



Statement regarding BBC Documentary Don't Exclude Me

We have no right to appeal the BBC's Executive Complaints Department's final response to our complaint regarding Don't Exclude Me. Their 'investigation' is complete and our comprehensively evidenced and presented concerns have not been upheld.

This 'final response' written by the BBC is upsetting on several levels –

First and foremost the BBC have, in our opinion, completely misunderstood our complaint. In their response they have summarised our four thoroughly researched letters beyond recognition. Our complaint was multifaceted. It revolved around the abuse of a child's Human Rights, the breaching of government guidance, the failure to consider expert medical advice and ultimately the BBC's broadcasting a potentially life-threatening restraint as best practice. The BBC have dummed down our complaint into two points that are simply not reflective of either the seriousness of our complaint, nor the danger of their broadcast.

The BBC cite that it is ICARS' 'objection', 'criticism' and 'concern' that the restraints demonstrated by Marie Gentles on 'Don't Exclude Me' are not safe. In actuality ICARS have provided the BBC not only government guidance to show the restraint demonstrated presented an unacceptable level of risk to children but in addition a statement from one of the UK's leading positional asphyxiation experts who wrote his statement out of consideration for the safety of children across the UK. We have also pointed them in the direction of others who could inform their investigation and evidenced much of what we wrote. But their response suggests that they have not taken adequate note of our concerns nor consulted with any of the people or organisations we signposted them to. Rather they claim to have watched a YouTube clip where Marie Gentles sought to justify her actions and a Twitter statement where the same is true.

We find it alarming that the BBC, in supporting Marie Gentles 'professional judgement', are perpetuating the opinion that the proportional response to a 6-year-old child kicking over a bucket of balls and half-heartedly throwing a ball in the direction of another child is a restraint that may lead to potential positional asphyxiation and lifelong trauma.

The BBC still haven't acknowledged that in all likelihood the child who they used to demonstrate dangerous and human-rights violating restraint on was a child with a neuro-divergent profile. It is widely accepted that the use of restraint in schools disproportionately affects children with disabilities and in particular autistic children.

When you consider the current media attention and public outrage regarding autistic individuals being deprived of their liberty in horrendous conditions in ATU's and other institutional settings we suggest that it is remiss of the BBC to fail to recognise a continuum in the use of restrictive practices involving restraint against the most vulnerable. A continuum that too often starts in schools.

The BBC admit themselves that they are not qualified to determine whether restraint used against children is appropriate or not. Therefore, to dismiss our complaint out of hand as they have is non-sensical. Why are they are not addressing this complaint comprehensively or passing it to those more qualified than themselves to address these serious matters?

Instead, the BBC investigator makes a bold statement, “I consider that what is shown in the programme is consistent with the law and good practice concerning the restraint of children at school.” Yet he has provided us with no evidence to support this view. He states, “Moreover the hold used by her was not one against which the Department for Education has issued advice”. Yet we have provided notable evidence to the contrary. The hold used by Marie Gentles was a form of Basket Hold which is clearly advised against by the government in their ‘Use of Force’ guidance. He goes on to write, “I understand that Team Teach does not approve or teach the technique used by Ms Gentles, however other agencies do continue to instruct teaching professionals on its safe application.” Who are these training providers who continue to train educational staff in basket holds/t-wraps against government advice and against expert medical opinion? If these companies exist, as the BBC assert, we would like to talk with them and those who accredit them. Let’s be clear there is no ‘safe application’ of this hold.

To be frank it would appear to us that the BBC are more concerned about their reputation and the reputation of Marie Gentles than taking the time to seriously reconsider their depiction of a restraint that could lead to ‘dangerous imitation’, resulting in the potential death and almost certain traumatising of children, and in particular disabled children, across the UK

And so:

- To all those children and survivors out there who are currently experiencing, or who have already experienced, traumatic, life changing restraint, we’re sorry. We are sorry that your suffering has gone unheard.
- To all those children who will suffer traumatising and potentially life-threatening restraint into the future as a result of this programming and its use in Open University Teacher Training courses, we’re sorry. We will continue to campaign and raise awareness of the deaths, the physical injuries and the psychological impacts the programme perpetuates. We recognise the complete lack of engagement there has been with survivors, the autistic community and others disproportionately affected by restraint. In fact, the lack of engagement with any who seek to change these archaic, barbaric practices by those who aim to justify them. These are behavioural management practices that too many, including the BBC, find acceptable even deeming them therapeutic. Rather the use of restraint needs calling out as the Human Rights violation it too often is.
- To those parents who lie awake at night haunted by the fact that their child with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities may be traumatised and harmed by the completely inappropriate use of restraint in their school tomorrow, we’re sorry. We know that you know the trauma first hand and are living with the pervasive, all-encompassing reality of it daily. We have tried to represent the outrage we saw and felt within the community of parents we are a part of. The BBC have failed to take our complaints seriously, but we hope that this irresponsible broadcasting emboldens us to work together uniting our voices against the institutional abuse of our children.
- To all those staff in education who want to and who do do so much better for the children in your care, we’re sorry. We know many of you were upset even horrified by the practices shown. We recognise there are many educators who support us and we thank you for the efforts you make day in, day out to meet the needs of our amazing, awe-inspiring children and young people who simply teach us all so much.

We are sorry that despite our best efforts the BBC chose to carry out such an incomplete and flawed investigation into our complaint. We are sorry that despite admitting they didn’t have the answers they didn’t seek the answers from anyone other than the one who perpetrated the restraint. We are sorry that yet again in 2022, in a supposedly civilised society, the most vulnerable have not been safeguarded.