**Understanding Support for School-Level Sexual Health Education**

In-depth interviews are a useful tool when you want to gain an understanding of school district stakeholders’ awareness of, concerns with, and support for sexual health education. Follow these six steps to plan, implement, and summarize findings from in-depth interviews with important stakeholders in your school district.

**1. Identify key stakeholders to interview.** Key stakeholders in the district are those individuals who are involved in the adoption or implementation of sexual health education programs. They may include:

* + School board members
  + School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) members
  + District administrators
  + Principals/Teachers/Counselors
  + School Nurses
  + Parents/Guardians
  + Students, especially student leadership
  + Community members or representatives from community organizations who have an interest in teen pregnancy and STD prevention

**2. Identify your interviewer(s).** It is important to identify an individual (or individuals) who will be comfortable and effective in conducting the stakeholder interviews. This may include someone who:

* Is familiar with the community and school district of interest
* Is supportive of sexual health education in the school district
* Is engaging, empathetic, polite, respectful, impartial, and a good listener
* Is trained in speaking and taking notes during an interview
* Has the ability to create a safe and open environment
* Is capable of asking probing questions to get to the heart of the issue

**3. Develop an interview guide.** Use the sample interview questions [below](#bookmark=id.30j0zll) to customize your interview guide. Effective interview guides have three types of questions:

* Open-ended questions designed to elicit information about a stakeholder’s beliefs or opinions regarding a particular topic.
* Follow-up questions designed to extend stakeholders’ responses to previous questions.
* Probing questions designed to encourage stakeholders to elaborate on their comments, clarify their responses, or stimulate new ideas.

**4. Schedule your interviews.** When scheduling in-depth interviews with a stakeholder it is helpful to:

* + Discuss the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used
  + Be flexible regarding scheduling
  + Select settings that offer privacy for stakeholders
  + Select locations with no distractions and little background noise
  + Select locations that are easily accessible for stakeholders such as their office or an online platform such as Zoom

**5. Conduct your interviews.** It can be helpful to record your interviews so that data can be transcribed at a later date, allowing you to focus more on the content during the interview. Make sure to request permission from your interviewee if you intend to record. Sometimes, people are a little hesitant about being recorded. You can assure them that you will keep their information confidential, and that you can pause/stop recording at any time.

Strategies for dealing with common issues during an interview:

* **Non-Talkative Interviewee**You may encounter a stakeholder who is not very talkative. Try to get the stakeholder to expand upon his/her responses by asking, “Could you elaborate or tell me more on that?” or “Could you explain why you think/feel that way?” Sometimes, affirmative comments (“I understand”, “Uh-huh”, “Okay”) can be helpful.
* **Too Talkative Interviewee**Some stakeholders may have a tendency to share too much information or talk about unrelated topics. Politely and gently take control of the interview, saying something like, “That’s very interesting, but could we get back to your thoughts on…”, or “Thank you for that insight. Could we come back to the point you mentioned about…”, or “I want to be respectful of your time. Could we come back to that point later?”
* **Confused Interviewee**A stakeholder might say to you that he or she does not understand the question. If this occurs, rephrase or restate the question in a different way without losing the original intent, or indicating/biasing the stakeholder to answer in a particular way. Do not simply repeat the question unless you are certain that the interviewee did not hear you.
* **Uncomfortable Interviewee**A stakeholder may indicate that he or she is uncomfortable with a particular question. Ask the stakeholder which part of the question is uncomfortable and why. Try to address the stakeholder’s concerns; however, be careful not to push too much or force a stakeholder to answer. Forcing a stakeholder to answer a question will make him/her less willing to continue the interview. If you anticipate that a particular question(s) may be controversial rearrange the interview structure to ask those question(s) at the end of the interview.
* **Contradicting Statements**A stakeholder may say something at one point in the interview and then contradict himself at a later point. If this happens, ask for clarification and make sure you understand. For example, you might ask, “Excuse me, …can you clarify this for me please?”
* **Addressing Personal Questions**During the interview, a stakeholder may ask you a personal question such as “Do you believe condoms or contraceptives should be discussed in the classroom?” Quickly assess how personal the question is while keeping in mind how comfortable you are with the participant. In some instances, you may know this person already or you may have developed a rapport with the person through the course of the interview. If the question is not too personal, it is ok to answer it, but do so briefly. If this continues to happen, remind the stakeholder that you would really like to focus on his or her answers at the moment. If the question is too personal, tell the stakeholder that this is something that you do not feel comfortable talking about and then redirect the questioning back to the stakeholder.

**6. Summarize the Findings from an In-depth Interview.** After you have completed the interview, summarize the information you gathered as soon as possible. It is a good idea to review your notes immediately after you have completed the interview to fill in any details or add any important comments made. Share your interview summary with others who may be assisting you in your efforts. By analyzing your interview, you will be able to decide how supportive the stakeholder is of sexual health education in your school/school district.

* If they are supportive, brainstorm activities that the stakeholder can do to assist you in your efforts.
* If they are not supportive, brainstorm strategies that could be implemented to help gain their support. Try to identify the stakeholder’s concerns regarding sexual health education and develop responses to address those concerns. See Tools related to [**Stakeholder Analysis**](https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/chppr/ichampss/tools/documents/Stakeholder%20Analysis.docx), [**Sexual Health Education Common Myths**](https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/chppr/ichampss/tools/support/facts-tips/SUPPORT-FT-Sexual-Health-Education-Common-Myths-FINAL.pdf), [**Mobilizing Key Personnel**](https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/chppr/ichampss/tools/support/facts-tips/SUPPORT-FT-Mobilizing-Key-Personnel-FINAL.pdf), and [**Communicating Effectively**](https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/chppr/ichampss/tools/support/facts-tips/SUPPORT-FT-Communicating-Effectively-FINAL.pdf).

**Benefits and Limitations of In-depth Interviews**

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| **Benefits** | **Limitations** |
| 1. Permits face-to-face contact with stakeholders 2. Provides easy and inexpensive way to gather detailed information relatively quickly 3. Allows the interviewer to explain or clarify questions 4. Allows interviewer to establish rapport with stakeholders 5. Provides an opportunity to build or strengthen relationships with stakeholders 6. Raises awareness, interest, and enthusiasm around sexual health education | 1. Takes time   1. May be difficult to select the ’right’ stakeholder 2. May be challenging to schedule interviews with busy and/or hard-to-reach stakeholders 3. May be prone to bias due to interviewer’s or interviewee’s stake in sexual health education 4. May require effective interviewing techniques 5. May be difficult to summarize large amounts of information gathered |

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ASSESSING SUPPORT FOR SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

**Interviewer:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Our goal is to understand how [insert interviewee audience here, e.g., parents, community members, school staff, students] feel about the implementation of a sexual health education curriculum in your school/school district. As a quick reminder, evidence-based curricula are those that have been proven to change behavior for their intended audience. Do you have any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What issues related to sexual health are you concerned about in your school/school district (e.g., teen pregnancy, healthy relationships, prevention of dating violence, sexually transmitted infections, needs of sexual/gender minority students, etc.)?

Probing questions (*if needed*):

* + Are these of major, moderate, or low concern? Why?
  + How would you prioritize these issues compared to other issues facing your school/school district? Why
  + Do you feel that they influence academic performance and/or other outcomes (e.g., available work force)?

If teen pregnancy is not specifically addressed, make sure to ask the following:

* Is teen pregnancy a major, moderate, or low concern? Why?

1. What is your school/school district currently doing to address teen pregnancy and other sexual health related issues that you mentioned in the previous question?

*Probing questions (if needed):*

* How did the school/school district notify you that these were a priority/concern?
* How did school/school district notify you that this was their method of addressing these priorities/concerns?

1. Is your school/school district currently using a sexual health education curriculum ? (*If the school/school district is not implementing a curriculum, or if the participant does not know, skip to question 5).*

*Probing questions (if needed):*

* What is its target goal?
* Does it discuss condoms and contraception? Why or why not?
* At what grade level is the curriculum implemented? Is the curriculum specific for a particular group of students (e.g., African American, at-risk youth, female-only)?

1. Describe an example of how your school/school district successfully implemented a sexual health education curriculum now and/or in the past.

*Probing questions (if needed):*

* + How was the decision made to use this curriculum? Was there a formal or informal process?
  + How did organizations, parents or other outside agencies influence the decisions, if at all?
  + Who was responsible for the idea? An individual? A group of people? How was the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) involved? Can you briefly describe that process?
  + Was permission needed to begin the curriculum? From whom? Could you elaborate more?
  + What administrative processes, such as filed paperwork or scheduled formal meetings, were needed in order to initiate the implementation of the curriculum? Could you elaborate more?
  + What part of the sexual health education curriculum do you think students value most or get the most out of?

1. If your school/school district is not currently implementing a sexual health education curriculum, then what role could schools/school districts play in addressing teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and other issues?

*Probing questions (if needed):*

* Should schools/school districts be held accountable for preventing teen pregnancy and other sexual health related issues? Why or why not?
* If so, how should they be held accountable?
* What suggestions do you have to schools/school districts for improvement? Are there any particular sexual health education curricula or approaches that you want to see used?
* What role could your School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) play in addressing teen pregnancy and other sexual health related issues?

1. How do you think other [insert target interviewee audience here]feel about schools/ school districts providing sexual health education curricula in schools?  
   *Probing questions (if needed):*

* Does [insert target interviewee audience here]support or disapprove of it? Why?
* How does their opinion or stance influence what schools/school districts choose to do or what they implement in the classroom?
* Do you believe that [insert target interviewee audience here]’s approval/disapproval for sexual health education curricula would change if schools/school districts chose a curriculum that included information on condoms and contraception? Why or why not?

1. Describe some barriers schools/school districts face in implementing a sexual health education curriculum?

*Probing questions* *(if needed):*

* How do you think personal views impact sexual health education curriculum adoption and implementation in schools/school districts? Could you elaborate?
* How do you think parent views impact sexual health education curriculum adoption and implementation in schools/school districts? Could you elaborate?
* How do you think political climate impacts sexual health education curriculum adoption and implementation in schools/school districts? Could you elaborate?
* How do you think staff jobs impact sexual health education curriculum adoption and implementation in schools/school districts? Could you elaborate?

1. Are you supportive of sexual health education in schools that focuses on abstinence but also includes information about condoms and contraception? What motivated your decision? (*If the not supportive of this type of curriculum then skip to question 10.)*
2. Describe how community-based organizations, parents, and/or influential community members (e.g., elected officials, respected clergy, etc.) could support your efforts to promote sexual health education in your school/ school district?

*Probing questions (if needed):*

* + What would make your relationship with them work?
  + What would make your relationship successful?

1. We would like to hear from other proponents and opponents of sexual health education, including sexual health education curricula. Are there other people you think we should talk to including other parents, community members or staff? Could you share their contact information?

**Interviewer:** Thank you for your time!