

Starting a Teens for Life Group: *The First Steps*



nationalteensforlife

established 1985

1

PLANNING THE INFORMATIONAL MEETING



Why do we need a Teens for Life group?

The reasons for having a Teens for Life group are the same as those for having a right to life movement. We believe that the life of the unborn and all people regardless of age or physical and mental handicaps is valuable and worthy of protecting.

One third of all abortions performed in America are performed on teenagers. Abortion is an issue that teens must face every day, and who better to educate teenagers on the life issues than other teenagers? In this day and age when organizations like Planned Parenthood are in our schools, students don't hear the truth about abortion. If you don't tell them, who will? It is your privilege and honor as a pro-life teen to speak the truth to your peers.

How many people do you need to begin?

Only one person is needed to begin a pro-life group -- and that person is YOU! All that is required is the guts, determination, and knowledge to begin. When you prepare to start a group, you must learn the facts and arguments of the pro-life movement. Our peers are ignorant of the facts. Therefore, it is up to you and your group to get the facts across to them. We are not here to condemn people who take a pro-abortion stand or women who have had abortions, but to honestly, patiently educate and love them.

You need to educate yourself on the issues of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia before you can educate someone else. Contact your state affiliate of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) and ask them for any educational materials that they can send you free of charge or "on loan."

Working with the adult Right to Life network.

When you call the state affiliate, inform them of your plans to start a Teens for Life (TFL) group and ask if there is a state TFL organization that you should contact. Finally, ask for the name and address of the local adult affiliate. You will need to enlist their help in your endeavor. See if either office has a list of teens on file.

The planning

Time to start planning for your first informational meeting. Here are some helpful steps to start laying it out.

- 1.** Find a room. Many banks, schools, libraries, and civic centers have community rooms that organizations can use free of charge. Call these places and ask if they have these services available and what their policies are. If you can't find a place like this, you may want to hold the meeting in your home. As a last resort you may want to use a church, but this may make your organization look sectarian or denominational.
- 2.** Set a date and time. Don't ever let a meeting go over two hours. An hour and a half is plenty of time for an informational meeting.
- 3.** Contact your local or state affiliate of the NRLC for a video or speaker on fetal development, abortion procedures, and Post-Abortion Syndrome (P.A.S). Most people attending will be new to the movement, so you want to address just the basic topics on abortion.
- 4.** GET SOME FOOD! Enlist the help of a church women's group or other individuals and ask them to bake brownies and donate juice or soda, or perhaps pay for some pizza. Remember to thank them!
- 5.** Write an agenda. Here is just a sample:

Welcome and get to know each other	15 minutes
Video or speaker	30-45 minutes
Question and answer session	15 minutes
Discuss next organizational meeting	15 minutes

The next step

People. You need people to come to the informational meeting. You will need a few other people to help you accomplish some of the tasks; a group of three to five of you can accomplish a lot. Here are some steps the planning group can take to publicize the meeting:

Contact your state TFL group and inform them of your plans to start a group in your area. They should be able to help you with the necessary literature, advice and information that you need to get going. They may also have names of interested teens in your area.

Contact your local Right to Life organization. Most pro-life groups are very excited about the youth pro-life movement and are more than willing to assist in any way they can. Once you have contacted them, ask if you may write an article about your group for their newsletter. This is a great way to get prospective members. Many adult members have teenagers who will want to get involved

Try local religious and conservative groups. You may get the largest number of members from these. Ask several volunteers to go through the phone book and contact every group that may be even slightly pro-life: Young Republicans, Democrats, Catholics, Evangelicals, churches, etc. (Sometimes among those groups that you would think are most liberal, you will find pro-life people.) It is important that you have a mix of people in your group. This is a human rights issue that should concern all members of the human family.

Ask these groups to announce your meeting during their service announcements and in church bulletins, and for the names and addresses of anyone that might be interested in being contacted by you. Also ask if you can make a presentation to their church youth group or at a general club meeting. This is the best way to generate interest in your group! The better impression that you can make on them, the more response you will receive.

Contact local TV and radio stations to do public service announcements.

Ask them to announce your upcoming meeting. Also, try the local newspapers and bulletin board.

Contact every public and private school in the area and ask them to announce your meeting. Generally it is best if you can approach them in person. This gives you more credibility and reassures them about this “new concept.”

Send an email or facebook message to a list of prospective members about ten days before the first meeting. Enclose a brief description of what will take place at the meeting and include any other necessary information such as directions, things to bring, etc.

Call, email or facebook everyone on your list two or three days before the meeting to remind them. Tell them to bring along a few friends.

The more people that you can get involved and interested in attending the first meeting, the better. But it is far better to have a small group that is accomplishing a lot than a large group that is doing nothing! You only need a few people to start. Do not be discouraged if more people do not initially show interest or even attend the meeting. Numbers are not really the point. Just do your best and trust that everyone who needs to be there will come. Three teen pro-lifers can make a huge impact on their community!

2

AT THE INFORMATIONAL MEETING



Schedule suggestion

- Welcome everyone and ask them to introduce themselves. Make sure they fill out their name, address, phone number, and year of graduation on a sign-up sheet. Try to make them comfortable; it's important that they have an emotional reason to come back. Pizza and munchies sometimes help to break the ice between nervous teens.
- Introduce the video or speaker. Make sure you have seen the video or talked to the speaker prior to the meeting.
- Allow plenty of time to answer questions. Remember, there are no dumb questions! Treat everyone who raises their hand with respect. If you don't feel comfortable answering the questions yet, arrange for a knowledgeable person from the adult Right to Life group to be there. **If you don't know the answer to a question, don't fake it!** Admit that you don't know all the answers, but you will do some research and see what you can find for them. Then do it!
- After the issues have been discussed, turn your attention to your group. Explain why you want to start a youth pro-life group, why it is important, what you see as the general goals, etc. You have a vision and unless you share it with the teens and show them the need, you will not have their full cooperation. Get them psyched about the group and the issue. Here are some "nuts and bolts" to discuss in a brainstorm session (someone should take notes to be typed up and handed out at the organizational meeting):
 - What the group will be named.
 - What activities you will do -- education, social service, fund raising, newsletter, etc.
 - If and how the group will be recognized and chartered in school.
 - How many officers will serve, when and how they will be elected and what their duties will be.
 - The importance of being a single-issue group focusing on abortion, infanticide and euthanasia. This enables people of all political and religious beliefs to unite and work for the unborn.
 - Anything else of importance, assuming time allows.

- NOTE ON ACTIVITIES: Often inexperienced teens get overly enthused and want to do everything. After the initial ideas are given, discuss them realistically with the group. A new group should set a few basic goals (i.e., education and legislative action) and then one or two activities under each goal (i.e., stocking the school library or writing their legislators once a month on pro-life issues) Start Slowly!!
- Set a date, time, and place for the organizational meeting. You will want to hold the meeting within three weeks, while the issue is still foremost in everyone's minds!

3

BEFORE THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING



Here's just a few simple tips for planning a successful organizational meeting for your new Teens for Life group:

- Do the same type of publicizing and planning as you did for the informational meeting.
- Type up a neat, orderly list of the officers and committees, as well as their jobs, according to the notes from the informational meeting. None of these ideas are written in stone. They should be discussed and voted on at the next meeting.
- Plan something fun to do afterwards! Use this time to develop a sense of camaraderie and fellowship.

4

AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING



*This meeting will set the tone for the future of your group!
Everyone needs to feel that their ideas are as important as everyone else's.
You need to pay close attention to the feelings of everyone present.*

Here's some schedule suggestions and helpful hints for a successful organizational meeting. Remember, you can add or subtract from these suggestions to suit the needs of your group.

- I.** Welcome everyone and pay special attention to any new faces. Have everyone introduce themselves.
- II.** Give a recap of the last meeting
- III.** Hand out the sheet with suggested officers, committees, and their jobs. Read it aloud.
- IV.** Open the floor for discussion. Discuss each officer and committee one by one until everyone feels fairly comfortable with the job descriptions. Make sure you discuss whether committee chairs are appointed by the president or elected by the group.
- V.** Ask for people to run for each position and hold elections.
- VI.** Ask for unelected members to sign up for a committee.
- VII.** Discuss a constitution. This should outline what your group believes in and the structure of your organization (i.e., officers and committees). At the meeting, appoint a committee to draw it up before the next meeting. Once you have your constitution, your group will have more stability and direction.
- VIII.** Write everything down!

4

CONTINUED....

Before everyone leaves from the meeting, it should be decided when and where the next meeting will be and who will be doing what between now and then. Below are a few ideas:

- Start planning your fund raiser or first event. Whoever is in charge of this should come to the next meeting with times, dates, cost, etc., to present to the group.
- Start developing your membership and contact list. Your membership list will be those who say, "Yes, I want to be part of your group," and your contact list will be those who say, "I'm really interested." Develop these lists through churches, schools, friends etc.
- Create a flyer or brochure about your group and start distributing it to as many people as possible.
- Have every person ask any questions or make any comments. Keep the meeting under two hours, if possible.
- If there is no further business, end the meeting and have some fun!



5

BUILDING UP THE GROUP!

Now that the group has gotten started, the next major step is building it up in function, numbers, and effectiveness.

Increasing Membership

- You must devote a good deal of time and effort to membership. It is essential for survival and to get projects done, to continuously increase in size and bring in new ideas.
- One method of obtaining new recruits is to have your present members encourage their friends to come to a meeting or activity. Word of mouth is one of the most effective ways to get people involved and interested in your group. Someone will be more likely to attend a meeting with a friend than by themselves, especially if it is their first time or if they have never been involved in the issue before.
- Everyone should be made to feel welcome no matter who they are or what they look like. Make a point of saying "hi" and making them feel like a part of the group. We are fighting to save the lives of innocent children; we are not creating a popularity club.
- Some basic ways to contact potential members:
 - Incoming freshmen are some of the best people to target for membership. They are in a new place and situation and are eager to feel accepted and part of the school. Pro-lifers are some of the friendliest people in the world, and it is very comforting to see a pleasant face in a strange new place. Since they are new to the school, they will not already be focusing their energies to another group. If you can get them in the beginning and hold them, you will be developing your future leaders.
 - Design some literature for distribution. This should tell a bit about who you are, what you stand for, what you do for activities, and an invitation to get involved. Include on it an address, phone number, or email of a couple of people that they may contact for more information.
 - Try to start the year off with a bang. Have as much publicity as possible at school and plan to stage some big event. This will attract a large number of people. Even a dance is a good way to make events and activities known to a large number of people with fairly little work. It is also essential that you work with groups that can be of great help to you, either in resources or just support.

Increasing Membership

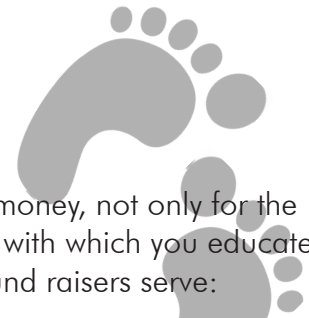
- Hold special events. Every couple of months hold events that are designed not only as a time to have fun, but a time to invite prospective members.
 - Personal contact is extremely important. Once a week, either over the phone or in person (NOT EMAIL!) each member should be contacted by someone in the group to remind them of upcoming activities and to see how they are progressing on their specific projects. At your meetings, encourage everyone to participate in making decisions and ideas.
 - Don't let a few people dominate the meeting and have others feel left out. If you do, you will lose them.
-
- Start working in your target areas (education, media, etc.). You need to sit down and assess the general needs and develop a basic strategy to meet those needs.
 - People in your community need to know that you exist! It is important to remember that how the community and the media perceive you will help determine whether or not you are successful. Your image is vitally important; therefore, you must come across as you really are -- kind, caring people who are concerned for the woman and the baby.

Fundraising

Fund raising is an intimidating but necessary activity. You need money, not only for the basics of running an organization, but for educational materials with which you educate the members of your community. The two basic functions that fund raisers serve:

1. They provide the resources that you need to do your work.
2. They build up a relationship of involvement between your group and the people around you.

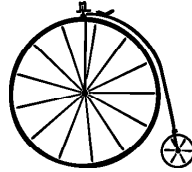
Raising money is especially challenging in high school, but it can be a lot of fun! People are sometimes more receptive if you are donating all or a portion of your profits to a charity such as a home for unwed mothers or a crisis pregnancy center.



Fundraising

Below are some ideas for fund raisers:

- \$ Bake sales
- \$ Parties
- \$ Mother's Day sale of carnations or roses
- \$ "Life Aid" dance
- \$ Rummage sale
- \$ Walk, run, swim, bike, etc. "for life"
- \$ Book fair
- \$ Bottle or newspaper recycling drive
- \$ Benefit luncheon or c
- \$ Raffle, auction
- \$ Booths at fairs



- \$ Sale of pro-life t-shirts, hats, buttons, stickers, "Precious feet"
- \$ battle of the bands
- \$ Floats in parades
- \$ Mother's or Father's Day
- \$ Car washes
- \$ Donations from community groups such as the Knights of Columbus and churches
- \$ Donations from people as they leave their church service, in exchange for a Life-saver Lollipop ("Be a Lifesaver")



It is important to find out the specific rules that your school may have concerning these events, since some are not allowed in some schools. Make sure you get a church's permission before planning to ask donations from people leaving services! Having a fund raiser early is good for a couple of reasons.

1. It immediately gives everyone in your group something to do. Everyone needs to become involved so that they feel like they "own" a part of the group. If they do not have a personal stake in the group, you will lose them.
2. An event like this starts to "gel" your group. Your communications network and general workings are tested, which helps you to improve. You need to get the bugs worked out as soon as possible, before they lead to problems later on.
3. You begin to have your name exposed to people in your community. They need to know that you are there and that you are doing something.
4. Fundraising gives the group money to do other activities!



Working with the Media



Invariably, you will want the media to write a story about your events, or you may be asked to do an interview. Here are some media tips:

- Build a good working relationship with the media, whether it be TV, newspaper, radio or other. How you come across to the press will determine whether or not you will get good, if any, media coverage in the future. Your image is extremely important! One of the best ways to do this is to work with someone in the media that you know is pro-life or someone that will be fair to you. Try to be patient with them because more often than not, they are willing to be fair and give our side a chance. The idea of youth being involved in the abortion issue is especially interesting to the press. They are usually quite curious about Teens for Life and willing to be very cooperative.
- When talking to the media, always be honest and knowledgeable. Present yourself calmly and professionally and do not come across as emotional or hysterical because you will lose your credibility.
- Select a spokesperson for your group. Ideally, this should be a female who is attractive and articulate, and who can deal with the issue from the human rights, as opposed to a religious, perspective. Your spokesperson should also be your Media Committee chairperson as she or he is the most familiar with the media. However, your president and at least two others in your group should be prepared to do so if the need should arise. Sometimes it is more advantageous to have the “president of such-n-such” than the “media spokesperson.”
- Don't get discouraged by bad or nonexistent coverage. Just keep working at it. Don't ever be rude or hostile to the media. They can sense if you don't like them.

Working with Churches

- As stated earlier, church youth groups may provide the majority of your membership, or at least until other people in the community learn about the group's existence. A profitable activity, both in educating yourself, educating others, and learning to work with the adult pro-life group, is to form a teen/adult speakers' bureau. People involved with this would undergo training on the issue and how to speak -- perhaps done by the adult group -- and then ask different organizations if they could come in and speak on the issue and the organization. Potential groups would be church youth groups, Christian schools, the Knights of Columbus, and other pro-life organizations.

Working with Churches



- The Teens for Life group's brochure should be placed in every local church vestibule, if possible. (Be sure to ask permission first!) If your pastor seems hesitant offer to provide an "abortion education session" for him, perhaps with an adult or another teen. Show him a good video, like the Silent Scream, and give him plenty of pamphlets. ALWAYS be understanding, polite, and responsive to his concerns and questions.
- Other activities with churches include:
 - Petition drives as the congregation leaves the services
 - Encouraging a pro-life sermon and subsequent free-will offering for your group
 - Prayer vigils
 - Diaper drives for crisis pregnancy centers



KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH NTL



- Please send all names, addresses (mailing and e-mail), phone numbers, and the years of graduation of the members of your new group to NTL, 512 10th Street NW, Washington D.C., 20004. You can also email it to NTL's advisors: Joleigh Little (jlittle@wrtl.org) and Derrick Jones (djones@nrlc.org). It is vital that we know how many teens are involved at the local level. Please send NTL updated lists at least annually, so that we can add these people to our mailing list.
- Make sure you stay in close contact with your state and local Right to Life offices. If you do not know how to contact your adult state group, please feel free to call National Right to Life at (202) 378-8853.
- Bookmark www.nationalteensforlife.org and check back for updates. Keep up with the latest from National Right to Life (www.nrlc.org) via Facebook and Twitter (@nrlc).

Thank you for contacting NTL and volunteering to be part of the fight for life! Thank you for standing up for the innocent unborn, the disabled, and elderly, who have no voice in this society! Don't get discouraged: keep fighting and hanging in there! We need YOUR help to return legal protection to society's most vulnerable!