

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILD ADVOCATES, YOUTH GROUPS AND CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

1. Work With Reporters To Give A More Accurate Picture.

Because of the juvenile justice system's historic confidentiality protections, many child advocates refuse to talk to reporters about the context of individual cases. This places a serious and sometimes insurmountable burden on reporters when they try to tell a more complete story. Child advocates and lawyers must develop more creative ways to tell a more contextual story about youth crime without jeopardizing their clients' confidentiality.

2. Engage Reporters, Editors, and Producers In Dialogue About Their Coverage.

Child advocates, youth groups and civil rights groups need to begin to engage news outlets as consumers to educate the news media about their needs and to jointly seek solutions to the complex issues raised in this and other reports about coverage of youth crime. We Interrupt This Message, an advocacy group that conducted two of the studies discussed in this report, took its findings on disproportionate youth crime portrayals directly to the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *New York Times*. In 2000, Suffolk University's law school held a forum which brought together reporters from the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, and several electronic media with lawyers and community groups that work with young people for a productive exchange of ideas about coverage of youth crime. In recent years, civil rights groups like the NAACP and the National Council of La Raza have highlighted the scarcity of minority representation on network programming. Although these efforts concerned entertainment media, similar efforts to educate news media about depictions of minority offenders and victims may also be well received.

3. Make Data Available.

Journalists need local data to make national problems relevant for their audiences. Share information with journalists so they can learn about local patterns, incorporate that information into daily stories, and give citizens the information they need to make better decisions about juvenile justice policy.

4. Prepare Young People To Speak for Themselves, and Let Them Do So.

Give young people the training they need to speak confidently about the work they are doing to improve their communities for themselves and others. Create situations where young people can interact with journalists so they can begin establishing themselves as sources on their own.

5. Make Yourself Available to Reporters.

Youth advocates and researchers cannot have an impact on the coverage of youth crime if journalists don't know they exist, if they cannot find spokespeople when they need them, or if advocates do not respond to their requests for information in a timely manner. Advocates' availability as experts or alternative voices prior to deadline can help shape coverage and put violence among youth into its proper context.