

Public Speaking

Why **PUBLIC** SPEAKING?

The purpose of this guide is to assist experienced youth leaders or supportive adults in preparing youth for speaking engagements. This can include trainings, youth panels, workshops, conference plenary sessions, etc.

It is essential for all public speakers to have a good understanding of the audience to which they will be presenting. Begin by briefing the youth on the group requesting the presentation and exploring the youth's general thoughts/experience on the subject. Before beginning the steps below, it is helpful to have the youth share their level of experience with speaking/strategic sharing so that you can tailor these steps to the level of experience of the youth.

The following steps are written to address the youth.

A Guide on How to Help Youth Prepare for Speaking Engagements

STEP 1:

define your **PURPOSE** for sharing

This could be to 'educate social workers on how youth think things should be done' or 'tell judges why youth need to be in court' or 'advocate for change

in certain legislative policies.' What is the end result you would like to see happen as a result of you speaking to the audience today?

STEP 2:

THINK about what you would like to share

Reflect on specific aspects of your story and how it would relate to the audience. Ask for examples from your youth leaders or supportive adults if you are not sure. Ex: If speaking at a court panel, focus more on your experience in court; for workers, focus on your experience you had with your worker(s) and what could be done to improve that relationship. Be sure to keep in mind tips mentioned in this

document. It is more helpful to focus on solutions to the problems and point out what was helpful in each situation.

[Note to Youth Leaders or Supportive Adults: It may be helpful in this step to include a list of questions to direct the parts of the stories that youth share. Please see the list of suggested questions by topic to assist the audience if necessary.]

STEP 3:

WRITE it down

as you would like to say it. This helps to prepare for the overall direction you want your speech to take. You don't need to read it during the presentation, in fact it is suggested to only take an index card or

an outline with key points of your speech to help jog your memory if you slip up. As you do more speaking engagements, you will learn what approach you are most comfortable with.

It is important to remember that the purpose of speaking engagements is not for individual therapy. Youth should understand that the purpose of a speaking event is not the time to process their emotions. This should not be done on stage, but rather with a trusted adult or counselor after the speaking engagement is over.

STEP 4:

SHARE it

with your youth leadership group as if you were sharing with your audience. If there is more than one speaker, this will help to ensure there is little overlap on stories and you can focus on unique experiences, which will more effectively educate the audience. Sharing helps to make sure you stay in your allotted time frame. Also, emotions can come up during speaking, especially if it is an area of your story that you have not spoken much about before or if there are currently things going on with that part of your story. Sharing with your group will allow you to work out these feelings in a safe environment prior to speaking.

If and when you get to a point in your story where you can feel emotions coming up that you haven't prepared for, you can simply say "that's all I would like to share at this point" and then be sure to talk to a trusted adult about this and the next part of your story after the speaking engagement is over. Once you have processed this with your supportive adult, you will be able to share these 'new' parts of your story during your next speaking engagement which can lead to being an even more effective youth speaker.



STEP 5:

GO FOR IT!

Here's your time to deliver. For some people it is helpful to have an outline of points you want to make; others prefer to keep the entire thing written out. Keep in mind: It doesn't have to be perfect! If you lose your place, no worries. Most audience members simply appreciate you sharing your views. Just take a moment to find your place and pick up where you left off.

Here are some helpful tips to remember during the presentation:

- **Keep track of time.** Know ahead of time how much of the presentation should be allotted for question and answers and when you have five minutes left.
- **Smile and breathe.** It's okay to be nervous. Public speaking is feared by most Americans, and you're not only up in front of people, you're sharing your life story. Pause and take a deep breath occasionally if you need to. It sounds a little silly, but it works!

STEP 6:

DEBRIEF it

after the speaking engagement. Discuss with your peers and supportive adults on what everyone thought went well, and what could be improved for next time. If there were any areas that brought up unresolved emotions, be sure to get with a trusted adult to work through these.

TIPS FOR YOUTH PANELS

- ✓ The main job of the facilitator is to ensure the most relevant information gets out to the audience so that they can walk out not only being inspired, but more educated on how to best serve other youth.
- ✓ If you only have a short time, Question and Answer (Q&A) portions are the most effective to help direct learning. Sometimes speakers will feel the need to speak on a particular part of their story that may not necessarily be relevant because they want to be heard. It is important to validate that the youth needs to share that information, but always try to bring the focus back to the topic at hand as this can detract from the message that the group is trying to get across. If this does happen during a presentation, the youth should be positively redirected during the debriefing and encouraged to speak with a trusted adult about that part of their story.
- ✓ Everyone on the panel does not need to answer every question. Always remember the purpose of the panel is to educate. You may have a part of your story that is relevant to the question asked, but you should get a turn to speak. If it's not adding new information, provide your unique experience to another question.
- ✓ It is also important to educate youth on self awareness. For example some youth may desire to advocate for adoption, or post custody services, or even prevention services. It is good for youth to know what their own agenda is and when it is appropriate to share that desire as well as differences between their own story and the collective story seen through statistics. A good way to address this is to mention the part of the youth's story that is relevant, but then follow up with a comment regarding what generally occurs. For example, "I was fortunate enough to have one home, though I know that's not the case for most youth" or "I very much knew that I wanted to be adopted at age 13 and wanted TPR (Termination of Parental Rights) done on my case immediately; however, this is not what all youth would want and it is important to ask each youth on a case by case basis."

List of suggested questions by audience in developing an outline for speaking engagements:

General questions

- ☐ How long have you been in care? How old were you when you came in? Are you still in care? How old when you aged out?
- ☐ How many placements were you in? Schools? Did you see brothers and sisters? Were you placed with them?
- ☐ What has been the best thing about being in foster care? The worst?

Court

- ☐ Did you have a guardian ad litem (GAL) or volunteer? How often did you meet with that person? Did you have an attorney? Did you know what their role was in your case? Did you have a CASA?
- ☐ Do you know what a court hearing is? Do you know that you had a court hearing in your case? Did anyone tell you about them? Who?
- ☐ Did you ever attend your court hearings? Did you speak in court? Did you ever speak with or write to the judge?
- ☐ Did you feel like anyone asked you what you wanted to happen in your case? Where you wanted to live? Whether you wanted to see your parents/siblings?

Foster parents

- ☐ What was your experience with foster parents? How many/what type of placements?
- ☐ What qualities did your caregiver have that helped you or that you appreciated?
- ☐ What do you feel caregivers need to know about youth?
- ☐ If you could say one thing to caregivers/foster parents to make it better for youth, what would it be?
- ☐ What can caregivers/foster parents do to help you?

Community

- ☐ Were there/are there people in your community that are important to you?
- ☐ Are you/were you involved with social clubs in your community? Ex: boys and girls club, YMCA, arts centers, sports leagues, churches, jobs, etc? What impact did they have on your life?
- ☐ What connections did you have before you were taken into care that you wish you would have been able to keep after going into care?
- ☐ Why is it important that your relationship with these people and places be maintained?

Workers

- ☐ How many workers did you have during your case? Did you have regular contact with them?
- ☐ What were some characteristics of your worker that you appreciated? What did they do that was helpful to you?
- ☐ What would you like workers to know about youth? What advice would you give to a worker who wants to learn how to better work with youth?

Youth

- ☐ What does being a youth leader mean to you?
- ☐ Describe a time when you advocated for yourself or someone else. What was that like?
- ☐ Who was a supportive person in your life and why?
- ☐ Describe a time that you had a struggle in care and what you did to overcome it.
- ☐ Did you see the people in your life that you wanted to see (friends, bio-family, siblings, etc.)? How did you deal with it if you couldn't?
- ☐ What advice would you give to other youth who are just coming into the system? What advice would you give to youth who are getting ready to age out?
- ☐ What inspires you?

Questions and comments youth should be prepared to respond to from the audience

The following questions are not necessary for youth to answer if they are not comfortable with the question. But it is important that youth are prepared to respond when these questions come up. Chances are, they will come up at some point. However, if youth are comfortable and can answer these questions in a professional manner during the preparation session, they can certainly provide a better understanding for the audience of the 'life of foster care' and can actually help to dispel myths people might have about foster youth.

- ☐ What did you do to get into care?
- ☐ What was the reason you were taken into care?
- ☐ Were you abused? What was that like?

- ☐ What was it like to not see your siblings? Your family?
- ☐ Youth need to be told what to do-it's stupid to let youth make their own decisions.
- ☐ Did you ever try to commit suicide?
- ☐ Because of what you've been through, is it hard to open up in other relationships?

As always, which questions the youth actually answer should ALWAYS be those the youth are comfortable with answering. It is helpful to go through this list with youth beforehand, and have them practice how they would respond to each question. It is okay to respond with some version of "Thank you for your question, but I don't wish to respond at this time."



Closing

Once you come to the end of your speech, always thank the audience for taking the time to listen and for the work that they do with youth.

Public speaking can be scary, but it can also be a really great opportunity for youth to build self-confidence and influence change in a larger system. If youth are prepared adequately, this can help take some of the 'scariness' out of

public speaking and turn it into a great learning opportunity for all involved.

For the youth reading this in preparation for a speaking engagement, best of luck on your speaking engagement!

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