

# HOST A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

## ACTIVITY

### Time Needed

1–2 months of preparation  
90–120 minute event

### Materials

Facilitators  
Questions  
Space set up for panel and conversations

### Activity Description

The conversations at this event should open up an ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders involved in raising and teaching our students. Lecturing and scare tactics are not the ideal way to understand drug use or to prevent it. Having supported community- and family-based conversations helps pave the way for specific conversations about drugs and alcohol. This activity is designed to bring together students, teachers, parents, and administrators to talk about the real dangers of stress and peer pressure the reality of its existence in the community. The hope is to start a conversation that will continue and hold all stakeholders accountable.

### Suggested Steps

1. Find volunteers.

Talk with students, parents, teachers, and administrators about who will lead this event and who is willing to help facilitate. This will be most effective if all stakeholders are represented and showing support.

2. Find a space.

Select a date and time and reserve an area for a large group discussion and smaller areas for breakout sessions. Assign facilitators for breakout sessions.

3. Inform the community.

Advertise the event and welcome all community members. Stress that this will be a serious but casual conversation. All voices will be heard and the goal is to get everyone talking. Invite people to send questions in advance.

4. Prepare leaders.

Before the event, identify who is participating and how. Student presenters can prepare a welcome and some examples they would like to share with the large group. They can read anonymous letters from other students if that's most comfortable. Try to represent a diverse group of students with different stories.



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Facilitators can be any stakeholder that is comfortable leading breakout conversations. The role of the facilitator is to manage the small groups in an equitable way, asking questions where appropriate, but generally letting the students and parents share their experiences. For example, “There are many experts on stress, brain development, drugs and alcohol, raising healthy teens, and the like—many of whom you have heard from. But today our experts are our teens, showing up authentically to share their insights and needs.” Sometimes it can get emotional, for participants and audience members. That’s ok!

Facilitators should have some suggested prompts to start the smaller conversations. If you received any questions ahead of time, make sure you have fact-based answers to provide.

Practice!

5. Reach out for questions.

Solicit questions from the community. If you get too many, you can consolidate them by theme.

6. Set up the rooms.

Create a comfortable space where participants can speak honestly, without judgment or interruption or feeling defensive. Suggested norms are:

- Listen fully, with your whole self
- Listen without judgement and cultivate empathy
- Resist the urge to fix things
- Confidentiality, respect, and trust
- Resist the urge to interrupt
- Turn off cell phones
- No bad ideas or questions

\*Students need to know there is a pledge of confidentiality and respect, and that nothing they say will be held against them. Make sure you announce this and post this so all participants understand they can be fully authentic.

There should be breakout rooms or areas that are clearly marked. It’s ideal to have the norms posted in those as well.

7. Hold the student panel.

Be welcoming and clear.

Facilitator to lead student panel, using prepared questions and stories.

Suggested questions to use with students:

- When you are on your way to school on a Monday morning, what are two words or phrases that describe your state of mind or how you are feeling?
- Who do you hang out with most and why (no need to name, but describe)?
- Who can you count on and why (no need to name, but describe)? What is one of your biggest challenges? How are you dealing with it?
- How would you describe your school culture to someone who has never been to the school?
- What do you wish the adults in this community really understood about you and your friends?

- Have you ever felt like you just can't handle everything on your plate? Describe that feeling and how you've handled it (even if you don't think you handled it well).
- What unspoken messages do you get from the adults in your life about their expectations or opinions of you?
- Do you feel pressure from your peers? If so, what does that look like?
- What are ways that your school currently helps students deal with stress (or helps to create a more balanced culture)?
- If you were a teacher or administrator, what is the number one thing you'd do to try to help students?
- What are some of your fears about what might happen if you are honest and open with your teachers? How about your parents?
- Does social media play in your stress level at all? If so, how?
- Where do you feel most supported, accepted or "seen" in your life? What does that look like?
- Parents want to talk with their kids about what is going on, but that can be difficult for both parties. In your experience, what works or doesn't work with parent-teen communication??
- What is one thing you love hearing your parents say to you?
- What is one thing you'd love to say to the parents at your school?

#### 8. Hold the breakout sessions.

Ideally have students separate from their own parents and close friends.

#### Suggested conversation starters:

- Discuss your reactions to the panel (likes, concerns, questions).
- Were you surprised by anything you heard?
- Given what you've heard, discuss something you do well to support student well-being.
- Given what you've heard, discuss something you might do differently?

#### 9. Close the event and thank participants.



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