

Your Honour, I'm scared

An interview at a police station, at a prosecutor's office or in court is a traumatic experience for a child victim of crime. The child does not understand the procedures he or she has to participate in, feels guilty, and is afraid of an unknown situation and the potential consequences of accusing a close relative or another significant person.

A CHILD IS A WITNESS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Let's interview children in child-friendly places, adjusting the interview's form and rate to children's psychological states and levels of development. Let's interview children only once, providing them with a mental health professional's support. Let's inform parents and children about their rights.

The Nobody's Children Foundation's campaign – "Child: Witness with Special Needs" – is carried out in cooperation with the Polish Ministry of Justice.



Campaign "Child: Witness with Special Needs"

The campaign "Child: Witness with Special Needs" conducted by Nobody's Children Foundation and Ministry of Justice since 2004 is addressed to professionals – judges, prosecutors, police officers, and psychologists acting as court experts – who participate in legal interventions or help children throughout the process. It is aimed at increasing these professional groups' sensitivity to children's special needs in criminal proceedings and improving their skills and competence related to interviewing children.

Training programs were conducted for these professional groups as part of the campaign, organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and the Mazowsze Social Policy Center. Professional participating in such legal procedures are also the addressees of the campaign publications, which present research and theory concerning the psychological functioning of child victims and child witnesses, systemic solutions designed and applied in other countries to help such children, as well as Polish experiences in the field. Books, brochures, and the special edition of the Foundation's quarterly *Abused Child: Theory, Research, and Practice* are distributed during training sessions and conferences and sent to relevant law enforcement institutions. Thanks to the Foundation's cooperation with the National Police Headquarters and the Ministry of Justice the campaign posters: "Your Honor, I'm scared" have been displayed in most Polish police stations, prosecutor's offices and regional courts.

The campaign is also addressed to parents and caregivers of children who participate in the investigation process and court proceedings as victims of crime. As persons who have the closest relationship with the child and who are trusted by him or her, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in helping the child cope with the difficult experience of being interviewed by the prosecutor or in court. Their task is to prepare the child for the interaction with law enforcement officials and for the unfamiliar, perhaps frightening situation. In many cases, however, contact with law enforcement institutions is a new, unfamiliar, and difficult experience for the parents themselves, who may not know legal regulations or what to expect during the legal proceedings, and are sometimes unaware of how the child feels and how to protect him or her from stress.

Therefore a brochure has been published, *When your child is a witness in court*, addressed to child witnesses' parents and caregivers. How to help the child? Should I tell him or her in advance what is going to happen in court? The brochure provides answers to these and other important questions. Our goal has been to make this information available to all parents and caregivers who may need it, so the brochures have been distributed among police stations, prosecutor's offices, courts, and help institutions across Poland. Moreover, institutions providing psychological help for abused children have been provided with *I'm going to court* booklets, which instruct psychologists and parents about how to familiarize the child with the court, the persons he or she is going to meet there, and the situations to be expected during the court proceedings.