

Thank you for understanding the importance and value of lived experience and storytelling in covering critical issues such as the child welfare system and youth homelessness. Our young people are committed to sharing their stories and expertise to effect change so those that come after them will have better experiences. Please keep in mind that sharing can be a deeply personal experience and oftentimes includes trauma. We ask that you be mindful and respectful of this when speaking with Mockingbird youth advocates. Below are some tips to think about before an interview so that you can get the best content possible while ensuring a young person also has a good experience with the interview.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Do your research and **be clear about your expectations** for the story before you go into the interview. Is this person's experience a good fit for your story? The power of stories is their relevancy and connection to the issue.
2. Please do a pre-interview meeting with your interviewee(s), either in-person or over the phone. Trust is one of the most important things to develop for a successful interview and it might take some time to develop. Be patient!
3. **Practice Transparency.** Be willing to provide questions beforehand so that interviewees are more comfortable day-of. Explain how the interview fits into your larger story or goal – this can be an educational opportunity for young people. Let them know who will be at the interview with you.
4. Be aware of **unintended consequences**. When choosing shots to film, do they expose other people or identifiable locations that could be unsafe for the interviewee/others?

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. **Avoid Generalizations.** Try not to make assumptions and be aware of your own inherent biases. Being open and honest about these things can create a good dialogue during an interview.
2. Shift your language. Be respectful that some young people might not want to talk directly about their experiences. Instead of saying, "Why are you homeless?" say, "What are some causes that you've seen contribute to homelessness?" This allows space for the interviewee to share as much of their story as they feel comfortable, or share other knowledge they have about the subject.
3. **Be respectful.** Please be respectful of the fact you are asking young people to share very personal stories that can sometimes bring up past trauma. A "gotcha" type question can shut down an entire interview and have lasting consequences for the interviewee. Asking broader questions (e.g. "How did you feel about that?") instead of leading questions (e.g. "Were you angry at your brother?") allows someone to share what they feel comfortable with and will most likely end up sharing the sentiment/experience you are seeking.
4. Some stories might have gaps. People who experience trauma might not remember, want to remember, or share certain things. If you feel a detail is missing, circle back to it but do not push.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. **Implicit Messages.** Our youth advocates work hard to dispel myths and stereotypes about young people experiencing foster care or homelessness. Please consider the implicit messages you might be sending with the images, quotes, and questions you choose.
2. **Next Steps.** Please be transparent about what are next steps. Will you need a follow-up conversation or photos? Does the article need to be reviewed/edited by others? Can the interviewee see it before it is published so they have a heads up about what is being said?
 3. Avoid trying to offer advice or help. As you know, stories can be powerful and inspire people to want to take action. However, while you may want to help after hearing our young people's stories, it could be counterproductive or even offensive if you aren't fully aware of the situation.