

SUPPORTING CHILD VICTIMS AND WITNESSES INVOLVED WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM



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Who We Are:

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Challenges When Working with Children:



- Engagement and building rapport
- Communication
- Explaining the justice system
- Preparing a child to testify
- Working with caregivers
- Accommodations in court

What Kids Experience with the Justice System:

- Re-traumatization
- Lack of information
- Disempowerment
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Consequences of disclosure



The Justice System From A Child's Point of View:

Annoying!

Scary!

Upsetting!

Takes too long!

Unfair!

Confusing!

Frustrating!

It's for adults!

Boring!

Repetitive!



The Justice System From A Teenager's Point of View:

Inconvenient!

Not in their best interest!

Frustrating!

A waste of time!

Lack of representation!

Annoying and unfair!



If we know that kids may have conflicting feelings about being involved with the justice system, then how can we productively work with (or for) them?

We can EARN their trust by...

Getting to know them

Actively listening

Showing respect

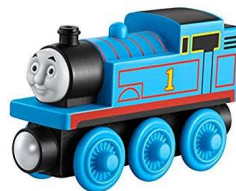
Acknowledging their feelings



How to Engage With Kids, or, “Things I Was Not Taught in School”



Be “in the know” about what’s cool these days!



Simple examples that can go a long way:

- “Did anyone explain why you are here today? Or who you would be speaking to? ...Or who I am?”
- “Before we talk today, tell me about your day! Did you do anything fun in school this morning/this week?”
- “Let’s make sure you understand, because that is the most important thing today!”
- “What worries you, and what can I/we do to help?”

What Do Children Need From Us?

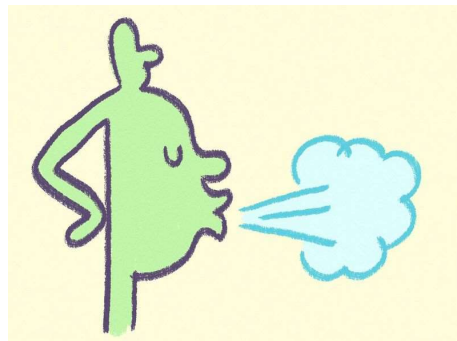
- Respect
- Honesty
- Empowerment
- Fairness
- Information
- Help to have their voices heard
- Alleviation of their fears



How Can We Do This?

General Support Strategies:

- Breathing techniques
- Coloring or drawing
- Checking in
- Taking breaks
- Self-talk
- Grounding
- Ask them!



Utilizing the Child's Multi-Disciplinary Team:

- Interview children together
- Concurrent evaluation of child
- Confirm outside support
- Strategize travel to and from court
- Following through with follow-up



Procedural Justice is One Way!

Defined: The perception that you are treated with respect and your concerns are taken seriously

It promotes effective, **empowered** participation – even with children!

Key Elements of Procedural Justice:

- Dignity and respect
- Understanding of the process
- Having their voice heard
- Helpfulness!
- Decision-making process is neutral and unbiased



Child feels supported and respected



Trusts practitioner



Increased sense of empowerment
and willingness to participate

How do you promote the ideals of procedural justice in your work?

How to Support A Child to Be A Better Witness:



- Preparation
- Victim-centered approach
- Use their strengths!
- Pre-trial motions for court accommodations

Considerations for Protecting the Child Victim or Witness:

Their fears:

- Public exposure
- Facing the defendant
- Cross examination
- Repercussions of testimony
- Emotional distress



Considerations for Protecting the Child Victim or Witness:



- Designated waiting area
- Sequestration
- Time to testify
- Entry into court
- Pre-trial motions

Increased information



Sense of control and predictability



Decreased anxiety and better ability to testify

Important Information to Provide to Children:

- Orientation to courtroom and personnel
- Explain roles of different practitioners
- Describe what will happen when they are in court
- Timeline of a court case
- Possible outcomes



Impact of Juror Perceptions:

- Emotional breakdown vs. confident demeanor
- Flat affect
- Relationship of child to defendant



Pre-Trial Motions:

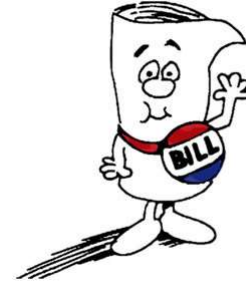


- Testimony *in camera*
- Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Set up of courtroom
- Age-appropriate questions
- Support person/support animal
- Timing of testimony

And more!

A Child's Rights in Court:

- The right to a break, glass of water, etc.
- The right to show and feel emotions
- The right to a support person
- The right to understand that their job is to tell the truth
- The right to a comfort item
- The right to answer "I don't know", "I don't understand", or "I don't remember"
- The right to ask for a question to be repeated
- The right to let court personnel know if someone makes them uncomfortable or scared



Remember:

- Legal systems are designed for adults
- Kids may not have their own direct representation
- Participation may feel (or be) coerced
- And...

YOU
can make a
DIFFERENCE!