

Bronx Community Conversations for Change **Supporting Healthy Living in the Bronx**



Discussion Guide:

A Community Conversation About Alcohol Use

INTRODUCTION

Underage and excessive drinking are major health concerns in the Bronx, because they are linked to many health problems, including: liver damage, cancer, unplanned pregnancies, accidents, and sexually transmitted diseases. There are many reasons youth drink alcohol and adults excessively drink, ranging from family and social pressures, stress, marketing, and easy access to alcohol.

Communities need to find answers and take action on many different levels. The dialogue-to-change process brings all kinds of people together to share different views and experiences. In the process, we begin to build stronger relationships and work together to find solutions to address these concerns and improve our health. Community conversations are a chance for us to hear from each other and make a plan to create better, stronger, neighborhoods for our families and neighbors. Our hope is that by talking and listening to each other, we'll start to build a better Bronx for and by the people who live in the Bronx.

Our conversations will focus on making our communities:

- Safer
- Healthier
- More beautiful
- Neighborhood friendly

We'll think about ways to create opportunities for feeling good and staying healthy. And it all starts with a conversation.

Using this discussion guide

This guide is not meant just for reading; it's meant for you to use. We want to have these conversations so we can tell the story of neighbors and organizations working together to solve problems and strengthen their community.

Here's the basic outline of the discussion sessions in this guide:

- **Session One** gives participants in the group a chance to talk about their connections to the Bronx and hear about other people's experiences. Also, it will offer some different viewpoints about the state of health in the Bronx and the root challenges for reducing underage and excessive drinking in our borough.
- **Session Two** is an opportunity for you to talk about possible approaches for reducing underage and excessive drinking and limiting the related harms in the Bronx, come up with action ideas and think about which approaches would work best for our community.

SESSION 1: GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER & HEALTHY LIVING IN THE BRONX

PART 1: Getting to Know One Another – Who are we and what is our vision for a healthier Bronx? (50 minutes)

Activity 1: Getting to Know One Another (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us today. In this session, we will get to know one another, talk about what is important to us, and see how we want to work together. Then, we will discuss about what other people are saying about health living in our community.

Let's go around the room and answer the following questions:

1. Who are you?
2. Why did you come today?
3. How long have you lived in the Bronx or been connected to the Bronx? What are your hopes for this effort?

Activity 2: Setting ground rules and designating roles/responsibilities (5 minutes)

Creating some ground rules will help our discussion work well. Here are some ideas. Are there other rules that you would like to add?

1. Start on time. End on time.
2. Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
3. Each person gets a chance to talk.
4. Speak for yourself. Use "I" statements instead of trying to speak for your group.
5. One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
6. It's OK to disagree.
7. Stick to the issue.
8. If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
9. Some of the things we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK. "What is said here, stays here."
10. Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Assigning specific roles for group members will make sure we get everything done that we want and everyone's voice is heard. Here are some ideas. Are we missing any?

1. Timekeeper
2. Note taker

Activity 3: What is your connection to the issue? (15 minutes)

1. Why is it important to talk about underage and excessive drinking?
2. How have underage or excessive drinking affected your ability to live or work in the Bronx?
3. What worries you the most about these issues?
4. Based on the discussion so far, what have you learned from others in this group?
5. What do we agree about? Where do we differ? Why?

Activity 4: Visioning Exercise - What Are Our Hopes for a Healthier Bronx? (20 minutes)

A "Vision" is an image of what we hope for the future, a goal to pursue.

"Visioning" is a process you can use to identify and name the values and beliefs that represent your hopes for your community. For example, if you say, "I hope we can create a community where everyone has an opportunity to succeed," the word that sums up this idea is opportunity.

Why it's important to hold up a vision for our community:

- Creating a vision motivates people. It gives them the energy and spirit to get the job done.
- A clear vision implies and promotes change.
- A vision that embodies cultural values and beliefs can inspire and guide the way community members treat one another.
- "You tend to move in the direction you're looking!"

Instructions

The goal of this exercise is to come up with 4 or 5 words that describe the group's hopes for the community. What kinds of positive things do we want to see in our community? What would show that we are living healthy lifestyle?

- Label a piece of newsprint: Our Community Vision. Set it aside to use at the end of the exercise.
- Label a piece of newsprint: Ideas to Start Our Visioning Process, and list words like: Opportunity, Respect, Safety, Health, Diversity, Spirituality, and Culture. Use this list to start the exercise.
- Ask the group to imagine that they are going to build a monument in the local park that stands for things they like about their community. Their job is to come up with 4 or 5 words that describe their vision of hope for the community. These words will be carved on the monument.
- Do a brainstorm. Write the ideas on the newsprint labeled Ideas to Start Our Visioning Process. (It's OK to include words that describe the community as it is today.)

Use these questions to help the group come up with ideas:

- What are the things that make a community a good place to live and be healthy?
- What words describe things in your community that make it easier to make good choices about drinking?

Once the brainstorm is complete, ask the group to talk about:

- What the words mean to them.
- Which ideas matter most.
- How others in the community might feel about these ideas.
- Words they would like to add.

Now, narrow the list to 4 or 5 top ideas:

- Ask group members to vote for their 3 top choices. They can do this with a show of hands, or put stickers next to the 3 words they prefer.
- List the top 4 or 5 words on the paper labeled Our Community Vision.

BREAK (5 minutes)

PART 2: What Are People Saying About Healthy Living in Our Community?
(60 minutes)

During the first part of our meeting, we talked about our personal connection to the Bronx. Next, we will talk about the issues and challenges related to maintaining a healthy lifestyle in our neighborhoods, like whether youth have access to alcohol and how we feel about neighborhoods where there are lots of bars and liquor stores. We will also discuss a range of views to help us explore the roots of the problem. This will help us develop action ideas in later sessions.

Activity 1: Discuss the Information Sheet (15 minutes)

Please review the attached information sheet and use the following questions to talk about the data:

1. When you look at the information, what stands out? Why?
2. Does anything surprise you? Why?
3. What overall themes and trends do you see?

Activity 2: Exploring Alcohol in Our Communities (45 minutes)

How can we support healthy lifestyles in our neighborhood? Here are a range of views that some people might hold. People have different ideas about the situation so one view cannot tell the whole story. We may agree with each other on some points and disagree on others. That is OK.

And please remember that not all views are represented. These are just examples of what some people could be thinking.

Views

1. Alcohol is too easy to get.

Some stores, bars and restaurants don't always check identification before serving alcohol. This means that sometimes people younger than 21 have access to alcohol, which is unhealthy and against the law. We should encourage people who serve alcohol to have strict ID policies so that no one underage can drink. And some parents keep alcohol in their houses, where young people can get it easily especially when they are not being supervised.

2. We need to keep young people safe from the harms of alcohol.

Many young people get into trouble because they have too much free time so they end up doing unhealthy things like drinking. If we plan activities for them and show them that we care, our young people will be more likely to lead healthy lives. We need to give them chances to work with caring adults, to interact positively with one another, and to do their part in the community.

3. People are responsible for themselves; they make their own choices and mistakes.

The community is not responsible for excessive and underage drinking and the health problems related these actions. Everyone is responsible for themselves; we are individuals, making individual choices.

4. We should have a say in decisions that affect our health and our neighborhood.

Our homes and quality of life are affected by what happens in the neighborhood around us. We should have a say about how alcohol is available and promoted in our communities. We should work with our community leaders to learn about how alcohol is advertised in our neighborhood spaces.

5. There needs to be more awareness about the harms of excessive and underage drinking.

Drinking when you're young and drinking excessively can lead to liver damage, cancer, unplanned pregnancies, accidents, and sexually transmitted diseases. Not enough people, especially young people, know that drinking can lead to a lifetime of illness or hard times. We need to have more honest conversations in our schools, places of worship and in our homes about the effects of drinking.

6. People under 21 should not drink.

Drinking under age 21 is illegal and unhealthy. Underage drinking can lead to lots of health and psychological problems so we should work hard to make sure that young people aren't drinking. Establishments that serve alcohol to people under 21 should be penalized by the law.

7. It's better if youth drink with their parents around.

In other countries and in some cultures, it's okay for teenagers to drink alcohol with their parents. When children drink with their parents around, they're more likely to develop better drinking habits because they've learned how to drink responsibly. And when alcohol isn't completely forbidden, it isn't as exciting.

8. Lots of people drink and drinking a lot once in a while isn't going to hurt anyone.

Everyone likes to have fun and blow off a little steam once in a while. Drinking a lot with friends or family when you're celebrating or hanging out isn't a big deal. Drinking alcohol together helps people relax and get to know each other better.

9. Young people should have a voice in the affairs of the neighborhood.

Most of the decisions made in our communities about alcohol affect young people too, but they are rarely asked to share their concerns, ideas, or solutions. Their knowledge, energy and intelligence shouldn't be ignored. Also, we should make sure that attend public meetings where our local officials will be. We need to let them know that we value the contribution they can make to the entire community.

10. Any Alcohol Consumption is Dangerous

Anything that is harmful or mostly harmful should be avoided. Alcohol adversely affects the mind and the body. It clouds the mind, causes disease, wastes money, and destroys individuals, families, and communities. Drinking impairs judgment, lowers inhibition, and encourages the type of risk taking involved in gambling and dangerous activities.

Turn to your neighbor. Discuss the following questions for the next five minutes and then report back to the group. I'll write some of the answers on a large piece of papers so everyone can see.

- Which views come closest to your own way of thinking? Why?
- Is there anything that you don't agree with or surprise you?
- What views do we agree about? What are things we disagree about?
- What other viewpoints do you think may be missing?

For next time: Think about these views. See if you hear them from others in the community. Also, look and listen for ideas about what we could do to improve the situation.

Activity 3: Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

To end this session, let's go around the room and answer the following (5 minutes)

- Name one thing that you enjoyed during this session.
- Name one thing that surprised you.
- Name one way we can improve the next session.

SESSION 2: WHAT CAN WE DO

Part 1: Approaches to Building a Healthier Bronx (45 minutes)

In Session 2, we talked about challenges to staying healthy in our community. Today, we will talk about how we can start to solve some of these challenges through specific action ideas.

Activity 1: Getting Started (5 minutes)

1. Before we get started, let's review the ground rules. Does everyone still agree with the list? Do we need to add anything?
2. Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?
3. Here is a brief summary of what we discussed during Session 1 to help us to be ready for our work today.

Activity 2: Approaches to Change (40 minutes)

We've talked about how our neighborhood is doing. Now, we will explore some ways to improve things. What approaches will work well? What can we accomplish within one year?

Below is a list of possible approaches. Please take 5 minutes to review them and then turn to your neighbor to talk about them (15 minutes). Use these questions to think about the different approaches:

1. Have we already tried any of these approaches? If so, what happened?
2. Which approaches do you like best? Why?
3. What other approaches can you think of?
4. What approaches might we be able to help move forward because they already have traction in NYC?
5. What approaches won't work? Why?

Approaches

1. Focus on the community.

If people do not drink, they should not be affected by people who do. For people who do use alcohol, factors in the community should not encourage underage drinking or encourage adults to binge drink.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Assess the availability and marketing of alcohol in your community

- Assess the social norms of alcohol use
- Explore all of the ways alcohol harms individual in your community and the community, at large

2. Focus on youth.

By preventing youth from drinking, we invest in their future and our own – they do better in school and establish lifetime health habits and we show our responsibility for protecting the next generation.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Strict enforcement of laws against selling alcohol to minors
- Raising awareness about why adults should not provide alcohol to youth
- Engaging youth in activities that increase their awareness of the availability and marketing of alcohol in their neighborhoods and the harms of underage drinking

3. Educate people about the harms of excessive and underage drinking.

Outreach and education can provide individuals with creative and engaging ways to talk about the role alcohol plays in their community and the harms it causes. Help people understand the problem so they can be better advocates for change.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Provide workshops for faith communities, community centers, and youth organizations on the harms of alcohol
- Train community groups to teach others about the harms of excessive and underage drinking
- Organize community events to educate community leaders, residents, and organizations about the harms of excessive and underage drinking

4. Talk with city officials and government agencies about the harms of alcohol.

In order to make sure that all community groups and residents know about harms of alcohol and get the resources that they need, we need to build relationships with elected officials and government agencies, especially the police, Business Improvement Districts and the Community Boards. We need to work together to create the kind of healthy community we all want.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Asking the police department to assign more police to patrol areas where alcohol is sold at stores and bars
- Working with elected officials and other community leaders to promote alcohol education
- Joining your local Community Board to make recommendations as to how to improve the health of your community

5. Focus on personal responsibility.

People need to take charge of their health and drink responsibly or not at all. Ultimately, access, education, and affordability can only go so far toward changing

our system. Lifestyle changes can only come from personal commitment. We can all take action to drink less and model responsible drinking for our children. We need to become active stakeholders in making healthy choices for our communities.

Someone who supports this approach might like these action ideas:

- Don't drink in front of children
- Limit the amount of drinks you have when you drink
- Spend more time exercising and hangout out with your family and friends then going to a bar

Now let's report back to the whole group. What did you think of these approaches? (20 minutes)

BREAK (5 minutes)

PART 2: Moving From Conversation to Action. What Can We Do? (70 minutes)

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will look at the strengths or assets we have. Next, we will brainstorm action ideas. Then we will connect our action ideas with our assets. And, finally, we will set priorities for action.

Activity 1: Community Assets Brainstorm (15 min)

Every town or city has assets. Assets can be people, places, or organizations – whatever makes our community a better place is an asset.

"Brainstorming" is a creative way for a group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Build on one another's ideas. All ideas are OK. Don't stop to discuss or judge them. The facilitator will write down every idea. Use these headings as a guide:

COMMUNITY ASSETS				
People	Places	Institutions/ Organizations	Funding Sources	Other

Use these questions to help people start the brainstorm:

1. Who has talents and skills that they might offer?
2. What groups in the community can help us out?

3. What sources of funding do we have in our community?
4. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
5. Can you think of anything else?

Activity 2: Brainstorm Action Ideas (20 minutes)

Think about the approaches. Try to come up with specific actions that fit with these approaches. How many different ideas can we come up with?

Make a list of action ideas in the following categories:

- Things that you can do on your own
- Things you can do with other small groups of people
- New partnerships, collaborations, or projects
- Institutional change

Activity 3: Connect Action Ideas with Assets (15 minutes)

Post list of action ideas beside the assets, and talk about which ones can be linked. Keep these connections in mind as we prioritize our action ideas.

Activity 4: Set Priorities for Action (10 minutes)

Look at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas to take to the action forum where people from all the discussion groups will meet to share their ideas.

These questions will help you set priorities for action:

- Which ideas are easiest to get done?
- Who would work with us on these ideas?
- Which ideas might do the most good?
- Which ideas might have a long-term impact?

As a group, choose two or three ideas that are important and doable. Then, consider the following questions:

- What would it take to make this happen?
- What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
- What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
- How do we begin?

Write the top two or three ideas on a flip chart labeled Priority Action Ideas.

Activity 5: Get Ready for the Action Forum (10 minutes)

The facilitator will explain the agenda for the action forum and the group will choose someone to present their top 2 or 3 ideas for action at the event.

ACTION FORUM

Community conversation programs lead to action in many ways. One way to do this is through an Action Forum. This is a large-group meeting at the end of a round of conversation. Ideas from all the conversation circles are presented at the Action Forum. There are usually several action ideas that many people support.

To move these ideas forward, people form action groups or task forces. Some people may join these action groups. Some may choose to help in other ways. In community conversation programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved, and many kinds of action occur.

Agenda: Action Forum (1.5 to 3 Hours)

1. Social time: Refreshments, Entertainment, Gallery Walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)
2. Welcome and Introductions
 - Moderator welcomes everyone and introduces sponsors.
 - Review agenda.
 - Talk about the effort in the community to hold community conversations
 - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.
3. Reports From the Community Conversations
 - A representative from each conversation circle speaks for a few minutes.
 - Be sure to include vision and community assets.
4. Moving to Action
 - Moderator identifies the most common themes for action from all community conversations, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force.
 - People choose action groups, and sign up.
 - Leader for each action group collects names, and sets a date for the first meeting.
 - People sign up for facilitator training, or to help organize future community conversation.
5. Closing remarks
 - Closing remarks. (Describe how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.)
 - Next steps. (Include plans for another round of conversations, celebration, or check-in meeting.)

INFORMATION SHEET

The following information can help us understand what challenges and opportunities we have in our community, especially related to alcohol.

How healthy are Bronx residents?

- In its annual county health report, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that the Bronx ranks 62 out of 62 counties in New York State in health outcomes.¹
- Nearly 1 in 4 adults living in the Bronx rated their own health as fair to poor, with Hispanic or Latino residents more likely than other groups to rate their health as fair to poor.²
- Diabetes disproportionately affects low-income people, ethnic minorities, and seniors. New Yorkers with the lowest incomes have diabetes rates twice as high as New Yorkers with the highest incomes. In the Bronx, 1 in 8 adults have been told by a health professional at some point that they have diabetes. This is the highest rate in NYC.²

How many Bronx residents drink?

- 1 in 7 adults report binge drinking in the past month, defined as drinking 5 or more drinks within a couple of hours of each other.²
- The Fordham/Bronx Park and Pelham/Throggs Neck neighborhoods have the highest rate of adult binge drinking in the Bronx.²
- People with higher education and income levels are more likely to drink and to drink too much more than people with less education and lower incomes.² However, communities who are less educated and have lower incomes may have more alcohol-related problems such as violence.³
- Women tend to drink less than men; however the rate of problem drinking among women is rising.²
- 1 in 3 Bronx public high school students report having at least 1 drink in the last 30 days.⁴ Over two-thirds report having their first drink before they turned 15.⁴
- Liquor was the most common type of alcohol consumed by Bronx high school students.⁴

Where is alcohol promoted and what is its impact underage and excessive drinking?

- In 2005, alcohol advertisers spent \$6 billion on advertising and promotion.⁵
- The more youth are exposed to alcohol advertising, the more they likely are to start drinking and to drink more.⁵
- "Responsible drinking" advertisements do not reduce excessive drinking.⁵

Why is it important to reduce excessive and underage drinking?

- Alcohol is the third leading behavioral cause of death in the US.⁶ In 2008, alcohol was a cause of death for 1,540 NYC residents, 374 of whom were from the Bronx.⁷
- 1 in 10 hospital stays in NYC is alcohol-related and this rate is rising.⁸
- Alcohol use is linked to liver damage, many cancers,⁹ mental health conditions,^{10,11} birth defects,¹² and suicide.¹³

- Almost half of murders and 1 in 4 unintentional injuries, poisonings and car crashes involve alcohol.¹⁴
- Drinking is a factor in more than 1,000 car crashes every year in NYC.¹⁵
- 2 in 5 youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 will become alcohol dependent in their lifetime. The risk drops with each year of delayed use.¹⁶
- Alcohol is linked with risky sex, resulting in STIs such as HIV/AIDS and unplanned pregnancies.¹⁷
- Heavy drinking lowers the quality of life in NYC neighborhoods (e.g., violence, crime, noise, public urination, loitering, etc.).^{18,19,20}

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