

Media Workbook

Created by BerlinRosen for Youth First

Thank you!

This guide is intended for young people who want to speak out about the problems in our justice system and how we can make it better. As a leader in the youth justice movement, we created this workbook to help guide you when you're speaking to the media.

Whether you have a personal experience with the system, or just want to make things better for everyone, you can make a difference in the world by speaking out in the media. It is a brave thing to do, and it can have a tremendous impact. Thank you!

Talking about these issues in the media can be difficult – but with these tips and practice, you can do it. These pages will prepare you to talk to “the press” as part of your advocacy work, and decide how and when to share a personal story to make your point.



Tuesday Dinner Table Number 10
Wednesday Breakout Round 1:
How to Engage, Organize and Build Leadership of Youth
Wednesday Breakout Round 2:
How to Create Appropriate Responses for Youth Who
Commit Violent Offenses

Have you been involved with the justice system?

Choosing to share your experiences with the justice system can help convince others that you have a credible point of view because of your lived experiences. Your story and reflections have tremendous power to change hearts and minds.

However, you never have to share anything you do not want to – especially about the reasons why you were involved with the system or any painful experiences. You, and only you, have the right to decide whether to share those experiences. Once they are made public, it is very hard to make them private again. Please use the “Protecting Your Privacy” section of this guide, and talk with people you trust, to help make these decisions.

Let's get started: who are you?

First impressions matter, and it's helpful to think of an interview as an opportunity to make a good first impression. That's why it's important to have clear answers to key questions: Who are you? What do you do? Why are you qualified? Why is it important? Exactly what you share, and when, is always up to you. You certainly can be an effective advocate for youth justice reform without delving into your personal stories. However, reporters may ask about your background to provide context for the issues you raise. Our goal is to give them compelling information so that they'll understand the value of sharing your message.

Reporters are as interested in who you are as what you have to say. When speaking with a reporter, you'll need a good introduction that is interesting, short, and specific.

The bio section of a Twitter account is a great example of a short introduction. It's the first thing you see when you go to a new Twitter page and can make a strong first impression.

Activity: Match these three twitter bios to the public figure they belong to.



Chicanx. Feminist. Human Justice Advocate. Youth Partnership Strategist. Formerly Incarcerated. #NoKidsInPrison. All opinions expressed here are my own.



Girl from the South Side and former First Lady. Wife, mother, dog lover. Always hugger-in-chief.



Believer. Husband to @ayeshacurry, father to Riley and Ryan, son, brother. Golden State Warriors guard. Davidson Wildcat. Philippians 4:13 #IWILL



STEPHEN CURRY



HERNAN CARVENTE



MICHELLE OBAMA

Now that you've seen how some public figures introduce themselves, it's time to write your own introduction! Include who you are, what you do, and why you do it. This could be why you're passionate about youth justice, what makes you keep fighting, or anything else that speaks to who you are and your values.

Activity: Write your own “twitter bio” to explain who you are and why your story matters. If you already have a Twitter bio, think about how you might change it to better explain who you are to a reporter.



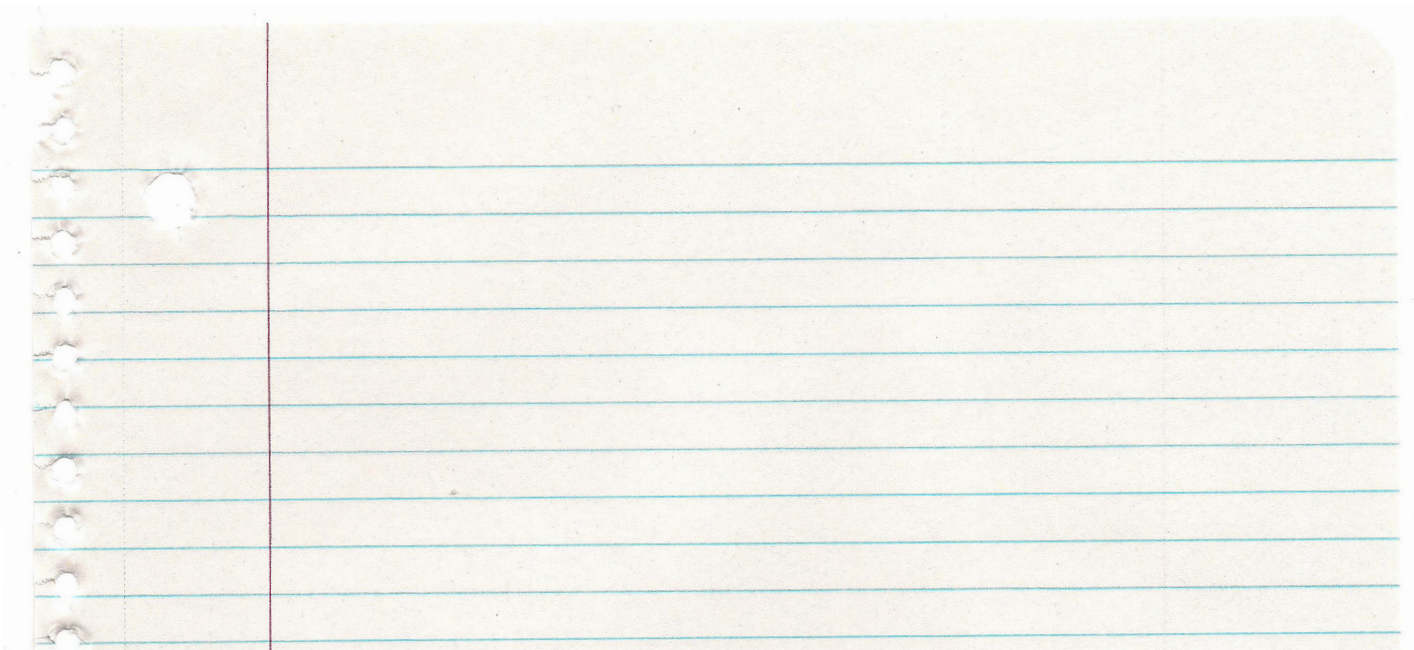
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SAVE CHANGES

Why the Media Matters

When people talk about “the media” or “the press,” they usually mean news reports on television, the radio or podcasts, in newspapers or magazines, and online. These outlets reach a wide audience, from families to politicians. That’s why the media is an important tool to educate people about issues like youth justice reform, and help them understand why the system needs to change.

Activity: Where do you get the news?
Where do other people in your family or community get their news?



Protecting Your Privacy

As we have discussed, sharing your personal experiences can add valuable context to your message about changing the youth justice system. However, it is important to respect your own and others’ privacy. You are always in control of what information you choose to share.

As you make these decisions, remember that news stories and social media posts can be found on the Internet in the future. This might impact educational or job opportunities, or even personal relationships. It is also important to determine if there can be legal ramifications to talking about a particular case.

Finally, your mental and spiritual health is incredibly important. Discuss with people you trust whether talking publicly about any of your experiences in this way is healthy and safe for you. Check in with yourself regularly, and if something doesn’t feel right, trust your gut.

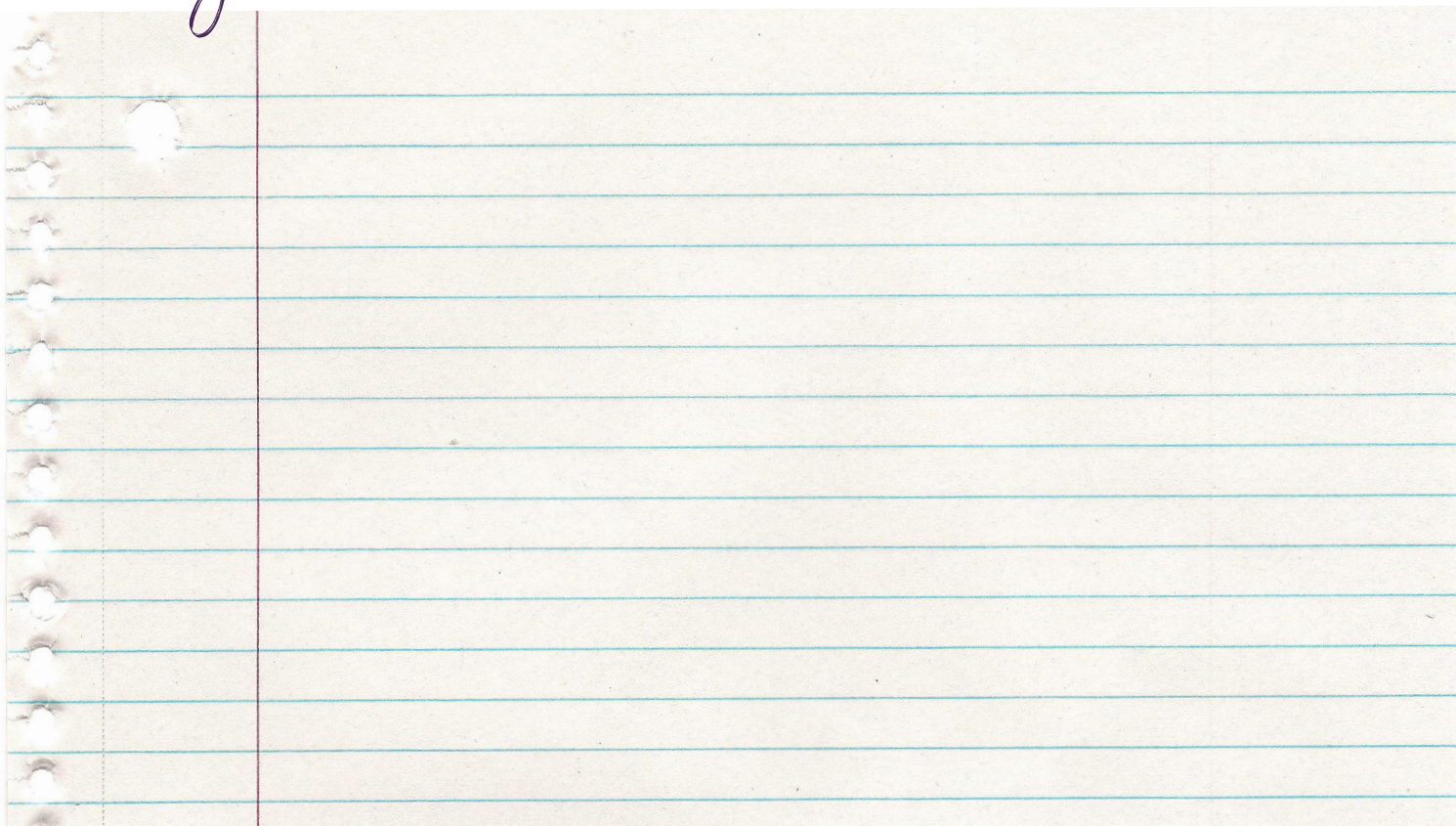
These considerations are important but do not let them deter you. It is possible to share your story while protecting your privacy. The most important way to stay in control of your privacy is to clearly tell the reporter what personal information they can include in their story. Before an interview, decide:

- Will I use my full name? Just my first name? Just a nickname, initials, or middle name?
- Will I allow my photograph to be included?
Make this clear to the reporter before agreeing to an interview.

Preparing for an Interview

A media interview is a chance to amplify your message with many more people than you otherwise could. Many of them will not know much about your issue. What's the one thing you want the reporter to remember? Make sure you know your objective before walking into the interview; if you're not sure what your message is, the audience won't be either!

Activity: Write down **the most important thing** you want to tell people:



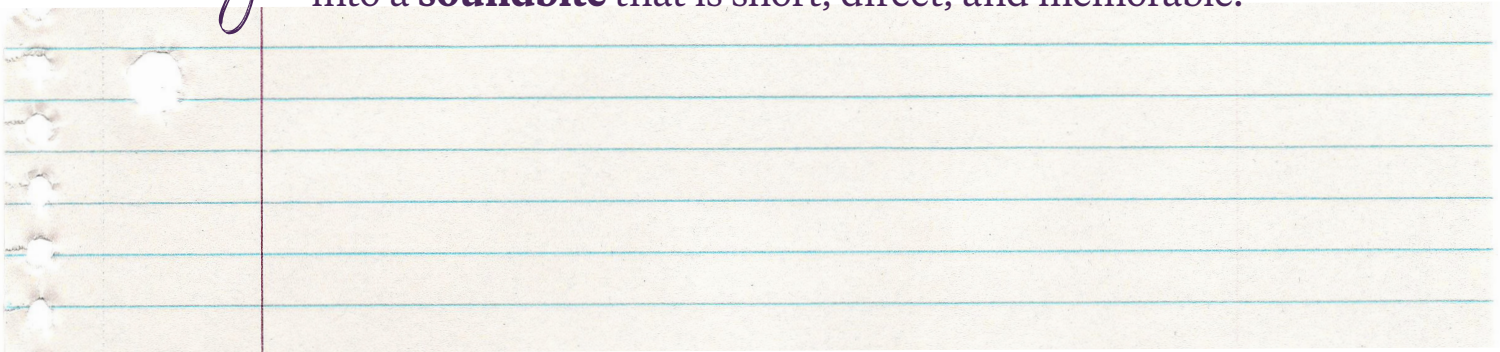
A **soundbite** is a short message that is easy to remember. It only takes a few seconds to say it, and it's catchy enough to stick in people's minds.

A soundbite is:

- **Short:** it takes 8 seconds or less to say
- **Direct:** it conveys one of your argument's main points
- **Memorable:** it is catchy, sometimes visual or poetic

Example: *"When a young person is incarcerated, their whole community serves time, too."*

Activity: Turn **your most important thing** you want to say into a **soundbite** that is short, direct, and memorable:



Here are some tips to make an interview smooth and effective:

- **Before the interview:** practice your soundbite in a mirror or with a friend. Decide exactly what personal information – like your first name, last name, image, age, etc. – you will or won't share.
- **During the interview:** speak with the reporter in a quiet place without other distractions, especially if it's on the phone. If it's a TV interview, wear neat clothing without lines or prominent writing. You can take your time and think about your answers. You can also end the interview at any time if you want to. If you don't know the answer to a question, that's OK– you can be honest about that, and pivot back to your primary message. In some situations, you can even say you will look it up and call them back later with the answer. However, you should never guess or lie.
- **Assume the reporter:** could print anything you say. But if you make a mistake or want to say something over again, that's usually fine! Just say so and try again.

Activity:

During an interview, what will you say if you don't know the answer to a question?

Interview Practice

Here are questions a reporter might ask you during an interview – including some tough ones. Practice how you might answer these.

Why do you care about this issue?

Is youth incarceration effective? Why or why not?

If you don't support locking up youth in prison after a criminal conviction, what is a better alternative?

Some people think there are young people who are dangerous or violent, and need to be incarcerated. What would you tell them?

A blank, lined notepad with a vertical margin line on the left and a spiral binding on the left edge. The paper is cream-colored with light blue horizontal ruling. The spiral binding is on the left side, and there is a small tear in the paper near the top left.

How do you want to change the system?

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Sometimes a reporter might ask a question that is personal, or that you might not want to answer. If that happens, you can always say: “That’s not my focus today. I’m actually here to talk about...” and then share your soundbite.



Make Your Interview More Compelling: Tell a Story

Knowing facts can help you during interviews, but stories are another important tool. Sharing a story that shows the facts about the justice system, instead of just telling them, makes it easier for people to understand and identify with the issue.

Compare these two examples:

“The youth justice system in this state is broken. 25% of young people convicted of simple assault in the last 10 years spent at least some time in a secure facility, even though data shows that 90% of teenagers suffer adverse effects following incarceration.”

Or...

“When she was 15 years old, Kayla was incarcerated. Her best friend and her mother wanted to visit her, but they were three hours away by bus – so they couldn’t come very often. Kayla, a talented musician, had always loved to play guitar, but wasn’t able to have an instrument with her. When her sister had a baby, Kayla missed the birth of her first niece. After her incarceration, she worked hard, but still faced challenges readjusting to her life.”

See the difference?

Stories are powerful. Humans are storytellers! Stories are why we enjoy watching movies and reading books. Think about a TV show that made you feel happy, afraid, sad, or excited. We make connections with the characters, we go along on their journeys, and share their feelings. This is true for fictional stories, as well as personal experiences.

Stories are memorable. Stories are easier to remember than numbers or facts. You probably don’t remember everything you learned for a test you took years ago, but you can explain the plot of a movie you saw when you were a little kid. When you tell someone a story, they will hold it with them for a long time.

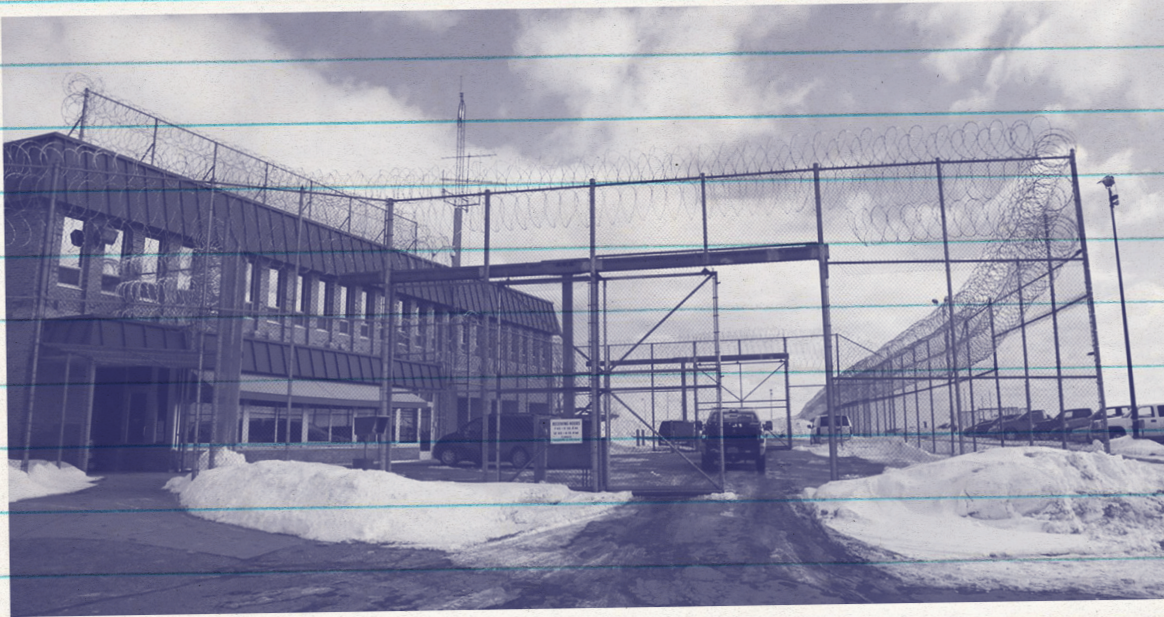
If your story is from your own life, or someone you know, that can be tough. It may evoke memories that are painful, embarrassing, or complicated. Sometimes people may be judgmental. Always remember that, sharing details like your name, age, and photograph can be a permanent decision; if the media report goes online, future employers and others will be able to see it.

That’s why **only you can decide when and how you talk about your own life** – and that’s why it’s important to be prepared. Practicing how to talk about pieces of your life will help you understand how to best present it to the media, and will help you set boundaries, avoid tough questions, and make sure people will hear your message.

Later on, we’ll learn how to turn real events into a story you can share with others through the news media, help people understand the problems in the youth justice system and inspire them to take action.

Marcus Williams: Help us, don't incarcerate us

Marcus Williams | St. Norbert College student Jun 16, 2017



The entrance at the Lincoln Hills School (boys) and Copper Lake School (girls) complex, rural Irma, in March 2013.

Dan Young/Daily Herald Media



I went from honor roll student to "menace to society."

Real World Example: Marcus in Milwaukee

Marcus is a real student, activist, and leader, fighting to improve the youth justice system in Wisconsin and nationwide. He shared part of his own story in a local newspaper in 2017, to convince the public that incarceration does not work, and that youth need support, not prisons.

This is available online at: <http://bit.ly/MarcusOpEd>

Marcus chose to include personal details about his life before, during, and after incarceration. That was his choice alone, as an experienced activist. Sharing personal details was right for him, but it may not be right for you. However, notice that he did not need to say specifically why he went to Lincoln Hills in order to

make an effective case that youth prisons don't work. Think about how Marcus considered which details were necessary to include as he told his story:

Op-ed by Marcus: I went from honor roll student to 'menace to society'

That's how I was labeled after a series of poor choices when I was 17 led me to Lincoln Hills School for Boys, Wisconsin's notorious youth prison that has been under federal and state investigations for almost two years. After my sentencing, I realized that Milwaukee, the city I loved and called home my entire life, wanted merely to punish me, not help me. Wisconsin's juvenile justice system failed me, and is failing hundreds of kids like me every day. Like so many others, I spent most of my life in foster care, only to be funneled into a broken juvenile justice system that disproportionately targets young, African-American men like me.

Growing up, I was abused, cast aside and in desperate need of programs and counseling that would have helped me work through my problems and get on a better path. But that never happened. Those types of community-based, nonresidential services were few and far between, and it, sadly, wasn't until I was behind bars that any services — which would have prevented me from getting locked up in the first place — were made available.

That is the fatal flaw in Milwaukee's current juvenile justice system. We cannot expect better outcomes if we don't commit to helping kids and their families in a way that has a real, lasting impact and can prevent kids from getting into more serious trouble in the first place.

Wisconsin's current system emphasizes punishment instead of prevention. This causes irreparable damage not only to a young person's development and growth, but to their self-worth and dignity. Despite overwhelming evidence of youth prisons' damaging effects, misguided legislation like the Victims Prevention Package — parts of which were advanced by a state Senate committee this week — simply double down on this failed approach and do nothing to actually keep our communities safe. The laws would do nothing to provide youth with the services they need; they would simply send more kids to dangerous facilities like Lincoln Hills for a wider array of crimes and for longer periods of time.

I can tell you from experience that what you've heard about Lincoln Hills is true. I witnessed kids suffer verbal and physical assault and be kept in solitary confinement for weeks at a time. The guards broke our spirits, telling us that we would amount to nothing but numbers in the system.

When you're treated like a criminal, you begin to see yourself that way as well. This dangerous conditioning is the fundamental reason why so many youth who've been incarcerated return to those same facilities, eventually ending up in the adult system — an outcome many people expected for me.

When I was released from Lincoln Hills, I wasn't allowed to go home to my foster parents or my friends who supported me, even though the Department of Corrections couldn't find me a place to live. But during this tough time, I was determined to become more than another statistic. **Opportunities, like those provided by groups like Youth Justice Milwaukee and the Running Rebels, allow me and kids like me to move past their mistakes and build a better future, which for me now includes attending college — something my parole officer once said was impossible. I worked hard to make changes and get the help I needed, but I shouldn't have had to be locked up to get to this point, and I shouldn't be the exception to the rule.**

Wisconsin can do better; if we care about our kids and our communities, let's prove it. Seventy-five percent of adults in the state already support shifting our juvenile justice system's emphasis from incarceration to prevention, and keeping young people out of harmful, ineffective prisons like Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake. Programs that support us at home with help from our communities are proven to lead to better outcomes.

As a result of circumstances and unmet needs, I made poor decisions in my past. But the way forward for people like me is to give us the opportunity to thrive through smarter and more effective spending on treatment, intensive mentoring, family therapy, and community-based resources. **The way forward is to stop labeling kids like me as "menaces to society." The way forward is to stop re-traumatizing young people, their families and our communities. The way forward is to close Lincoln Hills and other harmful facilities.**

We can hold young people accountable for poor decisions, and we can also help them change and heal. But subjecting us to inhumane youth prisons instead of addressing underlying trauma and other issues is wrong. Wisconsin is better than this, and if we commit to working together, we can solve these problems.

Marcus Williams spent 14 months at Lincoln Hills two years ago. He is now at student at St. Norbert College in Green Bay.

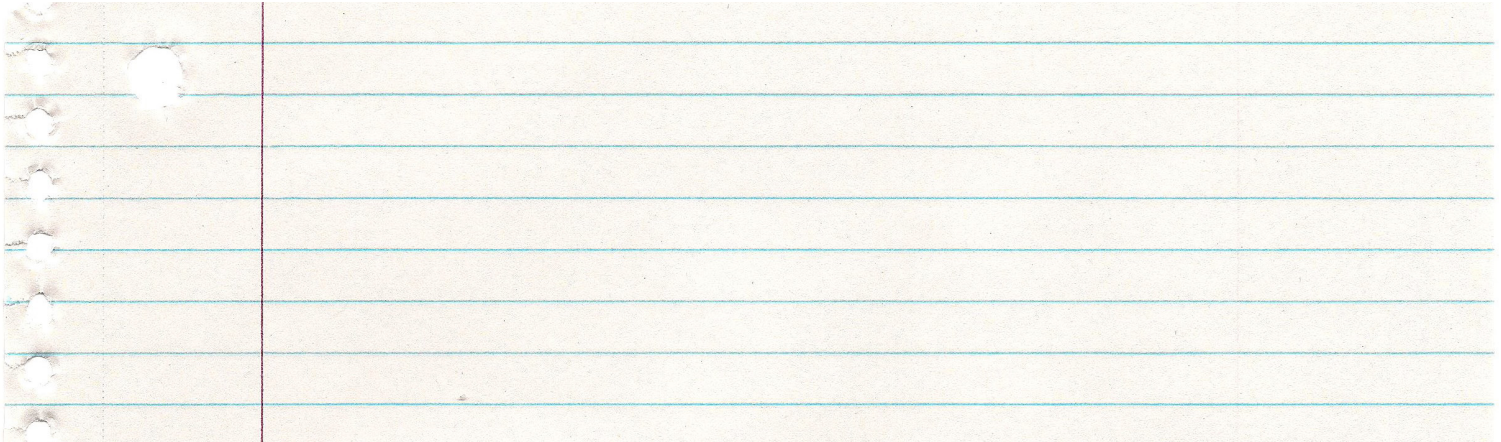
What's a story?

We already know why stories are powerful. But what makes a story?

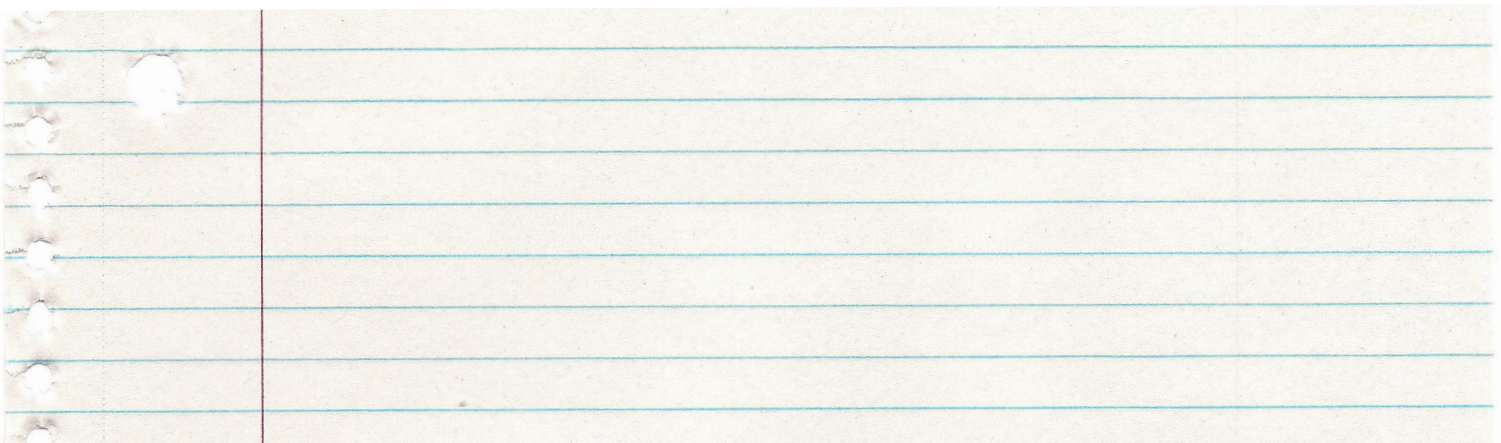
- Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Stories have characters, a setting, a conflict, emotions, details – the elements that give it life and make it more than just facts.

Did Marcus's story have these elements? What stood out to you?

Activity: 1. Write 1-3 complete sentences about the main “character” – which could be you. This can be similar to a Twitter bio, but a little more complete.



2. Share a story related to the youth justice system, with a beginning, middle, and end. Include details to describe people, events, and places. Remember: even if you're describing a personal experience with incarceration or the justice system, only include the information that you want to share. You have the right to talk about why prisons don't work, without explaining what led you to the justice system in the first place, for example.



3. What are the facts about youth incarceration that people who aren't familiar with it need to know?

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4. What do you want the people reading or watching your interview to do about the problems for youth justice, and why?

A blank, lined page from a spiral-bound notebook, identical to the one above. It is cream-colored with light blue horizontal ruling and a vertical red margin line on the left. The spiral binding is visible on the left edge.



Beyond Media

The skills you learned in this workbook can be used beyond speaking to the press. For example, you may be asked to speak at a public event, or may want to help other potential advocates understand the importance of youth justice reform and persuade them to get involved.

Preparation is still important, and before attending events, it is always helpful to ask questions of the event organizers:

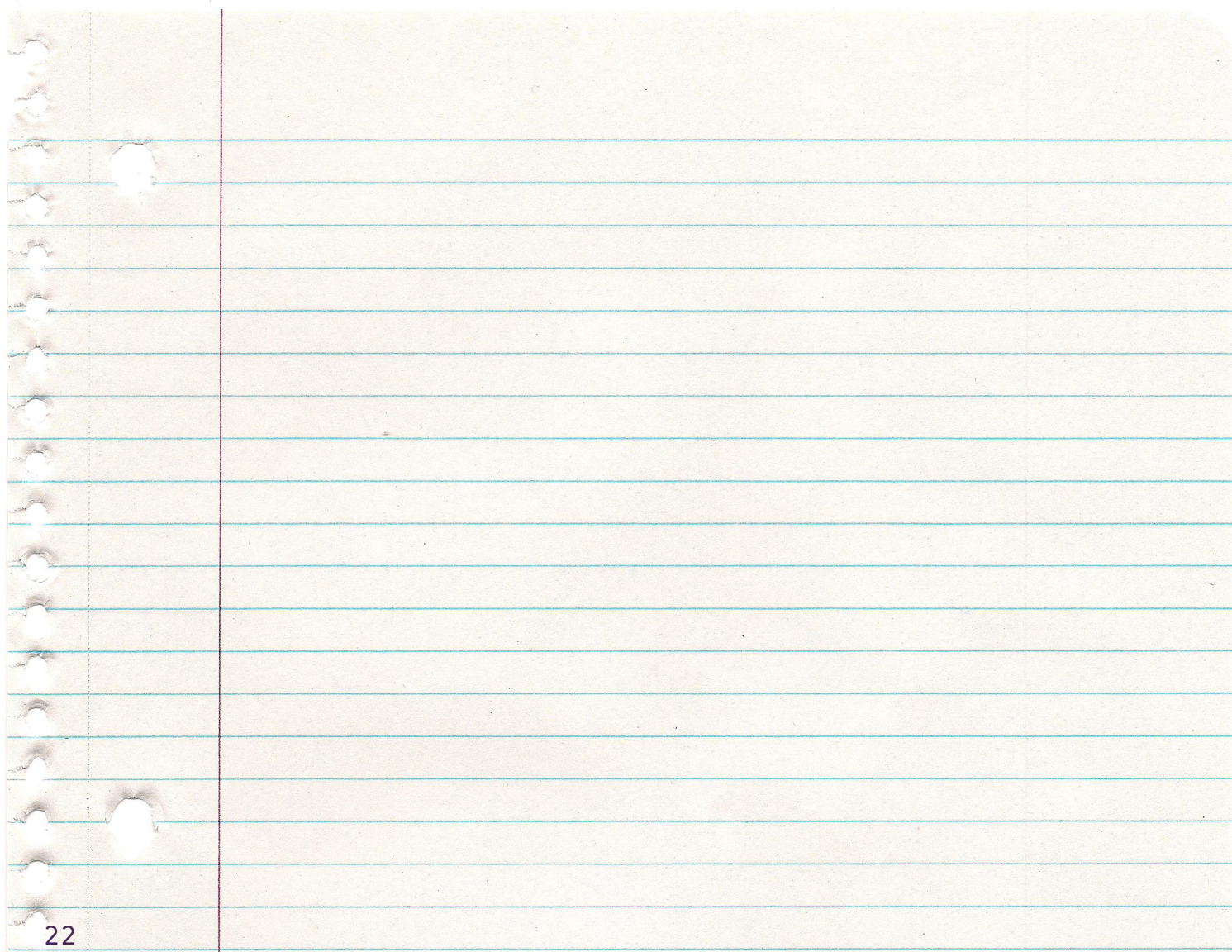
- What is the schedule or agenda for this event? What time should I arrive?
- Who will be in the audience?
- What do you want me to talk about?
- Will reporters be attending?
- What should I wear?
- How should I get there?

Take Care of Yourself

Fighting for justice and speaking out can make you feel empowered. But it can also be a demanding experience. If you choose to speak to the media and advocate for others, it's important to be kind to yourself and take care of your own needs. Some ways to stay healthy, physically and emotionally:

- Get enough sleep, exercise, healthy food, and water.
- Spend time with friends and family.
- Talk to an adult you trust.
- Set your boundaries; only do what you're comfortable with.

If you start to feel stressed out, unhappy, or uncomfortable, what are two ways you'll take care of yourself?





You're on your way!

This workbook is just the beginning. Talking to others with more experience and gaining experience yourself is the best way to learn! Use what you've practiced here as a starting point and a reference.

Thank you again for taking the time to prepare yourself for media interviews. You're on your way to reaching even more people with your message.

Notetaking and Brainstorming Space

Notetaking and Brainstorming Space

Glossary: Terms to Know

Like anything else – sports, school, or video games – “the media” has its own language, with special terms.

Coverage is the general term for the story or stories about a topic. Examples: “The presidential election got a lot of press coverage.” “I saw very positive coverage of the MTV movie awards on the news.”

On **television or radio**, there are two main types of interviews that you might do: **taped** or **live**. If you are doing a live interview, that means that everything you are saying is being broadcast on the show at the same time. Most professional sports are live. There are no do-overs; someone watching at their house can see you immediately. **Taped** interviews are done in advance. You’ll do the interview, and then someone will edit the video – so they can make it shorter and only put certain parts on TV. If you have an interview with a TV station or show, be sure to ask if it will be live or taped – and if it is taped, ask when it will **air** (which means “be shown on TV”).

Print media means **newspapers, magazines, and websites** – anything that is just written words, instead of sound or video. Print media interviews are usually a phone call between you and the reporter. Then, the reporter writes a story and publishes it later as an **article**. **Articles** are usually about telling a story and publishing facts; the writer generally does not share his or her personal opinion.

An **op-ed** or **opinion piece** is a persuasive piece of writing that goes in the newspaper or on a website – but it’s not written by a reporter. Instead, it’s written by someone like you! In an op-ed, the author gives his or her opinion on an issue, and makes an argument about why that opinion is correct. The best ones use facts to back up the argument. If you’re writing an op-ed, it’s OK to get help from another advocate or friend. A **letter to the editor (LTE)** is similar to an op-ed, but shorter.

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