

# **National Child Safeguarding Conference**

## **Communication**

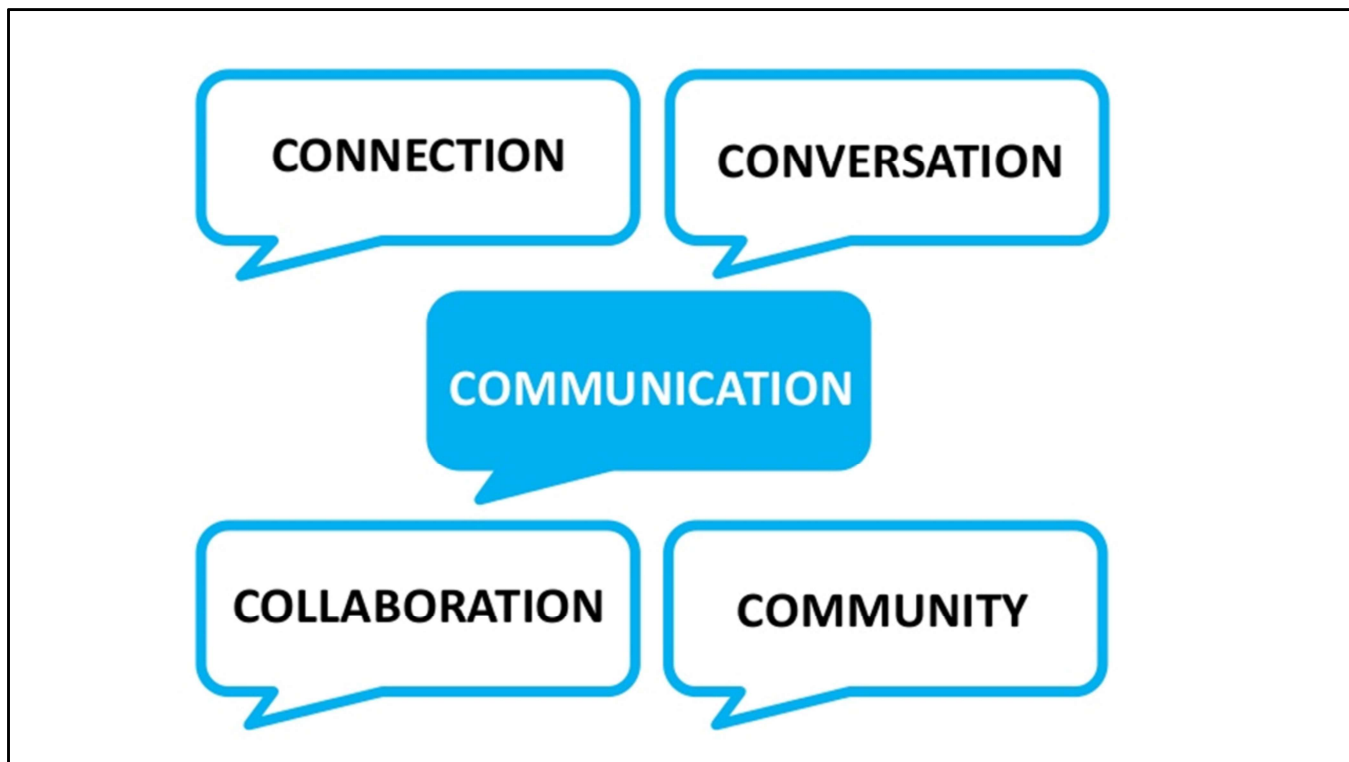
**Breda O'Brien**

**Tullamore, Oct 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

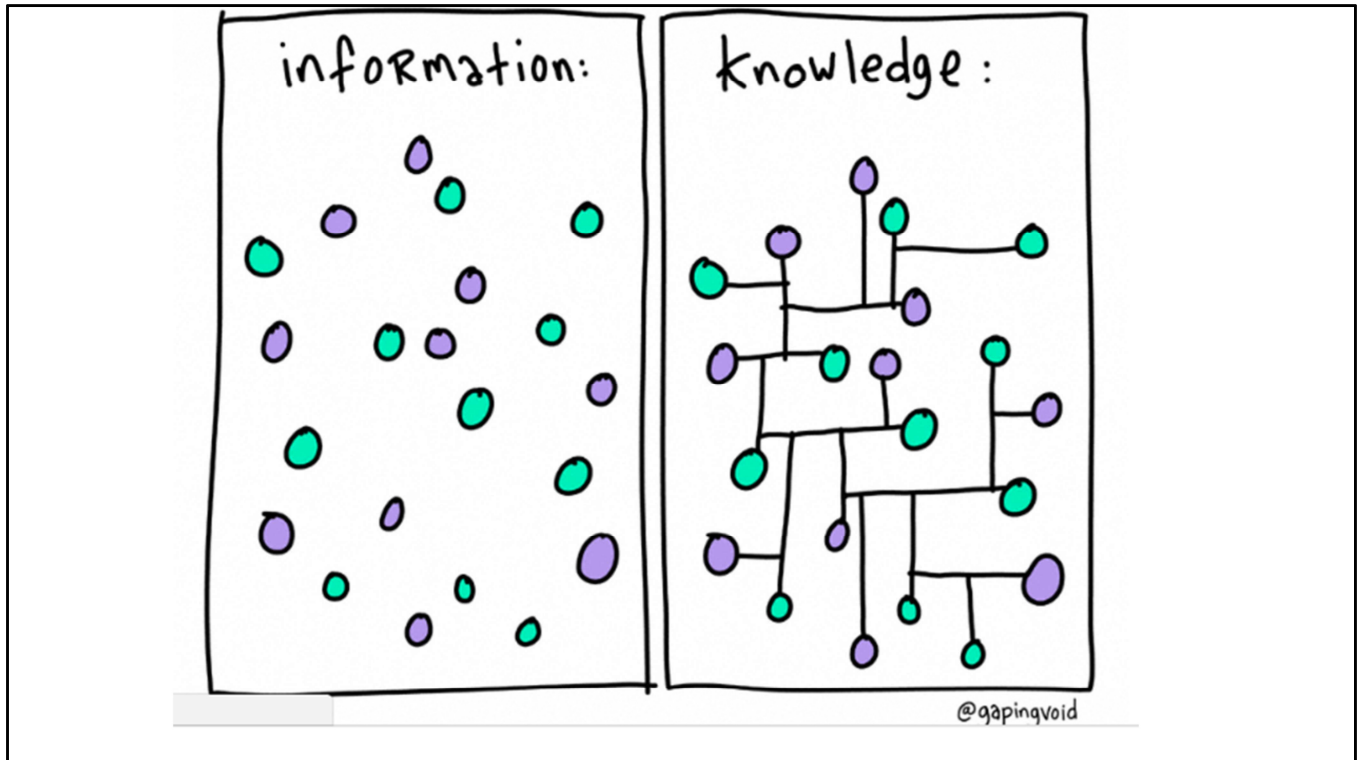
(Note: The format of the talk on communication depended heavily on visual images. The words of the talk have to be read in conjunction with the images or they do not make sense. )



Optional Extra? I am, of course, biased, but communication to me is not something bolted on to what you do in your work of safeguarding children, but is something absolutely central to everything that you do. Communication is an interchange between human beings, encompassing facts, information and feelings, and is a dynamic, fluid and interactive process that goes beyond words and has the potential to change all parties involved.

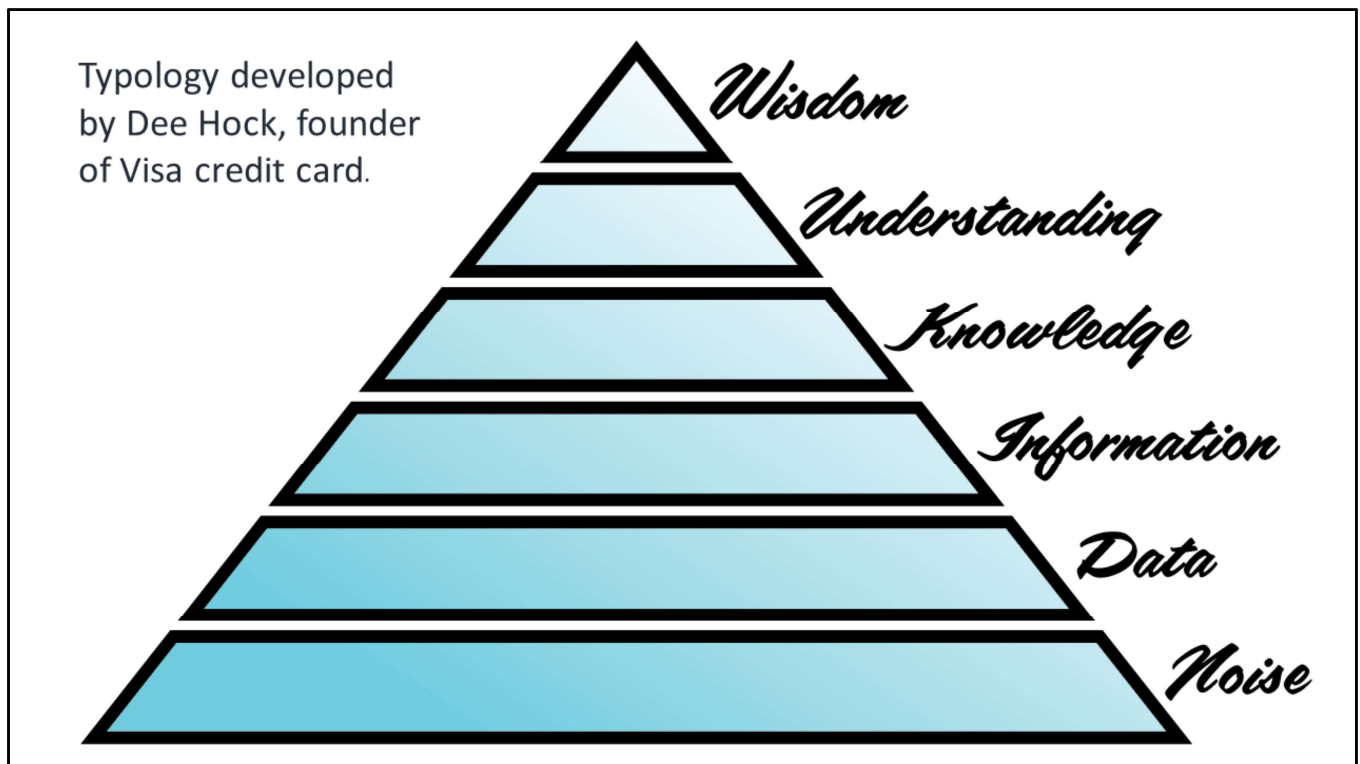


Slide Two: Communication happens at every level of what you do, whether it be the poster or the flyer in the back of the church letting people know who to contact, to the need for sensitive active listening to a person who is telling their story of abuse for the first time or the twenty-first time. It happens during training and it happens when someone is being told that there is an allegation against them. It is the lifeblood of what you do. Put at its most simple, without communication, safe environments for children will not happen, complainants will not feel listened to, and respondents will not feel that they are being treated justly.



We all know that there is a difference between information and knowledge and a greater difference again between knowledge and wisdom. Information can be scattered, and unconnected. Knowledge begins to join the dots. Information becomes knowledge when it's integrated with other information in a form useful for making decisions and determining actions. Wisdom, to me, has a spiritual dimension, an attempt to become one with grace before taking part in any difficult communication.





This hierarchy comes from a slightly unusual source – Dee Hock, the founder of Visa, and you would never suspect it, but the founder is someone who spent ten years reflecting on what makes organisations and corporations work, and the essential need that they have for purposes beyond making money. In his schema, knowledge becomes understanding when it's related to other knowledge in a manner useful for anticipating, judging, and acting.

**Wisdom:** Understanding becomes wisdom when it's informed by purpose, ethics, principles, memory, and projection.

Which may just  
remind you of...



**Wisdom**  
**Understanding**  
**Right Judgement**  
**Courage**  
**Knowledge**  
**Reverence**  
**Wonder and awe**

The astute will no doubt recognise the more than a little resemblance to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To me, communication at its best is a spiritual act.

# Honest



Let's look at some key characteristics of effective communication. We live in a world of spin. So most people's BS detectors are highly developed. As a result, honesty is almost a surprise. Personally, I think Tony Blair did enormous damage not just to politics but the culture in general when he promulgated the ideals of New Labour, which basically was about rule by focus groups. There were no fixed principles, just what would gain votes. As Christians, we don't have that option. But honesty is not a synonym for brutality.

**SPEAK  
THE  
TRUTH  
IN  
LOVE**

**Ephesians  
4: 15**

I think our motto has to be Ephesians 4: 15 - Speak the truth in love. Never as easy as it seems...



# Timely

It may seem an obvious point, but just like justice, communication delayed is justice denied. Picking the right moment, but not delaying out of fear is a key part of good communication.



## Clear and transparent

So often in the past, the Church suffered because it was not clear and transparent. Instead, it was opaque and almost relieved if it could avoid communicating at all. Any communication needs to be done in such a way that insofar as possible, even a child could understand it. After all, children are one of our key audiences.



# Balanced

This is another difficult things to achieve in any communication. It can refer to an inner balance, which harks back to our discussion of wisdom. But achieving balance means that it is fair to all parties, insofar as that it at all possible. This is not easy. By its nature, child safeguarding, responding to complainants and being just and fair to those who are respondents is like tap-dancing on a minefield.



I don't mean to be facetious in any way by proposing this metaphor. The work that you do, which attempts to balance the need of complaints to be heard and believed with the right of respondents to their good name until complaints are assessed as well-founded, is very, very difficult. Bet you never thought of yourself as a tap dancer – or maybe you did!



# Light not Heat



The next two principles are borrowed from Catholic Voices, which originated as Catholic Comment in the UK. So much of modern communication is about heat, about anger, about unhelpful blaming or defensiveness. We are all called not just to walk in the light, but to be light for each other.



# Witnessing, not winning

This is another of Catholic Comment's principles, and one I think that can bring calm to any area where you are trying to communicate. You can win an argument but lose a battle. People remember how someone made them feel long after the substance of an argument has been forgotten. We are trying to witness, not to win. Sometimes you just have to get out there and tell the truth because it is the right thing to do, even though you will be metaphorically clobbered for doing so. We are not trying to beat people into submission with the force of our arguments. We are trying to be respectful and constructive.



People working in child safeguarding are working in an area where the damage has been incalculable. Some of Jesus' strongest statements in the Gospel are about those who bring harm to children. And the reason that it is so scandalous is because it utterly contradicts everything that we should be about as a Church. In order to come from there, huge humility is needed, and an awareness that we can never relax our vigilance. In this case, it really is true that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.

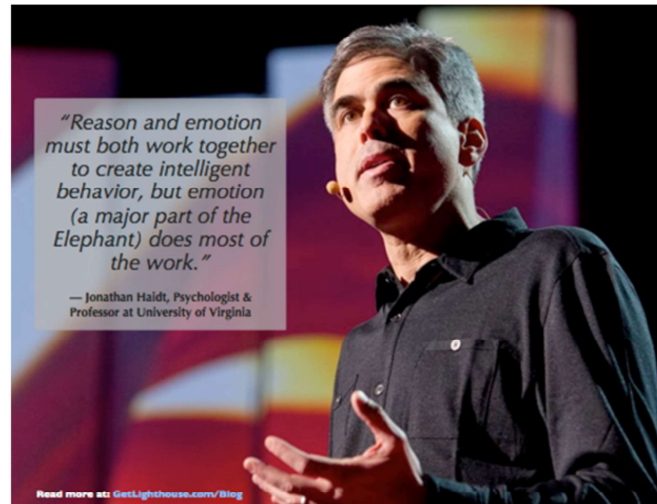
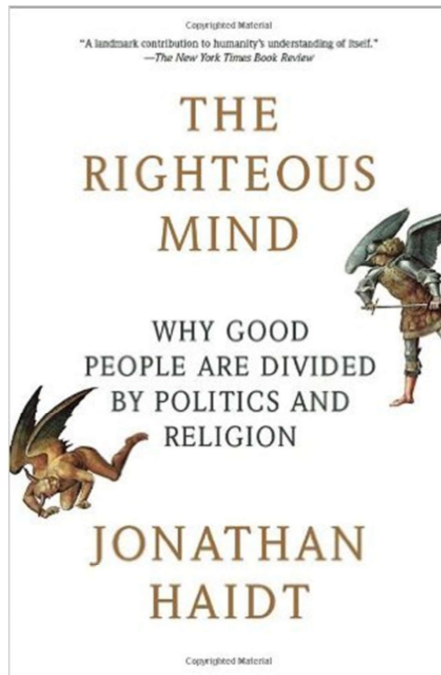


# Emotional vs Logical

A huge amount of communication is about emotional intelligence. This illustration comes from a metaphor coined by Jonathan Haidt, which describes humans as having both an elephant and a rider. (Although Haidt half borrowed it from Plato, who has an analogy concerning a chariot and two horses, one of which is ugly and obstinate, and the other is eternal and beautiful. A charioteer is attempting to steer both.) The little guy on top represents rationality, and the elephant represents emotion and unconscious processes. Don't scare the elephant!

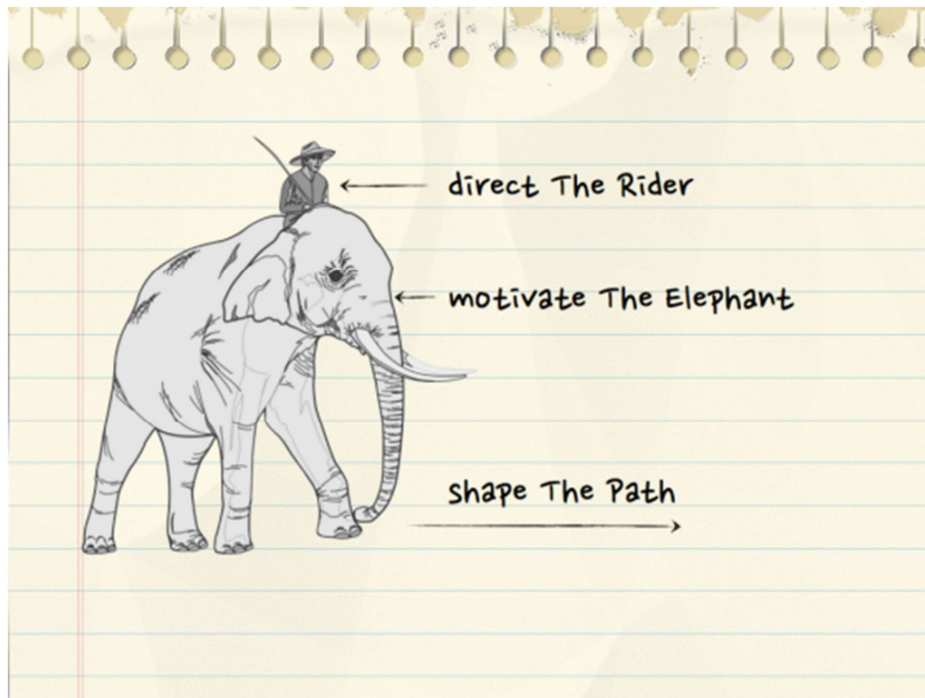
<http://bit.ly/2ejHZUJ>

**When you attend  
to the emotional work,  
then people no longer  
complain  
that the Church still  
does not  
'GET IT'**



Don't undervalue emotion. Emotion provides us with the energy to work. The gift of the elephant is action, while the weakness of the rider is endless indecision. The weakness of the elephant is bolting without rational thought when startled or afraid. When the rational and the emotional brain are in harmony, tremendous things happen.





In order to make it easier for them to work in concert, Haidt has three principles. Direct the rider, motivate the elephant, and shape the path. In my unparalleled ability to mix metaphors, you have now moved from being a tap dancer to being a mahout. But in fact, that is what you have accomplished over the past ten or eight years, depending on how you choose to count it. In particular, you have shaped the path, so that it is easier to comply with safe environments than not to comply. That is crucial. Communicating the seriousness of this touches the emotional mind, but unless the environments are there and the path is shaped, you will not get compliance.

*The rider and the elephant metaphor for changing behaviour. From **Switch** by Dan and Chip Heath.*

Joanne Warner

**THE  
EMOTIONAL  
POLITICS  
OF SOCIAL WORK  
AND CHILD PROTECTION**

## ‘Emotional Work’

Politicians:  
Expressing and  
generating anger

There is very little written about media coverage of child safeguarding. There has been some very good work on media balance in regard to child abuse, by people like Michael Breen in the University of Limerick, and a lot of sociological work on the impact on the influence of the Catholic Church. But this book, even though it is written from a UK perspective, is very interesting, because it focuses on the emotional work of child protection, as they call it. Joanne Warner has one key insight. Communicating about child protection has a key emotional component, and success in politics now rests on judging the emotional temperature during a crisis, and articulating that. She also says that one of the primary emotions in politics is anger...it is easier to be against than to be for.



Joanne Warner

**THE  
EMOTIONAL  
POLITICS  
OF SOCIAL WORK  
AND CHILD PROTECTION**

**Media:**  
Do not 'tell it  
like it is' but  
'tell it like it  
means'  
(Bird and Dardenne,  
1997)

So it proved during one of the worst scandals to hit British social work, the death of Baby P.. Peter Connelly (also known as "Baby P", "Child A", and "Baby Peter") was a 17-month-old English boy who died in London in 2007 after suffering more than fifty injuries over an eight-month period, during which he was repeatedly seen by the London Borough of Haringey Children's services and National Health Service. It was a moment of national shame. And Warner quotes this, and I have to say that as an English teacher , the construction of the sentences offends me, but the insight is very important.

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In other words, media narratives are constructed. They make meaning out of events. They create a story. What's the story? This is the key media question. I will be looking in a minute more closely at frames, but for the moment, I'm going to look at the narrative that David Cameron helped to construct around Baby P.

Let me be clear, there were egregious failures regarding Baby P and his death and the circumstances regarding it were shameful. But David Cameron, then in Opposition, wrote several pieces for the newspapers, and they shaped the dialogue to a large extent.

In the final section of his article, Cameron positions the social workers in the case as blameworthy *specifically* for following bureaucratic procedures and failing to act on ‘common sense’. ‘Managerialism’ and standardised assessment—ironically also under attack from within social work of course (see, e.g. [White et al., 2009](#))—are presented here as the barrier against an empathic engagement with Baby P’s suffering that virtually *anyone* else in the country *other than a social worker* would have overcome. Social workers fail not as soft, do-gooders, but as robotic bureaucrats who have become disconnected from humane responses to suffering. Invoking common sense reinforces an ‘us–them’ divide because the message is clear: any of ‘us’ would have acted, but ‘they’ did not:

You can see that the natural anger at the failures of some becomes a narrative where all social workers are detached, unfeeling, not us – we are humane and caring, they are robotic, unfeeling.

So real failures that are systems failures become also personal failures of an entire class or group of people. You can see the parallels, I’m sure?

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Warner says: (and I agree!)

No Point in Trying  
to Generate 'Good  
News' Stories

All About Building  
Relationships

The media have their own values, deadlines and demands. Trying to 'use the media' is a pointless exercise in many ways. We need to do what is right, and then if we receive good media coverage that is a very nice by-product.

Joanne Warner

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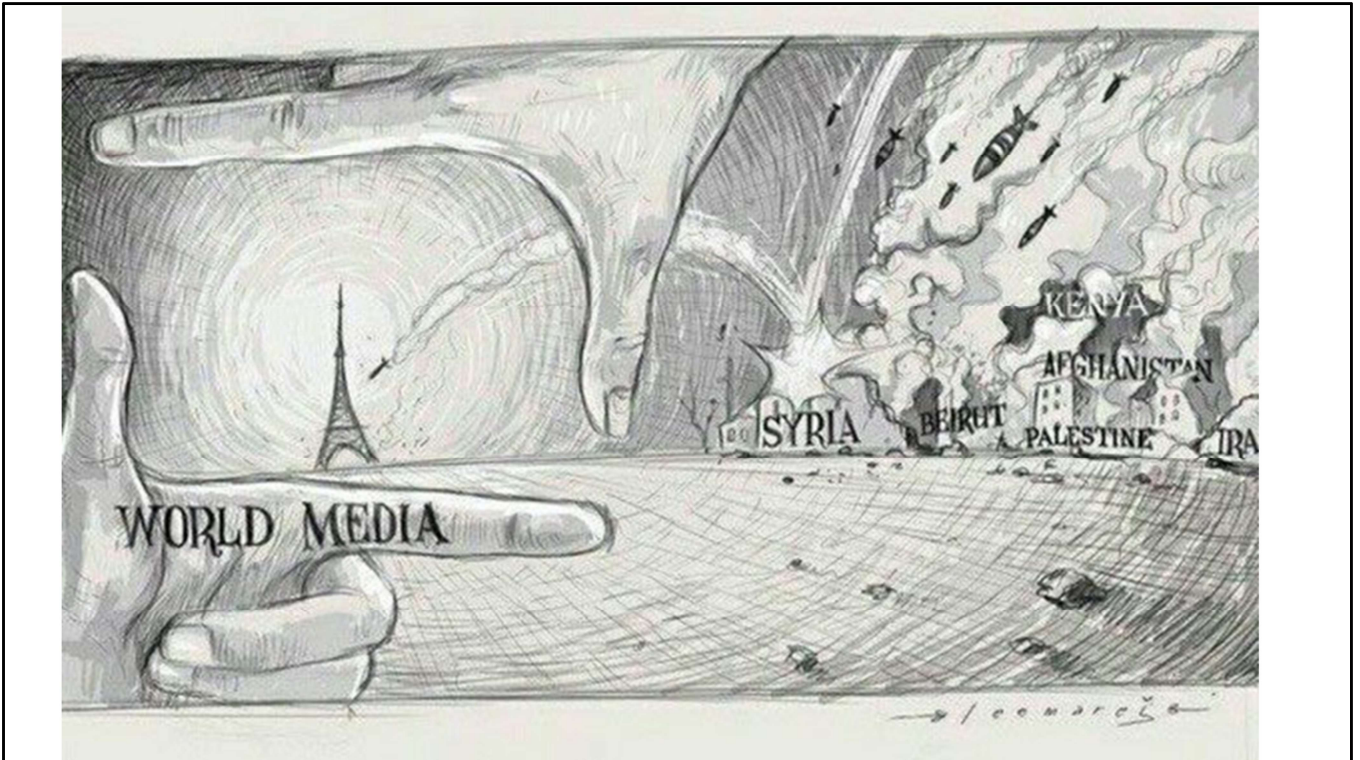
News = primarily  
about news  
'The media are  
better at scaring  
than reassuring'  
(Waisbord, 2002)

It really is true that if it bleeds, it leads. Good news is far less likely to generate coverage. Nor should media feel obligated to produce good PR for organisations.



This does not mean that the media do not have significant power. Just like the idea of story, framing is another vital media concept. The media cannot tell us what to think but they can tell us what to think about...but also tell us where to focus.





Slide with hand framing Eiffel tower while bombings go on constantly elsewhere: Our attention is always focused on the local, the prominent, the powerful and the conflictual. But by definition, and this is due to constraints of time and space, we are always NOT looking elsewhere when our focus is directed in a particular direction. <http://bit.ly/2e99Crn>

You will continue to make  
news whether you want to or  
not...



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

For historical reasons, the National Board will  
continue to make news for a long time to come.



1. THE Boko Haram group which kidnapped over 250 Nigerian schoolgirls on 14 April has released a new video, which appears to show some of the abducted girls. The group has listed some of its demands for the release of the girls:



Source: AFP via Twitter

2. THE National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland are publishing their fifth review of dioceses around the country. The full reports will be online [here](#) at 1.30pm but there are a number of recommendations emerging – including that a proper policy for ‘whistleblowers’ on abuse be set up.



I was amused to see that on the Journal.ie in May 2014, in their news of the day, you rated second only to the story ‘Bring back Our Girls.’

1. THE Boko Haram group which kidnapped over 250 Nigerian schoolgirls on 14 April has released a new video, which appears to show some of the abducted girls. The group has listed some of its demands for the release of the girls:



And in fact, there is a little modern parable here. Remember the intense media focus in 2014 on this story? Well, the media attention has moved on, and most of those girls are still out there, now mothers of babies, and many of them rumoured to be dead. The media attention has moved on, but you can be sure that there are people on the ground still struggling to find those girls. They are continuing on doing what needs to be done even though media attention has gone away, continuing with the quiet, painful, difficult work that still has to be done.

Source: [AFP](#) via Twitter

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It is fascinating that in May 2014 that this relatively straight piece of reporting made the second most important story.

# Real progress achieved by Catholic Church on child protection

Board for Safeguarding Children has adopted robust integrity since it was set up in 2006

© Fri, May 6, 2016, 00:00

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THE IRISH TIMES VIEW



To your great credit, you have achieved so much through building relationships and shaping the environment, that you even occasionally get praise from the Irish Times – which is praise indeed!

Joanne Warner

**THE  
EMOTIONAL  
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Mainstream media  
have gone from  
being a 'big, bad,  
uncontrolled beast'  
to a 'fatally  
wounded stag'.  
Dean, 2013

Sadly for the Irish Times and other mainstream print and broadcast media, they have no clear idea how to deal with the new kid on the block – online media



This is a more and more common sight.



All this technology is making us unsociable



I could not resist adding in this slide. There are many worrying aspects of modern online media, including aspects which touch directly on child safeguarding but there is also some gloom and doom which may not be justified.



Here's an image often used to describe the impact and spread of the smartphone. The top is Pope Benedict's election as Pope, and the bottom is from Pope Francis' election. See the sea of screens in the second image?





Except the top picture was taken after the death of Saint John Paul, not the election of his successor. It was a much more solemn occasion. This picture here was actually taken at Pope Benedict's election. You can see that there were plenty of photographs and videos being taken. The key change is that the internet and especially uploading videos, had not taken off in the way it had by 2013. People might have been showing them to friends, but the whole interactivity of social media was still to come.



Social Media has changed the way we look at.....

Sports results

Elections

Campaigns

Purchasing

Customer Service

Live events

Concerts

Crises

It has also changed the way we interact with media, especially with news. Now, sometimes people are reacting to the tweet about the news item rather than the news item itself. This gives tremendous power to people who have a large number of followers.

Newspaper sales have been in retreat since 2007.

In the second half of 2007 an average of 816,031 newspapers were sold each day.

In the first half of 2015, that number stood at 493,913.



Irish Independent: 109,524, down 2.5%

Irish Times: 76,194, down 5.2%

Irish Sun: 57,702, down 5%

Irish Daily Star: 57,658, down 6.4%

Irish Daily Mail: 49,872, down 0.3%

The Herald: 48,133, down 6.7%

Irish Daily Mirror: 43,250, down 14%

Irish Examiner: 33,198, down 5.3%

The numbers seem to be going inexorably downwards. People still want news, but they want it for free. This is impossible. It is particularly impossible if you want any semblance of balance.

# 1.8 million Irish People use Facebook every single day



70% of Irish Businesses are on  
Facebook.

Source: Irish Digital Consumer Report 2015

These are extraordinarily high figures. Of course, it does not mean that they are interacting with news media, but if they are, the algorithms that Facebook favour are leading to 'bubbles', where people are increasingly presented with what their family and friends are looking at. Therefore, there is the danger that they are not seeing a wide spectrum of views, but only the views that confirm what they already believe.

# 700,000 people log on to Twitter every day in Ireland.

15-24 year olds at 53% of the Audience

92% of Irish Journalists use Twitter every day.



Source: Irish Digital Consumer Report 2015

Twitter is not the real world, but journalists are obsessed with it, and there is a real danger that even though their conscious minds may realise that only people who have jobs that permit them to be constantly online are represented, the journalist's 'elephant' can begin to believe that this is a fair representation of modern Ireland.



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‘The use of social media...appears to reflect and magnify mainstream media accounts more than it challenges them.’

However, just because media has become more interactive, does not mean that it has become more balanced. Quite often, it has become more imbalanced due to the bubble effect mentioned earlier.



## Opportunities and Challenges

Given all that you have achieved, I feel bad about loading another responsibility on you, but where is the National Board on social media? Where would someone find information online? There are tremendous opportunities to connect much more directly to audiences, partly to the generation who are under 35.



Good  
News!

The text "Good News!" is written in a red, hand-drawn, slightly irregular font. The word "Good" is on the top line and "News!" is on the bottom line. Above the word "Good", there are three gold-colored crosses arranged in a slightly curved line. The entire text has a soft, light blue glow or shadow effect around it.

But in all this talk of news and news values, it is important to remember that our real Good News lies in the values of the Gospel, from which we can never waver.



**Be wise as  
serpents  
and innocent  
as doves...  
Not the other  
way around!**

<http://eegor316.deviantart.com/art/Serpent-and-the-Dove-98218405>



I like to refer to this power of communication as “closeness”. The encounter between communication and mercy will be fruitful to the degree that it generates a closeness which cares, comforts, heals, accompanies and celebrates.

World Communications Day, 2016

I’ll end with this quote from the last World Communications Day, which I think neatly connects two key themes – the work of communication and the work of safeguarding in the Catholic Church.