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## LETTER | Covid-19: Learn to respect child's privacy

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**LETTER** | The movement control order (MCO) has been put in effect for more than a month now. In the beginning, it took almost two weeks for the people to get used to new rules that restrict people from doing their daily routines.

Parents are not exceptional to have to deal with what has been termed as the new norm. Having to put up with work-related tasks, priority should also be given to family and children. While this might be easy to manage for some, it could be unsettled and daunting to others.

Whether one agrees or not, the MCO has proven to be a door that reveals the reality of how flawed our society is.

A few days ago, a visual of a child who was crying while reading a book was aired in one mainstream media.

What was clear from the visual is that the child was



How could such a video be shared to the public? Is it fair to the child? Can it be considered as an act of bullying? Or can it be considered as a laughing stock because the owner was showing how they kill their time during Covid-19?

Of course, it is not wrong to share our activities, but the public has to be mindful of what they are sharing. It seems that some people fail to see that protecting the rights to children's privacy is a responsibility. If this is true, we should reconsider that educating the society about children's privacy is pivotal and should be ongoing.

Research has shown that fear and anxiety among children could obstruct children's brain development hence hampering their interest in learning. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child of Harvard University reported that early exposure to circumstances that produce persistent fear and anxiety can risk long-term consequences on their brain, which do not recover easily.

It is unfortunate to learn that the clip might not alarm the public because the immediate effects on children are not yet visible.

### **The impact of sharing on social media**

The social media has been flooded with pictures and videos portraying children in manners that are often inappropriate. It is worrying as they mostly come from



During this stay at home order, for example, photos of children being sealed tape on the floor to allow parents to work peacefully have been shared as memes on social media.

Two weeks ago, a video of a group of kids getting caught and advised by the patrolling police has become the highlight on social media. Not only that, but the video has also been picked up by some independent online news portal to feed the human interest value.

It is understood that the intention is to show how dedicated the authorities are in carrying out their duties.

So why make such a fuss on this? Is it necessary? Yes, it is. Because some videos might be shared across online platforms without children's consent that usually paired with captions that make fun of them.

Some might have shared their children's antics with close contacts only, but then become the public views because it was spread by irresponsible parties.

Parental permission might be missing in this instance. We are all guilty for allowing this to happen. This is because once it is uploaded and shared it will spread like wildfire especially issues that have a taste of sensationalism.

It is not easy to undo and erase. Imagine if the children who were once the source of the memes find out their



the videos and photos?

Everything seems to start from harmless fun. We might not realise that this abnormality has become the norm for quite some time. The community has become desensitised and say "everybody is doing it anyway; it should be right."

When everyone is doing it and no one to remind of the negative impacts, what more with no implications on the public policy, it will be regarded as acceptable behaviour, and that is not okay.

However, it is not too late to curb it from spreading further. Let's make a conscious effort by not sharing or complementing inappropriate contents involving children the moment we spot them. Adults should learn that these children are vulnerable whose dignity and privacy should also be respected, thus protected.

Being empathic by thinking and feeling of how would you feel if you are in the situation might be the key.

### **Media to take the lead**

The media should take the lead to educate the public by setting the right examples on how to protect the rights of children. It is timely for the mainstream media to uptake the responsibility by adhering to, and popularising a guideline on how to portray children as provided by Unicef.



responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. Unicef has laid out principles on how to address issues on children.

Among the principles include the need to respect the dignity and rights of every child in every circumstance, the importance of preserving a child's right to privacy and confidentiality when featuring them on media, and the commitment to not publish a story or an image that might put the child, their siblings or peers at risk, even when their identities are changed, obscured or not used.

The public has to be informed that there is such a **guideline** that upholds the rights of children that they should observe. Further, the use of guidelines should be regarded as an aid by media professionals in deciding how children should be represented.

Guidelines are not censorship but a protocol to ensure children's issues are reported in a way that enables them to serve the public interest without compromising the rights of children. It is understood that there are limitations when it comes to media practices because different media entities carry different goals. But, let's be positive if we set the right examples, the rest will follow suit.

I believe, through this intervention by the media, the public will be more informed because it is observed, people still look up to the mainstream media for credible information.



Having said that, the efforts explained here are like killing two birds with one stone, that is protecting the rights of children and keeping them free from emotional anxiety and distress that could be one of the reasons for the current mental health problems in Malaysia.

Admittedly when children have safe, secure environments to grow and develop healthy brains and bodies, they will indirectly create a strong ground for a thriving, prosperous society.

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