

5 Key Recommendations for Journalists and Editors – Reporting of Substance

Imagery

Images of alcohol and drugs should only be used **where appropriate** in articles.

Images of people in vulnerable conditions – including whilst drunk or unconscious – are stigmatising. These images should always be avoided.

Articles about alcohol harm should not contain images which make drinking seem glamorous, sociable, or appealing.

Drug paraphernalia should only be used where the context is informative.

Images should **tell the human side** of the story in a positive and responsible way. Photos of interview subjects, support services, and/or the community featured in the report should be used instead.

Language

Stigmatising language such as ‘user’, ‘addict’ and ‘alcoholic’ should be kept to a **minimum**. Journalists and editors should use language appropriately, referencing interview subjects as parents, professionals and so forth. Interview subjects should be asked how they would **prefer to be described**.

Examples of best practice include saying ‘substance use’ instead of ‘substance abuse’. Words like ‘druggie’ or ‘junkie’ should **always** be avoided.

Case Studies

There are many people who are happy to share their stories in a bid to help others to find support. Some people may prefer to share their experiences anonymously and this should be **respected** by the journalist.

Journalists and editors should spend time **getting to know people** and learning more about their experiences. Interview subjects deserve to be treated as **humans**. A person’s story might be ignored because it is not ‘interesting enough’, but all stories are worth telling if they can help others into recovery.

Interview subjects should be offered **copy approval** of their own quotes and contributions.

Support Information

Support information should **always be included** in any article that is reporting on alcohol and/or drugs.

Education and Stigma

Lived experience stories will not only be more compelling for readers but will actually help others. By including **honest** accounts of alcohol/drug use and recovery you can promote the message that people can and do recover.

People usually remember a story more vividly if it reflects the human experience, helping readers to **relate and empathise** more with those involved.

There are many support groups and recovery communities that are happy and willing to speak to journalists. We recommend that journalists and editors reach out to groups and communities to learn more about their work.

To get in touch with any questions about this toolkit, please contact Rebecca Bradley rebecca@sfad.org.uk