

Facilitator's Guide

Once you've hosted a teen panel and uncovered some of the issues your kids are facing in their digital lives, plan to host a series of Conversation Cases. You may choose to host one a month or one a quarter, but these Conversation Cases provide for ongoing dialogue within your school community. Use this Facilitator's Guide to plan for and host these small breakout group discussions from beginning to end.

The purpose of breakout groups is to enable smaller discussions in which everyone present can be an active participant. Creating a space for parents to talk to other parents allows you to leverage one of your community's best resources – the parents themselves. Parents can trade ideas, troubleshoot problems, swap strategies, offer support, and develop relationships. In the context of their kids' digital lives, parents might be wondering about norms or searching for advice. This type of sharing flows naturally when parents are given the opportunity to connect with each other.

This guide includes:

- **Logistics** for hosting
- **Icebreaker** activities
- **FAQs** for group facilitators

The Logistics

Step 1 — Schedule:

- Work with school administrators to choose and plan ahead for a series of Conversation Cases for the entire school year.
- Each Conversation Case takes about an hour. You may want to plan for a two-hour event, though, to take into account logistics like room assignment, etc.
- Find dates and times that work well for other parents. If this is the first event you're hosting, you can check with a teacher, administrator, or former PTSA coordinator about which days and times get the most parent attendance.

Step 2 — Invite:

- Consider whether you want to invite teachers into the conversation. These conversations are valuable for students as well, but you may want to have an initial, candid conversation with parents first, and then plan for a follow-up session.
- Get the word out! Copy, paste, and tweak the following messaging for:

► Emails

*Dear **[School Name]** Family Member,*

*Many parents today share an interest — and even sometimes a bit of concern — about their kids' digital lives. As part of Common Sense's Connecting Families Program, we are hosting an evening for parent discussion and education about **[Conversation Case topic(s)]**. We hope you will join us on **[day of the week, date]** at **[time]** in **[meeting room]**. I hope to see you there!*

Warmly,

[Your name]

▶ Newsletters

[School Name] is excited to be offering Connecting Families. This parent engagement program from Common Sense encourages community conversations about our kids' digital lives. On [date] at [time], we will be hosting an evening about [Conversation Case topic(s)]. We hope you can join us in [meeting room].

▶ Flyers

Send home [this writable flyer](#) to families of elementary students

Send home [this writable flyer](#) to families of middle/high school students

Step 3 — Recruit:

- Recruit a few other parents to be group facilitators. You want 1 facilitator in each discussion group.
- Recruit a few other parents to help organize parents into groups, hand out materials, and monitor time during the event.

Step 4 — Organize:

- Reserve several classrooms for your breakout groups. Aim for one classroom per breakout group to enable a sense of privacy and community. So, if you're expecting 50 participants, reserve 6-7 classrooms.
- Share with facilitators:
 - ▶ the Conversation Case videos with facilitators as a training model.
 - ▶ the Ice Breakers
 - ▶ the FAQs for Group Facilitators
- Print:
 - ▶ a copy of the annotated Conversation Case for each group's facilitator
 - ▶ enough copies of the Conversation Cases, 1 copy per participant
 - ▶ **HINT:** You may be able to ask the school to print copies for you to defray printing costs
 - ▶ the corresponding Family Tip Sheet & Digital Dilemma, 1 copy per participant

Step 5 — Coordinate:

- If the case(s) you selected requires any video, make sure to let the school know that you'll need projection devices or screening systems (otherwise everyone will be clustered around one small computer screen trying to watch).
- Decide which resources you will use/share with parents. You may want to pick and distribute equally throughout the series. For instance, you may want to conduct the Survey during the first event; you may want to share the Digital Glossary during a second event.
- Consider offering snacks at the event, especially if it is later in the day!

Step 6 — Host:

- On the day of the event, let group facilitators know which room they will be in before the event starts.
- Make sure that each group facilitator has a printed copy of the Ice Breakers and FAQs in hand the night of the event.
- Make the Conversation Case videos available if a facilitator needs support.
- Have a system (e.g., name tags) for parents so that they know which room to go to. Alternatively, divide parents into small groups as they arrive, about 8 per group is ideal.
- Consider asking for feedback at the end of the event — share a survey, an email address, or a sticky note board.

Icebreakers

The term icebreaker makes some people think of inherently cheesy and awkward activities, but the idea of “breaking the ice” and getting people in the room to feel comfortable is key for a great discussion. We’ve selected a few of our favorite least cheesy and most engaging icebreakers that work especially well with adult groups.

HINT: If you’re pressed for time, “Opening Question” is the shortest.

Hey, Neighbor!

Ask everyone to introduce himself or herself to the person sitting next to them. Tell pairs that each person will have two minutes to introduce themselves to their partner (four minutes total). Then, have people introduce their partners to the rest of the group.

True or False?

Ask everyone to introduce themselves to the group and to share three things about themselves – two that are true and one that is a lie. Have the other group members guess which is a lie. Move around the circle (group) so that everyone has an opportunity to introduce themselves and share their “two truths and a lie.”

Take Sides

Have everyone stand up and get ready to move. Read from the list of questions (below) and ask people to move to the side that corresponds with their preference. Tell participants that they should move to your left for first option and your right for the second option.

Would you rather...

- Visit the doctor or the dentist?
- Watch TV or listen to music?
- See the future or change the past?
- Eat broccoli or carrots?
- Have a beach holiday or a mountain holiday?
- Always be a little too hot or always be a little too cold?

After the exercise, everyone should be warmed up and relaxed – ask people to move back to their seats and briefly introduce themselves.

Opening Question

For a quick icebreaker, you can open by asking everyone to introduce themselves and share their response to one question. Pick one of the following from our list of favorites (or create your own!):

- What was the last really nice thing someone did for you?
- If you were going to have one weird, unusual pet, what would it be?
- What is your favorite meal? (Pizza, Pad Thai, Steak? From any particular place?)
- Would you rather be a famous scientist, athlete, actor, or musician?
- How did you celebrate your birthdays as a child? Did you have any special traditions? Is there one particular year that stands out?

Or, if you want to start with an opening question that is related to the topic for the evening, try:

- What piece of technology do you remember longing for or being really excited about as a kid?
- What brought you here this evening? Is there anything you’re hoping to discuss?

These icebreakers are adapted from several resources, including:

- http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf
- <http://www.howdoesshe.com/wp-content/uploads/DinnerTableTalk1.pdf>
- <http://adulted.about.com/od/icebreakers/tp/toptenicebreakers.htm>

FAQs for Group Facilitators

You may notice that we've provided discussion questions and prompts without offering answers. Make no mistake — we're not trying to lead you up a creek without a paddle! The reason we don't include responses is that we think much of the value lies in thoughtfully considering and discussing the questions, rather than arriving at one particular answer. That said, we realize that facilitators may be nervous about navigating the discussion. Here are a few of our facilitating tips for navigating common sticky points in group discussions.

What if someone says something that seems offensive?

- As a facilitator, it's understandable to worry about “cringe-worthy” moments, such as another parent making a comment that offends you or someone else in the group. If you're upset or disagree with their comment, it's likely that one of your participants feels the same way.
- When we're facilitating conversations, we like to handle these moments by (a) turning the conversation back to the group (rather than voicing our own opinions and criticizing the participant) and (b) clearly inviting different perspectives. You can simply say, “Other thoughts?” or more specifically try asking, “Does anyone else have a different perspective?”

What if a parent recommends a concerning strategy, like using violence to stop another child who is cyberbullying their kid?

- Parenting is inherently value-ridden, and we want to make sure that our discussions are sensitive to different parenting styles and approaches. That said, certain reactions — like those that involve violence — are certainly problematic.
- In these kinds of cases, we find it's useful to validate the person's feelings, without validating the proposed actions. For example, trying saying, “I can certainly understand why you would feel so upset about your child being involved in something like that.”
- You can also shift to focus from values to legal consequences. You can try saying something like, “We also need to keep in mind the broader legal context that we operate in — finding strategies that support our children without putting ourselves in positions where we face legal consequences.”
- If you don't feel comfortable addressing the comment directly, you can try one of the above strategies, such as inviting other perspectives from parents.

What if someone asks a question and I don't know the answer?

- This happens to us, too! We have two strategies to help you in these situations. First, feel free to ask whether other participants have suggestions or answers. You can say, “That's a great question. I actually don't know — but I'm curious whether others have any experience with that?” Second, we've prepared a number of resources that you can share with parents who want more information on the topic. You can say to parents, “We actually have a list of resources with more information on the specifics of [the topic] that we are going to share with parents at the end of the evening, and I'd also be able to email the links to you directly” or “I'd like to take some more time to think about your question, would you mind if I circle back to you after our discussion?” (Of course, make sure that if you offer to follow-up, you do!)

What if I have one person who is dominating the conversation?

- Group dynamics can be tricky. It's great when people are active participants, but it can be challenging as a facilitator if one person is dominating the discussion. The trick is that you don't want to embarrass the over-participant — you just want to bring others into the discussion.
- Try saying, "Thanks so much, [name]. Does anyone else have a perspective on that?" Or, "Does anyone who hasn't shared yet want to weigh in?"
- If the problem continues, you can say, "I want to be mindful of hearing different voices in our conversation."
- You can also set the tone at the beginning by saying, "Because of time, I want to make sure we keep the conversation moving and so I apologize in advance."

What if people don't talk?

- We've intentionally designed our materials to try and help you avoid these situations, but sometimes a group can be on the quieter side. If you pose a question and no one responds, try waiting it out a few minutes. Sometimes people are hesitant to be the first to share, and their silence isn't actually an indication that they don't have anything to say. If you're comfortable, just sit for a minute or two to see if this is the case.
- If you suspect that the question is the problem, just say, "Okay, that question doesn't seem to resonate for our group — let's move on." Or try, "If we don't connect with that question, I think we should just skip over it."

What if someone gets very emotional and/or cries?

- Conversations about parenting can certainly become emotional. What can you do if someone gets visibly upset during your discussion? There is no "right way" to handle these situations, except to do your best to be empathic and to make sure the person — and the other participants — feel comfortable and supported. Your exact response will depend on the nature of the situation, but here are a few possible approaches:
- Acknowledge and validate their feelings ("These conversations can definitely be emotional/upsetting").
- Be appreciative that they took a risk by being vulnerable ("I understand this is something that can be hard to talk about/share/go through. You're brave for sharing with the group").
- Reinforce that they are not alone and set the stage for others to join the conversation ("You're not alone in feeling that way/in that experience. I suspect others in the room can relate to what you're describing").
- If the person seems like they need immediate attention and you want to respond to them privately, feel free to suggest a break ("Why don't we take a five-minute break").