

Classroom/Youth Organization Exercises for a Prosecutor and Police Officer

Ages 14–17

These exercises are designed to provide a positive experience for students through collaborative and educational exercises with a prosecutor and police officer.

Programming at this age should begin with a program where prosecutors and Law Enforcement (LE) visit classrooms (or other locations such as afterschool programs, camps, youth programs, etc.) monthly throughout the school year. Wherever possible, it should be the same prosecutor and law enforcement (LE) member visiting the same classroom(s) over the course of the school year to build the relationship over the time. *Given time constraints in the classroom, most exercises can be done as a “stand alone” exercise if the school or program is unable to implement all segments. Note that segments 2, 4, 7, and the closing ceremony involve more than one segment.*

Try to identify in advance any youth that may have an adverse reaction to having a police officer or prosecutor in their classroom. Make sure that youth’s parent or guardian is aware of the program and the goals of the program, and consents to the youth’s participation. Should consent be gathered from all parents/guardians? This is something for each jurisdiction to figure out as some student populations may have been impacted by an event requiring police to respond and seeing police in the school again could be triggering/dysregulating and interrupt their entire school day.

The NDAA Curriculum for this age group is a 9-segment (1–2 hours per segment) program hosted by the prosecutor’s office that includes learning sessions on the juvenile justice system, discussion, and interactions with Law Enforcement (LE) and prosecutors, and opportunities for youth to effectuate change in their communities. The ratio of officers to youth participants will vary based on the needs and resources of individual jurisdictions. The segments can be varied by jurisdictions to suit their individual needs and time constraints.

Segment 1: The Juvenile Justice System

The segment starts with the prosecutor and LE introducing themselves and providing an overview of what the program will involve and stressing that one of the goals of the program is to build relationships between youth and law enforcement. At tables, each person is asked to put their answers to general icebreakers (e.g., share a fun fact about yourself; what is your favorite TV show/movie/video game; what is your favorite dessert, etc.) on a piece of paper and share their answers with the other people at the table. The LE members from each table will then introduce the youth at the table by sharing their answers to the icebreaker questions and vice versa. The prosecutor and LE member then conduct a learning session on the juvenile justice system (see [PPT-Introduction-to-the-Juvenile-Justice-System-FINAL-5.10.24.pptx](#) for a suggested template for the presentation).

Suggested topics to include in the learning session:

- What types of behavior/conduct do LE get called to locations about? What types of calls do they get about or involving youth specifically?
- What options does LE have with respect to a juvenile who has committed a crime/delinquent act? The LE member should speak about what options s/he has, including issuing a warning, contacting a parent, referring to a program, etc. and under what circumstances those options can be utilized.
- Age of juvenile court jurisdiction.
- Purpose of juvenile justice system (rehabilitative as opposed to punitive).
- How a case flows through the system.
- Victim rights.
- What disposition/sentencing options exist.
- Differences between the juvenile justice system and the criminal justice system.

Segment 2: Dialogue between Law Enforcement and Youth/How to Stay Safe Project

The purpose of this segment is to continue a dialogue between the youth and LE members and then work on a team project. Write the questions out on paper and provide them to the youth and LE participants. Each person should answer the first question followed by the next one until the group members have answered all the questions that pertain to them. In the second part of the segment, ask the youth and LE members to begin to work on a project together (described further below).

Part 1

- Do you play video games? If so, which is your favorite?
- What is your favorite thing to do in the summertime?
- Do you play sports? If so, which is your favorite?
- What is your favorite board game?
- What app do you use the most?
- If you were going to a costume party this weekend, what would you go as? Why?
- Who is your favorite musician/singer/band?
- What is the best part of being a teenager? (youth only)
- What is the worst part? (youth only)
- What types of things do you think adults who interact with teenagers should know about teenagers? (youth only)

LE Member Questions Only

- Do you like wearing a police uniform?
- Why did you become a police officer?
- What is the best part of your job?

- What is the worst part?
- Do police officers ever get scared? If so, of what?
- Do police officers ever cry? If so, over what?
- Did you ever get stopped by the police when you were a teenager?
- What was the worst thing one of your friends did when you were in high school?

Part 2

The second part of Segment 2 involves a team project of creating materials regarding how youth can stay safe. Each table should discuss how youth can be safe, and should then create a one-page poster, meme, or other visual tool that can be distributed to teens through social media and other mechanisms, upon approval by the prosecutor's office and other relevant entities. There are many different aspects of safety this tool can address including but not limited to, walking home alone, on-line safety, safety on trains/buses, etc. Encourage participants to voluntarily create a picture, poster, etc. on their own that can be incorporated into the project.

A group may also want to consider the same project but with the focus on how officers can stay safe when they are working. What types of things do they do (per policy or otherwise) to stay safe or healthy while working? What do they do before arriving on scene to stay safe? What can and do they do on scene? What can and do they do following a traumatic event for their emotional health? Provide art supplies and paper for this purpose, and electronic resources can be identified at a later point though to create electronic versions of what is created, perhaps through the school or local library. This is an ongoing project that can be worked on at future sessions.

Segment 3: Hypothetical Traffic Stop and Discussion

This segment involves the acting out and discussion of a hypothetical situation involving youth and LE during a traffic stop. There are several roles to play and participation of youth and LE members is needed. The roles of the officers (2) should be given out to youth through a random process, and the roles of the teen driver and passengers (3) should be given out to LE members, also through a random process. The random process will avoid any appearance of labeling. Chairs should be set up to resemble a driver's seat, front passenger seat, and back passenger seat. This can also be done for a larger audience as part of an assembly; drama or theatre students could play the roles and classroom discussions could follow.

Hypothetical Scenario

Officer 1 receives a call over the radio to a 911 call at 9 pm regarding a yellow SUV driving erratically. A partial license plate # is provided and Officer 1 sees a car matching that description. Officer 1 proceeds to pull over the car which has tinted windows. The car pulls over to the shoulder of the road. Officer 1 approaches the driver and says, "Get out the car"; has hand on gun; yelling, "I said get out." The teen driver says, "what did I do?" There is a teen passenger who reaches into the glove compartment, takes out a cell phone and starts to video the officer, saying "this is why we don't trust you." Ultimately, the driver gets out of the car and is very nervous; his hands are in his back pockets. Another police car approaches and Officer 2 gets out and has a conversation with Officer 1. Officer 2 says "I know you just came from that gruesome scene; do you want me to handle this?" Officer 2 approaches the driver and calmly says "Where were you heading?" and asks the driver for his license and registration. Officer 2 gives the driver a warning, and tells the driver to drive more carefully, particularly with a passenger in the car.

After the scenario is acted out, the prosecutor should facilitate a discussion about the scenario, including the officer's perspective and the youth's perspective, and should discuss what each could have done differently in this situation. The notes below can be used to help facilitate that discussion.

Officer Perspective

- Stressful situation; high anxiety
- Nighttime, tinted windows; cannot see inside
- May have concern that there is a weapon in the car
- Some officers may admit fear in that situation

Youth Perspective

- Did not do anything wrong
- Had no idea 911 had been called
- Did not understand why officer gave order to get out of the car
- Officer's actions made youth very fearful

What Youth Can Do Differently

- Signal when pulling over
- Put hands on 10:00 and 2:00 on the steering wheel
- Roll windows down
- Put interior car lights on
- Turn the engine off
- No furtive movements

What Officer Can Do Differently

- Use a calmer approach
- Explain why the driver was stopped
- Ask if everything is all right—why is the driver all over the road? Is the driver feeling okay? Is something going on in the vehicle?
- Remove hand from gun
- Discuss these points including driver and occupant safety during traffic stops

Ask the police officer to share with the youth 3 things s/he would like the driver of the car to know about the officer.

Ask the youth to share 3 things about them if they were the driver in the above hypothetical that they would like the officer to know.

Have a group discussion about whether anyone in the room learned something from the exercise or would do anything differently during a traffic stop because of the exercise.

Segment 4: Electronic Booklet Creation: “How to Prevent Youth Crime”

This segment involves further teamwork, including continued work on the Staying Safe project, as well as work on an additional project entitled “How to Prevent Youth Crime.” The teams of youth and LE will create an electronic booklet from the perspective of the youth and LE containing recommendations of what youth need in their communities to stay out of trouble. Recommendations may include programs, counseling, tutoring to succeed in school, activities, mentors, etc. that would be beneficial to youth. The prosecutor’s office can share this booklet with appropriate government stakeholders so that the recommendations can be considered.

Segment 5: Hypothetical: At the Park After School

This segment involves a second hypothetical scenario to be acted out in the same way as Segment 1, with the parts being given out through a random process.

Two teens agree to fight after school in a park. It gets posted on social media and at least 10 kids show up at the park to watch/film the fight. The police receive a call about it and respond to the park. When they arrive, they approach with their arms at their sides but they shout and start running when they see fists being thrown.

The girlfriend of one of the teens who agreed to fight starts mouthing off to the responding officers that they should get the [bleep] out and stop harassing kids. This leads to others in the group throwing rocks at the officers. One officer gets hit in the face. The kids are all detained until the one who threw the rock is identified and s/he is placed under arrest for assaulting a peace officer/assault with a weapon.

The prosecutor should facilitate a discussion about what the police should do in this situation, including how they should handle it in a manner that does not escalate the situation. The discussion should also include what the youth should do when the police arrive, and what decisions youth can make to avoid a situation like this getting worse. The prosecutor should explain how this case would be handled in the juvenile justice system.

Segment 6: Career Informational

This segment involves a career event where the LE members are paired with and introduce individuals in different professions who will talk about their respective professions and job responsibilities. As part of the introduction, have the LE members explain how LE interacts with individuals in those professions in the normal course of police work.

Examples:

- Firefighter
- EMS
- Social Worker
- Court Officer
- Nurse
- Bank Employee
- Restaurant Manager
- Defense Attorney
- Judge

Segment 7: Project Completion (This is the second part of Segments 2 and 4)

The projects on Staying Safe and Preventing Youth Crime should be finalized. The final project of the program should be worked on and completed during this segment; the youth and LE members should develop a list of activities that youth and LE can work together on in the future.

Segment 8: Safe Driving (Segment 3 can be combined with Segment 8 where time permits)

The police officer and prosecutor should discuss safe driving. Topics that should be covered include:

- Obeying speed limit
- Wearing seat belts—driver and passenger
- Dangers of texting while driving (and other distractions)
- Dangers of driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Review the traffic stop safety tips from Segment 3

Segment 9: Closing Ceremony and Presentation

This segment is the final segment. If students participated in multiple segments, there should be a closing ceremony. Parents/guardians of the youth should be invited to this event. There should be an opportunity for youth and LE to share their views on the program, tell whether they learned anything, and if the program changed their viewpoints about anything. Students should give a presentation on the Staying Safe and How to Prevent Youth Crime projects. Certificates of appreciation/completion should be given to the youth and there should be a celebration where the youth, parents/guardians, and LE members can sit and talk with each other informally over a meal or dessert.

This project is supported by Grant #2019-MU-MU-K002 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.