

Creating a safe space to interview children

 By Leigh Andrews

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With #YouthMonth underway and #ChildProtectionWeek fresh on the media's agenda, what better time to put the focus on how to more ethically report on children's issues? Here's my final report back from Media Monitoring Africa and the UCT Children's Institute's media workshop on 22 May at the Doubletree Hilton.



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Children make up around 35% of the South African population, yet coverage of children's issues tends to be minimal. The media tend to only report in extremes and not involving children in stories about them, which is a big missed opportunity.

Children are not on the agenda yet they should be, as the future of the country.



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One reason for steering clear of including their voices is uncertainty over the legalities – an unfortunate case of 'red light ethics' at its best.

Another is uncertainty over how to get children to open up and share their side. That's why in the final session of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and the UCT Children's Institute's media workshop on ethical reporting on violence against children, MMA legal consultant Taryn Hinton shared three tips and techniques to use when interviewing children.

1. Create a child-friendly interview environment

In creating a child-friendly interview environment, you'll be able to get more meaningful input and quotations from your interviewees.

This boils down to **reducing the parent-child power parity**

You can do so by:

- Avoiding titles,
- Sticking with a first-name basis, and
- Ensuring you are literally on the same level by reducing your stature – sit on chairs or crouch down.

Hinton says to also share your experiences as a child and speak of your own children.



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Get involved to get more responses. Play games with the children and don't sit on the sidelines.

2. Create a relaxed environment

Hinton says to choose a spot that's away from distractions – private but still in clear view. Ensure it's warm, well ventilated, well-lit and spacious enough to accommodate your activities.



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Let the children see your recording equipment and hold it so they are more comfortable with it.

Hinton also said, "Don't feel you need to fill the silence with words. That's an adult thing."

3. Engage in appropriate activities

Lastly, explaining appropriate activities to include in the interview process with children, Hinton mentioned drawing, ranking, mapping, acting or drama, and deflection projection to create distance but still get them to talk to you about their own story.

“ Sitting shoulder-to-shoulder while engaged in an activity together is less intimidating than face-to-face, and don't be afraid to kick off your shoes and sit on the floor. ”

With tight deadlines you don't have much time to get the interview but these tips will help set children at ease and tell you their side of the story. Taking steps to be more inclusive of society overall will instantly add authenticity to your reporting.

Hinton ended by appealing to attendees to aim to write more solution-based articles rather than just explaining the situation – leave the audience with something positive or inspiring, where the situation allows.

The UCT Children's Institute houses a [reporters' research hub](#) – visit it for further tips.

That's the end of my media workshop coverage. Follow [MediaMattersZA](#), [#MediaMonitoringAfrica](#) and the [UCT Children's Institute](#) on Twitter for further updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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