



Advocacy Education Series: Tips for Speaking with Reporters

- **If a reporter calls you, call them back promptly** and ask what kind of story they are doing, how much information they need, if there is anyone else they'd like to talk to, and when their deadline is.
- **Read some of the reporter's previous work** to learn what kind of story they tend to do and what kind of questions they ask.
- **Prepare your main points and examples.** Write down 3 quotes you want included in the article and have them in front of you.
- **Make sure that you understand the question.** Walking things back is difficult, so take the time to fully comprehend and think before you answer to avoid being misunderstood or misquoted.
- **Clarify immediately** if it seems that you have been misunderstood. Be gentle, but make sure you've been properly understood.
- **Be deliberate and concise.** Use language that is relatable and easily understood, but don't speak down to them. Avoid overly technical terms or legal jargon. Keep to major points and broader issues.
- **Smile and relax.** Even if they can't see you, a pleasant demeanor will come through. Speak clearly and confidently.
- **Don't worry about awkward silences.** A reporter is likely focused on writing or typing what you are saying and may not acknowledge when you are finished speaking. It doesn't mean you need to add to what you said or continue speaking.
- **Have one or two overlaying points** that all your statements support or relate to. This makes it easier to stay on message and ensures that the article is about what *you* want it to be about.
- **Be honest** if you don't know an answer. Ask when their deadline is and let them know you will get them the correct answer, then make sure to follow through.
- **Provide background materials** if possible and always cite your sources. Ensure that the reporter understands your position or the position of the organization you are representing.
- **Assume that everything you say could end up in the article.** This will help you filter yourself and stay on message and on guard. Stay away from jokes, as they can easily be taken out of context.
- **Don't take it personally** if you aren't quoted very much in the published article. What stays and goes is usually an editor's decision, generally determined by available space.

For tips on how to pitch a story, see the National Juvenile Justice Network's ['Pitching Stories to Reporters.'](#)