

**Complaint Subject (Character Limit of 225):** I am writing in complaint of the Emmerdale episode which depicted... [Please use summary table available on the website 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/p/itv-stop-emmerdale-down-syndrome-storyline) 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 were 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