POLICE-YOUTH RELATIONS DIALOGUE
Youth Dialogue Example
Facilitator, law enforcement, and community organizers introduce themselves and summarize overall aim of the dialogue. For example, “Now we’d like to tell you why we are engaged in this work. In recent years, we’ve seen many examples of tension between police and the communities they serve. Importantly, events that happen elsewhere can also affect and inform local community-police relations. We’re doing this exercise to help community members and police better communicate their expectations.” It also helps participants to think about “what if something happened here that is similar to what we’re seeing nationally?” “Would we be prepared?” “Would we know how to respond?” “How should we respond?”

Invite everyone else to introduce themselves: “Please state your name, organization (if applicable), and your motivation for participating in this exercise.”
Purpose of a Dialogue Format for Police-Youth Relations

• Communities are made up of people with different backgrounds and perspectives.
• Many communities have difficulty bringing key viewpoints together, including youth’s views.
• All sides may have a hard time seeing others’ perspectives.
• Challenge: How to set aside competitive relationships and allow for an open dialogue?
• The dialogue format removes pressure to
  – commit to something before fully understanding
  – “win” the conversation
  – fix all issues in one session.
How does the dialogue work?

1. Describe a hypothetical community and background issues
2. Present two scenarios that build on each other (crises, breaking news)
3. Participants reflect and discuss after each scenario, in small groups and then with the full group
4. At the end, evaluate the dialogue overall, then identify and assign action items
Short-Term Goals of the Police-Youth Dialogue

IDENTIFY
gaps or areas of weakness in police-youth relations

DEVELOP
connections and communication between the police, the community, youth, and government and community-based organizations

Long-Term Goals of the Police-Youth Dialogue

ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION
between participants that continues after exercise is over

BUILD A CULTURE OF TRUST
between youth and the police
Before we get started, a couple of research procedures

- Informed consent
- Pre- and post-dialogue surveys

Review consent forms (adult and youth).
Direct participants to surveys in their packet.
Discussion Ground Rules

• Everyone in the room is equally qualified to participate in the dialogue.
• Any existing power differences you have in roles in the community do not exist in this room.
• Everyone’s perspective is valued and should be respected during this discussion.
• Do not interrupt one another, do not do all the talking in the discussion or talk down to one another. We want to hear from all of you.
• No single individual has all the answers. There is no “right” answer. We are here to listen and learn from one another.
• If you feel yourself getting upset, try to have an open mind. Police officers, no one here is telling you how to do your job. Young people, no one here is telling you that your experience is wrong.
• It is okay to discuss things that were said during the dialogue, but everyone’s comments should remain confidential. Do not say what any of the participants said after the dialogue is over. What’s said here should stay here!
• No cell phones! Please respect each other’s time by not using your cell phones during the dialogue, except while on breaks.
Things to Consider About the Scenarios

• No scenario is a perfect reflection of reality, which is intentional. No single scenario will address all components of an issue, but you should try to stick to only the issues presented in the scenario.
• Some of the scenarios might be difficult to discuss or very personal to you (i.e., you’ve experienced it). If the scenario is too difficult for you, please feel free to take a break and come back to the group when you’re ready or tell one of the facilitators.
• Try to pinpoint the key issues identified in the scenario and discuss them with the group.
• If you have questions about the scenario, ask the facilitator for clarification.
We’ll start by describing the setting of this hypothetical community, and some of the things that are happening there. Although it’s hypothetical, you’ll still be considering your own reactions as if this was happening here in [name of community].
In this hypothetical scenario, in April, there have been several national events involving police encounters with youth that put a spotlight on how police interact with youth in racial/ethnic minority communities.
In addition, in this hypothetical community, the race and ethnicity of the police officers is mostly different from the race and ethnicity of the people who live in the community. Most residents are Black or Hispanic/Latino.
In response to national events, community members and youth begin to protest issues the way they feel the police are treating youth. This starts to make people pay closer attention to the tension between police and youth in their own communities.
So that’s the setting we’re entering. Next, we’ll present 2 hypothetical scenarios for you to think about and discuss. As we show you these scenarios, consider some of these questions. Feel free to jot down notes during the review of each scenario using the notepads on your tables. After each scenario, you will break into small groups to discuss your thoughts using the discussion questions that are in your packets, then you will come back to the larger group to share your perspectives. At the end, we’ll summarize what we’ve learned and try to come up with some next steps for you all to work on together.

Things to Think About

• What’s your reaction?
• What’s most important to you?
• Who would you talk to about any concerns?
• What would you want to happen next?
First Scenario
In the community we just described, it’s June, a few months after the beginning of the rise in national attention to policing of youth and local protests. There has been an increase in criminal activities among youth (e.g., youth selling drugs in the community, bringing weapons to school).
In response to the rise in crime committed by youth in the community, the police start making more stops, searches, and arrests of young people. Often, these stops are for such minor offenses as youth riding their bikes on sidewalks and jaywalking, or for asking youth for identification. These stops are viewed as harassment. Police also ask the community to help with investigating these incidents.
Youth and parents become frustrated and feel there is overpolicing (i.e., youth are being targeted and stopped too much), aggressive police behavior, and racially biased behavior (i.e., youth are being treated differently because of their race or ethnicity).
Then, there are police messages leaked on social media where officers are talking about Black and Hispanic youth in disrespectful ways, making assumptions about their upbringing, such as saying they’re not raised right, and viewing them as more dangerous than other youth.
In response to these issues, the chief of police says that the police officers’ increased stops and arrests of youth are necessary to reduce crime, and he denies that they are targeting youth based on race. However, he authorizes an internal review of police behavior and places some officers on paid administrative leave. Police officers say they feel like they are being treated unfairly and that they don’t treat youth differently because of their race or ethnicity.

So, taking from this set of evolving circumstances in this scenario, what is your reaction? In summary, in response to youth crime increasing, the police appear to have started to stop and arrest more youth in the community, especially for minor offenses. Parents and youth say that this is harassment and biased policing (policing based on race). The leaked messages seem to support the claims that police have negative views about Black and brown youth. The police chief doesn’t think the police are biased, but he agrees to an internal review and punishes some officers. Police officers feel like they are not being treated fairly.
SCENARIO 1
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

General
• How would you react to the scenario? What is most important to you? Who would you talk to about any concerns? What would you want to happen next?

Scenario 1
• What do you think about the police department’s response to rising youth crime?
• How do you think the community should respond to the rise in youth crime and the increase in police stops of youth?
• What impact do you think the officers’ text messages have on the community? On other police officers?
• How do you feel about the police chief’s response?
• How do you feel about the officers being upset about the community’s and the police chief’s response?

Large group discussion:
• What are some things that you think are important for the police and youth to know about each other’s perceptions of this scenario?
Second Scenario
OK, now it’s August, a couple months after the incidents in the first scenario. There have been several encounters with school police and students of color at schools across the country.

Then, in this community, there is an encounter between a Hispanic youth and a school resource officer at a local high school. The student makes disrespectful comments to the officer while walking past him, and the officer grabs her by the neck, shoves her against the lockers, and begins to try to handcuff her as the student fights back; the student is arrested and charged with assault and battery of an officer and resisting arrest.
Tensions continue to increase between the police, community members, and youth because they feel Black and Hispanic students are being targeted and treated more aggressively by police in school and being arrested. The community and youth feel students should be disciplined by the school, not sent to jail.
Local school officials and the chief of police convene meetings with community members and youth to discuss these issues and try to come to a resolution.
OK, before we move on to the discussion, I'd like to check in to see how everyone is feeling. I know these are sensitive topics, so please let me know if you are feeling uncomfortable and need to talk to someone for support.”

If everyone is feeling OK, let’s turn to the discussion questions. Again, start with the general question, then move to the scenario questions.
Now we would like to wrap up by discussing what we’ve learned from this exercise and how this group can continue to work together to address any concerns in the community.

Closing Discussion

- Are there topics that weren’t discussed that should have been?
- Did you identify areas where youth or police actions or behavior could be better?
- How do we begin solving some of the issues that came up in this hypothetical community?
- What do you think needs to be done next to improve police-youth relations in your community?
About This Resource

This file contains supplementary material to the RAND publication A Toolkit for Community-Police Dialogue, by Dionne Barnes-Proby, Samuel Peterson, Alexandra Mendoza-Graf, Pierce Holmes, Danielle Sobol, Nipher Malika, Meagan Cahill, TL-A615-1, 2023 (available at www.rand.org/t/TLA615-1). This project was funded by both the Lenzner-Coleman Challenge Fund for Criminal Justice research and the American Arbitration Association-International Centre for Dispute Resolution Foundation®, which focuses on collaborative and community approaches to dispute resolution, as well as the use of alternative dispute resolution that is tailored to the conflict.

Justice Policy Program

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