

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVENESS TIP SHEET

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Effective movements include many diverse voices. The following guidelines were developed by members of the NJJN community to ensure that all voices are respected, heard and involved in all levels of decision-making.

For All Groups

- It is the responsibility of everyone to identify instances that do not meet current guidelines.
- Be aware of any privilege that you bring to the conversation and its potential impact on participants.
- Be sensitive to group dynamics in which marginalized voices are often silenced or sidelined, and actively counter those dynamics.
- Members of the dominant culture have a responsibility to educate themselves on those who are not part of that culture and on the societal dynamics (personal, interpersonal and institutional) of those inequalities and hierarchies.
- Respect all opinions and voices, even if you don't agree.
- Be aware that for individuals who have been harmed by our systems (racism, sexism, heterosexism etc...), discussions on these topics may be retraumatizing, and recognize their potential need for self-care and support.
- Be aware of intent and impact. Even if you don't intend something to have a particular impact, it may still be damaging. When in doubt, apologize without condition.

Race/Ethnicity

- Unless relevant, avoid identifying people by race or ethnicity.
- Avoid words, images, or situations that reinforce stereotypes of any race, nationality, ethnic group, or religion.

- Note that if you invoke a rule of “safe space” you may inadvertently silence people who would otherwise voice ideas that may make some people uncomfortable.
- When someone points out a comment that he or she feels is racially or ethnically offensive, take it seriously and seek to understand, not dismiss, what happened.

Youth and System-Involved Youth

- Honor the participation and perspectives of young people and recognize that their experiences and input are invaluable contributions to discussions of youth justice system transformation.
- Be aware of and respond to any needs that young people might have for them to participate in the discussion. These needs might include transportation, child care, educational supports, medical needs etc... as well as not being the sole representative of all youth in the discussion.
- Take youth’s statements seriously; don’t trivialize statements made by youth.
- The fact that youth’s brains are still developing is unrelated to their intellectual capacities, which can be as developed as those of adults. Be mindful of this when talking to or about young people.
- Avoid statements that imply that all youth are immature and/or make poor judgments.
- Use language such as “youth who commit offenses,” which describes actions and behavior, in lieu of using terms like “youth offender,” which implies a state of being or an identity.
- Use terms such as “youth, young person, teen, etc...” when talking about youth who have committed offenses. While “juvenile” may describe our system of holding young people accountable, as in “juvenile justice system,” it has negative connotations and is descriptive of a category created by law, not a person.

Families

- Honor the participation and perspectives of families and recognize that their experiences and input are invaluable contributions to discussions of youth justice system transformation.
- Be aware of and respond to any needs that family members might have for them to participate in the discussion. These needs might include transportation, child care, medical needs etc... as well as not being the sole representative of all families in that discussion.
- Ensure that family members are given the opportunity to better understand the youth justice system and their rights and responsibilities.
- Don’t make global statements about families being the problem, e.g.,

references to “family dysfunction” or “bad parenting” as the practice of labeling families “dysfunctional” adds another layer of blame to the family.

- Recognize the potential for adversarial relationships to develop between families and the state, as parents may not share the same interests or have the same ultimate goals as the state.
- Recognize the transformative process of collaborating with families which includes engagement, involvement and ultimately, partnership.
- Respect the resilience of families, particularly families from under-resourced communities.

Victims

- Understand that victims’ needs rarely get met. Additionally, many of the youth and families that are caught up in the justice system have also been victimized. Transforming our justice system requires that we pay attention to victims’ perspectives.
- Respect victims’ voices and the real harm that victims have experienced.
- Don’t use language that implies that victims need “to move on” or that you understand their harm; this can be perceived as condescending.
- Don’t respond to victims’ pain by talking about the trauma of the person who caused the harm.

People with Disabilities

- Understand that because youth with disabilities are rendered invisible in our justice system through lack of data, bias, understanding, etc..., it is important to give space to the concerns of these youth by elevating questions specific to their experiences in the conversation.
- Please use respectful terms around disability. Avoid offensive words such as crippled, crazy, retarded, etc... If you don’t know what term to use, then ask.
- Avoid language that implies that there is something wrong with having a disability. For instance, people do not *suffer* from a disability, they live with one. People are not visually *impaired*; they are blind or have low vision.
- Emphasize the person, not the disability. Use “people first” phrasing, e.g., “people with disabilities” or “people with autism.”

Gender Identity

- Understand that because youth who are not cisgender (or binary) are rendered

invisible in our justice system through lack of data, bias, etc..., it is important to give space to the concerns of these youth by elevating questions specific to their experiences in the conversation.

- Understand that inclusion requires that we actively value the perspectives of people identifying as women.
- Give space for people to claim the gender that is appropriate for them, such as asking for their preferred pronouns.
- Use gender-neutral words/phrases and general reference terms that include all people. For example, instead of “policeman,” use “police officer.”

Sexual Orientation

- Understand, that because youth who are not heterosexual are rendered invisible in our justice system through lack of data, bias, etc..., it is important to give space to the concerns of these youth by elevating questions specific to their experiences in the conversation.
- Do not assume you know someone’s sexual identity or orientation.
- Avoid comments, gestures, and jokes that reinforce sexual stereotypes.
- Be inclusive of families of same-gender partners, or families of lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgender single parents.
- Use “partner,” “significant other,” or “spouse” instead of “husband” or “wife.”
- Respect others’ privacy, and do not discuss someone else’s sexual orientation.