



Dear BBC,

We at the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion (ICARS) are writing in response to the BBC 2 programme, “Don’t Exclude Me” broadcast on Oct 7th 2021 at 9pm. We are a specialist non-governmental organisation with expertise in the field of restraint and seclusion within educational settings, we support over 1600 families across the UK whose children have been harmed physically and psychologically through the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

Our complaint centers around the use, and method, of restraint demonstrated by Marie Gentles and staff from Milton Hall School at 26 mins and 59 mins into the programme.

### **Complaint 1**

**That a clear breach of a child’s human rights has been broadcast on the BBC with the action being lauded by the programme makers as best practice.**

In the incident at 26 mins Marie Gentles resorted to the restraint of a 6-year-old boy who clearly had SEND needs unfortunately not acknowledged by the programme. He was in an open space and, albeit he kicked over a bucket of balls and scattered them whilst running from the demands that we watched the staff placing on him, he wasn’t a danger to himself or anyone else. This was completely inappropriate and disproportionate restraint aired on Prime-time TV. A clear abuse of the child’s human rights yet lauded as best practice by the programme makers. The government write in their guidance “Positive environments where children can flourish” (2021) “Restraint of any kind can have a negative impact on a child’s mental health and damage relationships between children and those who care for them”. Yet the premise of this programme was purportedly based on Marie Gentles coaching staff at Milton Hall School to build positive relationships with children in order to prevent exclusion. The government also write in the same guidance, “While restraint is permissible it should be used only.....when there is no other alternative to help children and staff to stay safe”. This was clearly not the case in the incident broadcast. There were so many other de-escalation techniques that Ms Gentles could have used to save the situation that the staff had created for this little boy.

Team Teach are the training provider that trained the staff at the Milton Hall School and a quick google search told us that Marie Gentles was also Team Teach trained. We reached out to Team Teach about this incident and they responded as follows,

*“The BBC documentary ‘Don’t exclude me’ and the person who featured in it, Marie Gentles, demonstrated an approach that is not taught or endorsed by Team Teach. From the clips that were shown we agree with your assessment that the child did not present a risk of harm to themselves or others and therefore physical intervention was not something that Team Teach would advocate in those circumstances. We will reach out to the school that featured to offer help in further training in best practice”.*

Thus we believe that this show breaches the Ofcom Broadcasting Code section 5. The restraint of the child that the BBC broadcast was controversial and no reasonable attempt was made to identify other views with regards this breach of a child’s human rights.

Section 2.3 of Ofcom’s generally accepted standards was also breached given that this show caused great offence to many in particular within the SEND community. This was demonstrated by an outpouring of fury and frustration with the programme on social media, and yet appropriate information regarding the harmful situation this child was placed in during the making of the programmes was simply not recognised by the broadcaster.

## **Complaint 2**

**The use of a dangerous potentially life-threatening hold that could lead to asphyxiation has been promoted as a safe hold by the BBC.**

On reaching out to Marie Gentles on social media she confirmed for us that she had used a hold known as a T-wrap on the child. This hold was repeated by staff from the school in the presence of Marie Gentles later in the programme. The T-wrap is a hold that was removed from the Team Teach syllabus in 2020. It was removed because of medical opinion from Dr Tony Bleetman reported on the Team Teach website in 2016 advising that the T-wrap restraint has the potential to cause fatal positional asphyxiation.

Yet Ms Gentles was heard to say, whilst carrying out the restraint, that the child was in a safe hold. This was far from the case.

In section 2.2 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code it states: “Factual programmes or items or portrayals of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience.” We believe that this programme has misled the audience significantly, and not only that but has also breached section 2.4 of the broadcasting code.

“2.4: Programmes must not include material (whether in individual programmes or in programmes taken together) which, taking into account the context, condones or glamorises violent, dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour and is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour.”

It is our opinion that educational staff and others could copy Ms Gentles use of restraint. In fact the purpose of the broadcast was to demonstrate good practice so in effect the BBC are encouraging people to copy this behaviour management strategy, yet in reality the BBC has inadvertently promoted life-threatening practice. This needs to be corrected as per section 3.1 of the BBC’s broadcasting code “We should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct them quickly, clearly and appropriately.”

The child being unnecessarily and inappropriately restrained was placed at risk during the filming of this programme and in addition other children have also been potentially placed at risk due to the very real possibility of viewers copying the techniques shown.

Our research demonstrates that it is neurodiverse children who are disproportionately affected by the use of restraint in our educational settings and hence it is primarily this vulnerable group that have been placed at increased levels of discriminatory risk by the BBC’s reporting.

Children have been killed in schools globally most recently Max Benson, Cornelius Frederick and Xavier Hernandez. All killed by fatal positional asphyxiation through restraints that restricted breathing at the hands of teaching staff.

This dangerous, misleading broadcasting could lead potentially to the death of children within the UK and needs to be addressed and corrected with the utmost of urgency.

Respectfully,  
The ICARS Team