Peer-to-Peer Support Group Manual
Peer-to-Peer Support Group Manual

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The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CalMHSA are funded through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63). Prop. 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California's diverse communities.
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Introduction

Why Develop a Peer-to-Peer Group for Foster Care Youth?
This component of the Wellness and Self-Care curriculum builds on the work you have already done with transition-aged foster youth (TAFY) via the basic and supplemental curricula provided. It allows for continued and increasingly peer-driven programming and mutual support among youth. There are many reasons to consider creating a peer-to-peer support group. While the intention is not to provide direct services or treatment, a group like this can provide needed support and can help make physical and mental health needs and problems known, allowing for referrals to such services when appropriate. Implementing this type of group can also be highly empowering for youth. It is natural for young people transitioning out of foster care to feel like they’ve been “the problem.” A peer-to-peer group turns this experience around—instead of being the problem, each group member has the opportunity to help others. Peer-to-peer wellness groups give each participant an opportunity to work with cohorts to make meaning of their common experiences, and to support each other so that they will have a better chance of leading healthier and more productive lives. These groups may also provide the opportunity for youth who are very interested in health and wellness concerns to further explore and deepen their knowledge in this area. Finally, conducting groups like this can help to build a local social fabric among foster care youth, which can support them to build permanent connections with each other for the future.

What does a Wellness Peer-to-peer Group Look Like?
There are two main methods for running peer groups. One is an all discussion or sharing group. This is where individuals have the opportunity to talk about anything that comes to mind, such as recent successes and obstacles, in order to give and receive support and information. At the other end of the spectrum is a curriculum-based group, where an educational curriculum is provided to participants. This model includes fun and interactive exercises that reinforce the learning experience, as well as opportunities for deep discussion of the key issues confronting youth who participate.

We have provided instructions and materials on both types of programs, group sharing and curriculum, along with a third option to develop a combination of these two types. With this knowledge in hand, facilitators and students at each site will be able to decide how they want the peer-to-peer group implemented at their respective colleges.

NOTE: Community college staff that gave us feedback believed that most sites might want to implement a combination of the two models.

An important element to consider in selecting a model is the question about frequency of meetings (weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly). For those who want to make sharing and mutual support a central aspect of their effort, we suggest you meet weekly (though a few YESS coordinators have reported that they have already run casual support groups on a monthly or semi-monthly basis). Meeting less frequently can detract from the building of trust, as group members tend to forget each other’s stories and issues when a great deal of time passes between meetings. And, if groups are held just once a month and somebody misses just one meeting, that means that he or she won’t have any interaction with other group members for at least two months—and this weakens the sharing process. Also, some of the group projects we describe, such as Photovoice-inspired activities, digital storytelling projects, and community service projects, will benefit from weekly meetings, as these efforts take considerable time for planning and implementation.
This document will primarily address how to develop and run weekly groups, but it will also provide strategies for bi-weekly or monthly efforts.

Finally, whatever model is chosen, remember that although the content likely to be covered in a wellness group requires careful facilitation and monitoring by trained adults, the intention is to allow for peer-to-peer support and youth leadership! It is essential that you involve youth in designing and leading your group, and we provide tips and instructions about how to do this throughout this guide.

About this Document:

Introduction: Includes a discussion of the peer-to-peer process and an overview of this document.

Part I: Selecting a peer-to-peer model. Describes various aspects of program development, including deciding on the model for the program at your site.

Part II: Tips for running effective peer-to-peer groups. Includes some best practices for implementing groups.

Part III: Icebreakers. Provides a number of icebreakers for facilitators to choose from.

Part IV: Exercises. Contains a blank matrix for program development, plus an array of exercises, including instructions for implementation.

Part V: Standard exercises. This section is made up of exercises that can be repeated one or more times with your group.

Part VI: Group projects. Covers strategies for developing group projects, a list of project ideas, plus detailed instructions on implementing Photovoice and digital storytelling projects.
Part I: Selecting a Peer-to-Peer Model
Part I: Selecting a Peer-to-Peer Model

This section describes in more detail the three possible models you can use for peer-to-peer groups and evaluates their pros and cons. We then suggest some important considerations in selecting a model and developing your group. Part II has some additional information that can help you to select the model for your site.

Deciding on Your Group Model: Individual Sharing, Curriculum-Based, or a Combination of the Two

1. Individual Sharing: The group leader facilitates a “check in” with each student; typically, students are asked to share recent successes and obstacles, and to assist each other in addressing life challenges. Sharing groups typically meet weekly, so that students will remember each other's narratives and the issues they are facing.

   - **Benefits:** The group-sharing model provides students with the ability to talk about hurdles they are facing, and to receive support from their peers and the facilitator. When it works properly, members feel listened to and supported, and a sense of camaraderie is also established between peers.

   - **Potential Drawbacks:** Not all youth want to open up in deeply personal ways with other youth, and not all youth are mature enough to appropriately respond to personal sharing from others. Curriculum-based activities can therefore feel “safer” or “more fun” to some youth. Even if your participants indicate interest in a sharing group, if they don't feel like sharing one day, and you don't have an activity ready for them to work on, then the group can become stuck. Additionally, a peer group devoted solely to individual sharing is most effective when groups meet weekly, as discussed. Also, the individual sharing model is weakened when group members lack consistency in their attendance, and a pure sharing group would not have time to work on group projects.

2. Curriculum-Based: The facilitator canvasses the students’ needs and works with students to prepare a module of educational curriculum for them to work with during the next meeting. Curriculum consists of a mixture of interactive/experiential activities, discussion, and minimal didactic information. Youth participants play a role in selecting, or even devising and helping to present, materials. Additionally, speakers can be recruited to provide presentations and to lead interactive exercises as a follow-up to their respective presentations.

   - **Benefits:** The facilitator and students may choose the specific curriculum, which results in covering topics and issues that are important to them. This kind of group doesn't usually become stuck, as there is always curriculum at the ready for them to work with. Additionally, when students are given an opportunity to choose (and sometimes even present) the curriculum, they feel a buy-in. Furthermore, guest speakers can help by presenting on pertinent topics; this also brings a new voice and a change of pace to the program. Another advantage is that a curriculum-based group could choose to work on group projects.

   - **Potential Drawbacks:** It can be challenging for a facilitator to come up with and to lead a new piece of curriculum for every meeting, and it can sometimes be even harder to facilitate youth in developing different curriculum for each class session. Also, if each meeting focuses only on curriculum, some students might become frustrated at their inability to talk about what’s going on with them, and therefore they won't receive empathy and needed support.

3. Combination of Individual Sharing and Curriculum-Based: Facilitators and students can decide to participate in 50 percent sharing and 50 percent curriculum-based activities, or they can choose to emphasize one mode more over the other.
• **Benefits:** Using a combination of the two models provides facilitators and students with the flexibility to move in either direction (individual sharing or educational curriculum). A group that features sharing and focusing on curriculum could also potentially work on group projects.

• **Potential Drawbacks:** There are no obvious drawbacks to this model; if group members don’t feel like sharing, then the facilitator can feature more curriculum; if group members tire of the curriculum, they can move back into more individual sharing. Facilitators, however, must be versatile and able to work with diverse types of learning.

**Facilitation of Groups and Student Leadership**

Because of the sensitive nature of the content discussed in these groups, it is critical that facilitators be comfortable with difficult material and have experience working with transitioning foster youth. It is highly recommended that facilitators either have relational/clinical training of their own, or that they have access to advice and support from someone who does.

Remember, the intention is that groups be youth-driven to the maximum extent possible. So although it would seem that most sites would prefer a combination of individual sharing and curriculum-based approach, it would be helpful to meet with students during the first group session to talk about the three options. To get feedback on their preferences during the session, you can discuss how a sharing session might go, or ask the group if it’s okay for you to go ahead and facilitate a short sharing session (see the “Good News/Bad News” method in Part II of this manual for sharing instructions). Additionally, you might want to prepare a short curriculum-based lesson for them to experience, so that they can participate in a hands-on lesson.

By the end of the first group session, try to obtain a consensus on what mode of peer-to-peer group interaction they want to try during the next two or three meetings (or for the entire duration of the peer-to-peer program). You should ask them again, several times throughout the course, to see if their needs are being met and make changes accordingly.

Ways of promoting student leadership should be considered throughout the course of the group. While an adult facilitator is likely necessary at most or all times, it is possible to select (and possibly rotate) youth leaders or facilitators. (Note: it is critical to have an experienced and mature facilitator during sharing sessions—for example, for the “Good News/Bad News” exercise) Group members can also be given a choice in activities and topics covered as often as possible. You could even go so far as to train youth facilitators prior to the start of the group and involve them heavily in the design of the sessions.
Part II: Tips for Running Effective Peer-to-Peer Groups
Part II: Tips for Running Effective Peer-to-Peer Groups

Strategies for creating sharing groups and for developing curriculum-based groups are listed below. As you read the descriptions, they can also help you to decide whether to create a sharing group, a curriculum-based group, or a combination of the two models. Additionally, considerations for helping groups to work on projects can be found in Part III of this manual.

Creating a Safe Place: The most important aspect of developing a peer-to-peer discussion group is to create a safe place for each person to share. Facilitators can consider the points below, as thinking through them and implementing these concepts can help in the process of trust building.

Confidentiality: During the first meeting, it is important to ask group members to agree that “what is said in the group stays in the group.” Facilitators should also cover child abuse, neglect, and endangerment reporting guidelines, so that members will understand that certain harm and danger incidents or suspicions must be reported to the authorities.

Group Rules: Consider developing group rules during the first session by asking members what kind of guidelines would help to create a safe place to share. Rules that are important include:

- Respect the point of view of others
- Maintain confidentiality
- Be supportive
- One person talks at a time

Write these agreements on a flip chart or board for all to see. Record them and keep a copy at the ready, should problems arise during future group sessions. You may not have to do this, but if problems do come up in the sharing process later on, you could take out a copy of the rules and cover them again by saying, “Remember when we all promised to respect each other’s points of view…”

Consistency: Within the peer-to-peer setting, the word “consistency” addresses two issues. The first is consistency of meetings. As already discussed, you should use caution if you decide to engage youth in conversations that involve deep personal sharing in groups that meet infrequently or inconsistently. The second use of the concept of consistency is for consistency of group makeup. This means that the same people are in attendance each time the group meets. (And, if you have more than one group, you assign the same individuals to the same small group each time.) If different people continually show up, it can be detrimental to the sharing process. Imagine sharing something sensitive during a session and then during the next meeting you see a number of different faces across from you. You probably wouldn’t feel like opening up again. A major challenge you may face in these regards is that youth in or exiting foster care have high challenges in terms of participating consistently in activities. So you will need to consider ways to accommodate transiency or to encourage consistency.

Time Considerations: Keep in mind that time may move more quickly than you think in these groups. Remember that you will need at least 15 min. just to get the group settled, do some kind of icebreaker, and have time at the end to adjourn properly. So if your session is 45 minutes total, you really only have 30 minutes for main content. If seven individuals will share during that time, for example, then you have an average of about four minutes for each person.
**Group Size:** Create a manageable group size for a sharing group. It is generally good to have only five to seven members, as this gives each person an opportunity to speak. For groups of up to 15, you would probably want to make two or three groups. Groups of more than 15 youth are not recommended.

**Sharing Method/Theme:** An extremely effective strategy is to ask each person to share the obstacles and successes they experienced since the last time the group met. Alternatively called “Good News/Bad News” (see Part IV of this document for instructions), this method provides members an opportunity to share the good things that have happened to them recently. It also gives them a forum to talk about current setbacks and obstacles, and to get empathy, support, and suggestions for solving difficult issues.

**When Problem-Solving, Draw From The Group:** As group members describe their obstacles and difficult issues, it's best if the facilitator draws suggestions from the group (and, of course, ideas from the person who has the obstacle) rather than the facilitator immediately offering his or her own suggestions and advice. Eliciting responses from the peer group helps build a sense of camaraderie and allows youth to learn much more from the experience. Plus, often a student will listen to suggestions from his or her peers over the group facilitator.

**Dealing with Deep Personal Issues:** There are many variables that go into working with students on their deep personal issues. As a group facilitator you bring your own level of confidence, abilities, and expertise to the group setting. There is no way of telling how much these students will reveal, and how deeply they will go. Putting these two factors together, there is no clear answer on how to deal with deep personal issues as they arise in the group setting. Each facilitator will need to use his or her intuition and address each situation as it arises. And remember, if you feel that you are in over your head, please try to obtain support and supervision from a relationship professional (such as a counselor or therapist) as soon as possible. If an individual's issue is severe, talk to him or her directly after the session to try to obtain resources and support. If impending harm or danger is involved, you may need to call a local hotline, or even make a report to Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement. Your Coordinator Toolkit provides some additional materials that can help you work more effectively with youth, regarding sensitive mental health and related issues.

**Facilitators’ Self-Disclosure Guidelines:** It is sometimes helpful for group facilitators to show the peer group members that they are not perfect or “bullet proof” by talking a little about difficulties they have had in their lives. But a word of caution: do not go too deeply into your own issues. These groups are not about the facilitator receiving therapy. Also, when facilitators go too deeply into their own personal issues, it can make the group members frustrated, because it takes away time from group sharing. Group members can also lose confidence with a facilitator that reveals too much; they might ask themselves, “Why is this person, who has so many issues, leading our group?”

**Icebreakers:** Even if you are leading a pure discussion group, it would be good to consider implementing an icebreaker during each session (see Part II of this manual for icebreakers). The process of doing an icebreaker helps group members get to know each other, builds trust, and loosens the group up.
Developing Curriculum for Group Sessions

The educational curriculum can cover a number of pertinent topics for this population. Examples include self-advocacy, well-being, mental health issues, charting your life’s journey, finding your strengths, managing stressful emotions and situations, time management and organization skills, helping others, and so forth. Additionally, members of the group can be asked to come up with topics.

We have provided a wealth of materials upon which you and your youth leaders can draw on to create content for your group sessions. This book contains an array of icebreakers and interactive exercises, along with what can be considered “standard exercises” that you can fall back upon again and again. Also, there is a selection of more unique activities you can choose from. This document also provides instructions for a standard “jigsaw puzzle” activity, which allows for small group discussion and learning on a variety of key topics youth have identified as important to them (already covered to some extent in the basic and supplemental curricula; here youth can delve more deeply into the specific issues of their choice, as we have provided detailed worksheets for a variety of these topics).

We also encourage the use of interactive and experiential activities, such as meditations and relaxation exercises, physical activities for fun and fitness, various self-assessment tools and games, role playing, and “jeopardy”-style games. Some of these are provided in this book, while others can be found in these resources:

- Basic and supplemental curricula
- Variety of activity books we have provided for each site
- TeenMentalHealth.org High School Mental Health Curriculum provided
- List of links and additional curricula we offer as part of the Coordinator Toolkit

Facilitators also have the option to bring in outside speakers to present on particular topics. The conclusion of each speaker’s presentation typically includes an interactive activity; this helps the process to be more enjoyable, and it is also a way of making it pertinent to each participant’s life situation, as students can be asked to reflect on their life experiences, strengths, obstacles, and so forth. If you decide to go with a curriculum-based peer group, icebreakers can be found in Part III of this manual, exercises in Part IV, and group projects in Part VI.

The group session development matrix can be an option for planning and developing an agenda for each meeting. Below is an example of a 50-minute session where the emphasis is on group sharing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icebreaker</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Sharing: “Good News/Bad News”</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure and Next Steps</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following is an example of a 50-minute session where the emphasis is on working with curriculum; this particular session also features a brief sharing period, so the icebreaker was eliminated to save time.
### Activity Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Sharing: “Good News/Bad News”</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Curriculum/ Interactive or Experiential Activity</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure and Next Steps</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample Peer-to-Peer Session Development Matrix

Please feel free to copy and use this matrix (or to create your own). Utilize the expanded space in the matrix to write down your own delivery notes, including any materials needed.

Possible headings for activities include:
- Icebreaker
- Sharing exercise
- Educational curriculum/activity
- Planning for group project
- Field trip
- Refreshments
- Closure and next steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part III: Icebreakers
Introduction to Icebreakers

Icebreakers, also known as “warmers,” are an effective way to kick off or energize a peer-to-peer sharing group, a curriculum-based group, or even a group that is focusing on a group project. This document provides a number of icebreakers for you to choose from.

Additionally, you may want to seek out additional icebreakers or warmers. To do so, in an Internet search engine, input words like: “icebreaker, warmer, training icebreakers, training warmers, fun icebreakers, team builders,” and so forth.

Other resources include books on icebreakers, warmers, and training exercises (find them online or at a bookstore). You may also ask students and colleagues if they have any favorite icebreakers you can use.

Some of the icebreakers found in this section have also been listed in the basic and supplemental curriculum. They have been repeated here because although they were in the basic or supplemental curriculum, facilitators may not have used them. Also, peer groups might be made up of different students than those who attended the basic or supplemental sessions.
Actor’s Interview (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** To get to know group members in a fun and interactive way

**Time:** 12 Minutes

**Materials:** Handout of the actor’s interview for each person
**Actor’s Interview Handout**

Interview your partner by writing down the following:

1. First, middle, and last name: ______________________________________________________________

2. Nickname: ____________________________________________________________________________

3. Something that’s interesting about my name (or nickname) is:______________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

4. I was born (where): _____________________________________________________________________

5. When I was five, I: _____________________________________________________________________

6. I now live (where): _____________________________________________________________________

7. What I do now is: ________________________________

8. In my free time I enjoy: __________________________________________________________________

9. What most people don’t know about me is (what I’m good at, or would like to be good at): ______
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

10. My least favorite word: __________________________________________________________________

11. Favorite word: ________________________________

12. My favorite movie is: _____________________________________________________________________

13. If they made a movie about me it would be called: _________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

14. And, the actor who would play me would be: _____________________________________________

15. When I’ve left this world, people will say I’ve made a difference because: ____________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

Now stand behind the chair of the person you have interviewed, read the responses, and become them (in a playful but respectful way, exaggerate their voice and their mannerisms).
I’m A Celebrity, But Who Am I? (Icebreaker)

Purpose: This is an excellent icebreaker, and it is especially good for groups that are meeting for the first or second time.

Time: 12 minutes

Materials:
- 3 x 5 note cards, one for each person, with the names of well-known celebrities, either real or fictional
- Tape to affix the cards on each person’s back

Name Examples:
- Kobe Bryant
- Madonna
- Beyoncé
- Wizard of Oz
- Mrs. Obama
- President Obama
- Martin Luther King
- Moses
- Mickey Mouse
- Superman

Instructions:
“Today we are going to play a game called, ‘I’m a Celebrity, but who am I?’ In a moment I’ll tape the name of a well-known celebrity, either real or fictional, onto your back, without you seeing the name.”

“This is a guessing game, and the first person that guesses the celebrity’s name wins. But, keep going, even after the first person guesses the celebrity.”

“After I tape the name on your back, go around and ask each person a question about your celebrity that can only be answered with a yes or no. For example, you can say, ‘Am I a male?’ Then go to the next person and say, ‘Do I live in the U.S.?’ and so on. Do not ask or answer any question that cannot be answered with a yes or no.” (You might ask them to repeat what you have just said, as people often forget this point.)

“Also, you can ask only one person a question at a time. Then you need to go the next person and ask a question. You can return to ask someone a second question only when you have asked each person in the room a question.” (If the individuals don’t know each other well, ask them to tell the other person their name before asking their question.)

“Are you clear on what to do? Okay, go!” (Wait until most or all people have guessed their celebrity before ending the game.)
Group-Composed Slogans (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This is a fun way for students to get to know each other

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Materials:** None

**Instructions:**

Ask students who share the same birth month (or who are nearest in birth months) to gather together in small groups. (Make it a requirement that there be at least three people in a group.)

Give each group two or three minutes to make up a cheer or slogan for their month (group of months or season of the year). When they present their slogan, ask them to do so with enthusiasm.

Lead the applause for each group.
Group Writing (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** To foster teamwork and build relationships in a fun and creative way

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Materials:**
- Two thick ink markers
- Two flip charts

**Instructions:**

Divide the group into two teams. Tape a large flip chart page to the wall for each team (or have the flip charts on easels). Have the members of each respective group form a line about 10 feet from the paper. Give an ink marker to the first person in line.

Ask each team to construct a complete sentence on the flip chart sheet by writing one word at a time; each team member writes one word and then passes the marker to the next person in line. This is done until the page contains a sentence complete with subjects, verbs, and punctuation.

No talking to each other is allowed (you want each sentence to arise organically and spontaneously). Members cannot insert words between words already on the page. Each person must contribute at least one word, and the rotation should continue until the team completes a sentence.

For smaller groups (three to five people), you can permit the students to go through their rotation two times each (each person eventually writing down two words, instead of one).

You may choose to go through the exercise a number of times.

**Variations to consider:**
- Ask teams to use at least three words that start with a specific letter.
- Ask that the sentence have something to do with the curriculum you have recently covered, or discussions that the group has had.
- You might let them know that the team that writes the most creative, funny, odd, etc. sentence will be the winner.
Hum This! (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This is a quick, fun, nonsensical icebreaker

**Time:** 10 Minutes

**Materials:** Note cards with the names of songs on them (one card for each person)

**Instructions:**

Pass out the note cards with the names of a nursery rhyme or another common song written on down. Examples: “Happy Birthday,” “Jingle Bells,” “Star Spangled Banner,” “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” etc. If you have 16 people in your program, then you might want to pass out the names of each of the four songs to four people, respectively.

Tell them to hum their assigned tune and find and assemble with everyone else in the group humming the same tune.

When they find others in the group with the same song, ask them to practice humming together for a minute or two. Let them know that they can be creative. Next, ask each group to hum their song to others, as everyone tries to guess their tune.

Option: After each group performs, ask them to put their heads together to come up with another tune—such as a popular song—that they can hum together to the others; then have them hum it and ask others to guess. You could also tell them that they could use percussion sounds, like slapping their thighs, or tapping their shoes, or using pencils on the tables.
Managing a Stressful Day (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This exercise begins by having students imagine a stressful day (this helps to “normalize” some of the stresses and feelings that students are having). It also helps students consider strategies that will help them prevent or manage their stress.

**Time:** 12 minutes

**Materials:** None

**Instructions:**

This exercise is best done in a relatively small group. Have group members sit in a circle, or sit across from each other at a large table (so that students can see each other’s faces).

Tell the students that they are going to collaborate to create a “hugely stressful day,” as each person will come up with an imagined stressful event. Ask the students to build on the previous student’s stressful event. Example: Person #1: “My alarm clock doesn’t go off.” Person #2 adds, “And I’m 35 minutes late for my first class.” Then everyone adds something until each student has had a chance to share.

When they are finished, make the following points:

“The scenario you created was probably more stressful than any that you would typically go through, as it was a combined effort of stressful events. (You should be happy to not have a day as stressful as this one.)”

“You all probably realize that you are stressed out by some of the same things.”

“For each of the stresses that you described, there are ways of handling or managing the stress.” (Some of the strategies they probably have already covered in class, and some strategies will be discussed in the future).

For the second part of the exercise, ask the group how they would manage each element of the scenario that they just created. For instance, if they were late to class, options include:

- Try to get notes from a fellow student.
- Talk to the teacher after class and let him or her know that you had a problem with your alarm.
- Take some deep breaths and try to relax.
- (Points to bring up include: no occurrence is fatal, you just have to keep taking the next step, try to relax, and your attitude about what happens is more important than what actually happens.)
Relationship Bingo (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This exercise is a great warmer for relatively large groups (10 or more people). It can be used the first time the group gets together. (Descriptors may be changed based on the ages and experiences of the population.)

**Time:** 12 minutes (To begin this exercise, you may want to start as soon as the first students enter the room. In a way, allowing them to start before other students arrive is a reward for them being ahead of time or on time.)

**Materials:**
One handout and something to write with for each person
A fun incentive for the winner

**Instructions:**

“In order to get to know each other better, we are going to play a game called ‘Relationship Bingo.’ You each have a bingo card. In a minute you will begin to interview people and ask each of them one and only one question.”

“If the person says ‘yes’ to your question, then have them write his or her name in that square. That person can also ask you a question. The rule is that you can only ask each person one question at a time, and then you have to ask at least three other people questions before you return to them.” (For very large groups, you can change this to five people.)

“This is ‘blackout bingo,’ so just getting them in a straight line doesn’t mean that you win. When I say ‘time,’ the person with the most squares signed off is the winner.”

**Debrief:**

After you call time, ask if anyone has all 25 squares signed, then 24, 23, and so on until someone wins. If you have an incentive to give them, this would be the time to do so.

Next, you may want to read a few squares and ask if this square describes anyone; for instance, “who can juggle?” and so on.

To put closure to the exercise, you may want to remark that this is a fun way to get to know each other.
## Relationship Bingo Handout

Find someone who fits the criteria in each of the boxes.

Get them to sign their name in the box, one person per sheet.

This is “blackout bingo.” Don’t just go for just a line—cover as many boxes as you can. The person with the most boxes signed wins!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person: Was Born Outside Of This State</th>
<th>Person: Has Had a Broken Bone</th>
<th>Person: Has Four or More Siblings</th>
<th>Person: Has a Weird Pet</th>
<th>Person: Has Traveled Outside of the US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person: Is Wearing Orange</td>
<td>Person: Speaks Another Language</td>
<td>Person: Has Been on Television</td>
<td>Person: Wants To Be a Teacher</td>
<td>Person: Plays an Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person: Has Tried Being a Stand-Up Comedian</td>
<td>Person: Can Juggle</td>
<td>Person: Free</td>
<td>Person: Hates To Shop</td>
<td>Person: Can Stand on Their Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person: Is Named After a Relative</td>
<td>Person: Can Touch Their Nose With Their Tongue</td>
<td>Person: Can Hula Hoop</td>
<td>Person: Doesn’t Eat Meat</td>
<td>Person: Is Left Handed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven Buzz (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This is a simple, quick, and fun icebreaker

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Materials:** None

**Instructions:**

This game is best when everyone is sitting in a circle, or around a large table facing each other. Let everyone know that this is a quick and fun game of focus and concentration. Tell them that together they are going to try to count as fast and as high as they can, but each time the number seven comes up, the person that would be saying the seven number has to say “buzz” instead of the number.

For instance, when the count goes to seven, the person that was going to say seven has to say “buzz,” and the next person says eight. When it gets around to 17, that person has to say “buzz,” and the same with 27, and so forth.

If someone in the group says the number containing seven instead of buzz, then the group has to start over. In starting over, it’s best if you start with a different person (than you started with the previous time), as then the sequence of numbers will be different.

Know that when the group gets to the 70s—71, 72, etc.—each number is a buzz. This usually throws everyone off, and the group has to start over.
Who is This? (Icebreaker)

**Purpose:** This is a fun exercise that helps group members get to know each other better. The exercise is best done with a group of people that have been meeting a while, as they will know a little of each other’s backgrounds.

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Materials:** A piece of notebook paper for each person

**Instructions:**

Ask each person to write one personal fact about themselves, something that they believe no one in the group knows. You might consider the qualifier, “Try to write down something that you believe might only be true for you, and no one else in the group.”

Then ask them to crumple their piece of paper up into a little ball. If you are sitting in a circle you can ask them to throw their paper into the middle of the room (or to the middle of a table, if you are sitting at a large table).

Mix the crumpled papers up, and also wad a few of them up even more (so students can’t keep track of who threw a particular paper) and then give one crumpled paper to each person.

Ask for a volunteer to open up read his or her paper, and caution everyone that if they get their own paper to read it as if it were someone else’s paper.

After the person reads the paper, ask group members to name whom they believe the paper is talking about. (Another rule is that you can’t vote for yourself.)

Also, ask everyone to keep track of how many they got correct. The person that guesses correctly the most times is the winner.
Part IV: Exercises
Introduction to Exercises

The peer-to-peer exercises found on these pages can also be thought of as “educational curriculum.” These exercises can be used as the main activity for each group session, or they can be an augmentation to the sharing process.

To decide on the type of curriculum (along with the actual exercises), group facilitators can canvass students to see what their needs and interests are. The next step would be to review exercises within this document and select one that is appropriate for the group. Group leaders can also peruse the Internet or training publications in bookstores for additional exercises.

When choosing exercises that are not in this document, please be sure that:

- The subject matter is relevant to the student population you are serving
- The exercise is at an appropriate developmental level (not infantile, and not too complex)
- Exercises are fun and interactive
- The materials needed to run the exercise can be obtained fairly easily
- You involve youth in selecting, devising, and leading activities and lessons
- Facilitators take a dry run! Practice giving the instructions to exercises to a friend or colleague prior to the peer-to-peer group
Inside and Outside Me Box

**Purpose:** This exercise helps students to recognize and reveal certain hidden aspects of themselves, and this can lead to improved psychological health.

**Estimated Time:** 30 Minutes

**Materials:**
- A variety of empty boxes of various sizes, from mint tins to shoe boxes (one for each student)
- A variety of magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

**Instructions:**

“Today we are going to do an exercise called the ‘Inside and Outside Me Box.’ We all have personality traits, characteristics, preferences, behaviors, and even life experiences that are visible or known to others, and all of us also have things that we like to keep hidden.”

“In fact, the Greeks called the face we show to others ‘the persona,’ and it’s also the word for mask. To some extent, what we show others is what we want them to see, or a mask.”

“In this exercise you will have a chance to make a box that represents both the outside (the visible) and the inside (the hidden) you.”

“We have various kinds and sizes of boxes, and there are also magazines, scissors, and glue sticks. Start by choosing a box, and then select images to decorate both the outside and the inside of the box.”

“When you display what you created, you don’t have to share what’s on the inside of your box unless you want to. You will have about 15 minutes to create your inside/outside box. Any questions?”

**Debrief:**

Ask if anyone would like to share his or her box. If you have a small group, ask everyone to share. Do not force anyone to share the inside of his or her box. As students share, praise their work.

If you have a very large group, say 15 or more students, place them into smaller groups of 4-5 to save time and help them feel more comfortable with sharing. After everyone has shared, ask for a few volunteers to share their boxes with the larger group.
Debriefing Questions for the Group

Does it seem that we generally show the same traits and characteristics as others, and also hide the same characteristics?

How do think about or name the “you” that you keep hidden? Examples: the real me, my hidden self, my true self, sensitive self, nobody’s business, my shadow, “Bobo,” and so forth.

Is there tension or anxiety about the difference between the hidden you and the outward you?

Do people sometimes get stressed out, or frustrated, or angry, or sad that the “me” they are showing others is not the real person?

How do people decide what to keep hidden?

How do people decide when to unveil something that has been hidden?

Any other comments about this exercise?
Write Your Own Obit

**Purpose:** This exercise helps students to look at the big picture of their lives, including their goals, values, and relationships.

**Time:** 30 Minutes

**Materials:**
- Paper and writing utensil for each person
- Handout of questions for each person

**Instructions:**

Provide each student with the handout on the next page, and read instructions to them.

Give them 10-15 minutes to answer the questions.

Ask for volunteers to read their responses, along with the inscription they would like on their tombstone (their “epitaph”).

Sum up the exercise by talking about the benefit of looking backward from the end of their lives, and that sometimes we can better see what’s important by considering the end.
Write Your Own Obit Handout

In this exercise you will have 10-15 minutes to write your own obituary. In other words, looking ahead years from now, after you pass on, what do you want written in the paper about you? Don’t overthink what you are writing—try not to hold back or edit too much. Just let it flow.

Questions you can ask yourself as you write your obit:

1. How long did you live?
2. What kind of person were you? What were the character traits that people will remember you for?
3. Interests, hobbies?
4. What were your major accomplishments in life? At age 25, 35, 45, 55.... Etc.
5. Was there one or more “big hurdle” that you overcame? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?
6. What did you care about?
7. Who did you care about, and who cared about you?
8. What legacy or imprint did you leave on the world? This is a time to dream, to think big, and to imagine the possibilities. Remember, don’t edit!
9. Finally... write the words that will be on your gravestone (your “epitaph”).
**Build an Ideal Leader** (Exercise)

“Leader” is just one example for an area of focus for this exercise. For example, you could substitute this concept for an ideal “student, healthy student, foster youth advocate, friend,” and so forth.

**Purpose:** This activity helps students to self-identify the traits and qualities of a good leader (or student, advocate, etc.) The exercise is easy and fun to do. It also gets students standing up, moving around, and working together.

**Time:** 35 Minutes

**Materials:**
- Flip chart paper or poster board (one for each group)
- A large number of thick-tipped colored markers
- Tape (to tape the artwork on the wall when completed)

**Instructions:**

Break up into groups of five to six, and then begin by telling them that they will be building an Ideal Leader.

Ask them to assemble with their team around a flip chart, and to choose the “most artistic person in the group.” With the flip chart and large colored markers provided, that person will draw a large outline (full body) of an individual (kind of like a gingerbread cookie, but with no eyes, nose, fingers, toes, etc.) Make it clear that the drawing doesn’t have to be perfect.

Let them know that each person will go to the outline to draw a quality or characteristic of the ideal leader. Ask them to draw the symbol on the part of the body where the trait might originate. Example: A good leader might have great ideas (as perhaps signified by a light bulb on or near the brain.)

Ask groups to draw as many symbols as they can think of. If they can’t think of how to illustrate a certain trait, ask them to say the trait aloud to their team members—perhaps they will come up with a symbol. Keep drawing or writing down characteristics until everyone runs out of ideas. Encourage using lots of different colors.

Make a rule for them to not look at the other groups’ drawings, as it is important for each team to do their own work. Let them know that later they will display their drawings to the larger group.
**Additional Facilitator Notes:**

It’s good to keep each group from seeing the other groups’ drawings, so space the groups out, if possible. Walk around and monitor each group’s progress. Every once in a while you may have a group that doesn’t get the exercise, or quickly runs out of ideas. You can make a suggestion or two if this happens.

Groups may want to work on their image anywhere from 10-15 minutes, or even a little longer. Give them a three-minute warning before you bring them back together. Tell them to turn the drawings over when finished, so that the other teams cannot see them. Let them know that you will be having a “grand unveiling” of their work.

Bring the finished flip charts to the front of the room, and reveal one at a time. Have one or more person from each group come up to explain their ideal leader to the larger group (about three or four minutes per presentation). Add drama to the presentation by encouraging everyone in the room to do a drum roll before revealing their work, and then encourage “Ohhhs!” and “Ahhhs!” from the attendees as you help each group turn their drawing over (students really get a kick out of this.)

This exercise is often very enjoyable, and the results are fun to see, so post each of the drawings in a prominent place so that students will be able to see them for the entire day.

**Debrief:**

How were the ideal leaders the same? Different? What seemed to go down on the drawings first? (This is a way of identifying the most important traits.)

What traits do you like to see in a leader?

What trait might you, yourself, need to work on?

What is your strongest leadership trait?
California Egg Drop Championship

**Purpose:** The California Egg Drop Championship is a fun competition that helps group members build a sense of team and learn how to work together better.

**Time:** 50 minutes

**Materials (for each group):**
- 2 small paper bags
- 12 popsicle sticks
- 8 straws
- 3 pieces of construction paper
- 10 cotton balls
- 10 Q-tips
- 6 feet of scotch or packing tape
- 1 egg per group
- Paper and pen, or poster board and markers (for them to create their commercial—let them know that this part of the materials provide cannot be used to create their vehicle.)

**Instructions:**

Divide students into teams consisting of around five individuals each, and pass out materials to each team. Tell them that in the “California Egg Drop Championship,” the goal is to make a “vehicle” for an egg that will prevent the egg from breaking when it is dropped from six feet.

The egg must be inside the vehicle and none of the building materials can be placed on the floor for the egg to fall onto. The materials need to be used to surround the egg, not to cushion its fall from below.

Also, during the exercise, each team needs to develop a name and a commercial for the vehicle while building it. “You also have materials (paper and pen, or poster board and marker) to make your commercial. You are not allowed to use these materials to create your vehicle. Right before you do your drop, you will be letting the rest of us know why your invention is the best egg protector on the market. Be passionate and convincing in your commercial.”

Each team will present their commercials just prior to dropping the egg. Teams have 25 minutes or so to build the vehicle and make the commercial.

When they are finished, ask for one group to volunteer to give their commercial first (commend their commercial efforts). “Let’s go outside, and have one person stand on a chair and drop the egg from six feet” (repeat commercial and egg drop with the second group).
If eggs survive the first test, increase the height to 8 feet, then 10, etc. The egg that makes it to the highest drop without breaking is the winner.

When this exercise is done, ask each group what they could have done to make their effort more successful. (The points brought up might have to do with “leadership,” or “working together better,” or a related issue.)
Creating a Vision Board

**Purpose:** This fun and interactive exercise helps participants to identify and then share with others their life goals.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:**
- Magazines (two or so per participant; make sure magazines don’t have an excessive number of sexually suggestive pictures, or other images that might take participants off track)
- Construction paper or poster board (one piece for each participant, size 11x14)
- Glue sticks (one for each participant)
- Scissors (one pair for every one or two participants)

**Instructions:**

Distribute magazines and other supplies to the students. On a flip chart or dry erase board write down the words: education, employment, lasting relationships, housing, physical health, and emotional health.

“Today we’ll do an exercise called ‘Creating a Vision Board.’ It will help you visualize goals for your future.”

“From the magazines, cut out pictures, words, and phrases that represent things you want for your future. You can think of these as ‘dreams’ and ‘goals.’ When you identify the things that you want in life, you are more likely to obtain them.”

“I’ve written the words education, employment, lasting relationships, housing, physical health, and emotional health on the board. These areas are very important. Experts in human development have found that if a person manages these areas well, they are likely to go on to live a happy, healthy, and productive life.”

“I would like each of you to cut out at least one image that relates to each of those areas. You can add additional images, such as things you would like to have or places you want to go, but I would like everyone to have one image from each of the six areas. You can even number them on your poster, if you wish.”

After you have finished, everyone will share what they have come up with.
Debrief:

The purpose of debriefing is to have them share their goals in these areas while identifying the first steps in achieving them. The facilitator can also remind the students that if they want to achieve their big goals and dreams, it's best to break them down into smaller goals.

“Who wants to volunteer to go first?” After they share their entire collage, ask them to choose the one thing they would like to do or have the most—and then one step they can take to achieve this goal.

If the student doesn't come up with the steps it might take, ask others if they know what it takes to reach that particular goal.

As you discuss students' goals with them, remain positive, even if their goals are unrealistic, as sometimes these individuals need to hang on to their dreams.

If you will have a session on goal setting in the future, let students know that the dreams they have on their vision boards are the first steps in goal setting. Some people think of goals as “dreams with a plan.”

Tell them: “You can take your work home with you today. It would be good to put your vision board in a place where you can see it every day. The more you look at your dreams and goals, the more likely you will achieve them. Thanks for your work!”
Dealing with Toxic Relationships (Discussion and Exercise)

**Purpose:** To help students understand what a toxic relationship is and also to develop strategies for getting out of these types of relationships.

**Time:** 40 Minutes

**Materials:** A set of handouts for each student (attached):
- “Are You in a Toxic Relationship?”
- “What if You Want Out of a Toxic Relationship?”
- “Toxic Relationship Problem Solving Scenarios”

**Instructions:**

Ask if anyone knows what a “toxic relationship” is. Let them know that a toxic relationship is often violent, and the person you are with wants to control you—they are relationships that make you feel unsafe.

Ask if anyone has known someone who has been in a toxic relationship. (Before they respond, let them know that you would prefer that the person remain anonymous—that you don’t want to break anyone’s confidentiality, or put anyone in danger by naming names.)

If someone volunteers, ask what the characteristics were of the toxic relationship.

Pass out the “Are You in a Toxic Relationship?” handout, and go through it with them. Let them know that if they answer “yes” on any of these questions, they should consider the strategies on the next handout.

Pass out the “What if You Want Out of a Toxic Relationship?” handout and discuss.

Pass out the “Toxic Relationship Problem Solving Scenarios” handout. You might choose to divide them into small groups and assign each group a scenario to solve (which they will later share out to the larger group). Or, you can read the scenario to the entire group to get their suggestions. You can also create more scenarios and add them to the handout, if you wish.
Are You in A Toxic Relationship?

How do you know if you are in a toxic relationship? Answer the following questions for yourself. They describe some of the warning signs that can help you decide if your relationship is turning toward abuse and possibly violence.

Are you going out with someone who...

1. Is jealous and possessive, won’t let you have friends, checks up on you, and won’t accept breaking up?
2. Tries to control you by being bossy, giving orders, making all decisions, or not taking your opinions seriously?
3. Puts you down in front of friends or tells you that you would be nothing without him or her?
4. Scares you, makes you worry about his or her reactions to things you say or do, or threatens you?
5. Says things that make you feel terrible about yourself?
6. Is violent or has a history of fighting, losing his or her temper quickly, or bragging about mistreating others?
7. Uses or owns weapons?
8. Grabs, pushes, shoves, or hits you?
9. Pressures you for sex or is forceful or scary about sex?
10. Attempts to manipulate you by saying, “If you really loved me, you would...”
11. Gets too serious about the relationship too fast?
12. Abuses alcohol or other drugs or pressures you to drink alcohol or take drugs?
13. Has a history of failed relationships and blames the other person for all the problems?
14. Believes that men should be in control and powerful and that women should be passive and submissive?
15. Makes your family and friends uneasy and concerned for your safety?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you could be the victim of dating abuse. Abuse isn’t just hitting. It’s yelling, threatening, name calling, saying “I’ll kill myself if you leave me,” obsessive phone calls, and extreme possessiveness. Dating violence or abuse affects one in ten teen couples.
What if You Want Out of a Toxic Relationship?

1. Tell your parents, a friend, a counselor, a clergyperson, or someone else whom you trust and can help. The more isolated you are from friends and family, the more control the abuser has over you.

2. Alert the school counselor or security officer.


4. Do not meet your partner alone. Do not let him or her in your home when you are alone.

5. Call the Women’s Services number in your phone book.

6. Avoid being alone at school, at your job, or on the way to and from places.

7. Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.

8. YWCA usually has groups for victims of abuse (and the YMCA).

9. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE. This number is toll-free and will not appear on your phone bill if you live in the U.S.

10. Plan and rehearse what you would do if your partner became physically abusive.

Adapted from:

The Boulder Police Department website on Teen Dating Violence:
http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/police/prevention/teen_dating.htm

The Insight Conflict Resolution Toolkit:
http://www.talkcity.com/theinsite/relationships/conflict_resolution_text.html
Toxic Relationship Problem Solving Scenarios

What should you do in the following situations?

1. Your girlfriend just started dating a guy and she really likes him. You go to visit your girlfriend at her house and the guy she’s dating is parked down the street from your friend’s house, slumped down low behind the steering wheel of his car. It’s obvious he doesn’t want anyone to see him, and that he’s got his eyes on your friend’s house. You tell your girlfriend and she says, “Oh, that’s okay, I think he loves me!”

2. Your dad was an alcoholic. Every now and then, when he was really drunk, he would yell at your mother and slap her face. He was always truly sorry and bought her expensive presents the next day to make up for it. You have a new boyfriend. He is often controlling and sometimes he loses his temper with you. You notice that the meaner he gets with you, the more you seem to want him in your life.

3. You have a new man. He’s often funny, has a good job, and is very good looking. Each time you are with him he talks about any one of a number of previous relationships he had with other women, and how they betrayed him. According to him, every woman he’s ever been with turned out to be a “selfish bitch,” or a “whore.”
Finding My Tipping Point

**Purpose:** This exercise explains the concept of the “tipping point,” or how when a person consistently completes small positive actions it can result in big changes in their lives. The aim of this exercise is to motivate students to make these small positive actions a habit.

**Time:** 40 Minutes

**Materials:**
- Note cards (one for each student)
- “Finding My Personal Tipping Point” handout, attached (one set per student)

**Instructions:**

“Today we are going to talk about a concept called the ‘tipping point.’ This idea was featured in the bestselling book called The Tipping Point. Let’s read about it on your handout.” Ask for a volunteer to read the first few paragraphs.

After the selected student finishes reading the following passage: “By taking care of the little things, this eventually became the ‘tipping point’ that led to big changes,” stop him or her and say something like...

“That's amazing. They stopped a huge crime wave in New York just by paying attention to the little things. And what the book pointed out was that we all have personal tipping points.” Ask for a volunteer to read the last paragraph about personal tipping points.

“In the table on your handout, there are some examples of personal tipping points” (read them). “Can anyone think of any other possible personal tipping points?” You can ask them to write in the right side of the table, if you wish, or you can write them on a dry erase board or flip chart.

Break them up into smaller groups. “Now, in your smaller groups, write down three things on the handout that could represent actions that could help you create a tipping point in one or more areas of your life. Talk to your group if you can’t think of anything. When you are finished, select one thing that you will commit to do over the next two weeks and underline it.”

“Within your group, have each person share the three actions they came up with and then the one thing they decided to do. Don’t forget to write your main tipping point on your note card.”
Debrief:

If there is time, you can have one person in each group record and share out each person’s tipping point to the larger group. If the entire group is small, each person could share the tipping point with the larger group.

After the tipping points have been shared, ask: “What are some of the things that many people had in common with their tipping points?” (It could have something to do with relationships, academics, etc.)

“Remember that, if you actually make a commitment over the next few weeks to repeatedly do the action that you identified, it could lead you to experience a positive tipping point. To help you do this, put your note card with your tipping point in a prominent place where you can see it each day.”

Don’t forget to debrief this exercise next time you meet by asking people if they are working on their tipping points.
“Finding My Tipping Point” Story

The “Tipping Point” is an idea developed by author Malcom Gladwell, who described it in a book by the same name. Gladwell found that if people kept doing the same positive things, no matter how small, the balance would eventually tip and the community would get better.

Example: New York City had experienced a terrible crime rate for years, and nothing the city did seemed to help. Finally, the mayor and the chief of police got together and decided it was not so much the big things, but the little things that could bring their city back to order. So, they said that they would constantly do the following things to try to turn the crime rate around:

- Ask owners of deserted buildings to repair broken windows immediately
- Paint over graffiti on buildings and subway cars, every day
- Clean up garbage and litter, every day.
- Cite lawbreakers for small infractions, including jumping over turnstiles to avoid paying subway tolls.

What they found was that taking care of the little things made people who were considering committing crimes (like robbery) think twice, as now they knew that this was a community where people cared and where laws were upheld—and this scared them off. By taking care of the little things, including citing people for small infractions, this eventually became the “tipping point” that led to big changes, and the crime wave ended.

Gladwell also points out that we all can have a “personal tipping point.” These are things each of us can do on our own, no matter how small, to become better friends, family members, scholars, athletes, citizens, etc. The exercise today involves choosing at least one of your personal tipping points, and practicing it for the next two weeks. Your personal tipping point can be in any area of your life. See examples below:
### Examples of Personal Tipping Points

| • Spend x amount of time on schoolwork each day | Other Examples: |
| • Smile at strangers | |
| • Find something positive to say about each person you talk to | |
| • Refrain from eating junk foods | |
| • Exercise x times per week | |

On the table below, write down three actions that you could do over the next two weeks to begin your personal tipping point. These actions don’t have to be in the same category.

Start with the phrase, “Over the next two weeks, I will...”

**Over the next two weeks, I will...**

1.

2.

3.

Now underline the one thing above that you will do over the next two weeks to begin to create your personal tipping point. You could also include the number of times per day or week, or the amount of time you will spend on the activity, etc.

Next, write the one activity you chose on the note card provided, and then put it in a prominent place where you can see it several times a day.

The next time the group meets, be prepared to share how many times you followed through with actions related to your personal tipping point, and what the outcome has been so far.
Identifying Health Services Research Activity

(Exercise)
(Extrapolated from TeenMentalHealth.org)

Purpose: This exercise helps students to identify and share community health resources. The purpose of this activity is to help you identify health resources and services and find the best one(s) for different needs and different people.

Time: Varies, as this can be a take home exercise.

Instructions:

Ask each student to identify one or more health resources or services in your community.

Answer the questions below either by checking out their website or speaking with them on the phone or in person.

Take/make a picture or video showing this health service or resource (photograph, drawing, screen shot, short video, etc.)

Questions:

1. What is the name of the health resource or service?

2. Where is this health resource or service located?
   - Street:
   - City:
   - Zip Code:
   - Phone:
   - Website:

3. What does this health resource or service provide? For example, information on a particular topic, certain support services, etc.

4. Who can use this health resource or service – men, women, children, youth?

5. Does this health resource or service cost anything? If so, what are typical costs?

6. What documents do you need to use this health resource or service? Driver’s license, insurance card, etc.
Process:

What is the process to use this health resource or service? Should you call ahead of time to make an appointment, or just drop in?

Is there a waiting list to use this health resource? If so, how long is it?

Personal Experience:

Do you know anyone who has used this health resource or service? If so, how was his or her experience?

Who, if anyone, would you recommend this health resource or service to?

What cautions, if any, would you give to someone who was considering this service?
**Piece of the Puzzle**

(From ResidentAssistant.com. A similar icebreaker was suggested in the basic curriculum, Module 1, Session 7)

**Purpose:** To build enthusiasm for being part of the group and to help them see that as a group they are greater than their individual parts.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:**
- A large white piece of poster board
- Colored markers and/or colored pencils
- A pair of scissors (for the facilitator to cut the poster board)

**Instructions:**

The facilitator should cut a puzzle out of poster paper ahead of time, creating one puzzle piece for each member of the group.

Have participants decorate their piece to represent who they are and what they feel they can contribute to the group. Ask them to not edit themselves, and to be creative.

Once participants are done, have them share what they have on their pieces. Participants should then assemble the puzzle.

**Debrief:**

After they put the puzzle together, comment that the power of the combined group can be amazing—that in fact, the definition of “synergy” is:

The interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements. (dictionary.com).

In this case, we can substitute “people” for “elements.” In other words, “The interaction of all of us combined is greater than the sum of us all, as individuals.”

Let them know that the final product could not be reached without a contribution from every piece of the puzzle (every member of the group).

Also point out that each person has different strengths and interests (as demonstrated on the puzzle), and that this is very helpful because some of them will be more interested and adept at certain tasks; this will help the group to be well-rounded.
Setting the Elephant Free

**Purpose:** This exercise helps students to work on their self-imposed limits. The goal is for them to realize that each of them has much more power and ability than they believe.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:**
- Handout: Elephant Story and Art Activity Instructions (artwork on page 52)
- Regular and colored pencils
- Flip chart or dry erase board (if you chose to make a list of false limits and strengths)

**Instructions:**

“This exercise is called ‘Setting the Elephant Free,’ and will help us to identify and overcome the ‘false limits’ we often give ourselves. The point of the exercise is that each of us is capable of much more. We can do much greater things in our lives if we look at what is limiting us.”

“Have you ever gone to a circus and seen the elephants? Have you ever wondered how they handle those giant animals? Let’s read the story of how the circus controls elephants on your handout.” Read the story of the elephant on the handout.

“What are some examples of things that people told or tell you that you can’t do?” Field responses and add your own perspective about yourself, especially if others don’t come up with anything right away.

“On the drawing of the elephant, you will identify the ropes or limitations people have put on you. You can write on the rope, or above and below it. Also identify your strengths, which are the things that will set your elephant—you power—free. You might want to put your strengths on the body or legs of the elephant. You can draw symbols or write words.”

“Above the mountains, on the horizon, draw the things that you would want for yourself if you had no limitations.”

“Make your drawing colorful. Again, use symbols or words. You have 15 minutes, and then we will share the drawings.”
Debrief:

While at the flip chart: “Let’s list some of the strengths that you have put on your elephant.” (Draw a column on the left side, and list them.)

“Great! Now how about the constraints and limits (the rope and stake) that the strengths are going to pull up and overcome?” (List them on the right side.)

“When you use your full strength, what does your future—your horizon—hold for you? What do you get? What did you put on your horizons?”

Again, you can also talk about your self-imposed limits or constraints, and your own horizons, but do so briefly, so that the focus remains on the students.

Next, lead a discussion of how to overcome the restraints that the students have identified. You may want to make a list of strategies that can be used to overcome restraints.

To end the exercise, you may want to ask each student to identify one thing he or she will do to help begin overcoming restraints. It’s best to identify one thing, instead of several, as they will have a better chance at implementing one specific strategy.
Setting the Elephant Free Activity

Elephant Story and Art Activity Instructions

The Story of the Elephant

If you’ve ever been around an elephant, you’ll know that they are one of the strongest and most powerful animals on earth. But do you know how they keep the elephants under control at a circus? When a baby elephant is born it weighs 400 lbs. Soon after it is born they put a rope on its foot and tie it to a stake driven into the ground. At first it pulls on the rope, trying to get away, but after a while it stops tugging, because it can’t pull the stake up.

As the elephant gets bigger, the people at the circus continue to use the same size rope and stake. Even though an elephant can grow to 30 times the size it was as a baby, when it gets older, it stops pulling on the rope because it doesn’t think it can break away. Can you imagine? A 12,000-pound elephant being held by a tiny rope! Well, we are all like that elephant. We all have false limits that we have put on ourselves—because long ago we were told that we couldn’t do what we wanted to do.

Art Activity Instructions

On the Elephant Picture:

“The rope and stake represent the things you’ve been told that hold you back, or tie you down. You can draw on it or write words that show the types of things that can hold you down. It could be ‘my brother told me that I would never...’ Or, ‘I felt I did poorly the first time I tried to read aloud in class...’”

“The elephant represents your strengths; draw or write out words. It could be that the legs represent some strength about the body, ears, trunk, or head. Think about what your strengths are. If you can’t think of any, ask people in your group or one of the mentors. You all have them!”

“The horizon on the drawing represents your future. On the horizon, draw what you want to have for yourself in your future. Remember the strength represented by the elephant is the power that gets you to your future.”
**Skyscraper**

**Purpose:** This activity is fun and very interactive, and it promotes teamwork and creativity. You can also focus on the theme of “leadership,” if you wish to do so.

**Time:** 50 minutes

**Materials:** For each team, give the same building materials, such as:
- Three or four small boxes (the same size and number for each team)
- Pencils and a legal pad for each group to design their structure
- Paper towel or wrapping paper tubes
- 20 popsicle sticks
- Eight straws
- A number of large rubber bands
- A roll of packing tape
- Four magazines
- Two rulers
- Five large envelopes

**Instructions:**
Divide the group into two or more equal teams and pass out the materials. Make sure to give everyone an equal chance to succeed by providing each team with the same amount of materials.

“This game is called ‘Sky Scraper.’ We are giving each group identical materials to build the highest structure possible. The team that builds the tallest skyscraper wins.”

“The thing you have to remember is that the structure needs to be self-supporting. It can’t lean against a wall, and you can’t hold it up. It has to remain standing by itself for seven seconds.”

“Each group will have 15 minutes to build the highest structure possible. But, before you start, I will give you five minutes to sit with your group and plan how you are going to do it.”

“In this ‘design phase,’ each team can use the time however they want. You can elect a leader, or not elect a leader. You can use the legal pad to plan your structure, or not. During this time you are not allowed to handle the materials. Anyone have questions? Okay, you have five minutes to talk about how you are going to create your structure.”

After five minutes... “Okay, go. You have 15 minutes to create your structure. I will give you a five minute warning, and then a two minute warning. If you want to, you can hold on to your structures until it’s time to test them to see if they are going to stay standing without any help.” After the warnings tell them to stop. They may hold on to their structures at this time.
Debrief

Start with the structure that appears the smallest, and have the participants let go of their structure. Then move to the next largest structure, until you have tested all of them. Then declare the winner.

Go back around and ask each group what they did in the design stage, and in the construction stage, and how they made their “engineering” decisions as they went along. You can also ask the question, “Looking back, what could you have done to make it taller?”

If you want to focus on the topic of “leadership,” you can ask questions such as: How were decisions made? Was everyone on the same page, and working in the same direction? Did you have a leader? How was the leader chosen, and why this person? Were they leaders by actions or by words? What are the qualities of people that work together well in teams?

If you want to give an award to each group you can also ask the group who made the most creative/artistic structure, the wildest looking structure, etc.

“Although this was just a fun exercise, it helps to talk about the qualities of leadership and how to best work in teams. In the workplace, at some point, it’s likely that you will work in teams, and teams need to learn how to work efficiently and get along together.”

“Anyone have any last thoughts or comments?”
**Trust Walk**

**Purpose:** This exercise is used to help students discuss and understand the concept of trust and the role that trust has in the mentoring relationship.

**Time:** 25 minutes

**Materials:** One blindfold for every two students; make sure the blindfolds are made with thick, dark material, so that vision is completely blacked out.

**Instructions:**

Tell the students that you are going to lead them through an exercise called the “trust walk,” and it is about developing trust. Point out that trust is extremely important in relationships, and that many believe that how we trust people also influences how we function in the world. If you can't or don't trust people, and you are afraid of everyone and everything, you won't be able to risk—and without risking, you won't get very far.

Ask students to pair up with someone they don't know very well. Have them choose one person to be blindfolded first. Make sure that when they are blindfolded, they can't see at all. Ask the other person (you can call this person “the leader”) to lead the blindfolded person around the room / school / parking lot, etc., in a safe manner. “Don't let them run into anything, and let them know if they are going to go up or down steps, encounter rough turf, etc., before they get there.” Remind leaders that they will have their turn at being blindfolded and led by their partner. Tell the pairs they have approximately five minutes, and let them begin the trust walk.

Before they begin walking, make sure that they are not near streets or any other dangerous areas.

After five or so minutes, have the students change roles. Let them go for five more minutes.
Debrief:

When time is up, bring them all back to the classroom or circle, and ask them to relate this experience. Questions may include:

- How safe did you feel? When, if ever, did you feel unsafe?
- Did your partner do anything to make you feel unsafe? How about safe?
- What does this exercise have to do with relationships?
- What types of things happen to people to make them not trust others?
- Is it okay to not trust others at times? (Answer: Yes, it helps us to survive)
- How do you think you would function in the world if you couldn’t trust anyone?
- How do you build trust in a relationship?
- If you led first, did the way your partner treated you when you were blindfolded affect the way you treated him or her when the roles were switched?
- Did knowing you would be blindfolded affect the way you led your partner, if you led first?
- Any other comments?
Part V: Standard Exercises
Introduction to Standard Exercises

Standard exercises are those that can be used more than one time in peer-to-peer sessions. For example, some programs might want to conduct “Good News/Bad News” (a sharing exercise) every time or almost every meeting.

Another example of a standard exercise is “One Big Thing,” which is a simple way for students to write down what they have learned after each session; this helps reinforce learning.

Additionally, “Jigsaw Puzzle” is an exercise that students can use to explore a variety of subjects while focusing on health and wellness worksheets.
Good News/Bad News

(A Standard Sharing Exercise)

**Purpose:** Good News/Bad News provides an opportunity for students to share both the good and not so good things that have occurred to them since the group last met. The good news gives them a chance to brag about themselves. The bad news can be a way for peers to receive empathy and support in the way of suggestions from other group members. This exercise can also be called “obstacles and victories,” “hurdles and successes,” or similar descriptors. This is termed a “standard” sharing exercise because it can be used during every or almost every group.

**Time:** Time varies greatly depending on the size of the group. Perhaps 5 minutes for very small groups and 25 minutes for large groups.

**Materials:** None

**Tips for Implementing Good News/Bad News:**

Using an exercise like this helps peers to open up and talk about what’s going on in their lives. In fact, if you are meeting and constantly focused only on “doing activities,” students might feel they do not have an opportunity to express their needs and concerns, along with their successes, and they can become frustrated.

You have the option of using this exercise more than once. In many peer group settings this exercise is done at each meeting. You might want to take the “temperature” from group members to see if they want to participate in group sharing each time you meet, every other time, or if they might want to wait until the actual group session to decide. If the group wants to wait until the actual group session to decide if they want to share, then facilitators will need to have an educational exercise at the ready.

As far as time needed, if groups are small (five or so students) then this exercise could easily be done each time the group meets. Also, if the group is large, facilitators have the option to break up into smaller groups, and this makes the sharing process go faster. Five to ten participants sharing in a group for a couple minutes each is doable, but if twenty people share, it might take the entire group time.

As far as breaking down into smaller sharing groups, for example, if you have fifteen people show up, you could divide into three groups of five and give each smaller group ten or twelve minutes to complete their sharing. Then you could come back together for other group activities.

If you do break down into smaller sharing groups, it is best to assign attendees to the same group each time, as this builds up trust.

If there is only one group facilitator, when breaking down into smaller groups, be sure that each group has a stable, responsible, and confident person who can help manage the group, should difficulties arise. When members describe problems or obstacles, the facilitator(s) should refrain from becoming immediate advice-givers. Instead, ask other group members what they would do if they were in that situation (this helps build a sense of teamwork).
As the facilitator, you should also share how your week went (your “Good News / Bad News,”) but don’t go deeply into your own issues, as you don’t want the group to focus on your deep personal life—the goal is to get the group members to share, not to give yourself the opportunity to receive therapy.

Never force group members to share. If they are shy when it comes to their turn you can skip them by saying, “That’s okay, if you want to jump in there later, please do.”

Some facilitators give a small stuffed animal or a ball to the first person who is facilitating the group, with the instructions, “After you share, look for someone who is raising their hand who wants to be the next to share. If no one raises their hand you can throw the object to anyone.” This makes the sharing a little more fun, and it can take the pressure off of those who are shy (having the sharing process progress around the circle until it comes to you can raise anxieties).

**Instructions:**

(This is an example of how to introduce this exercise the first time.)

“Today we are going to do a sharing exercise called ‘Good News/Bad News.’ Each day on TV or in the newspaper or online, we see both good news and bad, but this exercise is about our own good and bad news.”

Next, model the exercise by sharing your own good and bad news. For example, “My bad news is that I forgot to water a couple of my house plants, and now I don’t know if they are going to make it; they are looking really parched! I’ve got to do a better job when it comes to my plants. My good news is that I’ve been working out at the gym lately, and I really feel good.”

“Who wants to share next?” You can go around the circle sequentially, if you wish, or you can throw an object to the next person (as described above). As each person finishes, thank him or her for sharing. If you have a small group and enough time, ask members if they have questions or comments for the person who just shared, as this can inspire interaction.

If a group member has a specific difficult obstacle or life experience, empathize with them: “It sounds like you are going through a tough time.” Also, if appropriate, ask others in the group if they’ve ever been in a similar situation and what they would suggest. If they have good, healthy suggestions, affirm them. Example: “That sounds like a good possibility.” If they have not so good suggestions, you can say something like, “Well, Bob has the option of not paying his parking ticket, but what might happen?”
One Big Thing

(A Standard Sharing Exercise)

**Purpose:** “One Big Thing” can be considered a “standard exercise,” as it can be used each or most days when the peer-to-peer group is meeting. You may even use it in ongoing sessions, and then create an exercise near the last meeting called “One Biggest Thing.” At this time you would ask participants to review all of their weekly “One Big Thing,” sheets to come up with the biggest overall thing they’ve learned.

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Materials:** Copy of “One Big Thing”

**Instructions:**

“I’m now handing out a paper that we call One Big Thing. This is a way of helping you remember the main thing you learned today. Take some time to write down the one thing that you remember today that is important to you.”

“The reason to do this is that we often learn many things during a meeting or training, and sometimes they jumble together, so we don’t do anything about what we learned. You can walk out of a session with a hundred ideas, right? But, if you write down the one big thing, and action items where it says, ‘My plans for putting the one big thing into action,’ then you will be more likely to benefit from what you learned during any particular meeting.”

**Debrief**

If you have time, you could ask each person to share out the one big thing they learned. This sharing helps group members to see what was important to their cohorts.
One Big Thing I Learned Today (Handout)

My plans for putting the big thing I learned today into action:

What I will do:

By the following date:

_____________________

Signed,

_____________________

Part II: Tips for Running Effective Peer-to-Peer Groups
Head, Heart & Feet
(A standard exercise for debriefing)

Purpose: To provide a way for each student to talk about what he or she learned today.

Time: 8 minutes

Materials: “Head, Heart, and Feet” handout for each student.

Instructions:

At the end of an educational session of a peer group session, provide each participant with the Head, Heart, and Feet handout.

Ask group members to take three or so minutes to write down what they learned today, or what tickled their mind (head), what touched them (heart), and what they are going to do about it (feet).

If there is time, ask each person to take 30 seconds to share what they wrote down.
Jigsaw Puzzle

(A Standard Exercise)

**Purpose:** Provide a process where students can work together to increase their knowledge on a wellness theme of their group’s choice, and specific related topics.

**Materials:**
- Student Resource Guide informational materials, or other health and wellness informational materials, related to the topics the group selects.
- Puzzle piece worksheets (several provided here; see instructions below for creating your own)

**Time:** 30-45 minutes

**Instructions:**

Ahead of time: select a “puzzle” to put together or a set of related issues you would like to discuss (“relationships” or “stress,” for example). Then identify several topics related to that theme. These will be your “puzzle pieces,” which each group of students will develop before the entire class puts the puzzle together at the end (sharing out).

Assemble the puzzle piece worksheets you will need. Several are provided on the following pages, or you can choose your own theme and some related topics ahead of time (create your own worksheets for them). To do this, first identify the informational handouts you will provide to students on the relevant topics. Use these to develop the worksheet questions, so that you are sure the answers can be found in the materials students will have.

When the group is assembled, discuss the theme briefly, and then break students into groups of 3 to 7 people. Assign each group, or have them select, a topic/worksheet.

Assist youth to find information and handouts related to their topics from the Student Resource Guide, TeenMentalHealth.org website, “Transitions” booklet, or any other resource.

Have each group choose a recorder who will write down the points that they will want to share later with the larger group.

Instruct each group to go over the worksheet and to review the informational materials you have provided in order to answer as many questions as they can.

Ask for a volunteer group to share, reminding them that they are now experts on that piece of the mental health puzzle.

After all groups have shared, ask the group as a whole what has been learned about the general subject, or “puzzle” selected—what do the various pieces tell us when assembled? Try to end with several key points or strategies the group agrees will help them live healthier lives.
Diet/ Nutrition

1. What role do vitamins and minerals play in wellness?

2. Can you give some examples of some vitamin-rich foods and their benefits?

3. What are some mineral-rich foods and their functions?

4. What are some easy ways that you can think of to replenish your store of water-soluble vitamins on a daily basis?

5. With your group, brainstorm some foods that contain the necessary vitamins and minerals you should be eating on a daily basis. How can you incorporate them into your diet?
1. What are some healthy ways to have fun?

2. Imagine having a friend who only calls you to drink or do drugs. List some ways you can offer fun and safe alternatives to drug and alcohol use.

3. What are some more nutritious alternatives to soda pop that actually quench your thirst?

4. Think of five ways to make your lifestyle healthier.
Exercise

1. Share your favorite ways to exercise and list them below.

2. What is the link between exercise and emotional health?

3. What are the three elements of a balanced exercise routine and why are they important?

4. Can you think of some creative ways to both exercise and fulfill your social needs (ex. playing kickball at the park with friends)?

5. How can having a workout buddy be beneficial?

6. Why is stretching important and how does it contribute to flexibility?
Sleep

1. How is the circadian rhythm of adolescents different from adults and kids?

2. What are the benefits of getting enough sleep? What are the drawbacks of getting too much? And too little?

3. What is the link between sleep and emotions?

4. What are some ways to get a healthy sleep schedule?

5. In a group, imagine an ideal bedtime ritual. List the steps you would take to get to sleep, starting from one hour before your bedtime. Do you put on some calming music or hum a tune, brush your teeth, close the computer, and turn down the lights as you reflect on the day? How does this ideal ritual compare to what you are doing now?
Personal Hygiene

1. What are some of the functions of your skin, and why might it be a good idea to keep it clean?

2. What is hair made of and what are some of its functions?

3. List three ways to reduce germs in your household and on your body.

4. Why is dental hygiene an important part of daily wellness?

5. What role does sugar play in tooth decay?

6. What is the point of flossing?

7. Brainstorm what an ideal daily hygienic routine would look like: how many times do you brush your teeth, and when? Shower in the morning or at night? How often do you wash your hands, and when? Think to yourself about how this ideal routine compares to your current one. Is there room for improvement?
Accessing Medical Care

1. All foster youth in California have Medi-Cal health benefits. Who would you call to find out information about accessing your health benefits?

2. Can you list at least three other resources available to foster youth to help navigate the health care system?

3. List some of the different kinds of doctors and write next to their names some reasons why one would need to see them. It might be fun to try to do this starting with the ones least familiar to you.

4. List some health care related rights guaranteed to California foster youth.

5. Think about what it would look like step by step to recognize or identify an issue with your body/health and getting to the doctor for an examination. What information do you need to make an appointment? Who do you call? What steps should you take to prepare for this possible scenario in real life?
Sexuality and Sexual Health

1. Sexuality is a normal part of being human and should be enjoyed, but you should keep a few things in mind before you make a decision to engage. Can you list at least four good questions to ask yourself before you make the decision to engage in sex?

2. What is the difference between protections against STIs vs. protections against pregnancy? Can you name a method that guards against both?

3. What is the difference between sex and gender?

4. How does sexual orientation differ from gender identity?

5. Many people believe that sexual orientation—being lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or pansexual—is a choice. If you are or know people that are heterosexual, think about when you “made the choice” to be heterosexual. Does this make you think that sexual orientation is a choice?
Suicide and Self-Harm

1. What are some common problems that may lead to suicide?

2. What are some warning signs that a person is feeling suicidal?

3. What should you do or ask if you suspect you have a friend who is contemplating suicide?

4. What should you not do or tell your friend if they tell you they are thinking about killing themselves?

5. Using the handouts in your workbook, can you list at least three resources you and/or your suicidal friend could use to get information and access to immediate treatment?
Self-Worth and Self Esteem

[from “Transitions” handouts pg. 29-33]

1. What are some questions you can ask yourself to get a sense of your self-identity? Pick about five to think really closely about.

2. What is self-confidence?

3. What does a lack of self-confidence look like?

4. How is a lack of self-confidence developed?

5. List at least five tips on how to be a more realistic and self-confident person:

6. Communication is important for developing our social identities. What do you think is the difference between a passive, aggressive, and an assertive communicator? Which kind of communication style is important for developing and maintaining self-confidence?
Body Image

1. What is the difference between body image and self-esteem? Why are they important?

2. What factors influence your body image?

3. List some tips for improving body image:

4. What do the terms “fat phobia” and “thin privilege” mean? How do these concepts affect the way we perceive our bodies?

5. What can you do to help yourself or a friend dealing with issues related to body image? Can you list at least one resource you can use to get more information on treatment?
Relationships

1. Can you share some instances where your friends or significant others make you feel uncomfortable? Share some ways you can create healthy boundaries with them in these instances.

2. What are some things you can do to make new friends, and where would you go to meet people you're interested in befriending?

3. What are some things you probably shouldn't do when trying to make new friends?

4. There is a person that you find really annoying, and this person seems to really want to be your friend. Share some ways you can respectfully communicate your feelings.

5. What are some healthy ways to get over a break up?
Violence

1. Violence means more than just harmful physical interactions; it can mean harmful communication, also known as emotional abuse. Brainstorm some examples of emotional abuse and talk about why these things are considered violent.

2. What is the cycle of violence in abusive relationships? And what are some ways you can think of to stop this cycle?

3. What are some examples of self-violence? Think of some ways to use self-care to prevent self-violence. Is it possible to change these behaviors over time?

4. List at least three forms of violence.

5. Identify some signs of anger that might lead to violent behavior. How can you use this knowledge to de-escalate or remove yourself from potentially harmful situations?
Part VI: Group Projects
Introduction to Group Projects

One great way for youth to support and empower each other is to work together on a larger project that takes several sessions to complete. Projects can be aimed at furthering the growth and healing of group members, giving back to others, or advocacy and social change.

At the beginning of the peer-to-peer sessions, facilitators can ask group members if they would like to work together on a creative project over several sessions. Many students have been on the receiving end of services for many years. When foster care youth remain on the receiving end of services, especially as they become adults, it can damage their sense of self-worth. Working on a group project can therefore be very empowering, as this a great way to turn the tables so that they can find a way to give back to others.

Examples of group projects, with brief descriptions, are listed on the next page. You can also search the Internet for additional ideas by inserting the following terms into a search engine: “foster youth projects,” “foster youth advocacy groups,” “wellness projects,” etc.

A few of the projects suggested use technology to allow youth to tell their stories and achieve a common goal. Since these are more complicated, detailed strategies for implementing “Photovoice” and “digital story telling” can be found within this section. One caution for facilitators is that technology-based projects take a great deal of time and planning, along with considerable resources. If you are considering implementing such a project, make sure that you plan far ahead of time, and set a number of meeting dates that will give your students adequate time to complete the project.

Some materials for planning and implementing social action campaigns are also included here, and in the TIG Mental Health Guide to Action manual (http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/guidetoaction/Mental_Health_Guide_to_Action.pdf) by using your licensed login.

Tips for Developing Group Projects

Brainstorm project ideas before the first peer-to-peer session. You can canvass a few students prior to the first session to get an idea of their interests, or convene the youth to brainstorm and select a project themselves.

During the first or second group meeting, discuss options and try to agree on a specific project.

You might want to ask students if they want to choose “project leaders,” or if they want to rotate leadership. Some projects choose leaders to head specific tasks. Examples: resources, research, technology, editing, marketing, outreach, surveying, etc.

Brainstorm tasks and timelines that will help move the project along. Rather than assigning tasks randomly, have discussions to find each person’s preferences and strengths. Use the “Project Development Matrix” (found on the next page) to determine tasks and timelines.
Important: One challenge you are likely to encounter if you undertake a group project is that youth in foster care are not always able to follow through with commitments or attend group meetings consistently. So make sure you give careful thought to project expectations and discuss them with students, including time commitments the project will place upon them outside of class, if any. You may decide not to have them do too much on their own, or if you have a group that is motivated and able, then you might need to make some agreements about follow-through. One way to do this is to let students know that if they can’t make the next session, they need to call or email you before the next meeting to let you know how progress is going on assigned tasks. (This helps accountability, as students who don’t follow through on their task often decide to skip the next meeting.)

Set meeting times and frequencies that are conducive to project completion. Some of the more complex projects could require meeting weekly for a minimum of 10 weeks; others can be done in just a few sessions. In terms of each meeting’s length, consider longer group sessions, if necessary. Assess material and equipment needs for each project, and the ease or difficulty in obtaining them. Technology-based projects in particular may require special equipment and/or additional expertise; make sure that the needed resources are available before deciding to take such a project on.

For project-focused peer groups, it may be helpful to set aside a short time at the start each of each session for a check-in to see how they are doing; advocacy projects can bring old emotional wounds to the surface, so it’s good to have a way for students to process their thoughts and feelings in a safe place, and to receive empathetic support.

### Ideas for Group Projects

Below are some ideas for group projects. You will want to canvass students to see if they have additional ideas. The “notes” section below can be used during the group brainstorming process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize a Mental Health First Aid Training for Your Group or the Campus At Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design a Training for Practitioners to Work with Current or Former Foster Youth (using youth stories, perhaps)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publish a Book or Blog on Foster Care Youth Mental Health Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build a Map of the Local Resource Network for Foster Youth (services, informal networks, voluntary groups, financial resources, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess the Needs of and Resources Available to Local Homeless Foster Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build a Map of the Local Resource Network for Families and Caregivers of Foster Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborate with Your Local Chapter of the California Youth Connection on a Wellness-oriented Project</strong> (or work with others in your area to help develop a local chapter if needed)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a Peer Counseling Process &amp; Training for Your College</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Find Ways to Reduce the Stigma for Foster Youth to Receive Mental Health or Other Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plan and Implement a Political or Legislative Advocacy, or Social Action, Campaign for Foster Youth, or for Wellness or Mental Health</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Develop a Foster Youth Advisory Council</strong></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.fosterclub.com">http://www.fosterclub.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conduct Online Research on Foster Youth-Friendly Jobs and Job Internships</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Create a Guidebook to Help Other Foster Youth Navigate the Transition to Becoming an Adult</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Develop an Exhibit Combining Artwork, Stories and Poetry Created by Foster Youth (to raise public awareness or for intra-group sharing)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Media Awareness for Foster Youth-Experiences and Needs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Explore Foster Youth Educational Obstacles and Solutions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Create a Newsletter for Foster Youth</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Collect and Publish Stories of LGBTQ Foster Youth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identify Sites on the Web to Read and Submit Stories Written by Foster Youth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Our Stories</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Postcard messages</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Digital Storytelling</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Photovoice</strong></td>
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* Instructions provided within this manual
+ The TiGed Mental Health Guide to Action is helpful with this project; licensed URL: [http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/guidetoaction/Mental_Health_Guide_to_Action.pdf](http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/guidetoaction/Mental_Health_Guide_to_Action.pdf)
Sample Group Project Development Matrix

Consider using a development matrix to keep track of tasks and timelines.

Project Title / Description:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Person(s) Assigned</th>
<th>Target Completion Date</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
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**Time Capsule: Exercise**

**Purpose:** During this activity, each student will make a personal time capsule that will be opened at a later date. This will help students consider what might be important to them in a few years; the exercise also includes each student writing a letter to his or her future self.

**Time:** This can be done in a single 60-minute session, if you prepare students the week before to bring materials. Or you can spread it over two or three sessions: one to discuss objects that participants may want to include in their capsule, their thoughts about the future, etc.; a second session to make time capsules; and a third to bury or store them and debrief on the activity.

**Materials:** Time capsules: Purchase one or more types of “capsules.” Capsules can be created from small boxes (perhaps purchased at craft stores) airtight jars, large envelopes, etc.

**Instructions:**

Note: It’s best if you brief students during the prior session so that they can bring in some of the articles described below (or other articles). Also, you may want to make a time capsule for yourself.

Ask students if they know what a “time capsule” is (a container with artifacts, photographs, and messages to be opened in the future), and then explain that they will be making one for themselves.

Ask them if they have any small items that they want to bring in to put into the time capsule (inform them of the size of the boxes or other container they will be using, so that they will know how large their items can be).

**Ideas for items to bring in:**
- Photo of what you look like now
- Photo of your favorite technology (iPhone, computer, etc.)
- Favorite recipe
- Letter or note from family member or boyfriend/girlfriend
- School activity calendar
- Copy of class schedule
- Example of school writing assignment
- Receipt from a meal
- Favorite type of pen or pencil
- Something you made or won
- Cover from a favorite magazine
- Copy of a page or two from your journal
- List of five favorite movies, songs, or books
- An item or two from your backpack or purse
- Anything else that you want to bring that will fit into the container
The process of creating a time capsule is as follows:
1. Select a specific date when you will open the time capsule. Example: September 25, 2023. Write the date on the outside of the time capsule.
2. Put in the artifacts into your time capsule.
3. Write one or more letters to yourself (see #3, below).
4. Before they begin writing letters and putting things into their capsules, talk about security and confidentiality factors. Begin by asking how likely it would be for someone to find their time capsule and go though it. For students that don’t have confidence that their information will be secure, suggest that they limit putting in sensitive items.

Writing a letter to yourself - Tell youth you’d like them to write one or more letters to themselves. One can be public (if they care to read it to the rest of the group later), and one can be private (just for themselves). They also have the option of writing a single letter and then only reading some of the parts during the group sessions. Also, tell them that it’s not mandatory that they read any of their letters to the other students.

Some example topics could be to tell their future selves:
1. What you are currently involved with (school, work, relationships, etc.)
2. How you are feeling, in general: your mood, your attitude, and so forth
3. The biggest issue that has been bothering you
4. Your biggest joy
5. What you like to do for fun
6. Current news, events, or politics that have recently caught your attention
7. Your hopes and wishes surrounding jobs/career
8. Your hopes and wishes in the area of significant others, and having (or not having) children (or in having more children)
9. Words of encouragement to your future self
10. Anything else you want to say

Burying or storing time capsules

If your group plans to bury their time capsules together, you will have to consider carefully who will steward the process of unearthing them later and how you or someone will stay in touch with youth so they can recover them later.

Another options is for them to each burry their own capsule, perhaps on your campus with permission, and for each youth to create a treasure map they take with them, so they can find it on their own later.

Otherwise encourage participants to find a secure place to keep or bury their capsule on their own.
Debrief:

Remind group members that what’s said in the group stays in the group.

Ask for volunteers to share, and begin by asking them the date they have set for opening their time capsule.

Ask the individual who is sharing to show the other group members what they are putting in their time capsule, and why.

Ask him or her to read all or any part of the public letter.

After everyone has shared, you may want to sum up by noting any similarities about the items they put in, or commonalities about what they said in their letters.

Thank members for sharing!
Sharing Our Stories

**Purpose:** Developing a “Sharing Our Stories” project can serve many useful purposes. Stories can be told out loud, in writing, or through artwork.

Written stories and artwork from former foster youth can be used as:
- Venue for self-expression and the release of emotions
- A way for former foster youth to become aware that they have had common experiences
- Method for expressing their strengths, talents, and interests (not necessarily related to being a foster youth)
- Tool for advocacy—the results can be used in newspapers, newsletters, blogs, etc., and sent to policy makers

There are many other possibilities of how and where to use stories, and you can identify them by brainstorming with your students.

Utilizing artwork can be a great way for students who are not comfortable with their writing skills, or with artistic talent, to express themselves—and to get positive feedback from others.

**Time:** Designate several group sessions (perhaps two or three) to discuss the project and to debrief the work. Debriefing can include talking about their stories or artwork, and also deciding what to do, if anything, with their creations (see more on this topic in the instructions below). For this project, you will need to talk to the students and get a sense of their enthusiasm and how much time it might take to complete this activity, and then adjust the number of group sessions accordingly.

**Materials:** Ask students if they want to do art projects, writing projects, or a combination of the two.

**Writing projects:** For any students that want to write stories or poetry
- Paper to write on
- Printed (or online) examples of “foster youth stories” (see within the instructions, below).

**Art Projects:** For students interested in sculpture, drawing, painting, collage, etc.
- Make up a list of materials after asking them what medium(s) they want to use, and then bring it to the next group session.
Instructions:

In a session prior to beginning this project, ask students if they would be interested in telling their own stories. Suggest that there are many ways to tell a story, and make clear that they can each choose their own medium.

If they choose writing, provide them with samples of stories. One idea is to show them stories written by other foster youth. The following is an extremely helpful site: [http://www.layouth.com/stories-by-foster-youth-2/](http://www.layouth.com/stories-by-foster-youth-2/)

This site has many samples of foster youth stories, and they can be found under the following headings: the importance of support, abuse, mental health, family, group homes, emancipation, probation, homelessness, education, and adoption. You can provide students with the aforementioned examples of general topics, but also point out that they can write about any other topic. You might also ask them about topics they are interested in, and write a list on a whiteboard or flip chart as they respond.

For those who choose to do artwork, let them know that they can create something that expresses what it's been like to be a foster youth, or something people should know about their experience, but also point out that they can create something using any theme or concept.

Let students know that, if they wish to read their stories or show and describe their artwork to the rest of the class, they will have the opportunity to do so. Also make it clear that they don't have to read or talk about anything that makes them uncomfortable.

During the subsequent group meeting (after they are finished with their work), before asking for volunteers to read their stories, remind students to be supportive and non-critical, and to maintain confidentiality.

After each person has read his or her story, or shown artwork, if it seems appropriate to do so, ask the others for questions or comments.

As part of the debriefing process, find commonalities between the stories. Possible examples:

- Most of you experienced many of same things.
- Although you experienced many hurdles, it seems like you became stronger people from the experience.
- It looks like you all gained empathy and an understanding of others from your experiences.
- You all are the strong ones—the survivors.

You can also ask the group what they want to do with their stories and artwork, if anything. Possibilities include:

- For writing, submit pieces to the Facebook site mentioned earlier, or other blogs. For artwork, search the Internet for sites to post their work.
- Use them to educate service providers, such as social workers, case workers, counselors, or volunteer mentors.
- Use them to educate policy makers and other influential individuals, such as politicians and judges (this may be most effective if you have a large number of students creating stories and artwork).
- Integrate them into other projects, such as digital storytelling or Photovoice.
Three Technology-Based Group Projects

As described previously under the heading, “Tips for Developing Group Projects,” technology-based projects may take a long time to complete, and they may also require special equipment and/or additional expertise. Before you decide to take one of these projects on, you will need to make sure that you have your peer groups together for an adequate amount of time and that you are able to obtain the needed resources.

There may be other technology-based projects that are appropriate for peer groups, but the three that we were able to identify are:
1. Postcard messages (with various display alternatives)
2. Digital story telling
3. Photovoice

Postcard Messages

Given limited time constraints, a postcard project may be the most feasible technology-based project for peer groups. This is an idea that comes from the Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA), and their results can be found at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lT1EjQnCTuI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lT1EjQnCTuI)

Or, just search YouTube for the “Culture of Foster Care Postcard Video Slideshow.”

FCAA’s video slideshow is moving. They communicated with current and former foster youth to create and send postcards that summed up their experiences as foster youths (see their instructions below). Young people sent in images with captions such as: “I am a person, not a case,” “balancing act–can’t go home–can’t live here,” and “moving again–fit as much as you can into this box.” There were also a few positive postcards; for example: “foster care is not all bad.”

If you decide to give this project a try, you might want to do it during one to three peer group sessions. It might be a good idea to brainstorm with your group prior to the session that they will work on their postcards. This will give them time to think about what they want to say and illustrate, and they can also bring materials from home to use.

You can give them the same instructions that Foster Care Alumni of America gave to current and former foster youth:

Create your postcard out of any mailable material; to qualify as a postcard with the U.S. Postal Service, it must be rectangular, at least 3-1/2 inches high by 5 inches long by 0.007 inch thick, and no more than 4-1/4 inches high by 6 inches long by 0.016 inches thick.

Think about using one postcard per “message” or idea; if you want to share two or more messages, use multiple postcards.

Put your complete message and image on one side of your postcard.
Tips:
- Be brief—the fewer words used the better.
- Be legible—use big, clear and bold lettering.
- Be creative—let the postcard be your canvas.

If facilitators wish to do so, show your students the slideshow video of the postcard project from FCAA prior to asking them to work on their postcards. You could also wait until your project is finished if you don’t want your students to be influenced by postcards from other youth.

Materials:
- Pre-cut images from magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Pens, colored markers
- Construction paper (multiple colors)
- Supply of stickers
- Images or text from personal archives (or reproductions of these originals)

If your group is small, you might ask each person to complete three or so postcards. There is also the possibility that students could ask siblings or friends (who have experienced or are experiencing foster care) to complete and send cards to them for inclusion in this project.

Once postcards are completed, there are several options for using them to communicate their messages:
- Display them all together
- Scan the postcards and arrange the images into: 1) a slideshow that can be shown in person or posted online on YouTube, Vimeo, or similar sites; 2) a poster that can be printed or shared as an electronic file or PDF; or 3) a PowerPoint or similar presentation format that can be shared in person or posted online
- Scan and reprint them and use the reproductions to mail out to others (for support or to raise the issues relevant to foster care for the community or policy makers)

Using the Finished Postcard Project

Talk to your students and ask them how they think the finished product might be utilized. A few possibilities include:
- Within the peer groups as a way to identify common themes to discuss.
- Within the peer groups to help determine ways of advocating for and supporting current and former foster youth.
- During presentations that will help educate service providers (such as counselors and social workers) about the issues that current and former foster youth face.
- During presentations to educate policy makers and legislators and advocate for specific changes to the system.
Digital Storytelling

“Digital storytelling” is a relatively new term that describes the new practice of ordinary people using digital tools to tell their stories. Digital stories are presented in compelling and emotionally engaging formats and can be interactive.

One can define digital storytelling as the process by which diverse peoples share their life stories and creative imaginings with others. This newer form of storytelling emerged with the advent of accessible media production techniques, hardware, and software, including but not limited to digital cameras, digital voice recorders, iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, and Final Cut Express. These new technologies allow individuals to share their stories using Internet tools such as YouTube or Vimeo, podcasts, or using other electronic distribution systems.

One can think of digital storytelling as the modern extension of the ancient art of storytelling, now interwoven with digitized still and moving images and sound. Thanks to new media and digital technologies, individuals can approach storytelling from unique perspectives.

Simply put, digital stories are multimedia movies that combine photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often a narrative voice. Digital stories may be used as an expressive medium within the classroom to integrate subject matter with existing knowledge and skills from across the curriculum. Students can work individually or collaboratively to produce their own digital stories. Once completed, these stories are easily uploaded to the Internet and can be made available to an international audience, depending on the topic and purpose of the project. (Extrapolated from Wikipedia)

Instructions:

As you decide if your group should take on a digital storytelling project, canvass your students to find out:
- If they would like to participate in such a project
- What the goals of the project should be

You might want to discuss the following points before you begin (these points have been extrapolated from a section called “Outreach and Activism” from PrairieNet.org).

Note: When talking to your students for the first time about the possibility of engaging in a digital storytelling project, try showing them samples of finished products to help build enthusiasm. Search for examples on YouTube. You could also add the words “foster youth” to your search.

If you are creating a digital storytelling project for the purposes of community outreach and activism, the following questions may be helpful in narrowing your scope:

- Is the goal of the project to collect and distribute the stories or to equip the community with the resources to produce the stories? This answer can determine the entire approach to the project.

- What technology would you like to use? Depending on the primary goal of your project, choices for technology may vary.
How would you like to distribute stories created? If your goal is community outreach and activism, defining the approach to reaching target audiences will be helpful early in the project.

As a peer group facilitator, you may also want to go over the following points with your students. This piece, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is called “How to Create a Digital Story.” [http://courseweb.lis.illinois.edu/~jevogel2/lis506/howto.html](http://courseweb.lis.illinois.edu/~jevogel2/lis506/howto.html)

(Note: Although the process below seems to be focused on individuals, the steps can also be used if the digital story is done as a group)

Telling a digital story successfully depends on one’s ability to plan the process first. Compiled below are several step-by-step methods, website links, and article abstracts that will guide an individual through the digital storytelling process.

**Part One: Define, Collect, Decide**

1. Select a topic for your digital story.
2. Create a folder on the desktop where you can store the materials you find.
3. Search for image resources for your story, including: pictures, drawings, photographs, maps, charts, etc. Save these resources in your folder.
4. Try to locate audio resources such as music, speeches, interviews, and sound effects. Save these resources in your folder.
5. Try to find informational content, which might come from web sites, word-processed documents, or PowerPoint slides. Save these resources in your folder.
6. Begin thinking of the purpose of your story. Are you trying to inform, convince, provoke, question?

**Part Two: Select, Import, Create**

1. Select the images you would like to use for your digital story.
2. Select the audio.
3. Select the content and text.
4. Import images into Photo Story (Note: Photo Story is free software available for download and use on Windows XP computers from Microsoft. Mac software is available for purchase at [www.memoryminer.com](http://www.memoryminer.com), but there may also be other software available for Mac).
5. Import audio into Photo Story.
6. Modify number of images and/or image order, if necessary.

**Part Three: Decide, Write, Record, Finalize**

1. Decide on the purpose and point of view of your digital story.
2. Write a script that will be used as narration AND provides the purpose and point of view you have chosen.
3. Use a computer microphone and record the narration of your script.
4. Import the narration into Photo Story.
5. Finalize your digital story by saving it as a Windows Media Video (.wmv) file.
Part Four: Demonstrate, Evaluate, Replicate

1. Show your digital story to your colleagues.
2. Gather feedback about how the story could be improved, expanded, and used in your classroom.
3. Teach your colleagues how to create their own digital stories.
4. Congratulate yourself for a job well done!

The Internet has countless sites that describe the digital storytelling process. For example, another synopsis can be found at:  [http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/howto.html](http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/howto.html)

The same site above also has a detailed version of each of the six steps, plus links to additional resources.

1. Script development: write the story, often with a group called a story circle, to get feedback and story development ideas.
2. Record the author reading the story (audio recording and editing).
3. Capture and process the images to further illustrate the story (image scanning and editing).
4. Combine audio and images (and any additional video) onto a timeline and add music track (video editing).
5. Add background music, titles, transitions, and effects (optional).
6. Present or publish the finished version of story.

Resources

- “Enter Here: Personal Narrative and Digital Storytelling” by Sara B. Kajder provides an insightful first-hand account on creating a digital story and its processes. Kajder establishes the six steps of digital storytelling from her experience and the methods that were incorporated.

- “Eight Tips for Telling Your Story Digitally” by Brian Satterfield provides good tools and best practices. Some tips include respecting copyright laws as well as using free or low-cost software to create a digital story.

- “What’s Your Digital Story” by Dusti and Deanne Howell is an article that provides several broad suggestions to help get a digital story started by following the K.I.S.S principle (Keep It Simple to Survive).

- “Digital Storytelling: Creating an eStory by Dusti and Deanne Howell” provides a thorough how to guide for multiple software media. The book includes a step-by step methodology for the following software programs: Kid Pix Deluxe 3, Pinnacle Studio, Microsoft PowerPoint, Adobe Premiere, and Macromedia Flash. Each chapter contains an introduction to the software, materials needed, a look at the completed project, how to get started with a storyboard, building the project, adaptations and extensions, resources, and a glossary. Visual snapshots of the software screens are also incorporated into each chapter. Also provided are tips to creating a better digital story and a storyboard template.

Sounds:

- [http://www.freesound.org](http://www.freesound.org): Searchable sound effects site. The creator of each sound must be credited and a login is required (BristolStories has an account you can use).
Pictures:
- [www.sxc.hu](http://www.sxc.hu): Searchable photo download site. Restrictions apply to some images.
- [www.flickr.com/creativecommons/by-2.0](http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/by-2.0): A searchable selection of pictures from the Flickr site that can be used as long as the photographer is credited.
- [openphoto.net](http://openphoto.net): A selection of pictures than can be used as long as they are credited to the photographer and your story is licensed under the Creative Commons “Attribution–ShareAlike” license.

Music:
- [www.opsound.org](http://www.opsound.org): Wide range of music available for download and licensed under the Creative Commons “Attribution–ShareAlike” license.

Moving image:
- [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org): A collections of moving images, sounds, and still images, some of which are freely available for re-use. Check before downloading; if you cannot find any rights information, assume you do not have permission.
- [creativecommons.org/video](http://creativecommons.org/video): You can search for Creative Commons licensed moving image media from the Creative Commons site.
- [http://www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk): A collection of archive film material made available free by the British Film Institute for non-commercial use.

Maps:
- [http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk): Large UK map images from the Ordnance Survey maps showing county boundaries or just the outline. The images are for non-commercial use only and the Ordnance Survey must be credited.
- World map jpeg image: A basic line drawing of a world map. The size is 6264 x 4161 pixels, so it is suitable for cropping, coloring, and retouching. Right-click on the World Map link and save the file.

Software for digital storytelling:
- iMovie is included with Apple OS X; MovieMaker is included with Windows XP.
- Microsoft Photo Story is free for Windows XP and newer.
- InAlbum is a slideshow maker for older versions of Windows, available as a free or shareware version.
- Audacity is a sound editor with versions for Apple OS X, Windows, and Linux.
- Gimp is a free image editing program for Linux, Unix, Windows, and Apple computers.
- Upgrading QuickTime player to QuickTime Pro enables you to cut and paste different media files together and add Dolby surround sound. The current version of QuickTime is usually only available for newer Apple and Windows computers.
Useful documents for story makers and facilitators:

- **Bristol Stories** provides a legal listing on various websites that one can copy and use in a digital story such as music, images, pictures, software, and some useful resources relating to copyright issues and tips.
- Linda Joseph’s article “Digital Storytelling” supplies a brief description of several digital storytelling tools that include: Apple iMovie (Macintosh OS X), Audacity (Macintosh OS X and Windows), BubbleShare, Ken Burns PBS website, Microsoft Photo Story 3 (Windows), and Windows XP: Moviemaker 2.1 (Windows).
- An example of a storyboard can be found on the following page: [http://courseweb.lis.uiuc.edu/~nkaffe2/Samplestoryboard.htm](http://courseweb.lis.uiuc.edu/~nkaffe2/Samplestoryboard.htm)

Examples of Digital Stories:

- **YouTube**: “A Good Dad”
- **Silence Speaks**: This site is for abuse survivors to tell their stories.
- **Bramble Town**: Artist Brent Wood presents an online narrative that is like an animated, interactive comic strip. (Requires Flash plug-in.)
- “Rumpets for Reindeer”: An animated, magical tale of how Santa’s reindeer fly. A print version is available with four different Santa choices.
- “Two Days in Paris” by Craig Marion: some of the links don’t work but it’s a neat example of “low tech” storytelling.
- “Instrument of War”: The True Story of the Yuba City Draft Board Members by Stephen Mamber.
- **The Fray**: An online collection of digital stories created by a variety of people. The site is currently not accepting new stories, but the archives remain available.
Photovoice

Photovoice is a method mostly used in the field of community development, public health, and education, which traditionally combines photography with grassroots social action. Participants are asked to represent their community or point of view by taking photographs, discussing them together, developing narratives to go with their photos, and conducting outreach or other action.

It is often used among marginalized people, and is intended to give insight into how they conceptualize their circumstances and their hopes for the future. It can be used as a social action, and it can also simply be a valuable tool for foster youth to work together to share their individual stories and support each other’s healing.

As a form of community consultation, Photovoice attempts to bring the perspectives of those who “lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” into the policy-making process. (Above two paragraphs extrapolated from Wikipedia.)

Before You Begin: Time and Resource Considerations

The time needed for this type of project varies, depending on the scope decided upon. We suggest that groups meet a minimum of 10 times—but you should know that even 10 meetings may not be enough to complete a Photovoice project. Please note that you will need to carefully go over the requirements of a Photovoice project before deciding to take one on.

We provide brief instructions on developing a Photovoice project below, but before you begin make sure to scan one or more of the manuals (cited below). These will clarify the time and resources that are necessary, as well as more details about how to do an effective project.

Instructions (A Brief Overview)

Some of the basic steps to creating a Photovoice project include:

1. Gain the interest of participants. First check to see whether the youth in your group are interested in Photovoice. Try showing them samples of finished products, as this could help to build enthusiasm. Examples are found listed below, and more can be found by inputting “Photovoice” into YouTube’s search engine. You could also add the words “foster youth” to your search.

2. Recruit staff/volunteers. You might need to recruit volunteers that are experts on cameras and other technology used to put the piece together.

3. Plan the project with the group you’re working with. Decide on the theme of the project, goals, timeframes, and tasks.
4. Train participants, staff, and/or volunteers:
   • Technical training (camera operation, lighting, etc.)
   • Training in ethical and safe photography in various situations.
   • Group building training. Make sure that you provide emotional support to the group members, as they may have emotional reactions as they research and take photos.

5. Get out and take the pictures

6. Discuss/reflect/choose

7. Exhibit

8. Take personal or social action. Use the photo essays you have created to wage a campaign. This can involve personal healing projects for group members with support from the group, or social action projects to help raise awareness, change policies, etc. (Examples: contacting policy makers, making presentations, or contacting news agencies).

The above points were extrapolated in part from “The Community Toolbox,” [http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter3_section20_main.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter3_section20_main.aspx)

**Resources**

There are a great number of resources on the Internet that provide details on how to create a Photovoice project. A few of these resources are listed below:

**How to Develop a Photovoice Project**

- “The Photovoice Process” – this YouTube video provides an overview of the Photovoice process. In this example, youth came together to create a Photovoice community advocacy project.

**Photovoice Examples:**

- An example of a Photovoice project that focuses on wellbeing is: “Health in my Hometown – A Youth Photovoice Project”

- “Youth MOVE North Carolina is NOT Afraid”: This Photovoice project helps young people to share experiences dealing with mental and emotional struggles. Many of these youth came from unstable family situations.

For more examples of Photovoice, search on YouTube. You can also try search terms like “Photovoice foster youth,” “Photovoice wellness,” or “Photovoice mental health.”

**How-to Manuals on the Photovoice process:**

- “University of Michigan, School of Social Work Good Neighborhoods Technical Assistance Center (TAC) Photovoice Project Organizer & Facilitator Manual.” This comprehensive 76-page manual covers all areas including history, materials needed, and how to create and exhibit a Photovoice Project.
• “Manitoba’s Photovoice for Community Development Guide.” This 34-page manual provides clear details on a step-by-step process for planning and implementing a Photovoice project.

• “PHOTOVOICE: Social Change Through Photography.” Developed by the Center for Peace and Human Rights, this 24-page manual also discusses many details of how to make a successful Photovoice project.
Envisioning a Social Action
© Dustianne North, 2010

According to Tips for Youth Empowerment (TIPSYE), posted February 14, 2007, (http://tipsfaye.blogspot.com), planning of youth empowerment efforts revolves around five questions. Use these to envision your project.

1) THE WHAT:
This seeks to clarify the goal or the target to be accomplished. This is like determining the end from the beginning.

2) THE HOW:
This is a question of methodology. There may be a hundred ways of going about the same goal. Facing this question, you seek to choose the best option from all the alternatives open to you.

3) THE WHERE:
This is a location problem. Having decided on the approach to give your goal, you need to state the place(s) where they are to be carried out.

4) THE WHEN:
A plan is incomplete without a time tag. There must be a time fixture to the action steps you have outlined. Without this, progress will be difficult to measure.

5) THE WHEREWITHAL:
Reaching a set goal will require a lot of resources. The bigger the goal, the larger the resources you need for accomplishment. This aspect of your planning is where you sort for necessary finances or other resources that may be required.
Now determine sequenced action steps and tasks to carry out your project. Be sure to assign tasks to specific people, and to determine completion dates for each:

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Social Action Campaign Planning

If your group would like to plan and implement a social action or advocacy project, there are many ways to go about selecting an issue and strategy. It may arise from the group on its own through your discussions.

One way to approach this is to help youth reflect, first individually, then in pairs, and then as a group, on their empowerment needs and desires. The worksheet on the next page can help you do this.

Once several ideas have been suggested for a campaign, group members can vote on a project. One fun and constructive approach is “sticker voting.” Have all brainstormed ideas up on flip chart pages. Give youth stickers and allow them to vote for three ideas by placing stickers next to them. As a group, observe which ideas received multiple stickers. Can any ideas be combined into one? Are any compatible in tandem? This is a nice way to build consensus.

Once a project is selected, it is very important to plan it carefully. The following pages also contain a worksheet for planning and designing a campaign. Once again, you may also find the TiGed Mental Health Guide to Action manual (http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/guidetoaction/Mental_Health_Guide_to_Action.pdf) helpful in designing and implementing a social action project. This document covers the following topics: identify the problem, get a team together, set your objectives, determine roles and responsibilities, determine your needs, find a site, fundraising, promotion, and marketing.
Activity Question #1
Imagine what it is like when you feel powerful, confident, and masterful over your own life affairs. What situations in your life make you feel this way? Jot down a few notes or pictures.

Activity Question #2
Consider a situation in your life where you would like to feel more empowered. Jot down a few notes or draw a picture about what is and is not empowering about the situation. What would it be like if you were more empowered?

Activity Question #3
Consider those in the world who lack empowerment. Who would you like to see more empowered, and how so?

Activity Question #4
In pairs, share what you learned. Are there any overlaps or commonalities? What do you notice about the differences?

Question for the class:
What are some ways we could all work together as a class, or within the larger community of people raised or working in foster care, to empower ourselves and each other?