



PANEL GUIDE

How to host a SPEAK OUT SABBATH Panel Discussion

A panel discussion is a formal discussion by a group of knowledgeable people about a specific topic in front of an audience. A panel discussion on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) could be a very helpful event in your community, bringing together local experts and audience members who might not normally cross paths and opening dialogue around a topic not normally discussed publicly. This guide is meant to help you think through the planning process for hosting your own panel discussion through your faith community, school or other venue.

Select your date, time and location

Though SPEAK OUT SABBATH would be an ideal day, don't feel limited. It might be helpful to have a panel prior to SPEAK OUT SABBATH to help build momentum; it could also be a great follow-up event afterward to keep momentum going. The point is to create dialogue and promote learning and engagement in the real issues facing your community.

The ideal setting would be more intimate, with the panelists seated in comfortable chairs, a coffee table in front of them and the audience on their level. This helps to ease the pressure off the panelists and allow the audience members to feel more connected to the panelists.

Tip: Plan for the panel discussion to be about an hour, with additional time allotted so you can serve snacks and coffee afterward to encourage ongoing discussion.

Invite your panelists

Panelists should be experts on SGBV or related topic and come from a variety of backgrounds. Three to four is a good number, and a great panel on SGBV might have some or all of the following:

- A faith leader to talk about it from a Scriptural perspective. If you want to invite a multifaith audience, it would be helpful to have local leaders from different faiths on the panel.
- A local law enforcement officer to talk about laws, reporting, local trends, safety precautions, etc.
- A representative from a Rape Crisis center or domestic violence shelter to talk about available services, how to get help and how audience members can support these resources and help survivors.
- A certified Marriage and Family Therapist or other licensed counselor/therapist to talk about the causes of violence, improving relationships, the importance of healing and taking the stigma out of counseling.

In your invitation, you'll want to explain your goals for the panel, who else has been invited and what you're hoping they'll talk about in their segment. **Be sure to also invite a crisis counselor who can talk with anyone for whom the discussion may trigger past trauma or who needs support.**

Tip: If your panelists plan to bring PowerPoint presentations, have them e-mail the presentations to you in advance so they are all on one laptop for easy transition during the event.

Invite your moderator

Choose and invite a moderator who is personable, quick on his or her feet and ideally has previous experience moderating panels. A good moderator will introduce the panel presenters to the audience and help them connect, keep the discussion moving and diplomatically facilitate questions. He or she should understand the issues being discussed and be able to provide summary points and/or closing remarks to tidily wrap up the discussion.

Invite attendees

Your audience is up to you and your space constraints – maybe you want to target only your own congregation, or perhaps you'd like to reach out to the local ministerium or ecumenical church council. Promotional possibilities are endless: announcements from the pulpit and in the bulletin, on social media, flyers, newspaper ads, etc. Feel free to use the We Will Speak Out U.S. logo on your materials to show your event is part of the movement.

Develop your agenda and program

There are many ways to run a panel discussion. One is to allow each panelist to speak/present for a set amount of time – say, 8-10 minutes – one right after the other. After each panelist has finished, open the floor to the audience for questions. This guarantees that each panelist will have adequate time for their presentation before discussion opens. It also ensures that audience members hear all perspectives so they can ask informed questions.

To keep your audience in the loop, be sure to create a printed program listing the agenda and brief bios and contact information for each panelist and the moderator. **Be sure to include hotline numbers that participants can call if they are suffering from abuse or violence and need help.**

Tip: To give participants a concrete action in response to the panel, hand out We Will Speak Out U.S. pledge cards (available for free download at www.wewillsspeakout.us) for participants to sign and return.

The day of the event

Prior to the panel, be sure to gather your panelists together to make final introductions and ensure they are comfortable with the order and agenda for the discussion. If the “host” of the event (i.e. the pastor/faith leader, headmaster, club president, etc.) is not the same person as the panel moderator, the host should welcome audience members and give them a brief background on the purpose of the event and We Will Speak Out U.S. Then he or she can introduce the moderator, who will begin the panel and introduce the panelists.

Tip: At the end of the panel, the host or moderator should ask participants to consider how they as individuals or as a group can take action in response to what they heard during the panel.

Goals for the event

A successful event will achieve some or all of the following goals:

- Raise awareness of the local context for SGBV and of resources available to survivors
- Connect members of the faith community with community resources and government leaders

- Inspire members of the faith community to learn more, take action and find ways to utilize and/or support community resources
- Promote dialogue around issues of violence and make them less taboo
- Encourage people who are suffering from violence to safely seek help
- Foster compassion and sensitivity within the faith community around SGBV issues
- Encourage more efficient and effective law enforcement for reported crimes.

Keep these goals in mind while planning your event, and you'll have a great starting point for a successful event.

QUESTIONS? Please email us at info@wewillsspeakout.us.