

To all those within the Down syndrome community, and their family and friends,

This is a call to action! We need your help, and together our voices are stronger.

Emmerdale has commenced a storyline which sees two characters choose to terminate their pregnancy following a diagnosis of Down syndrome. This storyline will perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigmatise those with Down syndrome. We do not cast judgement on the choices that women make about their pregnancies, and this storyline could have run without targeting our community. It is outdated and offensive.

We are asking you to please take five minutes tomorrow evening after the episode of Emmerdale tomorrow, where Laurel and Jai receive a high chance screening result, to complain to Ofcom about the episode. We also ask that you continue to complain as the storyline runs.

We have drafted a template complaint below which you can use. We strongly encourage you to personalise this and give your own reasons for why you do not support the Emmerdale storyline.

Our loved ones deserve so much better than this; the more complaints Ofcom receive, the more likely they will be to act. Please ask all your friends and family if they will help make a stand too, by sharing details of this action online, with the hashtags **#EducatingEmmerdale**, **#HearOurVoice** **#EmmerFail** and tagging **Ofcom**, **Emmerdale**, **ITVdrama**, **DSAInfo**, **Positive About Down Syndrome**, **the Postcode Lottery** and your local MPs.

Please help us get our voices heard too. Please help be a positive voice for change. Please support us to make a stand against discrimination and stereotyping which is set to be broadcast into family homes across the UK in the name of entertainment.

Link to Complaint Form:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/complaints>

To Navigate to complaint form, click;

- Complain about TV, radio, on demand services or video-sharing platforms
- A programme I saw or heard
- On another TV channel or radio station

Programme details

- Programme title: Emmerdale
- Date of Broadcast: [Update to complain after every episode]
- Time of Broadcast: 19:00
- Channel / Station: ITV

Date of Episode	Summary

30/11/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signposting to DSA was only available on ITV website 15 mins post episode ending• DSA signposting only has phone number, no description of services provided, which is unlike ARC• Signposting only provided verbally at the end of each episode – This is not accessible for affected viewers who have DS, as they have a learning disability and research into their learning profile means they are better at visual rather than auditory processing• Doctor says, regarding CVS testing, “obviously It’s for you to decide how important that information might be to you” and Laurel responds “You mean whether or not I choose to have a termination?” and then the scene ends. This suggests that the purpose of antenatal screening and diagnostic testing is to determine whether or not to have a termination of pregnancy, and does not provide details of other reasons for testing, including determining whether additional monitoring and scans are required during pregnancy, or for parents to prepare for a baby with disabilities. This is directive and does not help significant existing issues around informed consent to antenatal screening and testing.
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01/12/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSA signposting only has phone number, no description of services provided, which is unlike ARC • Signposting only provided verbally at the end of each episode – This is not accessible for affected viewers who have DS, as they have a learning disability and research into their learning profile means they are better at visual rather than auditory processing • Jai says “It’s bad, isn’t it?”. This language perpetuates negative stereotype that DS is something be feared of and is “bad” • Jai asked if the test would change anything. This suggests that the purpose of antenatal screening and diagnostic testing is to determine whether or not to have a termination of pregnancy, and does not provide details of other reasons for testing, including determining whether additional monitoring and scans are required during pregnancy, or for parents to prepare for a baby with disabilities. This is directive and does not help significant existing issues around informed consent to antenatal screening and testing. • Quotes in the episode (below) perpetuate negative stereotypes of the condition, that a DS diagnosis is “bad” that children with DS are a burden to their families and their siblings, that they are people to be “coped” and “managed” with. Furthermore, the scripting is not accurate or consistent with scientific studies which show that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“brothers and sisters experience a wide range of emotions, but typically the positive feelings outweigh the negative feelings”</i> (Skotko, Levine, 2006) ○ <i>“Siblings find rich value in having a family member with DS, and most will assume positions of advocacy at some level in their lives”</i> (Skotko, Levine, 2006) ○ <i>Of parents surveyed “99% reported that they love their son or daughter, 97% were proud of them; 79% felt their outlook on life was more positive because of them”</i> (Skotko et al, 2011) • “Families of children with Down Syndrome have the potential to lead full and productive lives and positively adapt to their child’s diagnosis” (Caples et al 2018) <p>Quotes</p> <p>Jai: It’s bad, isn’t it?</p> <p>Laurel: This child could potentially need a lot of care. This doesn’t just affect us, it has a huge impact on our kids lives too</p> <p>Jai: When Eliza was born, we were shocked to hear she had a disability, but we managed</p> <p>Laurel: Given the choice, isn’t it better to be armed with the facts so we can properly decide whether we can cope?</p> <p>Laurel: Kids break your heart.... Parenting is a series of difficult decisions. We need to know what we’re dealing with to make informed choices</p>
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Complaint Subject (Character Limit of 225): I am writing in complaint of the Emmerdale episode which depicted... [Please use summary table above to describe episode in complaint subject]

Description: Complaint (1,500 Character Limit – If complaint is greater than character limit, the whole complaint can be submitted using a computer rather than phone)

I am writing in complaint of the Emmerdale episode which depicted Laurel and Jai receiving news that their unborn child has Down syndrome, and the broader storyline which is set to continue over the run up to Christmas.

[So that complaints are not all the same, we really encourage you to add your personal reasons for feeling strongly about the storyline]

I believe that this episode was in breach of Section 2 of the Ofcom Broadcast Code (Harm and Offence) and in breach of Article 14 of the Human Rights Act (Protection from discrimination).

Ofcom guidance states that; "If there is an under-representation, the use of stereotypes and caricatures or the discussion of difficult or controversial issues involving that community may be seen as offensive in that it is viewed as creating a false impression of that minority". The 2020 Creative Diversity Network's annual report found that representation of disabled people on screen by ITV was only 4.6%, despite approximately 17% of the working-age population being disabled. The storyline represents discussion of a difficult and controversial issue involving the Down syndrome, and broader disabled community, in the context of under-representation and no consultation with the community during its production – except, it appears, those on ITV pay roll. Therefore, I believe it is offensive.

The storyline perpetuates fear and stigma of the condition, by suggesting that a Down syndrome diagnosis will inevitably lead to a lifetime of suffering and that those with the condition are a burden to their parents and society more broadly. This in turn fosters the environment in which prejudice and discrimination against those with the condition can prevail.

A responsible broadcaster would take steps to ensure that they do not cause harm or offence to a community; and harm and offence is precisely what is happening to the Down syndrome community because of this storyline.

The storyline has already caused unbearable pain and anguish to the Down syndrome community. As a result of the Emmerdale publicity build up and "sneak-peek" trailers advertising the storyline, members of the Down syndrome community have already received direct attacks via social media, hate mail posted to home addresses and feel judged and uncomfortable whilst going about their daily lives as the Emmerdale storyline continues to be fiercely debated. There have been comments in response to the media publicity of this story to suggest that people within the Down syndrome community are lying about their quality of life, that women who continue their pregnancy are selfish to knowingly bring a disabled child into the world and - worst of all - that the lives of those with Down syndrome are lives of suffering, burden and economically too costly to tolerate. Emmerdale is causing harm to our community by inciting discrimination and hate speech.

At the time of writing this complaint, over 29,000 people have now signed the [change.org](https://www.change.org) petition requesting the storyline be binned. It is estimated there are 40,000 individuals in the United Kingdom living with the condition, which means that a significant proportion of the impacted minority group is offended by the storyline.

The promotion and publicity of the storyline was not adequately labelled to reduce the potential for offence and the trailers released were inappropriate as they included offensive material. To date, ITV has only sought to sign post to Antenatal Results & Choices, which is a charity which supports women through termination, and not any charities which support individuals with Down syndrome, or their families. The trailers and promotional material to advertise the storyline equated a Down syndrome diagnosis on-screen with termination, used outdated condition-first language, and perpetuated fear and stigma of the condition by using language such as "agony" and "devastating", in relation to a couple receiving the news of a pre-natal Down syndrome diagnosis. This language is directive, offensive and discriminatory.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states *“The Committee is concerned about perceptions in society that stigmatize persons with disabilities as living a life of less value than that of others”* and noted concerns where expressed around the approach to abortion in the UK, where disabled people have suggested a bias towards termination of pregnancies if a child is likely to be disabled. Furthermore, the CRPD encourages *“all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the present Convention”*. This storyline does not portray persons with disability in a manner consistent with the Convention.

The United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) *“aligns itself with CRPD in the condemnation of sex-selective and disability-selective abortions, both stemming from the need to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices towards women and persons with disabilities”*. The depiction of a disability-selective abortion following a Down syndrome diagnosis by Emmerdale, stigmatises people with Down Syndrome as living a life of less value than others.

Article 14 of the Human Rights Act makes it illegal to discriminate. This storyline would not be tolerated if it were regarding termination of pregnancy on any other grounds such as race, gender, or sexuality. As such, people with Down syndrome are being treated less favourably, and this treatment cannot be objectively and reasonably justified.

This storyline is a direct attack on a community with protected characteristics, who were not consulted or considered during its production. The story line is set to continue during the run up to Christmas, with even more harrowing scenes expected to come. I understand there will be an upcoming episode featuring Laurel, Jai, Rhona, Marlon and Leo, in which the value of Leo’s life is debated and informs the decision made by Laurel and Jai. This suggests that his life is still not of equal value to a typical child. Debating the value of the life of a child with Down syndrome in this way will achieve nothing in terms of promoting an accepting and compassionate response to Down syndrome. This episode will be extraordinarily distasteful, offensive, and harmful to all individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and their friends.

I request that you please open a formal investigation into the nature of this storyline and take appropriate actions to prevent further harm and offence being caused to our community. I await your response.

Yours faithfully