

Kids Speak: Organizing a Fishbowl Session

This is the script used by the High School Task Force to conduct fishbowl sessions with students. It easily can be adapted for use by anyone acting as moderator of a fishbowl session with students, adults or educators.

In a fishbowl session, participants sit in a circle along with a facilitator. Observers, who sit in a concentric circle surrounding the participants, do not participate in the discussion unless they are invited to introduce themselves. The purpose of the fishbowl is to allow the participants to express themselves, to engage in dialogue together and to allow the observers to listen to and personally reflect on what the participants are saying.

Script for Kids Speak fishbowl session

1. Welcome to Kids Speak:

- Facilitator: This is a focused forum designed to provide some of our area high school students with an opportunity to speak candidly about their hopes and dreams, their concerns about the future and their attitudes and assessments regarding their relationships with adults ...

2. Introductions:

- The facilitator introduces himself or herself and states his or her reason for wanting to facilitate the session. Usually, the facilitator includes some personal information about himself or herself of interest to high school students.
- Facilitator to students: Please tell us your name, your year in school and the high school that you attend.
- Facilitator to students and audience: Let's find out who our observers are. We've invited parents, teachers, administrators, employers and others to join us today. Please introduce yourselves.





3. Format

- Facilitator: In this session, we will follow a fishbowl format.
- If you are familiar with a fishbowl format, you know that the participants in the inner circle are the only folks who engage in the discussion. For students in the circle, your task is to engage freely in the discussion. The parameters are to try and keep your comments focused, clean and honest but respectful. The role of those of you on the outside ring is to silently observe, listen and learn from what these young people have to offer. I will remind you that the deepest learning comes from trying to understand the perspective of the speaker.
- I will serve as the facilitator and the students will do most of the talking. I have a list of questions that we will use to get the ball rolling and then we will see where the discussion takes us. Once we get started, I will put a question on the floor and invite any student to comment.
- After the first round of questions, I will provide the observers with an opportunity to pose a question to me for possible inclusion in the second round of the discussion. Any questions about format?

4. Think, pair, share:

- Facilitator: I want to start the discussion by asking each of you to take a minute and think about this question: *If you could create your version of the ideal high school what would it look like, and how would you describe the relationships that would exist between students and adults?*
- Take a minute or two to share your thoughts with the person beside you. Then we will open it up for a general discussion.

Questions for general discussion:

- A. When you think about the ideal adult relationships you described, how does that image stack up with your current reality?
- B. Believe it or not, everybody wants to know what high school kids are thinking about these days? Let's start off with a positive focus, what are some of your dreams for the future and how are the adults in your life helping you to take steps to realize those dreams?
- C. From your point of view, what is really working well in high school, what should we be doing more of?
- D. Many students tell me that "high school is a joke" Is there an element of truth to that statement? If so, how so? Can we do anything about it?

E. Approximately one in five Vermont High School students will not graduate with the same students they started with as freshman. In your opinion, why do students drop out, fall behind their peers or transfer to other schools?

Let's shift gears:

F. For the past two years, what students told me they wanted most from the adults in their lives was mutual respect. They wanted to feel like they were known and valued for who they were as individuals, not just for their membership in a group, a class or an achievement level. How are the adults in your lives measuring up on that scale?

G. What do *you* need and want most from your adult relationships?

H. Complete this sentence.....“The one thing I wish adults would try to understand about high school kids is.....”

I. Do you feel that you belong in your school? Do you feel valued and respected in your community? If not, what suggestions do you have to change this situation?

J. If the adults in your life really valued your uniqueness, what would that look like and feel like? Use any context that makes sense, i.e. school, work, sports, family, etc.

End of round one. (Take a stretch break. Entertain any questions the audience would like to pose.) Get student input: What else would you like to talk about today?

K. Do you feel psychologically and physically safe in your high school? Describe adult behavior that can contribute or detract from a safe environment?

L. Is school violence an issue in Vermont? If so, what steps should we take to address it, if not, what should we do to prevent it from becoming an issue in our schools?

M. In your opinion, what role should parents play in the decisions that high school students make about their friends, the courses they take and how they choose to spend their free time?

N. If you had to give the adults in your life a grade for the level of support that they are providing you, what would the grade be, and what suggestions would you give them to improve their performance?

O. Who are your heroes? What does someone have to do to get on your list? Is a hero automatically a role model?

P. Should heroes be forgiven when they fall from grace? How does disappointing behavior on the part of adult's effect your view of them as role models?





Q. Think about a recent or past incident that was covered in the media, in which you came away feeling disappointed or ashamed about the way in which adults had behaved. Why did you feel let down?

R. How many of you watch “Reality TV” (survivor etc)? What do you think about the behavior you witness? Based on your core values, what type of individual would you vote off the Island, kick out of the house, or reject for the big date and why?

S. What are the two or three biggest challenges that young people are facing today? What can adults do to help you meet these challenges in a constructive and healthy manner?

Group/partner task:

T. If you were named to the Governor’s youth council, and he asked for your advice on how best to spend \$1 million dollars for youth development and youth services, what advice would you give him?

➡ Fishbowls were conducted by Bob Stanton, Assistant Superintendent, Lamoille South Supervisory Union. If you would like to know more about the fishbowl process, please contact him at (802) 888-4541.