

Tips for Youth Participation on Workgroups/Speaking Engagements/Panels

Before the Presentation:

- Come prepared! Find out as much as possible prior to the event. What will be expected of you? What history is there with the group? What questions will you be asked? Don't just volunteer – know what you are committing to and what your role will be.
- Know that you are important member of the group and what you have to offer matters! Hearing first hand from someone with experience is one of the most helpful things when trying to make changes or improve things!

How You Represent Your Best Self:

- Cell phones should be put on silent and put away during the presentation.
- Be inquisitive. If something is said that you do not know what it means go ahead and ask. Chances are there is someone else in the group who has the same question and it will only make the meeting more confusing if you do not find out.
- Present yourself as professionally as possible – dress nicely, sit up in your chair, speak clearly and loudly, and don't chew gum while you are talking.
- During the meeting, try not to sit with your eyes closed. Doodle on your notepad or step outside for a minute if you need to but try to show interest to what is being said.

When Sharing Information.....

- When first speaking, share a little about yourself to the group: Tell them your name, age, how long you have been in foster care, current living situation, accomplishments, and future aspirations. Brag on yourself – what are you involved with, what are your passions. You were selected to be a part of this for a reason!
- If you need a question repeated, ask.
- Learn about strategic sharing. Two great articles:
 - <http://www.whcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/youth-leadership-toolkit-strategic-sharing.pdf>
 - http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf
- If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, please feel free to state this when asked. You can say "I do not feel comfortable talking about that." Just because a question is asked of you does not mean you have to answer it.
- Another option if you are uncomfortable answering a question is to open the question up to the entire group. "Great question. Let's see what others have to say on this. Who would like to respond?" This may not work if you are the only one who may have experienced but it can be used in some situations.
- Instead of saying something happened to you that you are a little uncomfortable sharing, you may share your "story" by stating "I know a youth that experienced

that." For example, when talking about something such as physical abuse, if you want to keep this part of your life private but experienced it and want to share something with the group about physical abuse you can say "I know a youth that was physically abused and....." and share your experience that way. However, there is no need to overshare! Many points can be made without sharing all of the details.

- To help you (and your audience) get the most benefit out of your presentation you can ask yourself: "Why am I sharing this information?" and "Who benefits from me sharing this information?" to help decide whether your sharing is strategic and appropriate.
- When talking about what you do not like or what has not helped you, remember to stay as positive as possible. It is okay to say something that was not good for you, but make sure you then say what would have helped or what could make a difference. A common complaint that I hear is that youth have not seen their caseworker much, so if you are talking about this you could say something like, "I did not get to see my caseworker much but would have liked to. I think it would help if caseworkers would make a point to see their youth."
- If you are asked a question that is too personal and off topic, remember that you have choice in what you share and direct the conversation back to the topic at hand.
- Remember to respect others confidentiality. For example, you may have brothers or sisters in foster care, but be careful not to share their experiences and identifying information as they are not there and should to have a say in what is shared. Again you could share something by stating "I know a youth that...." and not use names.
- Realize that what you say may go outside of the group. Most groups have youth at the table to make changes in the work the group is addressing so what you share will be used for that purpose.

After the Presentation:

- Be open to feedback. Feedback is hard for everyone to receive but it can be a learning opportunity and improve your leadership skills. If someone you know is at the meeting, ask them for feedback on your participation.
- Talk to people after the presentation is over. This is a chance for your voice to be heard as well as for you to make connections.
- If you volunteer to do some work outside of the meeting, follow through. This is part of being on a professional team and important to keep the work of the group moving. It will also be a reflection to the group on if they can rely on you.
- If you are part of an ongoing workgroup, keep up on emails you receive about the group.
- Add this to your resume – it is an accomplishment to be selected and a part of something.