

CAMPAIGN FOR  
**YOUTH JUSTICE**

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

**Ending the Practice of Prosecuting Youth as Adults**

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**How to Host a Film Screening**



# Welcome!

The Campaign for Youth Justice is so excited that you are interested in hosting a documentary screening for your community! We hope that this guide can provide you with some helpful tips and resources as you prepare to hold your event.

**Background:** The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is a national advocacy organization committed to ending the prosecution and incarceration of youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. We partner with states to pass legislation that (1) keeps youth in the juvenile justice system, where they receive age-appropriate services; and (2) protects youth who are charged as adults, ensuring they are protected while in custody. Since we opened in 2005, 27 states have passed more than 45 pieces of legislation limiting the prosecution of youth as adults.

*The How to Host a Film Screening* is intended to provide advocates with guidelines for hosting a successful film screening event. Video brings an emotional power and immediacy to an issue in a way that the written or even spoken word cannot. At the end of this guide is a short list of films on the issue of juvenile justice and kids in adult courts, jails, and prisons. Some are available on YouTube, some only as DVDs. Most are not too long, which is preferable for an event like a public screening.

Please let us know which films you might be interested in screening. We can also provide national and state-based fact sheets that can help guide your discussions, and ideas for actions you guests can take.

Specifically with our Youth Justice Awareness Month in mind, we hope that this is one of many events around the country that people like you are taking the time to host! We thank you for your dedication to our cause.

Have questions or need extra help? Contact State Campaign Coordinator Brian Evans at [bevans@cfyj.org](mailto:bevans@cfyj.org) or 202-588-3580 ext. 1606.

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# Film Screening General Overview

## How do I get people to come to my film screening?

- Send an evite, or, if you're old school, mail out invitations to your film screening and follow up a week later with a personal phone call
  - Be sure your evite and/or invitations include the date, time, and address of the film screening house party location. Include good directions to the location of the event, a small map for reference, and parking instructions if that's complicated where you are showing the film
  - DON'T FORGET to include your phone number as well
- 5-7 days before the screening, make a second reminder call (this has a huge impact on attendance at the screening)
- Have people RSVP so you have an idea of how many people are coming
- If you haven't heard from someone, give them a call about a week before the event to encourage them to come

*\*remember, having 10 people is great, but having 5 people attend is just fine too—make it comfortable for you*

## What Should I do to Prepare?

- Consider asking a few friends or colleagues to help you plan. You can even list them as a “host committee” on the invitation to attract more people who will recognize the names
- Watch the video before the event in the location you are hosting it to make sure the streaming works.
- Develop some points for discussion (call us if you want some ideas)

## Where Should I Host My Screening?

- The event can be in your home, or it could be at a church, or other community or campus setting
- You can host a dinner or brunch at your home; it can be a wine-tasting, chocolate-tasting, tea party, etc...
- You could piggy-back on an existing meeting; for example, see if you can use the first 30 minutes of your book club meeting

## Call to Action

- Encourage people to get active. CFYJ can provide you with options for people to get involved.
- Make sure to encourage people to write the letters or sign the petitions at your event. If they take the materials home, they will likely forget. Taking 10 minutes to write letters will allow you to send them yourself and to know how many you generated!

## Planning Timeline for a Film Screening

To help you ensure a successful event, we've provided a sample timetable for a small to medium-sized film screening. Keep in mind that depending on when your event takes place, its size and its type, your timetable will be different.

### **What you'll need to provide:**

- A sign-in sheet
- Food & drink
- A fast internet connection if streaming a video online
- An action table featuring Fact Sheets, swag, a printed out petition ready for signatures, or blank paper and envelopes for letter writing

### **What CFYJ can provide:**

- DVD (Childhood Interrupted)
- Fact Sheets, including information about juvenile justice in your State
- Petition / letter writing ideas
- Swag

### **When you decide to host an event:**

- Get in touch with CFYJ to request assistance and check for supplies
- Determine the where, when, who, why, and what of the event
- Write out an action plan and to-do list
- Create an invitation list
- Arrange for a friend to help or develop a committee

### **Three Weeks to a Month Before:**

- Send evite or mail invitations with directions and a request for RSVP
- Reserve any necessary equipment (e.g. big screen, projector, etc.)

### **One to Two Weeks Before:**

- Plan the meal or refreshments
- Prepare to facilitate the discussion
- Make sure all guests have directions

### **One to Five Days Before:**

- Make follow-up phone calls to those who responded to invitations
- Purchase beverages and supplies

## Day of Event: The Screening! (more details in next session)

- Arrivals: allow guests to sign-in, get food & swag, and mingle
- Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)
- Show film
- Discussion of film (10-20 minutes)
- Call to Action: Ask guests write letters/sign petitions (15 minutes)
- More mingling, eating and drinking
- Departures: Thank guests for coming, wrap up (5 min)

## Follow Up:

- Send thank you notes to your guests
- Tell CFYJ how it went!

# Typical Film Screening Agenda

## **Introductions**

### **Host Introduction:**

Briefly explain why you are involved in Youth Justice Awareness Month. If you are comfortable you can use the CFYJ fact sheet as talking points and select the top three issues most important to you.

### **Guest Introductions:**

Have guests give their name and how they know the person who invited them. Have guests share why they were interested in coming to the event and if they have personal experience or concerns with the current laws regarding youth in our nation's justice system.

### **Introduce the Video:**

Let your guests know that there will be a quick discussion after the video, followed by an opportunity to take action.

## **Discussions**

### **Pre-Video Discussion:**

Q. "What does it mean to be tried as an adult?"

A. When a young person is tried as an adult it means that they appear in the adult court, in front of a judge and possibly jury of adults, and will serve any sentence in an adult jail or prison. This usually means that the youth is not eligible to receive any of the services or treatment available through the juvenile justice system. The youth will also have a permanent adult criminal record that will make it hard to apply for jobs or housing or higher education funding.

Q. Ask your guests if they know what the juvenile justice laws are in your state.

A. Use information from CFYJ to provide answers.

### **Post Video Discussion:**

Participants can discuss what they saw in the video and bring their own experiences into the forum. Questions should be addressed by both the host and the participants.

- What were your reactions to the presentation?
- What shocked you the most?
- What was the most interesting part?
- Was there anything new that you learned?
- Did this presentation change your views? How?
- Would you reform some of these laws? How?

### **Actions**

Once your guests are motivated by the video and subsequent discussion, introduce the action (petition signing / letter writing), briefly explain what your guests should do, and give them some time to do it. Make sure to allow time following the action for more eating & drinking and informal conversation.

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Your Film Screening**

### **1). I AM NOT AN EXPERT ON THIS ISSUE. WHAT SHOULD I DO TO GET READY FOR MY FILM SCREENING?**

We don't expect you to be an expert. The video and the campaign literature speak for themselves. You are a concerned citizen and who cares about our children. While we have some background information for you, please don't feel you have to know everything about the CFYJ campaigns to host a party.

- If you need more information on a specific issue, call us or visit: [www.cfyj.org](http://www.cfyj.org)
- Think about why you care about youth justice and write a few paragraphs so you can share your passion and excitement with those who attend the screening.
- If someone asks a question that you do not know the answer to, don't worry about it. You and/or the concerned person can contact us.

### **2). HOW CAN I KEEP TRACK OF ALL THE QUESTIONS MY GUESTS HAVE?**

If you have a "helper" have them take notes, so people's questions are answered to the best of your ability and unanswered questions can be quickly followed up.

## Film Screening Evaluation Form

Host(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Party \_\_\_\_\_

Your feedback is critical in helping us improve our future house parties!

\_\_\_ number of guests

\_\_\_ number of new volunteers enrolled

\_\_\_ number of new house party hosts recruited

Did you receive enough guidance in organizing your film screening?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Please explain how it could have been better.

Did you find the campaign materials helpful in conducting your party?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

What would have been more helpful?

What worked well?

Do you have any suggestions or advice for future film screening hosts? Do you have any stories or quotations to share with us?

Are you willing to do another film screening at your home or in the community for YJAM?

Would you be willing to help someone else organize their film screening?

Please Send/Fax Completed form to:

Brian Evans

1220 L St. NW Suite 605

Washington, D.C.

Phone 202-588-3580 ext. 1606 • Fax 202-386-9807 • [bevans@cfyj.org](mailto:bevans@cfyj.org)



# Fact Sheet

Our children are worth far more than the biggest mistake they have ever made. We cannot simply abandon them to the adult criminal justice system. The practice of transferring youth into adult courts and prisons is:

## OVER-USED

- Every year in this country, as many as **200,000** youth are put into the adult criminal justice system.
- In 22 states, children as young as **SEVEN** can be prosecuted as adults.
- Each year **100,000** youth are held in adult jails and prisons.
- Most youth who enter the adult system are there for nonviolent offenses.

## DISCRIMINATORY

- African-American youth make up **32%** of those arrested while they only represent **16%** of the overall youth population.
- African American youth are **NINE** times more likely, and Latino youth are **FOUR** times more likely to receive an adult prison sentence for the same crime as white youth.

## HARMFUL

- Even though only 1% of all jail inmates were under 18 in 2005 and 2006, they accounted for **21%** and **13%** of the victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence in jails respectively.
- Many children behind bars are placed in isolation where they are locked down **23** hours a day in their cells, for extended periods of time.
- Youth housed in adult jails are **36** times more likely to commit suicide than are youth housed in juvenile detention facilities.

## NOT POPULAR

- In a 2011 national poll, **69%** of Americans opposed placement of youth in adult jails and prisons.
- **89%** favored rehabilitation and treatment approaches for youth, such as counseling, education, treatment, restitution, and community services.

## A FAILED POLICY

- Research tells us that youth who are prosecuted in the adult system are **34%** more likely to recidivate and with more violent offenses.
- Each year the U.S. incurs an estimated **\$8-\$21 billion** in long-term costs for the confinement of youth.

## CHANGING

- In the past **8** years, **27** states have enacted **45** individual pieces of legislation to remove youth from adult jails and prisons, limit the prosecution of youth in adult court, or revise sentencing laws.

*To learn more, or get involved in changing things in your state, contact:*  
*Brian Evans, State Campaign Coordinator, Campaign for Youth Justice, 202-558-3580 ext. 1606*  
[bevans@cfyj.org](mailto:bevans@cfyj.org)

## List of Films On Youth Prosecuted As Adults

***The Box: Teens in Solitary Confinement in U.S. Jails, Prisons and Juvenile Halls*** – (2014) Read the stories at <https://medium.com/solitary-lives>. Every year, thousands of teens are placed in solitary confinement cells in juvenile halls, jails and prisons nationwide. This animation tells the story of Ismael "Izzy" Nazario and the time he spent in solitary confinement in New York City's Rikers Island jail. It's just 5:25 long and can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA1LkgyQ4lw&app=desktop>

***Childhood Interrupted*** – (2010) This 20 minute film features interviews with current and formerly incarcerated youth, youth activists, parents, researchers and public officials who share their experiences and views, providing the most powerful arguments to date on why youth should not be tried, sentenced, or incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system. Their message is clear: Campaign for youth justice because the consequences aren't minor! You can also use a Discussion Guide created by CFYJ to further exchange about this important issue. For your free copy of this DVD with Discussion Guide, contact us at [bevans@cfyj.org](mailto:bevans@cfyj.org). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onJCh5bylal>

***15 to Life: Kenneth's Story*** – (2014) This film follows the story of Kenneth Young to explore the issue of life without parole sentences for children. As a 14 year old boy, Kenneth was convinced by a 24 year old neighborhood drug dealer to join him on a month long spree of four armed robberies. Taking place in Tampa, Kenneth was eventually caught and tried as an adult under Florida law at age 15. It was his first serious encounter with the law. The film follows his battle for release after more than 10 years of incarceration, much of that time spent in solitary confinement. It also serves as a portrayal of the extraordinary fact that the U.S is the only country in the world that condemns juveniles to life without parole. Kenneth's sentence is not a rarity, and the issues highlighted in this film are issues that our juveniles across the country face every day. Also available is a Discussion Guide, which can be used to further exchange about this important issue. 83 min. (theatrical)/52 min. (TV)  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/15tolife/> (not available for free viewing online)

***Growing Up on Lock Down*** – (2011) This film, featuring CFYJ spokesperson Dwayne Betts, and Samuel Harvey, and created by the National Black Law Students Association and the North Carolina Central University School of Law, explores the detrimental effects of trying youths under 18 in adult courts and putting them in adult jails. It focuses on North Carolina, where all 16- and 17- year-olds are automatically tried as adults for any offense but also addresses the other 11 states that automatically try all 17-year-olds as adults. It addresses the adult system's inability to ensure the safety and development of these kids as well as its failure to rehabilitate kids relative to the juvenile justice system. 20 min.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWW2SBxJdy8>.

***Me Facing Life: Cyntoia's Story*** – (2011) This film takes a hard look at some of the complex social issues concerning a 16-year-old girl who is serving a life sentence for murder. Cyntoia Brown found herself in a series of bad situations that led to her killing a man who picked her up for sex. The filmmaker spent nearly six years exploring her life and familial relationships in order to answer a very basic question...why? 60 min. <http://itvs.org/films/me-facing-life> (not available for free viewing online)

***Stickup Kid*** – (2014) This short film gives an inside perspective on California’s harsh juvenile laws that make it easier to try young people as adults. By following the story of Alonza Thomas, it shows the harmful effects of the so-called “predator laws” created in the early 1990s to get tough on juvenile offenders. While juvenile crime did not rise as predicted, these new state laws kept too many kids like Alonza in adult facilities for too long. Following his story shows us the harsh realities of kids facing adult sentences. You can also use Discussion Questions created by CFYJ to further exchange about this important issue. 28 min. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/stickup-kid/>

***Stolen Dreams*** – This is a short documentary film made by members of YASP, an organization led by young people who experienced life inside an adult jail and who are now leaders of their communities. The film includes interviews with teenagers who are currently in adult jail and their families, young people who have been incarcerated as adults, as well as a judge, social worker and teacher who work with youth charged as adults on a daily basis. The young people featured in the film describe the experience of being a teenager in the adult criminal justice system, from the food to the education system to the everyday violence. In telling these stories, the film educates the audience about Act 33, a Pennsylvania law that allows prosecutors to try young people 15 and older directly in adult court and send them directly into adult jail for all serious, violent charges. "Stolen Dreams" can be purchased for \$20. To order a copy, email [yasproject@gmail.com](mailto:yasproject@gmail.com). <http://www.yasproject.com/our-documentary.html>

***Stolen Dreams II*** – (2014) Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pkpSMc08aU>

***The US throws 100,000 children into adult jails and prisons every year*** – (2014) This brief 10 minute video gives an introduction of the United States’ practice of trying, sentencing, and imprisoning an estimated 250,000 children in adult jails and prisons each year. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court has agreed that children are different than adults and often deserve a second chance, our country continues to incarcerate kids as adults. This video takes a closer look at the practice. 10 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAJFWYFPgH0>

***Young Kids, Hard Time Director’s Cut*** – (2012) From the producers of the award-winning “Lake County Juvenile Justice” series and “Lockup: Inside Pendleton Juvenile” comes “Young Kids, Hard Time,” a 45 minute video that throws back the veil on the reality of young kids serving long sentences behind adult prison walls. With sweeping access inside the Youth Incarcerated As Adults (YIA) cellblock at the maximum security Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Carlisle, Indiana, “Young Kids, Hard Time” reveals what life is like for kids as young as 12 who will grow up behind bars. The YIA cellblock is home to 53 kids who are rarely permitted to leave the unit, due to the dangers posed by the adult prisoners just outside their door. But once a youth offender turns 18, they begin the immediate transition into the general prison population, where thousands of adult prisoners await. “Young Kids, Hard Time” explores post-conviction life for children staring down decades behind bars, illuminating the effects of sentencing kids to the adult prison system, and whether or not this practice leads to a safer society. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3lw6PMjj40>

***Young Kids, Hard Time Director’s Cut Episode 2*** – (2015) <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/ykht2/104075351>