

THE CHARTER OF MILAN

For the respect of children's dignity and rights in communication

Respecting children dignity and rights in communication and advertising

FOREWORD

Nowadays our attention as citizens is increasingly stimulated by education and behavioral models that reach our children through the media, molding their imagination and their daily life. We think it is a priority to reconsider the relationship between media and children, starting from the use that media make of their image. Often, the market-oriented use of children's image seems to belittle their dignity and to strengthen gender discrimination stereotypes or to foster harmful lifestyles.

As citizens, parents, psychologists, communication experts, institutions, creatives, school, enterprises and law representatives, we believe that respect for children requires new instruments and a new social responsibility engagement of all communication players.

That's why, following Terre des Hommes suggestion, we have decided to set up the "Charter of Milan: For the respect of children's dignity and rights in communication".

While writing the Charter of Milan, we started from the principles expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of Treviso, Keeping Children Safe Toolkit, the Commercial Communication Code of Practice and from the experience built up in five editions of the Child Guardian Award organized by Terre des Hommes.

With the Charter of Milan we intend to start a debate on children's image, thus contributing to create a more respectful and careful world for our children. This is why we present it to society to be endorsed and adopted, in order to become an example for all the people who work in the communication sector and for all the citizens who want to stick up for the absolute priority of children's interest.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In accordance with the "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" the respect of children's dignity must be ensured in any kind of communication, particularly when it is the children's image itself to be represented.

The respect of children's dignity must be ensured by all concerned subjects, in every phase of the production of an advertising or communication campaign: parents and guardians, casting agencies, communication agencies and creative designers; clients and advertisers; studios; editors and anyone involved in diffusing those campaigns.

The respect of children's dignity requires their participation in every phase of the production process, from creation to distribution, and that their wishes, values, times, viewpoints, expectations and workers' rights are taken into due account.

It is of fundamental and pressing importance that these guidelines become a real engagement of corporate social responsibility, transparently substantiated by all concerned professionals.

1 - Children are not objects, but active subjects with their dignity, their likings, hopes, sensitiveness, points of view and values that enrich and strengthen them. They have inalienable rights and duties. The representation of girls and boys should always consider this wealth, involving them actively and consistently with communication goals and avoiding the purely showy, affected and sensationalist use of their image.

2 - Children are to be considered so regardless of race, colour, religion, origins and social conditions. Communication must be able to depict differences of ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation and socioeconomic status, avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory messages.

3 - Communication must consider the age of the involved children and respect their natural evolution. It must not represent them in behaviors, manners and postures not in accordance with their psychical, physical and emotional development. Any precocious eroticization of children is to be banned.

4 - Communication should give a real image of children, avoiding any idealization and do-goodery, banning any promotion or incitement to deviant behaviors. Communication should respect children's inventiveness, creativity and curiosity as well as their delicate world of relationships and interactions.

5 - Children must not be represented through the adultlike image of negative feelings, as boredom, depression, anger, fear or discontent that aims only to their exploitation for commercial purposes. The representation of these feelings must be consistent with the meaning they give to them.

6 - We should never forget that children have the right to be respected as any other human being. Communication must represent children regardless to gender: no exaltation of virility and force on one side and of gentleness and submissiveness on the other. Communication must not insist on gender discrimination, for example showing girls busy in traditional female duties.

7 - Children need strong referential figures that they usually find in their family and/or in the loving persons close to them, or even in the person in charge of their psychophysical well-being. Communication should not belittle these figures, thus undermining the child's confidence in people, that is of the utmost importance for their psycho-physical development and upbringing.

8 - Children's weakness and their need for protection must not be misused in order to make adults feel guilty, inadequate, or scared.

9 - The representation of children suffering from pathologies must not use images, descriptions or words that could cause harm to their dignity.

10 - Children's well-being is precious and their diet is basic for a healthy and balanced growth. Communication should therefore promote correct physical lifestyle and dietary habits, trying to focus on behaviors that protect children's present and future well-being.