



New York State Combat Heroin and Prescription Drug Abuse Kitchen Table Toolkit

Guidelines for Discussing Substance Abuse and Addiction at Community Forums

Communities across New York State are being affected by the very real consequences of substance use and misuse. We see coverage about this almost every day in the media. In response, communities are beginning to hold forums about drugs and alcohol in our neighborhoods, schools, towns, and cities. We need to raise awareness and engage parents, educators, health care professionals, law enforcement, and young people in conversations about this critically important issue.

When planning a forum, it's important to first establish a list of objectives and then develop a program designed to achieve those objectives. This toolkit has been created to assist communities in planning a well-attended and informative event that will inspire attendees to take actions to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in their communities.

Tips for Planning and Holding an Effective Community Forum

1. Identify the objective of the event

- Develop a clear set of objectives or outcomes for the forum (e.g. What do you want the attendees to gain?). For example, the objectives of this forum are: to raise awareness of the prevalence and risks of illegal substances in our community; educate residents about the signs of drug use; and provide residents with information about how and where to get help.
- What message/information/empowerment/motivation to act do you want the audience to take away from the event?
- Refer to the The New York State Combat Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Kitchen Table Toolkit Discussion Guide. The toolkit includes videos that maybe used at community forums. Part 1: Talking with the Community is an adult-targeted video to show at community forums, PTA meetings, teacher trainings, etc. Approximately 17 minutes in length, the video includes the action step of using Part 2 to talk with young people.

2. Identify a team that will help organize the event

- It is recommended that a variety of stakeholders be included in the planning of the community forum. Members of the organizing team should be invested in (or at least familiar with) the topic, able to relate to the target audience, and/or have assisted with past community events.
- Consider speaking with different members of the community (including key officials) to identify individuals with the appropriate skill set and knowledge about substance use and abuse, understanding of different perspectives, and willingness to participate in the forum.
- In order to engage more partners with community forum efforts, talk to individuals in the local school system (District Superintendent, School Principals, Coaches, Teachers, Guidance Counselors, etc.), County/City Health and Mental Hygiene Department, Prevention Providers, Community Coalitions, City/Town or Village Officials, Law Enforcement, Community Doctors, ER clinicians, and local recovery organizations.
- Keep your team small enough to manage while working together to get the job done.
- Each member of the team should have a specific responsibility (e.g. developing handouts, promoting the event, identifying speakers, finding a location, etc.).

3. Identify an event moderator

- Identify a moderator or facilitator who is a strong leader and comfortable intervening during a presentation or discussion to keep the event on track and on schedule.
- The moderator should be credible and knowledgeable about the topic, but does not need to be the subject expert. S/he should be able to facilitate the presentation(s) and any question and answer portions, as well as keep the speakers to their allotted time frames.

4. Select a date and time convenient for the target audience

- Check with local community calendars to identify possible conflicts with other popular events, holidays, etc.
- Choose a time convenient for the target audience to increase the likelihood of attendance. For example, a 2 p.m. event on a Wednesday would not be optimal for an event targeting a high school student audience as it might conflict with classes; parents may be more available during weeknight evenings or weekends. Be sensitive to varying work schedules to accommodate as many people as possible.

5. Consider including incentives that may increase attendance

- Light refreshments (especially for events around meal time).
- On-site babysitting (for the duration of the event).
- Giveaways/Raffle (depending on the funding source, appropriateness for audience, etc.)

6. Select a location for the event

- Consider a location that is known by the community.
- Identify a venue that is easy to locate and easily accessible (i.e. on main street of town/city, near public transportation, ample available parking, handicapped accessible). The location should meet audio visual, internet, scheduling, and capacity needs.
- Venues to consider might include libraries, town halls, firehouses, and schools.

7. Select appropriate speaker(s) for the event.

Speaker should:

- Be credible, knowledgeable, and impassioned about the topic.
- Be motivated to participate by their genuine concern. Summarize what s/he would articulate to ensure the presentation is in line with the event's objective. (It is completely appropriate to request an outline of the presentation prior to the event).
- Be comfortable speaking publicly and preferably, has done so before.
- While it may be difficult to ask these questions, it is critical in order to ensure you have the speakers who will help to meet the forum's objectives and make the event a success.
- If the speaker plans on sharing his or her personal addiction and recovery story, or a family member's, ensure they understand this is a public meeting, that media may be present, and guide them on not sharing any details that they may want to keep private.

8. Promote the event to target audiences

- Raise awareness about the event by distributing and posting flyers, encourage local media outlets to run public service announcements (PSAs) through the local town/county or village outlets (groups, e-mail lists, listservs, town publications, radio stations, community boards, etc.) at 30 days before and then again 5-7 days prior to the event.

- Post on social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) 30 days before and then again 5-7 days prior to the event.
- Ask the planning team, moderator, and speakers to promote the event through their own social media channels and networks.
- On the day of the event, place a bright sign with large, readable font outside of the location with the time and title of the event. Check with venue about policies and/or town codes.
- Contact local media outlets prior to the event to request coverage.
- Contact local elected officials at state, city, town, and county levels at least 30 days in advance of the event to ask for their support and attendance.

Important Considerations for Event Leader(s)/ Facilitators:

- Take the time to plan a community event about a topic that is relevant to local issues/ needs/ requests. Doing so will help maximize success and generate sustained engagement.
- Develop a clear objective for the forum.
- Understand each speaker's perspective on the topic and his/her talking points prior to the event.
- Develop an agenda for the event with established timeframes for each item.
- Keep your event on schedule.
- Throughout the forum, have members of the event team stationed in different areas in/around the room to deal with the unexpected. Examples of the unexpected might include technology issues, noise from outside the hall/room, assisting an attendee, seating anyone joining the forum after it has begun, opening or closing doors quietly, etc.
- Notify local police and parking enforcement of the scheduled event in advance and again on the day of the event.
- Actively engage the target audience. If possible, include a question & answer session on the agenda.
- If you choose to include an exhibit area, include that information in pre-event promotional materials. Alert the audience if potentially sensitive images will be displayed.
- Have related resources available and accessible, such as:

1. The New York State Combat Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Kitchen Table Toolkit (add link)

2. Websites

www.CombatHeroin.ny.gov

Kitchen Table Toolkit that includes talking points and recommendations to support the video viewing, assist with discussion, and how to use video 2 with youth.

<http://talk2prevent.ny.gov/>

Talk2Prevent website

www.OASAS.ny.gov

Includes information on how to find an addiction treatment provider, including inpatient/outpatient services (e.g. state-operated Addiction Treatment Centers (ATCs))

- a. New York State's HOPEline (call 1-877-8-HOPENY; 1-877-846-7369 or text HOPENY (short code 467369))
 - b. Good Samaritan Law at <http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov/prevention>
 - c. Local AA/NA/ALANON and NARANON meeting days, times, and places
 - d. Local prevention providers, treatment, and recovery providers
 - e. Handouts
- Distribute an anonymous evaluation form at the beginning of the event and ask attendees to complete it after the event and before they leave to help you assess the forum's effectiveness, and use this information to determine future event needs/topics.

Guidelines for Speaker(s) and/or Moderator(s)

- Opening statements should convey:
 - a. Purpose - the reason why the speaker is credible and has chosen/been asked to speak to the audience about the topic at this event.
 - b. Partnership - thank the audience for attending. Be aware that participants/attendees may need an opportunity to voice their concerns about the substance use/abuse issues in their particular community or family. Provide information about question and answer sessions to be included or upcoming opportunities for discussion points along the way.
- Acknowledge that drug use is a perilous circumstance. For healing of families and communities, hope is both possible and essential. With the support of loved ones and other resources available, people can recover. This is why today's event is so important and why we need and learn from the audience's participation.
- Be prepared to provide immediate referrals. If the content resonates with the attendees, it's likely people may ask for resources or seek help for themselves or a loved one right there at the forum. Have the contact information of local treatment centers on hand, or invite a local treatment provider to attend. Share the NYS OASAS HOPEline referral number (1-877-8-HOPENY). NYS OASAS-operated Addiction Treatment Centers (<https://www.oasas.ny.gov/atc/directory.cfm>) are one excellent resource. The OASAS provider directory is available at this link where you can find a program in a certain location by entering your zip code, city, etc.: <http://www.oasas.ny.gov/providerDirectory/index.cfm>.

- Keep presentations clear, simple, and to the point.
 - a. Repeat key messages throughout the presentation.
 - b. Revisit the focal point.
 - c. Insert language throughout the presentation that continues to remind the audience why the topic is important.

- List and share facts about the issue. Consider:
 - a. What is heroin?
 - b. Why is misuse of prescription drugs dangerous?
 - c. What is the new drug in the community?
 - d. What are the access points of these substances?
 - e. National, state, and local statistics
 - f. Discussion starters such as: Why do you think risky use doesn't always lead to addiction, but can lead to death?
 - g. Personal facts pertinent to the presentation and the objective of the event
 - h. Information about warning signs of a substance use problem.

- Integrate the perspective of law enforcement, other speakers, and/or participants. For example:
 - a. Emphasize that addiction can happen to anyone, any family, and at any time. There is no "typical" user.
 - b. Examples/trends of what law enforcement is encountering locally.
 - c. 911 Good Samaritan Law - New York's "911 Good Samaritan" law provides protections from charge and prosecution for drug and alcohol possession for the victim and those who seek help during an overdose.
<http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov/prevention>
 - d. Calendar of medicine take-back days/events including dates and locations.

- Include important information for parents to consider:
 - a. Their own patterns of use for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, including prescription pills.
 - b. The frequency and effectiveness of discussions with their child/children about alcohol and drug use, including the risks of sharing medications with friends.
 - c. When communicating with children and youth, keep it fact-based, short, and simple; avoid lecturing.
 - d. Monitor medicine cabinet contents and all medications in the home.
 - e. Lock medications and dispose of expired and unused medications in a safe way.
 - f. Suggest that parents offer to role-play with their children about peer pressure regarding drugs/alcohol, what they can say, etc. Offer to role play

(as part of the presentation) those issues and other scenarios like talking with another parent.

- g. Empower parents with knowledge about naloxone (brand name: Narcan), an opioid overdose reversal medication, as Opioid Overdose Prevention as well as the role of schools and school-based registered nurses in these prevention efforts.

- Avoid Discussing:

- a. Positive or negative commentary about specific providers.
- b. Negativity about any person with substance use disorder; rather, focus on how the person's actions affected his or her health, how addiction impacted their family, relationships, etc.
- c. Opinions regarding specific models of treatment (abstinence, medication assisted treatment), inpatient, outpatient, etc. Everyone's treatment journey is individualized; there is no "one" way.

Specific Guidelines for Speakers in Recovery or with Lived Experience Sharing Their Stories

The individual speaking to the public should:

- Have a demonstrated commitment to their recovery
- Be willing to share his/her story (See “Sample Discussion Topics” chart for suggestions on how to share the story.)
- Share consequences in a general way; specific details are not necessary.
- Share the road to recovery, including the steps that got him/her there; add details and specifics, if comfortable.
- Reiterate that recovery is individualized and personal; there is no “right” or “wrong” way.
- Inform the audience/community why s/he has chosen to speak at the forum and, if relevant, that s/he is a member of the community.
- Dress appropriately. Refrain from using foul or offensive language, and speak loudly and clearly.
- Be mindful of the amount of time allotted, and focus on key points.
- Be aware of the target audience and maintain authenticity. For example, if the target audience is made up of parents, speak to the parents. Consider what’s important for them to hear or know. If the audience consists of young people in their teens, consider what’s important for them to hear or know. Use age-appropriate language and examples.
- Sessions that conclude with a Question and Answer session should be facilitated by a leader or moderator, however; if a speaker is confronted with a question that s/he is not comfortable answering, state: “I am not comfortable answering that question. Maybe the event organizer can give you some resources on that or maybe someone else in the audience can speak about that.”

Sample Discussion Topics

Sample Discussion Topics (as related to forum's theme and objective)	Sample Talking Points for Forum Speakers (as appropriate)
<h3>Childhood experiences</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about childhood and the impact that childhood experiences may or may not have on the decision to begin experimenting with drugs and/or alcohol. • Reflect on the influence of risk and protective factors.
<h3>Progression of substance use</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about the early stages of substance use, which often begin with social or experimental alcohol and marijuana use. • Talk about the progression of use and some of the early consequences of addiction that were likely ignored or dismissed at the time (e.g. losing friends, no longer playing sports, drop in grades, etc.).
<h3>Consequences of addiction</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss habitual substance use and the more severe consequences that resulted (e.g. being fired from jobs, legal involvement, being kicked out of the house or school, seeing friends leave, etc.). • Describe treatment experiences, including inpatient and/or outpatient experiences; what worked to make recovery possible.
<h3>Recovery</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how life has improved since choosing to be (and working at) being sober, in recovery. • Describe how social life is as a (teen, young adult, adult, parent) in recovery. • Discuss hopes and aspirations for the future. • Explore what or who assisted most during recovery, which is an evolving and on-going process.