

# NYC-Parents In Action School Rep Guide

September 2005

# **NYC-Parents In Action School Rep Guide**

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## General Information About NYC-Parents In Action

### Who is NYC-Parents In Action?

- We are a group of volunteers serving the independent school community.
- Our mission is to advance effective parenting through communication both within the family and between families.
- We view effective parenting as a core element in the long-range prevention of a host of social concerns, including peer pressure and drug and alcohol experimentation and use.

### How does NYC-Parents In Action communicate its mission?

- **Through our Newsletter:**
  - Our newsletter is published 3 times during the academic year and is sent to the schools for distribution.
- **Through our Seminars:**
  - We offer seminars by parenting and child development experts several times each year.
  - We annually host *Teen Scene*, in which a panel of New York City teenagers openly shares with an adult audience what it's like to be a teenager today. *Teen Scene* is held each February in conjunction with the Parent's League.
- **Through our Parent Discussion Groups:**
  - We send professionally trained volunteers into our member schools to facilitate discussion groups for parents in individual grades. In these meetings, parents share their experiences and concerns by bringing up topics of common interest. These discussion groups provide a setting for open and productive communication among parents.

## General Information for School Reps

### What Are my Responsibilities as a School Rep?

- To bring information about NYC-Parents In Action to my school via Parent Association meetings.
- To arrange parent discussion groups for each grade in my school.
- To arrange distribution of the Parents In Action newsletter and flyers to each family in a way appropriate to my school.

### PIA Newsletter:

The newsletter is published in the fall, winter, and spring. We will notify the school reps when the newsletter is to be delivered to the schools. We hope that you will make sure the newsletter is distributed in the next parent mailing or is sent home in backpacks.

### Announcements from Parents In Action:

We ask that the school reps make a brief announcement about Parents In Action at the first Parents Association meeting of the year. The announcement should briefly describe the mission of the organization and encourage class reps to schedule facilitated group discussions for their grade.

At subsequent Parents Association meetings, when feasible, school reps should also announce upcoming seminars and lectures organized by PIA, and continue to encourage classes to set up parent discussion groups.

### Parent Discussion Groups:

- How Do I Arrange a Discussion Group?
  - 1) Set a Date, Time, and Place for the Meeting:
    - Call each class rep to set up a meeting. Choose two alternative dates (in different weeks) and meeting times at least one month in advance. Identify a place for the meeting.
    - Call Penny Spangler, PIA's administrator, at 426-0240, or email her at [administrator@parentsinaction.org](mailto:administrator@parentsinaction.org), with all of the following information: two possible dates, the time and place as well as the class rep's name, address, email address and phone numbers. Penny will check the calendar and confirm one of these dates within two days.
    - **SCHOOLS WHERE ALL PIA MEETINGS FOR THE YEAR ARE SCHEDULED AT ONCE.** We realize that some schools schedule this way. However, our concern is that PIA discussion dates are set at the same time other school events occur. This leads to a low PIA turnout and makes for a less participatory discussion for parents. If schedules are set at one time, it is **IMPERATIVE** that you pay close

attention to the FULL SCHOOL CALENDAR when setting up meetings, and that you be in touch with the class representative 30 DAYS BEFORE THE MEETING to remind the class representative to send invitations and to encourage attendance. If a school event is scheduled at a later date that conflicts with the PIA meeting, please contact Penny Spangler at 212.426.0240, or email her at [administrator@parentsinaction.org](mailto:administrator@parentsinaction.org). Penny will do everything she can to reschedule the meeting at a more convenient time for parents.

2) Confirm the Meeting:

- Get back to the class rep with the confirmation. Let the class rep know Penny will send a confirmation by mail no later than two weeks before the meeting. If you do not receive your copy of the written confirmation or if you find any discrepancies in the scheduling, call Penny as soon as possible.
- Please make sure to inform the class rep that in the interest of confidentiality participants are to refrain from note taking during the meeting, as well as from circulating any written recaps afterwards.

3) Ask the Class Rep to Arrange the Meeting:

- Send announcements (sample attached; also available on our website, [www.parentsinaction.org](http://www.parentsinaction.org)) to the class rep for emailing, mailing or sending home in backpacks. The class rep should feel free to add information and duplicate the announcements.
- Let the class rep know the facilitators will call a week before the meeting to confirm and ask if there are any questions. The class rep should call the facilitator if he/she doesn't receive a call.
- Please make sure to inform the class reps to make follow up calls to encourage attendance; remind the class rep to bring nametags and a wide-nib marker.

• Where Do the Discussion Groups Meet?

- At the school, in a meeting room in which chairs can be arranged in a circle (such as the library or a classroom). Please make sure the meeting venue allows for privacy. Schedule spaces which are self-contained and where other people won't be sitting or passing through. We discourage school cafeterias, for example.
- In the home of a parent from the class. If the host wishes to serve refreshments, parents should be invited to arrive 15-30 minutes before the facilitators are scheduled to arrive. If the meeting is scheduled for the evening, we recommend that alcohol not be served; school-aged children should not overhear the meeting.

- When Do Discussion Groups Meet?
  - We encourage parents to start meeting in kindergarten. It takes time to create an environment of trust in which parents feel comfortable conferring with one another. Parents are more open to communicating if they start talking before problems arise. Substance abuse prevention begins long before an actual discussion of drugs and alcohol is timely.
  - Most classes have one facilitated discussion group a year, although two can be arranged.
  - Groups generally meet either in the morning, after school drop-off (8:30am) or in the early evening, between 6pm and 7:30 pm. The facilitated discussion lasts 1-1/2 hours from the scheduled starting time.
  
- What Happens at a Discussion Group?
  - Parents meet to share their experiences, questions, concerns, and suggestions regarding parenting a child at a particular age. There is no pre-arranged agenda; parents bring up topics of current interest to themselves. Although some topics commonly occur at specific ages (e.g. play dates in kindergarten, walking home alone in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, curfews in 9<sup>th</sup> grade), parents are free to choose any topic. Sometimes a class decides to meet in order to address a specific incident or a situation of concern to several parents – issues like cliques, bullies, or dating.
  
  - Parents and facilitators attend discussion groups; school administrators are not present. At the opening of the meeting, the facilitator will specify that this is a forum for discussing *social and developmental topics only*. Parents are advised not to discuss any issues related to school policy, as such issues are better addressed directly to the school. Facilitators are there to guide the discussion not to give advice or suggest topics. Please advise class reps that in the interest of confidentiality participants are to refrain from note taking during the meeting as well as from circulating any written recaps after the meeting.

Questions? Call Tessa Namuth, Chairman School Liaison at (212) 772-6974, or School Liaison Committee Members: Ellie Costa (212) 877-1166, Denise Crystal (212) 737-3824, Debbie Feller (212) 683-5736, Kathy Posner (212) 988-5837.

**Sample memo from school rep to class rep**  
**describing facilitation meetings**

(use unmarked copy on next page to duplicate)

From: \_\_\_\_\_ (PIA School Rep)  
To: \_\_\_\_\_ (Class Rep)  
Re: **NYC-Parents In Action, Inc. Facilitated Discussion Group**

**Parents Talking To Parents**

Many times we wonder how other parents address issues related to their children, or we wish we had the benefit of another parent's creativity in problem solving. NYC-Parents In Action, Inc., a 25-year-old not-for-profit organization in the independent schools, sponsors parent discussion groups led by professionally trained facilitators to help build a stronger community of parents. NYC-Parents In Action, Inc., recognizes that effective parenting begins with good communication within the family and between families.

Each meeting is spent discussing topics that are brought up by the parents themselves. Topics vary widely, depending on the age group. For example, parents of kindergarteners might discuss bedtimes and play dates. Lower School parents often bring up after-school activities and over-scheduling. Middle School parents are concerned about street safety and the Internet. By Upper School, parents are interested in balancing the logistics of city living with concerns about children's increasing demand for independence. Of course, your class may have completely different interests, and the discussion of any non-academic topic is welcome. Anything academic is beyond the scope of these meetings and should be taken directly to the school administration.

I will be calling you within the next few weeks to schedule a parent discussion group for your class at a convenient date and time, or you can contact me.

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_(PIA School Rep)  
To: \_\_\_\_\_(Class Rep)  
Re: **NYC-Parents In Action, Inc. Facilitated Discussion Group**

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EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample invitation to facilitated meeting  
for class rep to distribute to class parents**

(use unmarked copy on next page to duplicate)

**You Are Cordially Invited  
To Attend Our Parent Discussion Group  
Facilitated by NYC- Parents In Action, Inc.**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  
THE PARENTS IN ACTION FACILITATED DISCUSSION WILL BEGIN PROMPTLY AT: \_\_\_\_\_

PLACE: \_\_\_\_\_

RSVP: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

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NYC-Parents In Action, Inc. recognizes that effective parenting begins with good communication within the family and between families. We will have an opportunity to experience the benefits of this first hand when our class meets.

**The meeting will only last an hour and a half, so please be prompt. We look forward to having this time together.**

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PLACE: \_\_\_\_\_

RSVP: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Sample reminder invitation to facilitated meeting  
for class rep distribute to class parents**

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**Reminder**

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To Attend Our Parent Discussion Group  
Facilitated by NYC- Parents In Action, Inc.**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

THE PARENTS IN ACTION FACILITATED DISCUSSION WILL BEGIN PROMPTLY AT: \_\_\_\_\_

PLACE: \_\_\_\_\_

RSVP: (if you haven't already) \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

At this meeting, you are invited to discuss whatever social topics are of interest to you. NYC-Parents In Action, Inc. tells us that the most lively meetings occur when a large percentage of parents in a grade attend, allowing a sharing of many different experiences and approaches to parenting.

NYC-Parents In Action, Inc. recognizes that effective parenting begins with communication among families and within families.

Please join us in helping to build a parent network in our class based on communication, respect, and trust. Please encourage other parents to attend, too.

**The meeting will only last an hour and a half, so please be prompt. We look forward to having this time together.**

## Reminder

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