

Tips for Parent Leader Spokespersons

The courageous stories of Parent Leaders who have made positive changes in their lives are an important tool for reaching out to other parents and professionals during National Parent Leadership Month and for demonstrating the importance of parents as leaders. Some activities for this month will focus on working with the media and others might involve public speaking opportunities. As a Parent Leader, you have much to offer others by sharing your personal story and reaching out to other parents in need of support. To decide whether or not you wish to talk with the media or participate in a public speaking event, think about the following questions:

- ✓ Is this the right time for you to speak out? Are you prepared for the attention that may follow? Is your life fairly stable right now?
- ✓ How much (or how little) do you want your name, face or voice to be used publicly?
- ✓ What do you most want to share in an interview or speech?
- ✓ Does your personal story help inform the public about Parent Leadership?
- ✓ Are you comfortable sharing your story with the public?
- ✓ Do you believe you can use your personal story to highlight broader issues related to Parent Leadership?
- ✓ How does your family feel about your interest in speaking publicly about your life experiences? Do your family members mind if you refer to them in your presentation?
- ✓ What effect will your exposure have on you and your family members, especially your children?

If you decide that the time is right and you want to speak with the media or give a talk, the following suggestions will help you:

- ✓ Speak from your heart and from your own experiences.
- ✓ Decide what you most want to say and choose your words carefully. 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 response.
- ✓ Anticipate difficult questions and come prepared to reply. It is always OK to say “I don’t know,” or “I’m not comfortable responding to that.” If you are talking with a representative from a newspaper or magazine, you can always offer to get information you don’t have and send it to them.

- ✓ Keep it simple. Don't talk in jargon or slang or use big numbers.
- ✓ Avoid sounding upset or angry.
- ✓ 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. Keep the focus 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 in the audience to take on Parent Leadership roles and encourage other listeners to partner with and support the work of Parent Leaders in all areas of policy and practice related to children and families.
- ✓ It is normal to be nervous – almost everyone is, no matter how much experience he or she has. Talk with your staff partner or a friend about your feelings and be sure you feel supported in your efforts.

After a media interview or a public speaking event...

- ✓ You may feel tired, excited, successful or even unsure about how you came across.
- ✓ Give yourself credit for being courageous and for showing strong leadership skills by taking part in the event.
- ✓ Take time to discuss how you feel about the experience with a staff person from the program you are representing.

By sharing your expertise and Parent Leadership experiences with others during National Parent Leadership Month, you can reach out to other parents and make a difference in your community.

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