

Session List for *A Death Penalty Curriculum*

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A sample Lesson Plan (for Session 1) follows

Session 1 – Introductions, Stories, and Basic Information

Goals

In this session, participants will: (1) get to know each other more deeply; (2) share and hear each other's stories of their experiences with the criminal justice system; and (3) learn some basic information about the history and use of the death penalty in the United States and your state (or neighboring state, if you choose).

Preparation

- a. If possible, set up your room so the participants can see each other.
- b. Provide nametags if you think there might be someone in the group who does not know everyone's name.
- c. Consider what personal experiences you will share during the class.
- d. Familiarize yourself with the content of each session you will include in your study so you can freely share this with the group. Make notes if necessary.
- e. Prepare and post a list of the names of the sessions your group will study on newsprint or a whiteboard to share during the class. You may also want to include the dates and times you will meet.
- f. Have whiteboard or newsprint and markers for writing responses during brainstorming.
- g. Have enough copies of *A Death Penalty Curriculum Reader* for each student and ask them to bring it with them to class each time you meet.

Class Outline

1. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Invite your group to silence and once everyone is centered, offer this or a similar prayer:

Holy, loving God, we gather as your people to discuss an important, emotional issue. Help us to know what we are feeling. Help us to share honestly and to listen compassionately. Help us to dwell in your love and be guided by your Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

2. Introductions (10 minutes)

Go around the room and share names and something that is personal but not threatening (like what types of pets they have).

3. Course overview (10 minutes)

Spend some time establishing some class rules (e.g., we will be respectful of each other, we will share discussion time, we will treat what is shared here confidentially, we will start and finish on time, we will speak from our own experiences and opinions using "I" statements, etc.)

Explain how the class will proceed. Explain what else they are going to do today. Then, calling attention to the list of session names you prepared and posted, give a simple overview of what will be discussed during the rest of this curriculum.

4. Sharing experiences (40 minutes)

Start by sharing your own experiences with crime, the criminal justice system, and the death penalty. Share what led you to lead this class.

Ask everyone to share their experiences with **crime**. Encourage people to share what happened *and* how it made them feel. You need not go around the circle, but make sure everyone has an opportunity to share.

Once this sharing is complete, ask everyone to share their experience with the **criminal justice system** – both what happened and how it made them feel. There may be people in your group who are connected professionally (lawyers, judges, police officers, probation officers, prison guards, etc.). Others may have experienced arrest, trial, or incarceration. Some have served on juries and others may be been pulled over for speeding. Again, encourage people to share both what happened *and* how it made them feel.

Remember, the larger your group is, the shorter the responses will need to be. You might challenge your group to share their experiences in two sentences. For example, for the first sharing: “I was once threatened by a groups of young men, one of whom was carrying a 5 foot long 2x4. I felt scared and somehow excited by the rush of adrenaline.” For example, for the second sharing: “I was once called to jury duty. It was boring sitting around all day.”

5. History of the Death Penalty in the United States (5 minutes)

Hand out the *Readers*.

Read or have someone read aloud “A Quick History of the Death Penalty in the United States” from *A Death Penalty Curriculum Reader*. Invite class members to read along.

6. Brainstorming a list of reasons for having the death penalty (15 minutes)

Ask the members of your group to brainstorm a list of reasons that they have heard for having the death penalty. What you will probably hear is: It’s a deterrent, it’s cheaper than jailing someone for their life, it protects the rest of us from a murderer, it gives the victim’s family justice or closure, an eye for an eye, it keeps a murderer from murdering again, executions are the appropriate punishment for certain criminals committing specific crimes, etc. As these reasons are called out, write (or have someone write) them on your whiteboard or newsprint.

Once the brainstorming is completed, point out which of the ideas will be addressed in upcoming classes. Say that next time the group meets, you will be looking at issues of deterrence, money, and a beginning look at justice and what that means.

7. Homework (2 minutes)

Ask your class members to read, “Death Penalty Law Primer” and “Why the Death Penalty is More Expensive than Life Imprisonment” from the *Reader* between now and the next time you gather.

Remind people that they may want to do some research and/or thinking about the topics of deterrence, cost, and justice as they relate to the death penalty.

8. Closing Prayer (3 minutes)

Invite your group to silence and once everyone is centered, offer this or a similar prayer:

Holy, loving God, thank you for being with us as we shared our stories with each other and with you. Thank you for giving those around us kind hearts and caring spirits to gently share. As we go from this gathering, help us to dwell in your love and be guided by your Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

45-50 Minutes alternative lesson plans

Session 1A: Do activities 1, 2, 3, 4, & 8

Session 1B: Do activities 1, 5, 6, 7, & 8