

Eight Tips for Juvenile Justice Advocates Who Want to Work with Victims & Crime Survivors*

TIP SHEET: OCTOBER 2015

1. **Respect victims' voices even if you don't agree with what's being said.**
Victims are experiencing trauma and their pain is real, even if you are uncomfortable with that pain or don't like how the pain is being expressed. There are not "good" and "bad" victims. Some prosecutors give preferential treatment to victims if they do what the prosecutor wants and press victims who "aren't cooperating." We can do better than this.
2. **Reach out to victim assistance organizations and victim advocates in your community to learn more about victims' issues and needs.** Learn and listen before taking action. Look for areas of common ground and assess if there's interest in working together to meet shared goals.
3. **Use caution when mobilizing any impacted people** (this applies to victims and convicted youth). Re-telling traumatizing experiences can trigger a trauma response from the person telling the story. Ensure that victims have access to support not connected with the case, and if they need to step out of the process, support their decision.
4. **Be honest.** You can be a great and reliable source of information about the criminal and juvenile justice system. Try to be unbiased in your communications but also transparent about your goals—trust is essential.
5. **Support victim services.** When we work towards cutting corrections cost and reinvesting in community-based programs, be sure to include services and supports for victims in your re-investment strategy.

* These eight tips were created through the Partnership for Safety and Justice's Crime Survivors Program (<http://www.safetyandjustice.org>).

6. **Learn the language.** As a movement, we constantly strive to learn more sensitive language around issues of race, gender, etc. We need to increase our knowledge of victim sensitive language. For example, telling victims things like “you need to move on” or “I understand” come across as insulting and disingenuous. Likewise, talking about the trauma experienced by the person who caused the harm (i.e., the youth defendant, “he is now being victimized by the system”) rather than validating the harm the victim experienced (“that must have been awful” or “I am so sorry”), can be perceived as disrespectful and trivializing by victims. Productive conversation depends on being a good listener and validator first.
7. **Remember: These are all our people.** There is real overlap between victims and youth convicted of crime. As we know, many youth who commit crimes have been victims of violence. While it’s important to acknowledge that not everyone who survives crime will commit crime, advocating for victims services will directly impact the lives of youth experiencing trauma.
8. **Respect and support victims and their advocates’ needs.** We need to work with victims and victim organizations honestly and holistically, and not simply try to leverage their support for our work. Support victim focused work when you can. Consider the impact on victims when passing reform legislation. Build relationships and get feedback.

Our justice system dehumanizes both “victims” and “offenders.” By working with everyone impacted by the system, we can help create safer communities and stronger individuals, ready to rebuild their lives!