

INTERNET POLICY PERTAINING TO ORPHANAGE CHILDREN

Without permission, it is against Ecuadorian law to have information that identifies specific children in orphanages in any type of public way, including public parts of websites (such as personal web pages, blogs, etc.), facebook.com, myspace.com (and other such places), mass e-mails, newspapers or other news media. This would include any pictures (even without names in the caption) or usage of names of children or orphanages that anyone might be able to use to identify specific children. OSSO cannot give you permission to use these kinds of things in a public place; only the orphanages can.

Not even the orphanages can give permission to tell, in a public way, about the abuse or illegal neglect or treatment of a child in a way that the child can be identified by pictures names or details of the story.

It's unlikely that after you leave Ecuador that you'll be punished for breaking these Ecuadorian laws, but OSSO, our Project Directors and, ultimately the children, could suffer from the actions of our volunteers.

A public place is any place on the internet that someone can find without specific permission of the owner. That means that if your website or blog can be found by searching, or by a link given out by anyone but the owner of the page, it's public. It also means the part of your profile on Facebook that's visible to people other than your friends is public. Even things seen on Facebook that can only be seen by friends, if you're not careful about who you accept as Facebook friends, could be a problem. Make sure that if you send any pictures to family or friends via the internet that they know they're not authorized to forward those pictures or identifying information to anyone.

Many private orphanages in Ecuador have their own websites and display pictures of their own children. For many reasons, this is a means of keeping their orphanage running—pictures catch people's hearts, and they in turn become supporters of the orphanage, donating funds toward the running of the orphanage and being involved in that orphanage being run well.

Up until the end of 2007 we didn't have pictures of children from the orphanages on our website. They weren't our children, and we didn't have permission to do so. OSSO now has its own orphanage, Los Pequeñitos de OSSO (OSSO's Little Ones), and we can, if we choose, display pictures/videos of our children on our website, in our newsletters and our official OSSO Facebook page, and we're doing this, but only with permission. If you want to use pictures of the children and have a specific compelling reason that will benefit the children we can ask permission for you as well.

Some volunteers have felt that as soon as a child is adopted that child is no longer an orphanage child and so their pictures can be used in a public way. That is not true. Once a child is adopted they still have a right to privacy. Pictures of them when they were in the orphanages need permission from the orphanage to be used publicly; pictures of them after they were adopted require permission from their parents.

We ask you to be respectful of the privacy and dignity of the children even in information you present in a private manner. If someone had access to very private information about your children you'd want them to treat it with respect and privacy. Please also ask those who have access to your private information or photos that they use that information with respect as well.

We also ask that in any communication you have about your experience in the orphanages, especially in public, that you avoid presenting things in a way that makes the orphanages, the orphanage staff or the government in Ecuador look bad. OSSO has been working hard for years on many levels to try to improve the situation of the children. We're given a great privilege to be allowed into the personal lives of these children, so help us respect their privacy and not make them victims again. We realize that things are not perfect, but we must maintain good relationships with everyone involved in order to help the children. If you had a babysitter that came to your home and took note of the negative things she saw in your home and then went and told everyone you'd likely not invite her back no matter how badly you needed her help.

If you'd like to place pictures of our children (Los Pequeñitos de OSSO/OSSO's Little Ones) on the internet in a public way you need to ask for written permission to do so, and we'll give you a written reply. If you'd like permission from any of the orphanages we work in to post pictures/information publicly we can ask for you.

Criteria for granting permission to use pictures/videos, names or identifying information about the children from the orphanages:

- it's still a possible invasion of the children's privacy to display their pictures, names or stories in any public way: permission will not be granted unless the perceived benefit to the children is greater than the perceived invasion of privacy
- pictures/videos cannot be tied to the children's names or identifying stories if there is mention of abuse or other illegal mistreatment
- the children must be portrayed in a positive light; while pitiful pictures of dirty, ragged children may be very effective at getting an emotional response, Ecuadorian culture considers this an assault on the children's dignity, as do we
- a personal pictorial travelogue or scrapbook has great personal value; permission will not be granted to have pictures of our children on sites whose primary purpose is of a personal nature, and not tied to a specific effort to advance the cause of the children
- we need to know the website/media where pictures/videos, or identifying information, will appear and reserve the right to withdraw permission if not presented in an appropriate manner

The only acceptable means of permission is *formal written permission* from OSSO's Rexburg office (technically, we'll have to get this permission from the specific orphanage and they'll in turn require a written, signed letter explaining what type of pictures and information will be used and how).

For anyone who has participated with OSSO to display pictures/videos, or other information, without permission puts OSSO, our employees and our mission at risk.

* Finding adoptive families is very important, but it's also surrounded by difficult legal and cultural issues; improperly posting pictures, or other identifying information, could actually block the adoption of the children.