

SECTION IV: Rallying Your Community



This section tells how to organize a community meeting about sexuality education. It includes:

- **Tips for Staging a Community Forum**
- **Sample Flyer**
- **Sample Ad**
- **Sample Press Release**
- **Sample Introduction**

Tips for Staging a Community Forum

A community forum can help start an important conversation between parents, school officials, young people and others in the community. Just igniting this important conversation is a victory in itself. And, often, once the conversation begins, it can lead to solutions, and better sexuality education.

This is also a chance for students to be heard, for them to explain to adults the problems they face and the help they need. So, you want to make sure you get the

word out to everybody — parents, teachers, students, community and religious leaders, board members and school officials.

If you can, try to get some adults involved in planning the forum. A good organization to tap into for this type of event is your local League of Women Voters. They want to encourage meaningful public debate, which goes a long way toward supporting a democratic system. Be sure to call your local league and ask for advice and support.

But, remember, if you can't find an adult who will help, you can do this on your own. You have every right to organize a public meeting, use a public space and invite students, parents and other community members.

Here's how to do it:

1. **Pick a Date.** Make it convenient. Week nights at about 7 p.m. usually work best. Before setting your date, check with the town clerk and school secretary to be sure there are no other meetings scheduled for that day. If there are, pick another day.
2. **Pick a Place.** Ask your school principal if you can hold the meeting in your school's cafeteria or auditorium. If that's not possible, check with the town clerk

to see if you can use a municipal meeting room. Other potential meeting places include churches or local organizations that are sympathetic to your cause. You will probably need a sound system with at least two microphones — one for the moderator and one for the speakers. You will also need some newsprint or posterboard. Index cards and a tape recorder are also a good idea.

3. **Advertise.** Fill out the “Community Forum Flyer” and distribute it. Just fill in the date and make copies. Distribute flyers to your classmates (stick them inside lockers or put a stack in the cafeteria). Post them around town, in area businesses and the supermarket. Give them to teachers, parents, churches, and local organizations. Deliver them to your school district offices and make sure your school superintendent and school board members get copies.
4. **Publicize.** If you have a school newspaper, submit a version of the “Community Forum Ad” and “Community Forum Press Release” that is part of this kit. You should personalize each form so it fits your particular situation, but both give you a good blueprint. Also submit the same ad and press release to your local newspaper. Call the editors of your local newspaper and invite them to send a reporter. (See “Working with the Media” section.)
5. **Make a Plan.** You’ll need a format so that everyone gets a chance to speak. Set up a microphone at one end of the stage or at the front of the room. People who want to speak will line up at the microphone and will be given only five minutes to speak. You’ll need a time-keeper and a moderator — someone who can keep people on track and handle things if they get out of hand. It’s also a good idea to have the health teacher or someone else at the meeting who can answer questions about the existing sex ed program.
6. **Set the Stage.** You’ll need to get the meeting started about 15 minutes after the designated time (to give everyone a chance to get there). Use the “Community Forum Introduction” to tell everyone who you are and what you hope to accomplish that evening. Lay down the following ground rules.
 - Please keep your comments under five minutes so that everyone has a chance to speak. You’ll get a warning at four minutes that your time is almost up. Start wrapping up when you hear that warning. When the time-keeper calls time, please step aside from the microphone.

- Please speak for yourself. People have really strong opinions about sexuality education. Please be careful to talk only about your own personal views. Don’t make general statements about others. Also, if you’re speaking for a group, please let us know. And we ask that any groups represented here designate one speaker and let them talk for the entire group.
- Respect others’ opinions. We won’t allow name-calling and stereotyping. They’re not appropriate and, besides, it sets a bad example for the students.
- Please do not call out questions. Only those at the microphone may speak.
- If you have additional comments or concerns please print them on index cards (provide them) and hand them in during the meeting. At the end of the meeting these will be read.

7. **Let Them Talk.** Allow each speaker his turn, but be sure they abide by the rules. You also need to set a time when the meeting is over, even if everyone hasn’t said their piece. Announce this time before the first speaker starts.
8. **Record It.** Use a tape recorder so you can listen to the comments later. Also, give someone from your group the job of “reporter” for the evening. That person should take detailed notes of what each speaker says and then write an account of the evening, focusing on the primary concerns and issues raised. This will show you what people are most worried about and what you need to do to address those concerns. You may want to have someone list a summary of comments on a large notepad so that your audience can see that all concerns are being accepted and treated fairly.
9. **Learn from It.** The forum will help you better understand what roadblocks stand between you and solid sex ed. It will also give you information to present to school board members. If, for example, many speakers supported the idea of providing more information and skills to teens, this is something you can cite as you appeal to the school board for better sex ed.

What Should Our Schools Teach Teens About Sex?

A Community Forum
Sponsored by

Students at (Your School Name) are concerned about the quality of the current sexuality education courses offered at our school. We are asking parents, teachers, students, community and religious leaders, school board members, local officials and people from interested organizations to join us for an evening of thoughtful discussion on this important subject.

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

PLACE: _____

The public is invited to attend. Each speaker will be given 5 minutes to voice opinions, suggestions, and concerns.

What Should Teens Learn in School About Sex?

A COMMUNITY FORUM

Sponsored by:

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

PLACE: _____



Community Forum Press Release

For Immediate Release

CONTACT:

(Name of someone from your group designated to work with the press)

Date:

(Your Group Name) Plans Community Forum on Sex Ed in High School

(Town Name) — In an effort to bring better sexuality education to (town name) youths, the (group name) is sponsoring a community forum on sex ed in high school on (date) at (time) at (place). The meeting is open to the public and will feature a discussion of what should be taught in today's health and sexuality classes.

"Young people today face real pressures," said (group president). "More teens are getting pregnant, contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and experimenting with sex earlier."

"Young people need more accurate information and better skills to make the right decisions so they graduate from high school disease and pregnancy free. We want to get parents, teachers and the community involved in deciding what information should be included in our health classes. We also want to talk about how and when it should be taught."

Anyone who wants to weigh in will be given a chance to speak. The district's health teachers will also be on hand to answer questions about the current curriculum.



Community Forum Introduction

This is a suggested introduction to kick off your community forum. You can tailor it to fit your situation and personality. It's just a suggestion.

Hi, my name is (your name) and I'm a member of (your organization). We are concerned about the high teen pregnancy rate, the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS among young people and the large number of young people who feel confused about dating, relationships, sex, contraception and abstinence. We believe that young people are entitled to graduate from high school pregnancy and disease free. We also believe they need information and skills to achieve those goals.

Currently, our sexuality education classes are offered in grades (fill in grades). They provide information on (fill in subjects). We're holding this forum so we can hear from the community on this important subject. We want to know, do you think this is enough? Too much? Not enough? What should our schools be teaching youth about sex?

We don't expect to come up with any specific plan tonight. Instead, we are hoping to start a productive dialogue between students, parents, teachers, school officials and others in the community. We do plan to use information and opinions expressed here to shape a proposal on sexuality education that we are currently creating for our school board. (If you've completed your surveys at this point, you can also share this information with the group.)

Please be considerate of others. We have set a five (5) minute time limit per speaker so that everyone has a chance to offer their views. Please respect this limit. Also, (name of health teacher) is available to answer questions about our current courses.

(Take this opportunity to say the meeting will end promptly at whatever time you decide. If you don't do this, you could be there all night. You should also state your position on the issue of sexuality education in your school. Remember to abide by your own 5-minute time limit!)

Community Forum Closing

We'd just like to thank everyone for caring enough to come out tonight. We plan to take your ideas and opinions into consideration as we move forward with our proposal. We'd also like to invite everyone to stay involved. This topic will be discussed at upcoming school board meetings. We'll be sending notices to the newspapers and other media, so stay tuned. Thanks again for your concern and your ideas. Good night.

