

This toolkit is designed to help guide difficult conversations which may arise in your program following the Jason Van Dyke verdict. Remember, After School Matters is not requiring you to facilitate a discussion of the trial during your programs, but we are asking that you be prepared and responsive to your teens' needs to express their emotions or reactions in a safe and supportive space.

### Before you begin:

- Educate yourself with background knowledge on the issues.
- Facilitate discussions in a circle and pass around a talking piece to ensure that everyone has a safe, free space to share.
- Work with your teens to set group agreements for how you will interact during this discussion. Give each teen a chance to offer an agreement that will make them feel safe and write on chart paper.
  - Norms to consider if they don't come up naturally:
    - Step up, step back (try to create space for everyone to talk, try not to dominate the conversation)
    - Try to use "I" statements, instead of "you, they, we" - speak your own truth.
    - Respect the opinions of others, even though they might differ from yours; deepen your understanding of the issue.
    - Personal stories stay personal (what's said in the room stays in the room).
    - Listen to others (Ask your teens to define what this looks like: encourage them to think about active listening and avoiding pre-conceived ideas).
    - Share your own truth instead of making assumptions. Assumptions might include: everyone believes in the criminal justice system, someone's cultural identity is X, someone can speak for all members of a certain race, etc.
- Acknowledge aloud:
  - That this is an important yet emotional issue for many people.\*
  - That some people in this circle (or people they are close to) may have been personally affected by issues or incidents involving race and policing.\*
  - That some of the people in this circle (or people they are close to) may have family members who are police officers or are involved in law enforcement.\*
  - We will pass the talking piece around, but you can always say "pass." You never have to share if you don't want to.

\*Source: Youthradio.org

### During the Conversation:

- Let teens own the conversation. You can help to shape the conversation when needed, but let it be their conversation.
- Recognize common pitfalls of any discussion about race, class, crime, etc. – return to the Group Agreement
- Listen without judgment. Receive statements and reflections, even ones you may disagree with, with neutral and open-ended responses, like "Thank you for sharing that." "Do you want to say more about that?"
- Listen actively and restate what you hear teens saying. Think about capturing notes from the group on a chart paper, so that teens can return to their thoughts.
- Pay attention to group dynamics – use your group agreement and talking piece as tools to ensure that the tone remains supportive and notice if any teens may need a one-on-one check in with you after the session for additional care and support.

### Follow Up:

- Encourage teens to seek out resources.
- Encourage teens to be a part of the solution and take constructive action to better systemic problems.
- After School Matters is committed to doing its part to educate teens on the importance of registering to vote and voting in upcoming elections. TEEN VOTES MATTER.  
-We encourage YOU to use the following resources in your program to facilitate a nonbiased session about the importance of voting and to empower eligible teens to register to vote. Click [here](#) for the Voting for Peace slide deck. Click [here](#) for the teaching guide to accompany the slide deck.