises the person with a disfigurement.

It's important to prioritise empathy over sympathy.

INTERVIEWING

If conducting a live broadcast or pre-recorded interview, there are multiple points to consider both before and during the interview itself.

- Speak to your interviewee and ask if they have any access requirements that would enable them to partake in the interview more fully. This could be in relation to speech, hearing, mobility and more. Accommodations should be made to ensure equitable access.
- Ask the individual to self-identify and provide you with their preferred term i.e 'I have vitiligo and I prefer for it to be called a skin condition'.
- Have researchers/producers get to know them before the interview in order to understand their preferred language, whilst ensuring everyone involved has read this Standard and understands the subject matter.
- Take the lead of the interviewee on what aspects of their experience they are comfortable sharing and how much they would like to share. If they would rather not share medical details or that of an accident or trauma, then do not probe for further details.
- Individuals with facial differences should be treated as equal participants in group interview settings. Always direct questions to the individual to answer for themselves, unless specifically requested by them to do otherwise.
- Consider whether it's relevant to the feature to discuss anything that may create drama or sympathy without reason.



Face Equality International is a global alliance of registered organisations and charities as well as non-registered grassroots and support groups that are all working for and with the facial difference community.

Our vision is a world free of barriers, where people with facial differences are thriving and proud to be themselves. Authentic and respectful media representation can help us get there.

FEI has produced this Standard to prevent poor media coverage given the success of Standards from NGOs such as the Samaritans.

Responsible media organisations should consult and accept the guidance of FEI's Member organisations in their country or region which may have their own Media Guidelines, appropriate to their own culture(s), language(s) and subject area. A list of FEI Members can be found on our website.

If your workplace would like to understand more about facial difference and/or implementing the media standard, contact us about our face equality workplace training:

<https://faceequalityinternational.org/workplace-face-equality-training/>