

fact sheet



Effective messages for Raise the Age campaigns

There has been a fair amount of polling on messages for Raise the Age campaigns, and for juvenile justice reform generally. It's important to remember that the messages that most appeal to advocates are not necessarily persuasive to the general public.

Most effective messages

Declining youth crime rate. When people believe they are at risk of being a victim, they favor more punitive juvenile and criminal justice policy. Get the data from your state on youth crime and share it widely. This data will also help you demonstrate that there is room in your juvenile justice system for older teens.

Raising the age is good for public safety. Research shows that kids kept in the juvenile system are less likely to reoffend.

Parental rights. Polling done by the Massachusetts Justice for Kids campaign found this to be the most persuasive message. If your state considers 16- or 17-year-olds adults, then parents won't be notified if their children are arrested and can't participate in the court process.

Dangers in adult facilities. Kids are at high risk of rape, other forms of violence and suicide in adult facilities.

Cost effectiveness. Because keeping adolescents out of the adult system lowers recidivism, taxpayers save long-term on serial incarceration. Youth who are rehabilitated are also more likely to go on to contribute to the economy as taxpayers.

Less effective messages

Giving kids a second chance. It's the right thing to do, but unfortunately messages based on sympathy for kids who get in trouble with the law test poorly with the general public. Use sparingly — and only with groups you know are on board.

Adolescent brain development. Connecticut legislators found a presentation by a scientist on this topic very persuasive. However brain science plays badly with some audiences. In general, arguments about diminished culpability are not effective, particularly with conservatives.