



April 2011

Youth and Violence

Reducing the Threat

Violence has become a pervasive presence in American life, especially violence involving young people. Whether it manifests itself on the screen or on the streets, the central and most urgent question is this: how can we reduce violence in the lives of young people?

OPTION ONE

Focus on Accountability

Society and parents must hold juveniles to a reasonable standard of lawful and civilized behavior. Children and teens who are violent need to face clear consequences. Parents need to be held accountable as well.

OPTION TWO

Focus on Prevention

We need to intervene early in families with children who are violent or are at risk of engaging in violent acts. Violent juveniles often inflict pain on others but they are children after all. Their poor decisions can be blamed, in part on their youth.

OPTION THREE

Change Our Violent Culture

Violence and images of violence are widespread in American culture—on the streets and in the media. It sends the message that violence is normal and that bullying—an increasing problem—is a routine part of childhood. The key to reducing juvenile violence is to change the environment in which our children grow up.



>>National Issues Forums and Study Guides

Why are we here? What are we going to do?

We are here to move toward a public decision on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

How do we do that?

We do that by engaging in a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- understand the PROS and CONS of each approach—its benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs.
- know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations—the things they consider to be the most valuable in everyday life.
- weigh carefully the views of others and appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

>>Forums or Study Circles—or Both?

Many NIF groups choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last two to two-and-a-half hours.

Other groups, however, plan for multiple sessions, or study circles, to allow participants greater opportunity to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings, while others might devote a separate session to each approach. And still others plan ahead for a session after the forum for participants to come back together and consider next steps.

In some communities, people begin their examination of an issue in a large group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse is also helpful—starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

National Issues Forums is about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

>> Stages of a Forum

Welcome

The convenor or moderator introduces the NIF program.

Ground rules

Participants and the moderator review desired outcomes and agree on ground rules.

Getting started

One good way to start is for participants to take a few minutes to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and tell their stories. Sometimes the convenor or moderator begins by showing a starter video that reviews the problems underlying the issue.

Deliberation

Participants examine all the choices. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each choice.

Ending the forum

Participants reflect on what has been achieved.

Questionnaire

Participants complete the questionnaire.

>> If This Is Your First Experience as a Moderator

You don't have to be an expert on the issue.

Reading the issue guide thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each approach is the critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about—deliberation.

Ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each approach, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them. Listen to others.

Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.

Sometimes it's difficult to move on to another approach with so much more that could be said. But in order to make progress, participants need the chance to weigh all the major options.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

In many ways, this is the most important work the group will do. The moderator will provide reminders that time is passing, but it is up to all the participants to help preserve the time to reflect on what they have said and what they might want to do about it.

>>Beginning a Forum

Before the deliberation begins, it is important for participants to review guidelines for their discussion. They should agree that:

- everyone is encouraged to participate,
- no one or two individuals should dominate,
- the discussion should focus on the approaches,
- all the major choices should be considered,
- they will maintain an open and respectful atmosphere for the discussion, and
- they will listen to each other.

>>Ending a Forum

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect, both individually and as a group, on what has been achieved. Consider the following kinds of questions:

I. Individual reflections

How has your thinking about the issue changed?

How has your thinking about other peoples' views changed?

How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

II. Group reflections

What didn't we work through?

Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?

Which trade-offs are we willing to make to move in a shared direction?

Which are we unwilling to make?

III. Next-step reflections

What do we still need to talk about?

How can we use what we learned in this forum about ourselves?

Do we want to meet again?

Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together you will undoubtedly think of questions that are at the heart of what makes the issue compelling. In some forums, certain questions will likely arise that could derail the deliberation by veering into partisan political debate. It will be important to remember that, as a group, you are dealing here with broader underlying concerns that are not defined by party affiliation and that your work here is to dig down to the basic values that define us as human beings and as Americans rather than as Democrats and Republicans. It is helpful to consider, ahead of time, broad questions that need to be addressed in each approach. Here are some examples:

O P T I O N O N E

- Do you think older teenagers who are convicted of major felonies, such as rape or murder, should be sent to adult prisons?
- Should parents face legal consequences when their children commit violent crimes?
- How can we best deal with repeat juvenile offenders? Is there an intervention program in your community that has been effective in these cases?
- Do you think we worry too much about what happens to youths who commit violent crimes and not enough about the children and adults who become the victims of these offenses?

O P T I O N T W O

- Many programs aimed at preventing juvenile violence are based on early identification and treatment of children judged likely to get into trouble. Do you see any downsides to this approach?
- When a teenager commits a serious crime, how much consideration should be given to the fact that he or she is too young to have fully developed reasoning abilities?
- If their parents aren't home, who do you think should be responsible for helping children stay out of trouble after school hours?
- What are the risks and benefits of programs that treat juvenile offenders in their homes and communities instead of sending them away to prisons or boot camps?

Questions continued on Page 6.

Questions, continued

O P T I O N T H R E E

- Do the schools in your community have policies or programs that deal with bullying? Are they working?
- How far do you think government entities should go to protect children by regulating the content of the popular media?
- Do you think gun control can play a role in reducing juvenile violence?
- Many people think parents should be responsible for controlling what children see and hear in the media and on the Internet. But what does that mean for the many children who come from homes where no such oversight exists?

>>Questionnaires

Questionnaires play an important role in your local forum—and in the national NIF network. Filled out after the forum, they serve multiple purposes. They give participants an opportunity to reconsider their views in light of the experience they have just had and give them a chance to add to what was said or heard in the forum.

The questionnaires also serve a vital role outside the forum. As one means of capturing what happened in the forum, they provide information that can be used to communicate participants' views to others—to officeholders, to the media, and to other citizens.

A national report on the outcomes of the forums on a given issue is produced each year, based on extensive interviews with moderators and the questionnaires that forums generate. Some communities use questionnaires as part of the reports they generate on the outcomes of local forums.

Please return completed questionnaires to your moderator or to National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

>>The Role of the Moderator

- To provide an overview of the deliberation process
- To ask probing questions about what's at stake in each issue and each choice
- To encourage participants to direct their questions and responses to one another
- To remain neutral

Another important job for the moderator is to fill out the Moderator Response sheet at the end of this guide and return it with the questionnaires to National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

>>For More Information

To order the *Youth and Violence* issue book and starter tape, call 1-800-600-4060, FAX (937) 435-7367, or mail to National Issues Forums Publications, 1800 N. Stonelake Drive, Box A, Bloomington, Indiana 47402. Other issue books and tapes may also be ordered from this source.

For other information and to make comments, visit the National Issues Forums Institute Web site at www.nifi.org or call NIFI at 1-800-433-7834.

To post the dates and locations of your forums, e-mail: forums@nifi.org.

Moderator Response

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it with the questionnaires from the forum.

Moderator's Name _____

Phone _____ E-mail address _____

Date and location (state) where forum was held _____

Briefly describe the audience of your forum, including city and state, diversity, and age of participants and number of participants.

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult for the participants? _____

What common concerns were most apparent? _____

Were there trade-offs most participants would accept? Describe. _____

Were there trade-offs most participants would not accept? Describe. _____

Did the group identify shared directions for action? _____

Return with questionnaires to:
National Forums Institute
100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777
www.nifi.org