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5.1 INTRODUCTION

The BBC aims to reflect the world as it is, including all aspects of the human experience and the realities of the natural world. In doing so, we balance our right to broadcast innovative and challenging content, appropriate to each of our services, with our responsibility to protect the vulnerable and avoid unjustifiable offence.

Creative risk-taking is a vital part of the BBC's mission. However, in all our output, the greater the risk, the greater the thought, care and planning required to bring creative content to fruition. We must be sensitive to, and keep in touch with, generally accepted standards as well as our audiences' expectations of our content, particularly in relation to the protection of children. Audience expectations of our content usually vary according to the service on which it appears.

When our content includes challenging material that risks offending some of our audience we must always be able to demonstrate a clear editorial purpose, taking account of generally accepted standards, and ensure it is clearly signposted. Such challenging material may include, but is not limited to, strong language, violence, sex, sexual violence, humiliation, distress, violation of human dignity, and discriminatory treatment or language.

Generally Accepted Standards

The Agreement accompanying the BBC Charter requires us to apply "*generally accepted standards so as to provide adequate protection for members of the*

*public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material*¹ The understanding of what constitutes 'generally accepted standards' will evolve over time and will be informed by relevant research. Applying 'generally accepted standards' is a matter of judgement, taking account of the content, the context in which it appears and editorial justification.

(See Section 2 Using The Guidelines: 2.4)

Context

Context includes, but is not confined to:

- the surrounding editorial material
- the service on which the content is available
- the time at which it is available
- other programmes or content that are available around the programme or content concerned
- the likely size and composition of the potential audience and likely expectation of the audience
- the harm or offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of the particular content in output generally, or in output of a particular nature or description
- the extent to which the nature of the content can be brought to the attention of the potential audience, for example, by signposting and content information
- the effect of the content on audiences who may come across it unawares.

When making our judgements, these factors will not necessarily carry equal weight.

For new series on television and radio (or when existing series change channels) where content may raise issues of generally accepted standards, there should normally be a discussion early in the production process with the commissioning executive and the production team, including presenters and performers, to establish parameters of tone and content appropriate to the platform, context and slot. A returning series which has established expectations of strong language and content should have a similar discussion before the start of each run.

Those planning online content should also consider whether there will be issues of generally accepted standards and determine, early in the process, whether

¹ Paragraph 46 (2) Broadcasting: An Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation, July 2006

the content is likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children or younger people and select material appropriately.

For the purposes of the Editorial Guidelines and unless stated otherwise, a child is someone under the age of 15 years. Young people are those aged 15, 16 and 17². It should be noted that these are not legal definitions.

(See Appendix 1: Ofcom Broadcasting Code)

5.2 PRINCIPLES

5.2.1 The BBC must apply generally accepted standards so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material.

5.2.2 We must not broadcast material that might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of children and young people.

5.2.3 We must observe the 9pm television watershed to ensure material that might be unsuitable for children is appropriately scheduled.

5.2.4 We must balance our responsibility to protect children and young people from unsuitable content with their rights to freedom of expression and freedom to receive information.

5.2.5 We must ensure our audiences have clear information on which to judge whether content is suitable for themselves or their children.

5.2.6 The use of strong language must be editorially justified and appropriately signposted to ensure it meets audience expectations, wherever it appears.

5.3 MANDATORY REFERRALS

(Mandatory Referrals are part of the BBC's editorial management system. While they will not, in themselves, meet the Principles in the Editorial Guidelines, they are an essential part of the process to ensure compliance and must be observed.)

5.3.1 Programmes broadcast on television between 5.30am and 9pm must be suitable for a general audience including children. Programmes in later pre-watershed slots may not be suitable for the youngest children or for children to watch without an older person. Any proposed exceptions must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

(See 5.4.7)

5.3.2 Any proposal to use the strongest language (cunt, motherfucker and fuck or its derivatives) must be referred to and approved by the relevant output controller. Chief Adviser Editorial Policy may also be consulted.

(See 5.4.23)

² These definitions reflect the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Section One: Protecting the Under-Eighteens *Meaning of "Children"*) which classifies "Children" as "people under the age of fifteen years".

5.3.3 Clear editorial justification will be required on the rare occasions we broadcast graphic scenes of bullfighting, cockfighting and other similar activities, even if they are recorded in countries where they are legal. Any proposal to do so must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

(See 5.4.31)

5.3.4 Any proposal to broadcast a hanging scene, portray suicide, attempted suicide or self-harm must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor. Referral should also be made to Chief Adviser Editorial Policy.

(See 5.4.45)

5.3.5 Any proposal to feature a demonstration of hypnosis must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

(See 5.4.54)

5.3.6 Any proposal to include flashing images or strobing sequences in recorded programmes which fail the Transmission Review technical checks must be approved by the relevant output controller.

(See 5.4.57)

5.3.7 Any content that might use techniques which exploit the possibility of conveying a message to viewers or listeners, or otherwise influencing their minds, without their being aware, or fully aware, of what has occurred (for example, by using images of very brief duration) must be referred to a senior editorial figure, or for independents to the commissioning editor, who may wish to consult Editorial Policy.

(See 5.4.58)

5.4 PRACTICES

Audience Expectations

5.4.1 We should judge the suitability of content for our audiences, including children, in relation to the expectations of the likely audience, taking account of the time and day on which it is available, the nature of the service and the nature of the content.

The following questions can help determine whether content will be within the expectations of the audience:

- What is the likely composition of the audience, including the likely number and age range of children in the audience taking account of school time, weekends and holidays? (We should be aware that school holidays are different in different parts of the UK.)
- Does the talent, slot, title, genre or service carry pre-existing expectations that may be challenged by the content?

- Has any difficult or challenging content been clearly signposted?
- Are there any special sensitivities surrounding the slot, for example religious festivals or anniversaries of major events?
- What is the likely “pull-through audience” (that is, what is the nature of the preceding content and what kind of audience is it likely to attract)?

Content Information

5.4.2 We must clearly signpost challenging content on all of our services using, either alone or in combination, appropriate scheduling and content information which is clear, consistent and factual. This is to ensure that our audiences have an appropriate expectation of our content and opportunity to make informed decisions about what they see and hear.

5.4.3 When relevant, we should provide clear information about the content of pre-watershed programmes, programmes which start before the watershed and run beyond it, and post-watershed programmes (if appropriate).

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.6 - 5.4.11)

On-demand content which would be post-watershed on television should be labelled where appropriate.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.15 - 5.4.17)

On radio, we should provide content information when children are particularly likely to be in our audience or when content has the potential to exceed usual audience expectations.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.12 - 5.4.14)

Information about challenging or unexpected content can include on-air and online announcements, content labels, electronic programme guides, trails, billings, Ceefax, press releases and other publicity.

Content Labelling On Demand

5.4.4 When we make audio or visual content available on demand on BBC platforms, and where appropriate, we must provide information to enable users to understand its context and to make informed choices about its suitability, both for themselves and for children, before they access it.

5.4.5 Stronger or more challenging content may require labelling under the ‘G for Guidance’ system. This provides:

- the BBC’s ‘G for Guidance’ icon indicating that content guidance is available for the user
- a system of content labels to describe strong or challenging content

- a PIN/password protection system so that parents can restrict access to more challenging material carrying a content label.

The Watershed and Scheduling for TV, Radio and Online

Television Scheduling and the Watershed

5.4.6 Television scheduling decisions need to balance the protection of young people and particularly children with the rights of all viewers, including those without children, to receive a full range of subject matter throughout the day. They must also be judged against the requirements of the watershed.

The 9pm television watershed is used by broadcasters to distinguish between programmes intended mainly for a general audience and those programmes intended for an adult audience. However, parents and carers share in the responsibility for assessing whether programme content is suitable for their children, based on their expectations of that content.

The 9pm watershed signals the beginning of the transition to more adult material, but the change should not be abrupt. Programme makers and schedulers should also take into account the nature of the channel and viewer expectations. The strongest material should appear later in the schedule. If sudden changes of tone are unavoidable they should be clearly signposted, for example by giving clear information about scenes of a sexual nature, violence or the use of strong language.

5.4.7 Programmes broadcast between 5.30am and 9pm must be suitable for a general audience including children. The earlier in the evening a programme is placed, the more suitable it should be for children to watch without an older person. Programmes in later pre-watershed slots may not be suitable for the youngest children or for children to watch without an older person.

Only in exceptional circumstances can there be any departure from this practice, and then clear content information should be given. Exceptions may include, but are not limited to, images that some children might find distressing in natural history programmes or items in pre-watershed news bulletins. Any proposed exceptions must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

5.4.8 Programmes that straddle the watershed, that is start before 9pm and finish sometime after 9pm, should normally be pre-watershed compliant throughout.

5.4.9 Programmes should normally be clearly commissioned for broadcast on a specific channel and for pre- or post-watershed, to allow the necessary careful judgements about the suitability of the content to be made during the production process. Changes to originally agreed channel or transmission slots, particularly any proposal to broadcast a programme before rather than after the watershed, may mean a programme requires significant re-editing to

ensure that it complies with these Editorial Guidelines for harm and offence, particularly regarding strong language and the overall tone.

Controllers, commissioners and production teams should be aware that channels and transmission slots, whether pre- or post-watershed, often carry well-established audience expectations. It is therefore advisable to determine programme slots as early as possible in the production process.

5.4.10 Interactive content broadcast on BBC public service television must observe the watershed and be appropriate for the audience of any associated programme. Interactive content broadcast on television and associated with pre-watershed programmes should be pre-watershed compliant at all times.

Television News

5.4.11 The nature of news means that it is not always possible to avoid showing material that might distress some of our audiences before the watershed. Our international news channels do not normally operate a watershed policy because the news is shown live across different time zones around the world. Wherever appropriate, we should provide clear and timely content information to signpost difficult images, particularly those that may be distressing for children.

(See Guidance online: Violence in News and Current Affairs Output and Live Output)

Radio Scheduling

5.4.12 Radio does not have a watershed. Our scheduling decisions should be based on the audience expectations of each radio service and informed by our knowledge of when children are particularly likely to be in our audience. We must take extra care when different generations may be listening together. This typically applies during the morning and afternoon school runs or during school holidays. Unexpected or challenging material should be clearly signposted to avoid causing unjustifiable offence.

5.4.13 We should normally play edited versions of music which would otherwise feature unsuitable material, including strong language or violent content, for mainstream daytime audiences. At night and in specialist music programmes, the original version may be editorially justified but it should be within the audience expectations for the programme and, if necessary, we should take steps to achieve this (for example, signposting and content information).

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.20 - 5.4.26)

5.4.14 We should consider using on-air announcements to inform listeners about programmes which contain difficult or controversial material which would otherwise be unexpected on our speech services such as Radio 4, Radio 5 Live, the World Service and other national and local stations. These services are predominantly for adult listeners and their audiences expect to hear a full range of issues and events explored throughout the schedule.

Online

5.4.15 There is no direct equivalent of the watershed online.

Any content immediately accessible on the BBC Home Page must be suitable for a general audience, including children. Any content immediately accessible one click from the Home Page should normally be suitable for a general audience, including children.

Otherwise, the nature of the content we make available should be based on the audience expectations of the specific online service and informed by our knowledge of when it is likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children. This applies equally to content we create ourselves, user generated content, material brought in from third party websites and links to third party websites.

Unexpected and challenging content, especially content which might be unsuitable for children, should be labelled to avoid causing unjustifiable offence. Content labelling should be clear and factual, but not inappropriately explicit. We should be mindful of the effect on users if they arrive at challenging content by following links on third party sites that bypass the BBC Home Page or other contextualising pages.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.4 - 5.4.5)

5.4.16 We should be aware that audience expectations may be influenced by the platform on which content appears. However, online content linked to any radio or television programme must be appropriate to the programme and its likely audience, regardless of whether the content is created by the BBC or users.

Additionally, the expectations of internet-based, user generated content may be different if that same material is also carried on television or radio.

5.4.17 When linking from a BBC site to a third party website, we must check the contents of the third party site before installing the link. We should not link to an external site if it is clearly inappropriate for us to recommend a visit. It may be appropriate to add a disclaimer, and additional information, if the links are to controversial material.

BBC web pages designed for children should only link to third party pages with content suitable for a general audience.

We should not link from a BBC website associated with a radio or television programme aimed at children to another site whose associated programme contains material which is unsuitable for children.

Interactive executive editors should review the suitability of maintaining links as appropriate.

(See Section 14 Editorial Integrity and Independence from External Interests: 14.4.19 - 14.4.20 and Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.27 - 7.4.29)

Scheduling of Programme Trails

5.4.18 Trails for radio and television programmes that are unsuitable for a general audience including children must be carefully scheduled.

Trails scheduled next to programmes targeted at children or when children are particularly likely to be watching, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, should be suitable for that audience.

Trails for post-watershed programmes must be appropriate for a general audience including children if shown before the watershed.

Live Output

5.4.19 We need to assess the risks when broadcasting live output and take any appropriate steps to mitigate them. If problems occur in live output, they should be dealt with promptly and sensitively.

(See Guidance online: Live Output)

Language

5.4.20 The effect of strong language depends on the choice of words, the speaker and the context. Different words cause different degrees of offence in different communities as well as in different parts of the world. A person's age, sex, education, employment, faith, nationality and where they live, may all have an impact on whether or not they might be offended.

However, the use of strong language must be editorially justified and appropriately signposted to ensure it meets audience expectations, wherever it appears.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.1 Context and 5.4.2 - 5.4.3)

Strong language is most likely to cause offence when it is used gratuitously and without editorial purpose, and when it includes:

- sexual swearwords
- terms of racist or ethnic abuse
- terms of sexual and sexist abuse or abuse referring to sexuality
- pejorative terms relating to illness or disabilities
- casual or derogatory use of holy names or religious words and especially in combination with other strong language.

5.4.21 Output controllers and programme or content producers should ensure that strong language, especially the strongest language, is subject to careful consideration and appropriate referral, to ensure it is editorially justified, before it is included in our output.

Context and tone are key to determining whether strong language will be acceptable or deemed unjustifiably offensive. We should consider the following:

- What language was used, who used it, to whom it was directed and why it was said
- How it was said. Was the tone angry or aggressive, or charming and funny? The same terms can be considered more or less offensive depending on the tone of the delivery and the character or personality who uses the terms
- Where the content is to be found in the television and radio schedules or online
- The quality of challenging material, which includes strong language, is a significant factor in determining its acceptability or unacceptability to audiences. Strong language can be acceptable when authentic or used for clear purpose or effect within a programme, but audiences dislike careless use which has no editorial purpose.

5.4.22 We must not include the strongest language before the watershed, or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children.

5.4.23 We must also make careful judgements about the use of the strongest language post-watershed and ensure it is clearly signposted. **Any proposal to use the strongest language (cunt, motherfucker and fuck or its derivatives) must be referred to and approved by the relevant output controller, who should consider the editorial justification.** Chief Adviser Editorial Policy may also be consulted.

5.4.24 We must not include strong language before the watershed, or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, unless it is justified by the context. Even then, frequent use must be avoided.

5.4.25 Apart from the most exceptional circumstances, we must not include strong language which causes offence in

- pre-school children's programmes or websites (for four years and under)
- programmes or websites made for younger children.

Bleeping of Strong Language

5.4.26 In general, where strong language is integral to content and relevant questions of transmission slot and channel have been resolved, it should not be disguised. When a section of content is editorially justified but the slot, channel or context are not appropriate for strong language, it may be necessary to edit or bleep language, even post-watershed.

Language that is bleeped for pre-watershed content must be thoroughly obscured, taking care to ensure also that the bleeped words are not then made obvious by visible mouth movements.

(See Guidance online: Language)

Violence

5.4.27 Our audiences, particularly children, can be frightened or distressed by the portrayal of both real and fictional violence. We should make very careful judgements when we plan to include violence in our output; there is increasing public concern about violence in society in general and as portrayed in the media, both in factual and fictional content.

Consideration should be given to the editorial justification for any depiction of violence, and violent content should normally be clearly signposted. When real life violence, or its aftermath, is shown on television or reported on radio and online we need to strike a balance between the demands of accuracy and the dangers of desensitisation or unjustified distress. There are very few circumstances in which it is justified to broadcast the moment of death.

(See Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.38 - 7.4.42 and Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies)

Our editorial judgements need to consider a number of factors which, in combination, can increase the impact of violence, both in factual or fictional content:

- violence that is true to life and may also reflect personal experience, for example domestic violence, pub brawls, football hooliganism, road rage, and mugging
- violence in places normally regarded as safe, such as the family home and hospitals
- unusual or sadistic methods of inflicting pain, injury or death
- incidents where women, children and the vulnerable are the victims
- violence without showing the effect on the victim or the consequences for the perpetrator
- sexual violence
- verbal aggression and tone, particularly when it includes the use of the strongest language and discriminatory or sexually offensive terms
- suicide, attempted suicide or self-harm
- broadcast reactions of others to violence, especially those of children
- post-production techniques such as atmospheric music, slow motion, graphic close-ups and sound effects

- sustained menace or unrelentingly dark tone.

5.4.28 We should take care to ensure that individual programmes, or programmes taken together across the schedule, avoid including material that condones or glamorises violence, dangerous or seriously anti-social behaviour, or material that is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour, unless clearly editorially justified.

(See Guidance online: Violence in News and Current Affairs Output and Violence in Drama)

Violence and the Protection of Children

5.4.29 Violence, its aftermath and descriptions of violence, broadcast in pre-watershed programmes, or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, must be appropriate to the likely audience and editorially justified.

5.4.30 We must ensure that verbal or physical violence that is easily imitable by children in a manner that is harmful or dangerous is not broadcast in pre-watershed programmes or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, unless there is strong editorial justification.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.48 - 5.4.52)

Violence Against Animals

5.4.31 Audiences, particularly children, can often be distressed by images or scenes which show human violence against animals. If the scenes are graphic but we know that the animal suffered no harm, then we should consider saying so in an on-air or online announcement or caption.

Clear editorial justification will be required on the rare occasions we broadcast graphic scenes of bullfighting, cockfighting and other similar activities, even if they are recorded in countries where they are legal. Any proposal to do so must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

(See Section 8 Reporting Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour: 8.4.3 - 8.4.5)

Intimidation and Humiliation

5.4.32 BBC content must respect human dignity. Intimidation, humiliation, intrusion, aggression and derogatory remarks are all aspects of human behaviour that may be discussed or included in BBC output. Some content can be cruel but unduly intimidatory, humiliating, intrusive, aggressive or derogatory remarks aimed at real people (as opposed to fictional characters or historic figures) must not be celebrated for the purposes of entertainment. Care should be taken that such comments and the tone in which they are delivered are proportionate to their target.

(See Section 6 Fairness, Contributors and Consent: 6.4.24)

Nudity

5.4.33 Nudity before the watershed or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, or suggestions of nudity on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, must be justified by the context. Nudity, whether actual or suggested, has the potential to offend and care must be taken in pre-watershed content, especially in promotional material which does not carry content information.

Sex

5.4.34 In all BBC output the portrayal of sex, or the exploration of sexual issues, should be editorially justified and treated with appropriate sensitivity.

In post-watershed content, we must be able to justify the frank and realistic portrayal of sex and the exploration of themes and issues which some people might find offensive.

5.4.35 The explicit portrayal of sex between under-16s and adults is illegal and must not be depicted at any time on any of our services.

(See Section 18 The Law: 18.9.6)

5.4.36 The discussion and portrayal of sexual behaviour must be editorially justified in programmes broadcast pre-watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children. It must also be appropriate to the likely audience and inexplicit. Clear content information may be required.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.2 - 5.4.3)

We must not portray or represent sexual intercourse without a serious educational purpose in programmes broadcast before the watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children.

5.4.37 We should consider whether support material is required when we encourage audiences, especially children and young people, to discuss their problems in any of our content. This could include addresses of a range of relevant websites or the phone numbers of authoritative helplines.

(See Section 14 Editorial Integrity and Independence from External Interests: 14.4.34 - 14.4.37 and Section 17 Interacting with our Audiences: 17.4.21)

Portrayal

5.4.38 We aim to reflect fully and fairly all of the United Kingdom's people and cultures in our services. Content may reflect the prejudice and disadvantage which exist in societies worldwide but we should not perpetuate it. In some instances, references to disability, age, sexual orientation, faith, race, etc. may be relevant to portrayal. However, we should avoid careless or offensive

stereotypical assumptions and people should only be described in such terms when editorially justified.

5.4.39 When it is within audience expectations, we may feature a portrayal or stereotype that has been exaggerated for comic effect, but we must be aware that audiences may find casual or purposeless stereotypes to be offensive.

(See Guidance online: Portrayal)

Alcohol, Smoking, Solvent Abuse and Illegal Drugs

5.4.40 We must balance the need to reflect realistically the range of public attitudes and behaviour with the danger of encouraging potentially damaging or illegal behaviour, particularly amongst children.

5.4.41 The use of illegal drugs, the abuse of drugs, smoking, solvent abuse and the misuse of alcohol:

- must not be featured in content made primarily for children unless there is strong editorial justification
- must generally be avoided and must not be condoned, encouraged or glamorised in any programmes broadcast pre-watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, unless there is editorial justification
- must not be condoned, encouraged or glamorised in other content likely to be widely seen, heard or used by children and young people, unless there is editorial justification.

5.4.42 We should also:

- ensure that contributors to programmes such as studio debates or chat shows do not smoke³
- deal with all aspects of illegal drug use, solvent and drug abuse, smoking and misuse of alcohol with due accuracy. Where necessary to achieve due accuracy, this should include, for example, the health implications and anti-social aspects of illegal drug use and binge drinking
- ensure the legal and social context of our coverage is clear
- avoid revealing explicit detail of how to use illegal drugs or abuse solvents, unless clearly editorially justified.

5.4.43 When archive content contains material that does not reflect current standards or attitudes towards smoking, alcohol, substance abuse or the use of illegal drugs, the historical context and integrity of the content may provide

³ Smoking in enclosed and substantially enclosed public spaces and workplaces is also now illegal in the United Kingdom.

sufficient editorial justification. However, the content should be appropriately scheduled and, where necessary, signposted and it should be clear to the audience that it is not contemporary.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.2 - 5.4.5 and Section 13 Re-use and Reversioning: 13.4.13 - 13.4.15)

Suicide, Attempted Suicide, Self-Harm and Eating Disorders

5.4.44 Suicide, attempted suicide and self-harm should be portrayed with great sensitivity, whether in drama or in factual programmes. Factual reporting and fictional portrayal of suicide, attempted suicide and self-harm have the potential to make such actions appear possible, and even appropriate, to the vulnerable.

5.4.45 **Any proposal to broadcast a hanging scene, portray suicide, attempted suicide or self-harm must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.** Referral should also be made to Chief Adviser Editorial Policy.

Care must be taken to avoid describing or showing suicide or self-harming methods in explicit detail, unless there is a clear editorial justification.

5.4.46 The sensitive use of language is also important. Suicide was decriminalised in 1961 and since then the use of the term “commit” is considered offensive by some people. “Take one’s life” or “kill oneself” are preferable alternatives. We should consider whether a helpline or support material should be provided, or linked to, when our output deals with such issues. The Samaritans are usually willing to be consulted by programme makers and other content producers about the portrayal of suicide and have published their own guidance for broadcasters.

5.4.47 Care is also required when portraying, in factual or fictional content, conditions such as anorexia or bulimia. We should be aware that the vulnerable, especially the young, may imitate or emulate behaviour and techniques depicted. Care should be taken to ensure that content is responsible and appropriate for the likely audience. Helplines or support material should be provided, or linked to, when necessary.

(See Section 14 Editorial Integrity and Independence from External Interests: 14.4.34 - 14.4.37 and Section 17 Interacting with our Audiences: 17.4.21)

Imitative Behaviour

Children and Dangerous Imitation

5.4.48 Children can be influenced by what they see, hear and read. Behaviour likely to be easily imitable by children in a manner that is dangerous, must not be broadcast before the watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience or online when content is likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children.

5.4.49 Very careful judgements are required about content which might lead to dangerous imitation, particularly when they include the use of domestic objects (such as knives, hammers and scissors) in violent acts. Such content must not be featured in output made primarily for children unless there is a strong editorial justification. Factual programmes designed for children should ensure that care is taken to discourage imitation of techniques, experiments and so forth.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.29 - 5.4.30)

5.4.50 When hazardous activities such as rock climbing, snowboarding or white water rafting are portrayed in factual content either before the watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, we must give warnings about the dangers of imitation without expert supervision and ensure the necessary safety equipment is clearly visible. Where relevant and unless there is a clear editorial reason for not doing so, pre-watershed drama and entertainment programmes, or similar online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children, should normally show the correct safety procedures when depicting these kinds of activities.

Safety

5.4.51 We should normally observe the law, both in the UK and other countries, unless there is clear editorial justification for not doing so. This includes ensuring that presenters, actors and contributors who are driving use seatbelts, fit child car seats correctly, wear crash helmets and use the correct mobile phone equipment.

(See Section 18 The Law: 18.3.1)

5.4.52 We should also show the commonsense use of safety equipment wherever practical, unless there is clear editorial justification for not doing so. This includes using eye protection for DIY activities and protective headgear and clothing for sports and leisure activities, particularly those popular with children such as cycling, skateboarding and water sports.

Tragic Events

5.4.53 The aftermath of a tragic event may require scheduling changes on television and radio or the alteration, or occasionally, the removal, of web pages. We should keep our output under review to identify anything that, in the light of events, might cause unjustifiable offence as judged against generally accepted standards. Anniversaries of tragic events, such as rail crashes, bomb blasts or child abductions, can also call for similar sensitivity to the potential for offence.

Hypnotism, Exorcism, the Occult and the Paranormal

Hypnotism

5.4.54 The Hypnotism Act 1952 requires any demonstrations of hypnotism for public entertainment to be licensed. It prohibits demonstrations on people under 18 and applies to any broadcast demonstration of hypnotism at, or in connection with, an entertainment which admits the public.

Although we have no evidence of harm or potential harm regarding the use of hypnosis in our output, we should still take steps to minimise any risk of inducing hypnosis and/or adverse reactions in susceptible viewers, listeners or online users. In particular, a hypnotist must not broadcast his/her full verbal routine or be shown performing straight to camera. Hypnotism acts, particularly those designed to ridicule someone, should be treated with care in entertainment programmes. They might be both harmful and offensive to our audience.

Any proposal to feature a demonstration of hypnosis must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

Exorcism, the Occult and the Paranormal

5.4.55 We must act responsibly when including material looking at any aspect of exorcism, the occult, the paranormal, divination or any related practices.

Demonstrations which purport to be real must not be shown before the watershed or on radio when children are particularly likely to be in our audience, or in online content likely to appeal to a significant proportion of children.

Paranormal practices for entertainment purposes (not including drama, film or comedy) must not be broadcast when significant numbers of children may be expected to be watching or are particularly likely to be in our radio audience or using our online content.

5.4.56 At any time, demonstrations of exorcism, the occult, the paranormal, divination or any related practices in factual programmes must be treated with objectivity appropriate to the output. In entertainment programmes they must be clearly labelled. In all our output, such demonstrations must not contain advice about health, finance, employment or relationships which encourages people to make life-changing decisions.

Flashing Images, Strobing and Images of Very Brief Duration

Flashing Images, Strobing and Photo-Sensitive Epilepsy

5.4.57 To minimise the risk to viewers who have photo-sensitive epilepsy we should follow the Ofcom guidance referred to in Rule 2.12 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code. On rare occasions it may not be reasonably practicable to follow this guidance, for example when flashing content is unavoidable, such as in a press event or a live news report when it cannot be remedied technically.

In such cases, when inclusion of the content is editorially justified, we should give a verbal and, if appropriate, a text warning at the start of the programme or item.

Any proposal to include flashing images or strobing sequences in recorded programmes which fail the Transmission Review technical checks must be approved by the relevant output controller.

Images of Very Brief Duration

5.4.58 We must not use any techniques which exploit the possibility of conveying a message to viewers or listeners, or otherwise influencing their minds, without their being aware, or fully aware, of what has occurred. Such techniques could include images of very brief duration.

Anyone who has reason to believe their content might contain such a technique must refer to a senior editorial figure, or for independents to the commissioning editor, who may wish to consult Editorial Policy.

Acquired Programmes

5.4.59 Acquired programmes must comply with our Editorial Guidelines on Harm and Offence. We should check them prior to broadcast to ensure the content is suitable for the likely audience. A film classification is only a guide and special care should be taken with films rated as “18” certificate, which should not play before 9pm on any service.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.6 - 5.4.10)

5.4.60 We should not normally broadcast a film or programme refused certification by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). For further details refer to Section 1 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.

We should not normally broadcast illustrative clips from a film or programme refused certification by the BBFC without clear editorial justification.