

Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) Middle School Student Focus Group Guide

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Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) Middle School Student Focus Group Discussion Guide

Moderator Initials: _____

Focus Group Start Time: _____

Date of Focus Group: _____

Focus Group End Time: _____

Welcome and Overview:

Thank you again for coming to our discussion today. We are _____ & _____ from ICF, a research and evaluation company that is helping your school district learn more about your health course. We appreciate you agreeing to talk openly about your health class and some of the lessons that were taught by your teacher. We know that everyone has different experiences and opinions so we would like to encourage everyone to respect each other. For us, that means (1) giving everyone in the group a chance to speak, (2) not judging other people or their ideas, and (3) keeping everything we discuss private (not telling other students or teachers what your classmates may have said during this discussion as well as not sharing the names of people in the group).

During the group discussion today, I will be asking the group different questions. You are really the experts on what your health class experiences have been like, so we would like to hear from all of you. We want to hear your opinions about the health lessons on abstinence, puberty, and personal health as well as better understand how students your age feel about these topics. We will not be asking about your personal experiences. We will be recording the discussion and _____ will be taking notes to help me remember what we discussed. But, no one will be able to put your name with any of the comments you make, so what you say will stay private. The group will last about an hour and a half.

At the end of our discussion, you will receive a goody bag as a thank you for your time.

Before we get started, let's go over a few ground rules. [**Note to moderator: Refer to pre-written ground rules (on flip chart or board) and go over aloud with group.**]

- Give your complete attention to the group (e.g., no cell phone use, no side conversations).
- Participate as much or as little as you want.
- Allow everyone to participate.

- Don't judge other people's comments – they may have a different experience than you did.
- Try to speak up, speak clearly, and speak one at a time,
- Keep things private – what is said in the group stays in the group. Please do not share what is said with others outside of the group or the names of the people in the group.
- Please do not use the real names of other students in our discussion,

OK, before we start, do you have any questions?

[Note to moderator: Answer any questions posed by participants]

Great, I will now turn on the recorder and we will get started. **[Note to Moderator: Start audio recorder.]**

Ice Breaker

We are going to begin our discussion today by talking about your experiences in your health class this year and how different health topics were taught. After, we will spend the rest of the time talking about how your health class may have impacted you or other students in your class.

So, how many of you know the game “hot potato”? To warm up, we are going to play a quick game. I am going to pass the ball to someone and I want you to tell me one thing that someone your age can do to stay healthy. After you answer, I want you to pass the ball to someone else. Remember, you must answer and toss the ball quickly so that your hand does not burn up from the hot potato!

Let's begin.... **[Note to Moderator: Begin game and allow group to play for a few minutes. Remind participants to answer quickly and that there are no wrong answers if they are holding the ball for too long. If possible, try to incorporate answers students gave throughout discussion where there is a natural fit.]**

Excellent, you gave some really good answers. Those were all great examples of things that young people can do to stay healthy.

General Sexual Health

Since all of you are taking health this year, I know there are a number of different topics that you cover. For now though, let's think about three health topics: abstinence, puberty, and relationships. Whenever we say “abstinence” we mean choosing not to do any sexual activity that can result in pregnancy or an STD. When we say “puberty” we mean the time when your body changes from a child's body to an adult body, and when we say “relationships” we mean feelings of love or affection.” **[Note to Moderator:**

Please have definitions of terms (abstinence, puberty, and relationships) pre-written on flip chart to refer to during discussion.]

1. When you found out you were going to talk about abstinence, puberty, and relationships **[Moderator: Ask about each topic (i.e. abstinence, puberty, relationships) separately]** in your health class, how did you feel? What were you hoping to learn?

Quality of Delivery of Sexual Health Lessons

What you learn in class is often influenced by your teacher. So, I want to talk for a while about your health teacher. I realize you may have different teachers, which is why it is important for us to hear from several of you. Your experiences might be the same, or they might be very different. We won't tell your teacher or the school district what is said about any specific teacher, so you can be completely honest.

2. Did you like the way your teacher taught health? Why or why not? (Think about the way he or she teaches all kinds of health topics—not just those related to sexual or personal health.)

Probe: What makes your teacher a “good” or “not-so-good” health teacher?

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not comfortable at all and 5 being very comfortable, how comfortable was your teacher discussing abstinence, puberty, and relationships? (For example, did he or she seem to act different or uncomfortable teaching these topics compared to other health topics like healthy eating or exercise?) **[Note to Moderator: Please have rating scale written on flip chart or board to use as a visual.]**

Probes:

- a. *Were there any topics related to abstinence, puberty or relationships that seemed to make your teacher particularly uncomfortable (for example, waiting to have sex, girls getting their period, boys having erections)?*
 - b. *What makes you think your teacher was uncomfortable talking about these things?*
4. How did your teacher make the classroom a comfortable place to talk about these things?
 5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not comfortable at all and 5 being very comfortable, how comfortable were you asking questions about **abstinence**? What made it easy or hard? **[Note to Moderator: Please use rating scale written on flip chart or board to use as a visual.]**

Probes:

- a. How comfortable were you asking questions about **puberty**? What made it easy or hard?
- b. How comfortable were you asking questions about **relationships**? What made it easy or hard?

6. Tell us about any questions that your teacher would not answer or could not answer? (What were the questions about? Did they forget to answer them or just not want to answer them?)

Probes:

- a. How were students encouraged to ask questions in class?
- b. Did your teacher use a question box? This is a box where students place questions that they don't want to ask out loud. The teacher will then take the questions out the box and answer them for the students.

7. Other than the teacher reading information to you, what types of class activities do you remember doing in the abstinence and puberty lessons? (For example, did you do things like role playing, a skit, or a play?)

Probe: What did you think of the activities in the workbook or student journal? Was this something your teacher used often?

8. Did you feel like you had enough time to practice skills that you learned in class, like how to have a conversation with someone you like? Why or why not?

9. Thinking about everything that was covered in class related to personal health, is there a topic you wanted to spend more time on or anything else you wish you had learned about?

10. If you could tell your teacher how she or he could help next year's students learn more about abstinence, puberty, or relationships, what would you say?

Probe: What could your teacher do to teach the information better?

Student Attitudes/Perceptions about Abstinence, Puberty, and Relationships

Okay, so now we are going to change topics a bit. We've been talking about your health teachers and how they taught. Now I want to ask you about how the lessons may have changed your attitudes or the attitudes of other students in your class.

11. What did you learn in health class that changed the way you think about risky situations? How to avoid peer pressure? How did your class change your attitude?

12. What are some of the benefits to being abstinent that you learned about in your class? Why is it a good thing to be abstinent? **[Note to Moderator: Use flip chart or board to list benefits and direct students to list when talking.]** Were any of these things that you had not thought about before? If so, which ones?
13. What did you learn that helped you feel more confident you can wait to have sex?
14. Now that you have had health class, do you think you will be able to make healthy decisions about abstinence and relationships? Why or why not?

Final Thoughts and Closing

Thanks so much for spending your time with me today and sharing all your ideas and experiences. This ends our discussion. As a reminder, we ask that you keep what we discussed today private. Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like to share that we did not discuss today? **[Note to Moderator: Allow sufficient time/pause for group to answer.]**

We appreciate your sharing your thoughts. It has been extremely helpful. **[Note to Moderator: Turn off audio recorder and provide incentive.]**