

Guidelines for Selecting and Preparing Parent Leaders to be Spokespersons

Parents Leaders can be powerful spokespersons for National Parent Leadership Month and can educate the public about the importance of Parent Leadership, reach out to other parents interested in leadership roles and help shape policies and practices that support Parent Leadership. Human interest stories about Parent Leaders will be an essential part of media outreach during National Parent Leadership Month and throughout the year. It is these men and women who will attach a “human face” to the concept of Parent Leadership. It is important that public speaking and media events are shared jointly by Parent Leaders and staff so that no individual has to assume full responsibility.

Professionals should offer tangible and emotional supports to Parent Leaders throughout this process. In addition to reviewing this information, it will be helpful to give the enclosed document, *Media Tips for Parent Leader Spokespersons* to any Parent Leaders who are considering taking on these important roles. If Parent Leaders and staff will be appearing on television, the enclosed *Tips for Television Appearances by Parent Leaders and Staff* will be a useful tool.

When Identifying Parent Leaders as Spokespersons, be sure:

- * You are familiar with the Parent Leader’s story.
- * The Parent Leader’s story will help inform the public about Parent Leadership.
- * The Parent Leader believes this is the right time for him/her to speak out and is prepared for the attention that may follow.
- * You know how much (or how little) the Parent Leader wants his/her face, name or voice used publicly, particularly on television.
- * The Parent Leader understands the possible effect that speaking out publicly can have on him/her and family members, especially children.
- * The Parent Leader is comfortable talking about his/her story.
- * The Parent Leader is at ease when speaking publicly.
- * The Parent Leader is prepared to talk to the press.
- * The Parent Leader understands his/her rights as an interviewee.

If a Parent Leader is ready to speak out, you may wish to offer him/her the following suggestions:

- * Speak from your heart and from your own experiences.
- * Decide what you most want to say. Focus on three main points throughout the interview, especially at the beginning and the end.
- * Rehearse what you say. Have a friend or family member ask simple questions so that you can practice your responses.
- * Keep it simple. Don't talk in jargon or slang or use big numbers. Avoid angry responses.
- * Anticipate difficult questions. It is always okay to say, "I'm not comfortable responding to that," or "I don't know the answer to that."
- * Always assume that anything you say to a representative of the media is "on the record" and might be repeated in a story.
- * Don't feel the need to volunteer information to fill in uncomfortable silences.
- * Talk only about the things you want to see in the story.
- * Be aware that a media story or headline may be portrayed in a more dramatic way than you expect.
- * If you are asked questions that require a simple "yes" or "no" answer, use them as a springboard to elaborate your main points and to give real-life examples. Remain focused on the positive changes in your life and how your involvement in Parent Leadership activities has made a difference.
- * Emphasize the Key Talking Points about Parent Leadership included in this Tool Kit.
- * Encourage other parents to take on Parent Leadership roles and encourage others to partner with and support the work of Parent Leaders in all areas of policy and practice related to children and families.

Remember to thank Parent Leaders for sharing their experiences and to debrief and provide support to them after the media event. By sharing their expertise and life experiences with others, Parent Leaders are sharing a valuable gift and are helping to make their community a better place.

Excerpt from the *Media Guide for Parent Leaders, Parent Leadership Series*, © Parents Anonymous® Inc. 2000. Courtesy of Parents Anonymous® Inc. Copies of this document may be reproduced and distributed.