

Action for Children imagery guidelines

Action for Children is a charity that has been working with the UK's most vulnerable children since 1869. We were originally called The National Children's Home, or NCH, until September 2008 when we changed our name to one that better describes what we do and what we value – Action for Children.

From day one we have applied the very highest standards to all our work, and this has led us to consistently achieve sector-leading results for the young people and families we work with.

This document is a simple, practical guide that will provide the information you need to commission images that fit perfectly with the Action for Children brand.

This guide applies to all imagery, internal, external, moving and still.

Some key messages

What we do

Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

Our Values

Passion – we are driven by our desire to help children and young people overcome injustice and disadvantage

Equality – we believe all children and young people have equal worth and equal rights

Hope – we believe in a child or young person's potential, no matter what they have experienced or what they have done

Our purpose

Always to be there for the most vulnerable children and young people, helping them break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

Our vision

Our vision is of a world where all children and young people have a sense of belonging, and are loved and valued. A world where they can fulfil their potential, shape their destiny and experience the joy of life.

Our operational mission

We meet the needs of the children and young people who need it most, so they can achieve their full potential. Through our work and through speaking out, we seek to

break the cycle of deprivation. We challenge injustice and empower children to overcome the obstacles in their lives that hold them back. We tailor our work to local circumstances, in partnership with children and young

The right image

There are two essential characteristics that will make an image you create on brand.

1. **Authenticity** – Action for Children deal with real people facing real challenges in their lives, and all our imagery must reflect this. No image should appear set up or in any way phoney. As a general rule, think photojournalist, rather than studio photographer.
2. **A positive message** – Children are at the centre of everything we do, and we know for certain that children want to be portrayed in a positive way in the media. There is no point in fighting for children's rights, if we then undermine this work, by using imagery that they will find offensive. This is in fact one of our organisation's pledges.

If you just remember these two key points, the chances are you will be on brand.

The right message

Action for Children's projects are based in communities across the UK. Our service users include people of both sexes, of different race, class, colour, culture, religion and sexuality, those who are disabled as well as able-bodied and those who live in poverty. It is essential that we represent them with dignity, accuracy and fairness.

We aim to give our service users a voice, and always put their interests first. So, we use positive imagery that does not exploit children and young people.

Recognising diversity and celebrating difference

It is important to recognise in our imagery the ethnic diversity of the communities we work with. There are situations where this may be a complex issue. Generally, photographs used to illustrate a project, for example, should reflect the ethnic make-up of the relevant community.

It is also important to celebrate the differences between people without resorting to stereotype or cliché. Boys need not necessarily be playing football – they could, for example, be painting a picture. Our service users are all individuals and we should promote that individuality.

Cultural issues and Consent

Be conscious of cultural issues, particularly when designing material for projects under the 'Supporting families' and 'Youth' categories.

Example:

A photoshoot was organized at the Bayswater Family Support project to illustrate the annual report and, after spending a whole day there, it turned out that the subjects of the photoshoot (female refugees) hadn't understood properly what the purpose of the shoot was, which meant they wouldn't sign the permission forms and we couldn't use many of the photos.

Informed consent means that we must fully explain the use of images and the possible implications e.g. your neighbours might see them, and this may conflict with certain cultural issues such as modesty for women.

Protecting Service Users

Some of our services cannot be photographed due to legal restrictions (eg anyone in care or with a court proceeding against them etc) and some cannot be photographed because of an implied connection (eg sexual abuse).

For this reason it is difficult to represent some areas of our work and it is necessary for Creative Services to find lateral approaches. This is often achieved through the use of models, illustrations or innovative non-representational abstract images.

A very effective solution can be to take pictures of objects that have meaning to the subject of the photograph. A teddy bear, a football shirt, something personal that gives the picture authenticity, without having to reveal the person's identity.

Creative Services also have a large library of real Service User's art, which can be another very effective way to give a feeling of the real person, when you can't show their picture.

Always remember though to only use the art in a genuine context. Say, if you're talking about an art event, or if you're talking about the feelings of children in a particular area Action for Children work in. Never use one child's very personal artwork, to illustrate another child's story

Active versus passive

Although the children and young people in our projects may be vulnerable, photographs should not unnecessarily emphasise this. We should aim to move beyond stereotypes of children passively receiving services and aim to portray, for example, disabled children involved in activities.

Remember we're called **Action** for Children.

This is particularly important if a photograph of a disabled child or young person is being used in isolation. Care should always be taken to ensure that any impact on the children is positive. Disabled children and young people rarely see images of themselves published, so any photograph of them may have a profound effect on their self-image.

Positive Imagery

Action for Children works fearlessly in the most difficult and challenging areas relating to children. We are not afraid of any issue, and know better than anyone the seriousness of the subjects we are dealing with.

Because of this, and because we aim to give our service users a voice, all imagery should be authentic and sincere. Use of gratuitous imagery should be avoided at all costs, as should sentimentality, and no situation should be portrayed as hopeless.

Some people see this as meaning that we cannot show images of children in difficult situations, and in dire need. This is not the case, and there is no issue that Action for Children is not prepared to openly address. What it does mean though, is that all images should be real rather than sensational, and should take into account the feelings of the people in them, and referred to by them.

The best way to work this out is to consider the context of the image, (how the accompanying text works with it etc), and then use your common sense.

If in doubt, ask yourself: "How would I feel if I were portrayed like that in a photograph?"

Child-centric

Children are at the centre of everything we do. So wherever possible, ensure the child is the main subject, or that you are representing the world from a child's perspective.

Use of models

Wherever possible, photographs of actual service users should be used, as this reflects the inclusive nature of what we do as well as being credible.

However, for some areas of Action for Children's work this is not always possible. There may be issues attached to the identification of an individual, for example where a child has a care order in place.

In these instances models will be used.

Suitability of content

Drugs, alcohol and cigarettes are sometimes used by children and young people. Photographs should depict the truth of this without encouraging it. There should be no visible cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking or references to drugs unless they are the subjects of the shoot. Avoid showing the glamorous depiction of drug, cigarette and alcohol culture, even through a background image.

Political sensitivities

When taking photographs for materials for Scotland and Northern Ireland, you should bear in mind the political sensitivities that exist around colours and emblems. For

example, with Scotland you should avoid showing people wearing either the Rangers or Celtic football strips.

Library images

Action for Children currently uses a photograph library classification system. This tool helps staff to clearly identify which images can be used to portray which areas of our work. Pictures can currently only be used for five years as children age and it would be insensitive to keep using them indefinitely. There are also cases when we need to withdraw images within this time period. For example when the service user dies or if they change their mind, as they may no longer wish to be associated with a particular aspect of their past.

Design issues

Wherever possible instruct photographers to ensure that:

- backgrounds are clear and uncluttered
- heads are not cropped
- a variety of poses are photographed (eg a child looking at a camera, engaged in a task, on their own, with staff, with parents etc.)

Propriety

Many Action for Children publications become available, both in printed form and on our website, to the general public. It is essential that the images used cannot be exploited by sexual offenders. The following rules must be followed:

- There should be absolutely no depiction of nudity, and children and young people should show no visible underwear.
- Exposure of cleavage, close-fitting tops worn without bras etc should be avoided.
- Swimming costumes may be acceptable provided the children or young people are photographed in a relevant context, for example in a swimming pool.
- Clothing may only be suggestive or revealing where it supports the intention of the shoot, for example, a model shot to highlight teenage prostitution or photographing a breast-feeding.