



Speak Your Mind Texas: Hosting a Community Conversation

The Texas Department of State Health Services encourages communities to conduct Community Conversations focusing on teen and young adult mental health as part of the [Speak Your Mind Texas](#) initiative.

Is your community interested in hosting a Community Conversation? These events may be designed to reflect the needs, concerns, and resources in your local community. Event materials and templates, including a sample agenda, are available here.

Questions? Contact: DSHS.Communications@dshs.state.tx.us.

Planning Your Community Conversation: Guidelines and Best Practices

PURPOSE: To spark community dialogue about mental health and substance use; reduce the stigma often associated with mental illness; and explore the steps that families, schools, and communities can take to improve mental health and remove barriers to treatment, particularly among teens and young adults.

EVENT PARTICIPANTS:

- Teen and young adult support systems such as educators, health professionals, and parents.
- Teens and young adults.
- Members of the community who have a stake or interest in the welfare of teens and young adults – including teachers, mental health professionals, faith leaders, law enforcement, business leaders, and local officials.

FORMAT:

- Town hall-style forum.
- 2 hours in length.
- Event timing (morning, lunch, afternoon, or evening) based on community preference and resources for providing refreshments.
- Number of participants may range from less than 50 to more than 200, depending on the needs of the community. Venue should accommodate table discussion for anticipated audience.
- Venue should be equipped with a podium, microphone, and audio/visual equipment to enable panelists to show community data/presentations and Speak Your Mind Texas testimonial videos.
- Refreshments may be provided by host or community partner.
- One experienced facilitator should be assigned to each discussion group of six to 10 participants.
- Table scribes may be assigned in advance or volunteers may be recruited to record discussion takeaways at each table.

AGENDA/PROGRAM:

- Enlist a seasoned leader, elected official or mental health advocate to serve as the “emcee.”
- Enlist someone familiar with Twitter to tweet about the event and tweet speaker comments.
- Begin the program with an overview of the Community Conversation’s purpose and show a testimonial video from www.SpeakYourMindTexas.org or www.HablaMeTeEscucho.org (Four videos, all available in English and Spanish).
- Choose no more than four or five panelists, including a parent or young person willing to share their personal experience with mental illness and/or substance abuse.
- Start your discussion with this personal story to engage participants and begin open dialogue.
- Allow participants ample time for meaningful small group table discussions.
- Keep in mind your audience’s needs and arrange to have translators available if necessary.

RESOURCES:

- Join with several community leaders to spearhead the Community Conversation event planning, including date and venue selection.
- Compile a list of local leaders and organizations and conduct outreach via phone and e-mail to encourage attendance.
- Create an event registration page using a free online tool, such as Eventbrite, or use an alternate method to track expected attendance.
- Localize the campaign promotional event flyer and include a link to the registration site.
- Compile a list of local resources offering mental health services and make the list available at the meeting.
- Order *Speak Your Mind Texas* brochures and posters in advance through the website. Ensure that each participant receives a brochure and that posters are displayed in the meeting room.
- Collect participants’ names and contact information for notification of future events and meetings.

MATERIALS:

The Speak Your Mind Texas [Campaign Materials](#) page has several options to help promote the event. These are also available in Spanish (speakyourmindtexas.org/materials-sp.htm).

- Brochure
- Poster for adult audiences
- Poster for teens and young adults
- Videos
- TV and radio public service announcements

DOWNLOADABLE MATERIALS:

Below are files that can be downloaded and localized as necessary.

- Agenda Template
- Flyer Template
- Participant Guide (English and Spanish)
- Facilitator Guide (English and Spanish)
- Talking Points
- Presentation Slide Template
- Participant Survey (English and Spanish)