

# Speakers, Panels, Field Trips

**FLASH** is designed to be as easy-to-teach as possible. To avoid excessive teacher preparation time, the lessons have been written so that they can stand alone; they do not rely on speakers, panels and field trips.

Nevertheless, those teaching methods can enhance the impact of the curriculum. They can inject a human factor into otherwise dry, cognitive learning. They can personalize the abstract. They can de-romanticize the idealized. They can make resources seem far more accessible and behaviors seem more do-able. Thus, a district should consider approving these teaching methods **in addition** to the lessons.

**Speakers** can be very valuable, not only to the novice sexuality educator, but in every classroom. They can bring special life experience or expertise as they provide a change of pace. Nonetheless, an individual's affiliation or credentials does not ensure his or her ability to communicate with young people. Ideally, you will invite as guests only people you have observed before. That is of course, not always possible. At a minimum, always talk with a speaker in advance to:

- Make sure they understand your objectives and expectations and visa versa.
- Make sure they know the ages of your students so that they present age appropriate information.
- Make clear that all handouts they wish to provide must be approved in advance.
- Find out what audio-visual equipment they may need.
- Be sure they know when and where to arrive.

**Make sure the presence of a speaker is consistent with your district's rules.** You must stay in the classroom during a guest speaker's presentation. Washington State law requires that a certificated person be present at all times. You can integrate the lesson with the rest of your curriculum and follow up on concerns that don't get addressed if you are present to hear what the speakers and your students have said.

**Panels** are most often arranged by high school health teachers who want teenaged parents, usually mothers to talk with their students. This particular panel can be effective, but there are a few things to keep in mind. First, one purpose of a panel is to introduce students to life experiences unfamiliar to them. Teen parents may, unfortunately, not be a particularly novel group of people in your students' lives. And there is the potential of a teen parent panel to "backfire". Panelists' confidence and relative success (albeit after struggles with adversity) can make teen parenting seem more attractive, easier, less demanding than it generally is. . . unless panelists are extremely well coached in advance.

Instead, we encourage you to consider panels of people (male and female), in their teens or early twenties:

- who *have chosen abstinence* from intercourse and drugs and can talk about why they've chosen as they have and how they handle pressures (especially effective with 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades),
- who *have placed a baby for adoption*, especially open adoption, with which your class may be fairly unfamiliar,

- who *are delaying parenthood* and enjoying the fruits of adulthood without assuming too many obligations before they are ready,
- who *identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning* and can talk about what that means to them and how it's impacted their lives,
- who *have experienced sexual exploitation* and can share their experience of survival and recovery,
- who *are living with herpes or HIV* and can discuss the impact of the infection on their lives, or
- who *are breast-feeding their babies* and can discuss their decisions and experiences, especially barriers to breast-feeding they may have overcome.

Consider, if you want a panel of parents, inviting people over ages 25 who are *first-time parents with toddlers*. They can share their experiences during the pregnancy, the birth and their child's infancy, without inadvertently promoting *teen* parenthood. They can speak about the child's profound impact on their lives.

**Field Trips:** We encourage high school faculty to assign *Individual Field Trips*, so that students can rehearse the skill of accessing a community resource. Oral reports on these individual field trips can also provide the class with information about a wide range of agencies, physicians and others in your area . . . along with another student's perspective on the attitudes and procedures teens can expect.

*Traditional* field trips, where the whole class visits a community resource, can also be effective, particularly for middle schoolers who may not yet be independent enough to take responsibility for individual field trips. Actually seeing a facility and meeting the staff can greatly enhance likelihood of students utilizing resources. Be sure to check with the agency you wish to visit prior to your visit to find out what the agencies' policy is regarding tours of the facility.