



Peer Education Institute Guidance: Processing Current Events with Teen Council groups

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

I can create a well-contained and supportive space for teens to process difficult current events.

SCOPE OF THIS GUIDANCE

As difficult current events occur, Teen Council facilitators will need to create a safe space for members to learn, process, and heal. This document serves as a guide for facilitating conversations about challenging current events with Teen Council. That being said, you know your group best, so follow your instincts and attune to the needs of the group to adapt in the moment.

CONSIDERATIONS

Teens will have a range of knowledge and feelings about the current event. Some teens may not know much about the event, while others will be very in-the-know. Teens will also have a different relationship to the event: some may feel unmoved or untouched, while others may feel deeply troubled or even personally impacted. You will likely have teens along these spectrums of experiences.

Teens will also have a range of perspectives on the event. Members within the group may have differing values or even disagree about the circumstances. This can make conversations more difficult.

We should seek to support those most impacted by the event, while keeping in mind that these teens may need very different things. Some will want to verbally process with their peers and others will look forward to the respite of not having to think about it for a few hours.

We should name all of these considerations to the group and share our intentions to best meet the collective needs of the group.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND STRUCTURED SPACE

Below are suggested steps to prepare for and facilitate conversations about a difficult current event. This should be adjusted depending on the relative proximity and impact to the teens and their communities.

1. **Self-care:** Take time to get centered before you facilitate a tough conversation. This will look different for each person. This may include taking a walk, doing some deep breathing, reaching out to a trusted colleague or friend, journaling, meditating, and/or making a self-care plan for after the Teen Council meeting. Identifying your own needs and tending to them as best as possible before supporting your group can be likened to putting on your own oxygen mask before helping others with theirs.
2. **Make a Plan:** Review the “Considerations” section above, then reflect on how your Teen Council members *may* be affected by the current event. Set your intentions for the conversation and write it down. Look at your meeting agenda and adjust activities accordingly. Create the structure of the conversation (see step 5) and, if helpful, rehearse what you are going to say (see the “What to Say” section) to the group. This may feel like over-planning but remember that it will be your responsibility to guide the conversation, and the more you trust your plan, the more present you can be with the group.
3. **Give Notice to the Teens:** Let the group know that you will be having a short discussion about the current event at the upcoming meeting. Communicate this as soon as possible by sending a group text or posting on your group’s communication platform so that teens can relax into knowing there will be an opportunity to process with their peers soon and/or emotionally prepare to discuss the topic. Telling them what to expect as far as content and structure will also be helpful.
4. **Create a Container:** Developing and communicating clear structure and expectations will allow teens to understand what is going to happen and how they can show up in the conversation. Allot between 15 – 30 minutes for the conversation towards the start of the meeting and communicate this time frame to the teens – remember, some teens may have a very difficult time with this conversation, so having an end time will be helpful.
5. **Facilitate the Conversation:** Below is a suggested structure for the conversation.
 - a. Describe the container (see “Create a Container” above)
 - b. Share the facts (see “What to Say” section)
 - c. Normalize any and all feelings teens may be having
 - d. Describe the range of experiences related to the event, focusing on those most impacted
 - e. Open it up for discussion. Consider the following prompts:
 - i. How are you feeling about _____?
 - ii. What do you need?
 - iii. What ideas do you have for self-care?
 - f. Share available resources
 - g. Close the conversation
 - i. Thank the group
 - ii. Share any next steps
 - iii. Lead the group in a few deep breaths

- iv. Take a 5-minute break - ask teens to be mindful of others' needs and ask that if they are going to continue the conversation to take it to a different space. Any continued conversation about the topic should happen *after* fully informed consent between all involved.
- h. Transition to the regularly scheduled topic of the evening.

6. **Follow-up as Needed:** Depending on a variety of factors, follow-up may be warranted. This may include:

- a. Checking in with specific youth one-on-one
- b. Having another conversation during the next Teen Council meeting
- c. Hosting an optional conversation space outside of the typical meeting time so teens can continue to process. This could be in-person or virtual.

WHAT TO SAY

Figuring out what to say about a difficult event can be hard, especially when you are feeling emotionally or personally impacted. A great starting point is to review any affiliate- or federation- provided talking points. Depending on the event and if it is hyper-local, state-wide, national, or global, you may or may not have been given talking points. If you have not, we recommend connecting with your manager to help develop some talking points that you can share with your group.

Another helpful resource is the Values Question protocol. Lean on your values-question-answering skills to share the facts, describe a range of beliefs and experiences, and refer to trusted adults.

Above all, be authentic with your group. If you are feeling affected, share this in a way the feels appropriate. Describing how you are feeling may help teens feel safer and more willing to open up and be vulnerable. Depending on the situation, you may also be able to model acknowledging your own power and privilege in the context of the event. And don't forget, it's okay to make mistakes. You can always follow-up one-on-one or with the group after the meeting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **SPARK*ED COURES**
 - **SELF-PACED APPLYING A TRAUMA-INFORED LENS TO SEX ED**
[\(HTTPS://SPARKED.NET/COURSES/TEACHING-FROM-A-TRAUMA-INFORMED-LENS/\)](https://sparked.net/courses/teaching-from-a-trauma-informed-lens/)
 - **INSTRUCTOR-LED FACILITATNG FROM A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS**
[\(HTTPS://SPARKED.NET/FACILITATING-FROM-A-TRAUMA-INFORMED-LENS-VIRTUAL-INSTRUCTOR-LED-TRAINING/\)](https://sparked.net/facilitating-from-a-trauma-informed-lens-virtual-instructor-led-training/)
 - **TRAUMA AND HEALING RESOURCE LIST**
[\(HTTPS://SPARKED.NET/FACILITATING-FROM-A-TRAUMA-INFORMED-LENS-VIRTUAL-INSTRUCTOR-LED-TRAINING/\)](https://sparked.net/facilitating-from-a-trauma-informed-lens-virtual-instructor-led-training/)