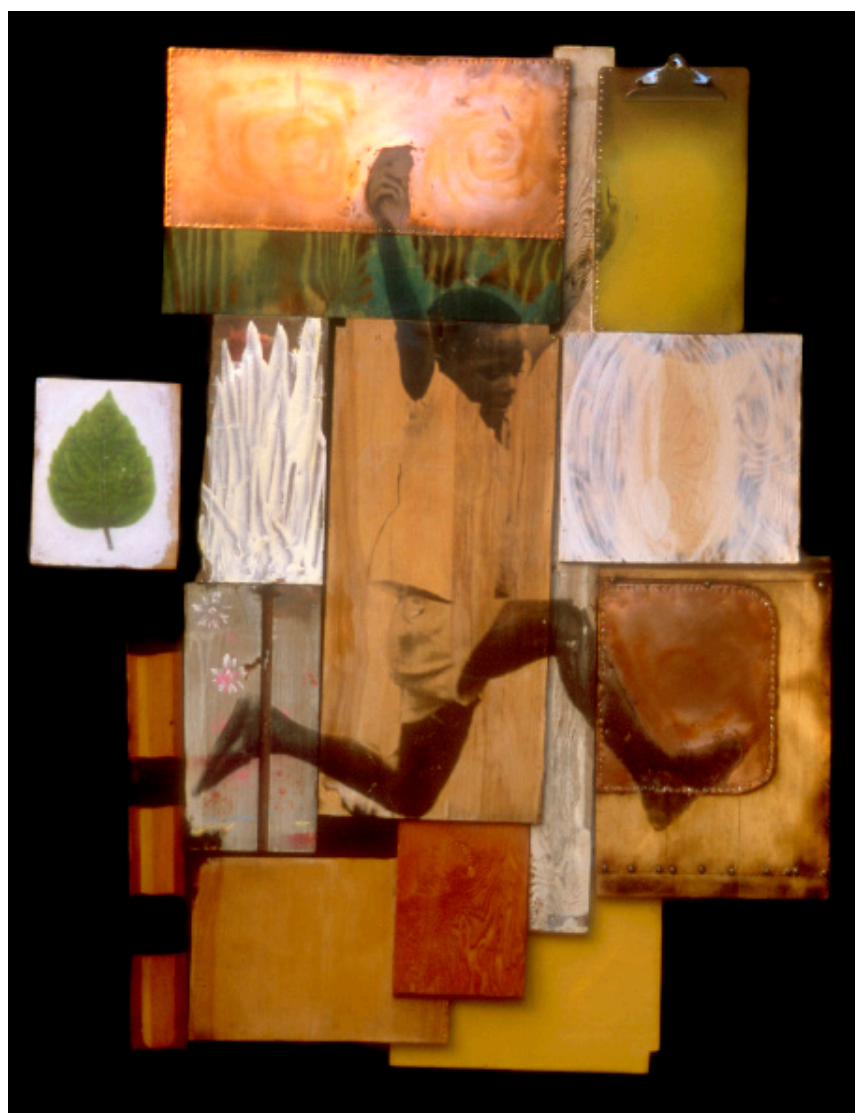


# FORWARD

A  
NEW  
WAY

HEALING WHAT'S HURTING BLACK AMERICA

Wellness Mentoring Circles for Young People  
THE GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS AND MENTORS



A National CARES Mentoring Movement Initiative

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The activities and framework for engaging young people that fill these pages are part of *The Rising: Elevating Education, Expectations and Self-Esteem* and are designed to shift consciousness and vision. They were created with youth development specialists, students, educators, mental health professionals and other subject-matter experts who are devoted to ensuring and advancing Black children. The pilot is presently in place at three greatly under-resourced schools: John M. Harlan Community Academy High School on the South Side of Chicago and Seagull Alternative High School and Whiddon-Rogers Education Center, two alternative schools on adjacent campuses in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This guide, and the programming for which it was created, is supported by generous grants from the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, a project of the Open Society Foundations, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.





ADINKRA SYMBOLS are visual representations of important concepts. Originally created by the Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa, they convey traditional wisdom and cultural mores and are often linked to folktales. They also serve a decorative function.



On many pages in this manual you will see an Adinkra symbol accompanied by a line of type. Example: **DWENNIMMEN**\*THE SYMBOL OF HUMILITY AND STRENGTH. The first word is the name of the Adinkra symbol and the words after the star are the meaning.

Symbols courtesy of ADINKRA.ORG

# FORWARD

A NEW WAY

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Wellness Mentoring Circles for Young People  
THE GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS AND MENTORS

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Wellness Mentoring Circles for Young People  
THE GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS AND MENTORS

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**HYE WON HYE**\*THE SYMBOL OF IMPERISHABILITY AND ENDURANCE; THAT WHICH DOES NOT BURN

## WHO WE ARE

**T**he National CARES Mentoring Movement is a community-led transformation movement dedicated to alleviating intergenerational poverty among African Americans. It offers Black children in low-income families and unstable communities the social, emotional and academic supports they need to unleash their potential and graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college or vocational-training programs and 21st-century careers. We employ two primary strategies in our work: (1) we recruit, train and deploy caring men and women to youth-serving organizations and schools desperate for Black volunteers to serve as mentors, reading buddies, role models and inspirers; and (2) in collaboration with our community-devoted partners, National CARES develops culturally rich, curriculum-based group mentoring initiatives designed to obliterate the crisis under-resourced Black children are facing and bolster the adults who mentor, teach and parent them.

Founded in 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as Essence CARES, National CARES is committed to ending in the now time the over-incarceration of our young and other painful predictables for Black children trapped in poverty, under-resourced schools and troubled communities. Before we began this work, there was no national infrastructure in place within the Black community to engage our desperately needed men and women who would volunteer to help secure our children by mentoring them. Operating in nearly 60 U.S. cities and led by dedicated community leaders—themselves volunteers—National CARES is determined to ensure that all Black children needing guidance and role models are surrounded by a circle of caring adults who are committed to giving an hour or two a week of their time as mentors.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

By asha bandele

**T**hank you for answering our call. Thank you for creating space in your heart, spirit and schedule to help undergird our young, so many of whom are struggling along the margins in stressed families and unstable communities that are unable to protect and guide them. *The Rising: Elevating Expectations, Education and Self-Esteem* is a national demonstration by CARES of what is possible when caring, committed adults knit ourselves together in support of our children. We maintain, and history bears out, that even the most challenged young lives can be transformed.

Becoming part of our innovative group mentoring initiative means that you are becoming part of The Beloved Community, the belief forwarded by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that all of us, including “the least of these,” can and should share in the wealth of the earth.

The original version of this guide is used to facilitate Wellness Mentoring Circles (WMCs or Circles) for adults across the country. As with this iteration, it is based on the CARES overarching philosophy outlined in our manual *A New Way Forward: Healing What’s Hurting Black America*. *A New Way Forward* captured the wisdom of our Braintrust, which consists of more than 60 of the finest minds in the fields of medicine, advocacy, the arts, wellness, economics, history, spirituality and the media. Our Braintrust demonstrated that in order to heal our children, we must first heal ourselves and, to that end, identified 10 distinct areas of focus that serve as the basis for the manual’s chapters. Each section of this guide contains uniquely developed, audience-appropriate activities that correspond to those chapters. Before you begin facilitating or mentoring within each WMC, we ask that you read and absorb the corresponding chapter in the manual. This will ensure your understanding of what our Braintrust offered and, accordingly, why the curriculum contained here was developed as it was.

In preparation for each session, please read the corresponding chapter in the manual and, if appropriate and needed, reread relevant sections. The activities we have included are intended to open students’ hearts to deep caring about themselves and others, help them understand and value their rich heritage and develop critical-thinking skills. Wellness Mentoring Circles offer young people a safe place for introspection and sharing and the inspiration and tools needed for transformation and successful living.

Our selection of the schools we are working in was based on the support of engaged local CARES Affiliate leaders, principals and staff willing to work with us and the challenges the students are facing. We recognized an opportunity to demonstrate the power of collective investment across the



city and nation—and an opportunity to provide programming that will reverse the trend toward death and mass incarceration of our young people.

In adapting this work for young people, we created a multitiered process. Students will be seated in single-gender Circles comprised of about six participants to allow for the greatest amount of safety in speaking their truths. Each Circle will benefit from your facilitation as caring leaders and mentors trained to reinforce the skills learned in the Circle. The Circles you will be working with will meet in the classroom for a period of 50 minutes once per week. Mentors will also provide their personal perspective, which will resonate with the young people in a variety of ways. It is important for you to see the Circles as part of a larger program that includes all-school assemblies, the themes of which will set the tone for the work in the Circles that month. While your commitment and support are central to helping the students transform their thinking and believe deeply in their brilliance and capacity, there will be an extensive support network in the community sustaining the youngsters even beyond the walls of the classroom.

*The Rising* emerged from the crises we were alerted to in two Fort Lauderdale alternative schools—Seagull, which has 300 teen mothers, and Whiddon-Rogers, which has 1,400 students, most of them males who have been in juvenile detention. In 2011, without funding, the remarkable women and men of South Florida CARES began offering consciousness-changing group mentoring support to students at both schools. *The Rising* at Chicago's Harlan High was first believed in and generously supported by the Open Society Foundations Campaign for Black Male Achievement. Shawn Dove, the campaign's director, said never before had he seen a school-wide effort whose goal it was to speak to and elevate the whole person. To that extent, our goal is to support the academic growth of Harlan's nearly 1,000 students, almost half of whom are our boys; the program is also designed to undergird students spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. Additional investment by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in our *Rising* programs has made funding available to South Florida CARES for the first time. With added local support from Opportunities Industrialization Center, our leaders in South Florida are expanding and changing lives in nine challenged schools.

For too long, we have asked young people to enter our school grounds focused, even though just outside the doors the streets have become killing fields. We have wanted them alert when many are hungry, or we have fed them, even in schools, food that dulled the mind. We have wanted them to excel even as the investment in education is nowhere near our investment in incarceration. *The Rising* is being piloted to override these challenges.



## A NEW WAY FORWARD: HEALING WHAT'S HURTING BLACK AMERICA

"Children have never been very good at listening to elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."  
— James Baldwin

**T**his is about our collective humanity and soul. This is about the big business of Black America. About knitting ourselves together with love, honoring our heritage, ensuring high-quality education for our children and encouraging African American achievement and entrepreneurship. This is the only way to peace, power and prosperity for Black communities and the nation.

Thank you and bless you for stepping forward, for your interest in giving the gift of promise to our children. The transformational pilot that you are helping to build will be refined and replicated throughout the nation to ensure millions of fragile young lives. Although the schools we are working in today are greatly under-resourced and, consequently, challenged institutions, they are fortunate to have powerful leaders who are already making great improvements. *The Rising* is designed to support visionary principals who simply need greater resources and support to make their schools top-tier learning environments. This is what all children deserve—and what Black children must have in order to grow into self-sufficient, caring and confident adults and put an end to intergenerational poverty. Blessings will pour into your life for embarking on this journey.

PHOTO: DWIGHTCARTER.COM

*A New Way Forward: Healing What's Hurting Black America* is a community transformational pilot that was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, U.S. Department of Education and Fannie Mae and is the guiding framework for all CARES programs. It was initially created as a mentor

training manual to instill in us adults the principles and practices that lead to personal wellness, inner peace, prosperity and mutual love. A meticulous and comprehensive racial healing curriculum, it was developed by a Braintrust of more than 60 of the finest minds in the academic, wellness and advocacy fields. It is designed to heal the incalculable damage done to the psyche and soul of African Americans over the centuries of enslavement, racial hatred and institutionalized Jim Crow practices. Though we have withstood and somehow survived these horrors, the wounds continue to live within us. They've been passed down through the generations but are rarely discussed or even acknowledged. The *A New Way Forward* manual was brought to life in 2010 as a training launched in Oakland and led by our Oakland Bay Area CARES affiliate. Our work is guided by a philosophy that our Braintrust elder Harry Belafonte so aptly put into words when he said, "We will never be able to fix what most affects our children until we fix what most affects us."

The National CARES Mentoring Movement is dedicated to securing and advancing our young by opening paths to healing, self-love and total well-being—not just for our children, but also for the parents, teachers and mentors who care for them. Our calling and our vision are tremendous, and as we link arms and aims with you and succeed the benefits to our children and community, along with your rewards, will prove immeasurable.

### **Wellness Mentoring Circles: Their History and Purpose**

Circles are single-gender intimate gatherings led by you—trained facilitators and a support team of mentors—that offer consistency and a safe place for sharing, understanding and resolution. The model offers participants methods to help manage life's stressors and identify and deconstruct emotional blocks that lead to self-wounding choices. The healing Circles are culture-comfortable, with shared language, customs, spiritual beliefs, histories and humor facilitating easy communication and trust.

Please begin this journey with us by taking the time to read the manual *A New Way Forward: Healing What's Hurting Black America*, so you will become deeply familiar with its restorative principles and practices. The content provides urgent, life-changing, life-saving information to strengthen those of us who want to let go of our fears, heal any wounds to our psyche and soul and work in unity with other beautiful Black people to secure our children and repair the village.

Immediately following the publication of the manual, *A New Way Forward* pilot trainings were launched in Oakland, a city that a large number of African American activists call home. The trainings and original incarnation of the facilitator's guide were designed for use with adults. They provided the community of caring men and women—the high and the humble who gathered—with strategies for de-stressing, fortifying wellness and building healthy relationships and intergenerational wealth, so that from a place of peace and wholeness we would commit to affirming and advancing our challenged young.

We learned from the 900-plus men and women who participated in the Oakland trainings that stress and feelings of overwhelm were the forces diverting their energy away from critically needed engagement in the lives of our struggling children and community. And our evaluators, led by Dr. Linda James Meyers, a professor at Ohio State University, found that more than any other element of the weekend-long trainings, it was the single-gender Circles that participants experienced as most help-

ful and needed. In those safe spaces, we adult mentors shared our challenges and triumphs, supported one another and built trust and solidarity as we learned to manage life's complexities and undergird our children. Given the strategies and opportunity to utilize our innate ability to solve any personal challenge—no matter how painful or shameful it may be—we develop the patience and compassion that fosters healing, forgiveness and forward movement in others as well.

The sessions were so popular that, after the launch weekend and follow-up trainings, Wellness Mentoring Circles were born in 2011 and are ongoing for mentors in Oakland and now 12 other cities. Many CARES Affiliate leaders throughout the nation are excited to launch Wellness Mentoring Circles in their communities. We only need to raise funds to expand this restorative work. Through interactive activities and the strategic use of videos, critical readings and lectures, as well as the time-tested healing protocol of just listening with an open heart, Circles have successfully supported and retained both women and men whose reach has extended far beyond their apparent numbers. In Oakland, for example, working with fewer than 20 mostly male CARES-recruited mentors, our partner Peacemakers Inc., led by Hank Roberts, successfully changed the academic and social culture of Castlemont High School. It was testimonies like Hank's—and the repeated asks of young people to be heard—that encouraged us to create a curriculum that spoke directly to our children, some of whom are managing stressors that would be daunting to any adult.

For *The Rising* program in schools, which we will replicate throughout the nation once it is refined and proven effective, our curriculum writers and trainers have incorporated the empowering elements of *A New Way Forward* into the Wellness Mentoring Circles designed for youngsters. You are helping to write a new history for our children and community. For that, our gratitude to you is without bounds.



**ADINKRAHENE** × THE SYMBOL FOR STRENGTH OF PURPOSE  
CHIEF OF ADINKRA SYMBOLS



# A VISION FOR HEALING OUR YOUNG

By Dereca Blackmon

**A**s a young child growing up in Detroit, my family, like so many others, was profoundly affected by a culture of poverty, addiction and violence. Like many of my peers, my life experiences might have continued to be punctuated by these painful and ultimately deleterious factors. But I had a saving grace in the spirit and love of countless family members, teachers and community leaders who believed in me and showed me the way to the road less traveled.

They were, in every way, mentors to me, and they allowed me to emerge from my environment strengthened rather than broken. For nearly 20 years, I have developed workshops, programs and organizations that serve as powerful agents of change in the lives of our children. Along the way, I have been deeply impacted by the passion, creativity and dedication of a growing cadre of leaders throughout the nation who are dedicated to reclaiming our young. The guide you are holding is borne of years of planning, visioning, evaluating and field testing by some of the brightest minds in our community. But through it all, able brothers and sisters like you are the ones we imagined stepping forward, the ones whose hearts and souls we hoped would be dedicated to standing in the gap for our children. You are the ones needed to answer the call to heal the wounded children of our village and help secure the bright future of the next generation.

Finally, at National CARES we believe that group mentoring is the most effective and powerful way to secure the multitudes of our children and reverse the crippling effects of centuries of discrimination and internalized oppression. It is a creative way of reaching the many, rather than the few, and more, it demonstrates to our young that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Just as churches or sports teams shift the way whole groups think, believe and behave, so too does group mentoring. As students interact in positive and productive ways, remarkable things begin to occur between them and the adults who mentor them. They learn to trust one another, inspire one another and draw upon the wisdom innate in every soul. With mutual love and respect rising, the often hostile world surrounding Black children loses its power and The Beloved Community grows.

Think of this guide as a road map for you and your students.



# ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL WELLNESS MENTORING CIRCLE

Wellness Mentoring Circles are single-gender gatherings and should be seen and experienced as the safe harbor young people are longing for. They must be places absent of harsh judgment and blame; places that offer listening hearts, guidance and support. Here are five signs that your Circle is spinning the way it should be.

**1 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TALKING.** Too often as adults we are eager to share our wisdom and advice with young people without giving them opportunities to discover their own insights and develop their critical-thinking skills. We have been entrenched in a didactic model of education where the adult is the teacher and the students are learners. In the Circles, we practice an integrated model of education where we are all teachers and learners. Give young people space to surprise you and they usually will.

**2 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CELEBRATED.** While there are many valid critiques of youth culture, we should approach our children as assets to our communities, rather than as problems. Focusing on generational differences sends subtle signals to young people that they are unfit or unwell. Instead, our role is to teach critical thinking skills that invite youngsters to harness their brilliance and intellect in service to themselves and their communities.

**3 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED.** Circle facilitators use a variety of teaching modalities to engage different learning styles. Whether it's film clips, interactive games or writing poetry and personal essays, the measure of our success is in our ability to engage the students we are trying to reach. Be flexible with your agenda. If something is not working be prepared to change course.

**4 YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFE.** Tragically, safety is not something our children take for granted. Verbal and physical violence have become far too commonplace in our schools, homes and communities. As facilitators and mentors, we model new ways of being together. Take time to establish and regularly review group agreements. Explain and use creative examples to demonstrate why mutual respect is key to joy and success. The more patiently and thoughtfully guidelines on how you will be together are established, the fewer disruptions there will be. Most important is that we adults model the respectful behaviors that are a part of our tradition and that we want our children to witness and adopt. Young people know when the rules are being enforced unfairly, so it's critical to not show any favoritism, participate in put-downs or shaming or become aggressive and threatening if any problems do arise. Every challenge can be seen and worked with as a teachable moment. This is the import of having supportive wellness professionals facilitating Circles in addition to caring men and women mentors.

**5 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE BEING THEMSELVES.** Remember what it was like when you were a teenager? Some adults made you feel loved and supported; some made you feel small. Rather than admonishing young people for behavior that is likely developmentally appropriate, see how you might integrate youthful exuberance into the day's lesson. Ask questions to engage students who are distracted or disruptive. Find a helping job for someone who is craving extra attention. Call on someone who seems accustomed to being ignored. Successful youth engagement takes time, but the trust you build with your Circle will pay off enormously in its long-term success.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLNESS MENTORING CIRCLE COVENANTS

Circle covenants, or community agreements, are formed by simply asking students to answer the following question: "What are the values that should consistently ground our interactions with one another?" The WMCs are where students will develop new ways of being with themselves and interacting with others. It is where they will discover our inescapable connectedness, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. prescribed. Being a member of a Circle is an opportunity to create a microcosm of the kind of world we would like to live in.

It's important to arrive at the first meeting with some time-tested agreements in place. CARES suggests starting with the ones below. As you meet and get to connect with one another, you, the students and other adult leaders may add agreements that make sense for your Circle. Put the agreements on paper and review them aloud. Answer any questions about them and, in the spirit of collaboration and community building, encourage input from students, mentors and the teacher if he/she is in the room.

- 1. COMMITTED LISTENING** – Ask students to be fully available to support each other by putting away distractions such as cell phones. Keep in mind, however, that young people are highly accustomed to multitasking, and research shows that some students are more engaged when their hands are busy. Provide colored pencils or markers for those who need kinetic stimulation to activate their learning. And utilize the effective tool of the Ago / Ame call and response from the Twi language of West Africa. When your hand is raised and you say "Ago," it means "May I have your attention?" Students answer by saying "Ame," or "You have my attention," and raise their hands as a signal and agreement to become silent immediately and stop all activity. This is best used when simply asking for young people's attention is not enough to quiet a room.
- 2. NO PUT-DOWNS** – Make a conscious effort to erase the common school culture of bullying and the intimidation of those who speak out or are different. Take time to demonstrate why diverse opinions are valuable. Ensure that the adults in the room never resort to put-downs when enforcing agreements.
- 3. USE "I" STATEMENTS** – Remind students of the importance of not blaming or demeaning others and speaking in the first person (e.g., "I think..." "I see it this way..." or "I believe it would work better if..."), especially when they disagree with someone or about an activity.
- 4. STEP UP, STEP BACK** – Invite students to pay attention to their participation in the Circle. Encourage those who speak less by asking, "Can I hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet?"
- 5. RIGHT TO PASS** – No one should be forced to participate. We are teaching young people to be empowered, independent thinkers and that their "No" is just as important as their "Yes." Facilitators and mentors may be unaware of the issues many students are contending with on any given day. If you have any concerns about a student's coping ability, speak with the youngster privately about his participation and discuss with your lead trainer how we can offer additional support options and services to the student and perhaps his/her family as well. There are many available support services that people in communities are simply not aware of.



**6. CONFIDENTIALITY** – Confidentiality is essential to creating a safe space in which students can speak candidly. Invite students to share a time when their confidence was violated and ask them to consider the impact it had on them. Remind them that confidentiality includes not discussing anyone's sharing—even with the speaker—outside of Circle time unless the speaker brings up the topic. Let the youngsters know that just because a person shared that he or she has suffered abuse does not give them permission to bring it up at lunch or elsewhere.

**7. ESTABLISH CONSEQUENCES** – Agreements need consequences. Teens are developmentally at a stage where testing boundaries is a natural part of their process. Agree beforehand what the consequences are for breaking these covenants and it will be easier to enforce them when the need arises. A writing assignment about trust is a good way to make a person more thoughtful. Try not to exclude anyone from participating in this healing work, and emphasize the importance of understanding and forgiveness.





DWENNIMMEN\*THE SYMBOL OF HUMILITY AND STRENGTH

# THE OPENING SESSIONS

“Let the Circle be Unbroken...” —*Inspirational hymn*

Your first Circle session establishes the tone for your time together with the young people in your community. After these first two weeks, if you haven’t already, please be sure to read the chapters in the manual that correspond to the chapters in this guide. Chapters are not sequenced in the manual as they are here, but they lay out the framework we used to develop Circle activities.

By bringing a sense of reverence to your opening ritual you will convey the significance of the journey and give the students in your Circle the feelings of belonging and community they are yearning for. It is here that you should establish the guiding principles of the Circle and create the initial sense of safety and welcome. This is where you begin to get buy-in from students who may be uncomfortable with—and unaccustomed to—talking about themselves, their challenges and what they truly feel or dream. Share yourself during this opening session. Model the openness and vulnerability we are asking of students and explain our interdependence as people and as a community. Explain why the saying “I am because you are” has profound meaning in a world that isolates us through false images, video games and virtual interactions that are no substitute for truly engaging and being with one another.

The facilitator and mentors should introduce themselves and *The Rising* pilot. Remember, too, that young people don’t care what you know until they know that you care. Model committed listening. Young people are often talked about but rarely spoken with, gently and lovingly. This process will provide many opportunities for you to share your knowledge and leadership abilities, but today is about establishing a safe space where our young people know they will be respected, listened to and cared for by a strong circle of adults who are committed to their success.

## AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS – The facilitator should take the lead in welcoming everyone, introducing herself/himself and thanking all for joining the Circle. Share why you were called to become a WMC facilitator and ask each mentor to do the same about his or her commitment to volunteering. Invite students to quickly introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the WMC and how the Circle will function.

FIRST ACTIVITY

SECOND ACTIVITY

CLOSE

## WEEK ONE: FIRST ACTIVITY

- **Name of Activity:** Establishing Circle/Group Covenants
- **Materials Needed:** A white board and marker, the Circle Agreements handout and chairs arranged in several small single-gender circles
- **Length of Activity:** 20 minutes

**Description of Activity:** In order for the groups to work well, it is important that people feel comfortable with one another and feel free to share themselves without fear of being disrespected or embarrassed. To that end, please start by establishing agreements—a group covenant—that guide how everyone will interact and be treated. We've included a list of basic covenants or agreements as a starting point, but remain receptive to other ideas the students may offer that will keep them feeling safe and open. (Please report any additions to your *Rising* leader so we can document it for our pilot and replication in other cities.) Everyone present, including adults, should sign the agreements, as should any students or mentors who join at another time. The facilitator should make it a practice to ask before each session if anyone present has not seen and signed a covenant.

**Explain the importance of creating a Circle based on trust and respect.** A mentor should volunteer to be the note taker and write any suggestions that arise on the board. Start the discussion by sharing your own experiences in creating a safe space in the community. Hand out the Wellness Mentoring Circle/Group Covenants and review each of the agreements. Invite students to take turns reading them aloud. Remember to discuss the “right to pass,” giving students the freedom to choose not to share and “step up, step back” to make room for the quieter voices to emerge in the Circle. Explain that some people take more time to figure out what they need to say, or how they want to convey their feelings. Ask Circle participants about their understanding of confidentiality and their willingness to uphold it and clarify how the group can share without divulging confidential information and ensure a trustworthy space for everyone. Talk about what will happen if confidentiality is broken. How will we acknowledge and repair trust? Let the group decide this together, with the facilitator or a mentor guiding the discussion.

Be sure to ask participants to suggest any additional agreements—and be sure to capture their meaning and not just their words. Demonstrate caring and committed listening through your facilitation of this introductory group process by giving your full attention to each speaker and repeating what you heard to ensure accuracy for the note taker. Finally, underscore the importance of the Circle and the idea that we are a continuum. Emphasize that our interactions are not about what's right or wrong or listening to one leader; we are here to support and sustain one another without beginning or end—like a circle itself.

**Reminder:** Convey your mandatory reporting responsibility as a caring adult and WMC facilitator and mentor as reviewed in our ongoing training sessions. Be sure to clarify any points of concern that may arise, and ask if there are further questions before moving forward to group discussion.

Thank everyone for participating. Read through the list and collect the signed covenants.

### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To facilitate an open group discussion about creating a safe space for self-discovery and giving and receiving support for authentic participation

## WEEK ONE: SECOND ACTIVITY

- **Name of Activity:** LISTEN, DON'T LISTEN
- **Materials Needed:** None
- **Length of Activity:** 30 minutes

**Description of Activity:** You will need eight volunteers to model the exercise. Four people will serve as speakers, while the remaining four will act as listeners. Break your group of eight into couples—dyads—and ask the first set of volunteers to sit opposite each other.

Instruct the speakers to talk to their partners for two minutes about a subject of their choosing. Privately instruct all speakers and listeners before the exercise begins.

Instruct the first “listener” to agree with the speaker so vigorously that his or her “Amens” and “That’s rights” drown out the speaker.

Ask the next listener to argue and disagree throughout the dialogue.

Have the third dyad demonstrate distracted listening, with the listener texting or participating in some other activity even as he or she claims to be fully present.

The final pair should demonstrate committed listening, with the listener nodding appropriately and perhaps asking a well-timed and non-intrusive question.

Ask the group to break into twos and replicate the four ways to listen that have just been demonstrated for them.

### Guided Group Discussion Questions

- What did participants notice and feel while they were role-playing?
- What did those who were watching feel?
- What kind of listener does each person believe he or she is?

#### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To demonstrate the importance and process of committed listening and contrast it with less empowering responses for the purpose of establishing a supportive and strong Circle environment

# THE OPENING SESSIONS: WEEK TWO

## AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** GETTING TO KNOW YOU
- **Materials Needed:** Paper and pens
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To help students,  
mentors and facilitators  
get to know  
one another

**Description of Activity:** Establishing trust is key in ensuring that the Circles work well and provide the emotional undergirding students need and deserve. As the weeks go on and trust is built, you will see the students go ever deeper as they and the adults around them take off their masks and enjoy revealing themselves to one another—and also to themselves. But for this first Getting to Know You exercise, a lighter approach is the best way to ensure that our youngsters feel safe in establishing these new relationships.

In this fun-filled activity, encourage students to share amusing facts about themselves with one another. Mentors and facilitators should model the exercise first. One mentor might share with another, as the class listens in, three quirks that most people are unaware of. For example:

**Every morning I sing really loudly while I get dressed.  
I still have my first stuffed animal.  
I rip up photos when I don't like the way I look in the picture.**

After both people have shared light-hearted facts about themselves, they will then introduce their partner to the rest of the room:

**This is Jabari, and he sleeps with his first stuffed animal, sings out loud every morning while getting dressed and throws away photos if he doesn't look fly in them.**

Ask students to pair off, interview one another and write down the fun facts—which may seem silly but open us up to revealing ourselves and connecting to one another.

After everyone has had about 10 minutes to do interviews, each student should introduce his or her partner to the group using the fun facts that were shared.

### Guided Group Discussion Questions

- What commonalities did you find between yourself and others?
- How did you feel doing this exercise? Do you feel more relaxed?
- When you learn things about people that are silly or fun, does that make you feel more comfortable with them?



NSOROMMA\*THE SYMBOL OF GUARDIANSHIP

# MENTORING

“...the truth is, if there ain’t no hope for the youth, then there ain’t no hope for the future” — *Tupac Amaru Shakur*

The National CARES Mentoring Movement helps to provide Black children in under-resourced communities and their peers with able, stable, consistent adults who can support and nurture their dreams and aspirations. The following sessions go right to the heart of the work we do. After grounding students—and yourself—with the opening sessions, the “mentoring” begins, because what we know is true is that when the community is well, children are mentored and guided and even adults are supported and advised by our elders and others. This truth has been disrupted for many of our young, which is why we are doing this work—so that our children will have what they need and deserve to navigate a difficult and evolving world. The next two weeks’ activities ask students to consider what success means. We’ll close with the deeply emotional and impactful activity “Who Are You,” which asks young people to shed the masks we’ve all been taught to wear and, instead, honor who they truly are. This opens the way to self-discovery and self-efficacy—which is the goal of mentoring.

## MENTORING WEEK ONE

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

• **Name of Activity:** YOU’RE A SUCCESS!  
EMBRACE IT!

• **Materials Needed:** Successful You handouts, a video player, projector, speakers and screen on which to play the video; CARES labeled notebooks

• **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Begin watching the provided clip from the movie *The Pursuit of Happiness*, where Will Smith’s character Chris sees a man parking a luxury car. (We will provide you with a capsule of the backstory.) Chris introduces himself and secures an opportunity for an interview at

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**

To help students  
create a clear vision  
of success

a brokerage firm, which we then see him show up for. After you and the students have watched the clip, begin a discussion emphasizing these points:

- Success is a process that involves both preparation and resilience.
- Preparation is defined as developing one's skills and talents.
- Resilience is the ability to pursue your goals despite adversity.
- You will succeed when: preparation + resilience meet opportunity.

Pass out notebooks to students and let them know that everything they document is for their eyes only—unless they choose to share it. Ask them to list what success would look like for them in one column and what it would take to achieve that success in another column. Encourage them to consider preparation and resilience as they think through what it would take. Using a show of hands, ask the students to define the term resilience (strength, resistance to trauma, toughness in the face of challenges) to ensure that they are clear about the word's meaning.

After 10 minutes, begin your guided discussion about the film and the meaning of success:

### **Guided Group Discussion Questions**

1. How does seeing the luxury car impact Chris?
2. What do you think Chris believes about himself?
3. How do the men in the board room respond to Chris?
4. Is Chris a success?
5. Who do you consider to be successful? Why?
6. What would success look like for you? Why?

Finally, please tell the students that the notebook is theirs to keep, update and change. Encourage them to draw and write their dreams and goals in it as lists, poems, words and raps. Every two weeks or each month, they should review what they've written and ask themselves: Have they moved toward their goals? If so, great! Ask students how their mentors can help them to keep moving in the right direction. If they haven't been moving toward their goals, ask how mentors might help them to change course, where the challenges are and what else *The Rising* program might offer them that would be helpful. This is why we are here. Encourage student feedback throughout the program and share it with the leader of *The Rising* and the National CARES team, so we can make adjustments and changes that ensure engagement, efficacy and success of this pilot that you are helping us to create for replication throughout the nation.

## MENTORING WEEK TWO

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

JOURNAL PROMPT

CLOSE

#### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To encourage students  
to think more deeply about  
how they are seen  
and how they  
see themselves

- **Name of Activity:** WHO ARE YOU?
- **Materials Needed:** List of questions to be posed by the facilitator, a watch or timer and video of married couple Marcia and Michael Eric Dyson, previously screened for facilitators
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** For this exercise to work its magic, it is best to model it with another adult first. Young people will likely feel safer opening up if you have done so too. Tell students that for this activity a partner will be required and ask them to select one they'll find it easy to be honest with. Remind them that sometimes it is easier to be honest with a stranger than someone who knows them well, but let them choose their own partners. If students do not find a partner, gently assign them one. (You will be encouraged to mix them up in later sessions, but it is important to build trust in small steps).

Finally, explain that we are doing this exercise because mentoring—truly being able to support someone—is most effective and life-giving when we are our truest selves. When we present a false version of ourselves, we add additional stress to our lives and do not receive the help or support we both need and deserve.

Once the students are in pairs ask them to consider the meaning of both of these questions:

1. Who do people say you are?
2. Who do you pretend to be? (Note: young people often have a hard time admitting that they pretend to be anything other than who they are. Encourage them to think hard about the times when they have pretended.)

Instruct Partner A to listen—*just listen*—to each answer provided by Partner B. Partner A students are not to give any feedback or make comments. Without replying to their partner's responses, they are to repeat the same question over and over again, until you call time. (Give them two minutes per round of questioning.) Then, instruct the students to switch, so that the B partners ask the A partners the same question.

During the exercise facilitators and mentors should walk around and check on the pairs. Encourage them to participate fully and engage in intentional listening. (Remind them of the committed listening exercise.)



### Guided Group Discussion Questions

- How was the experience of asking?
- How was the experience of answering?
- What was most difficult part of this exercise?
- Did you find out anything new about yourself?

**Journal Prompt:** Ask students to go home and think about what supports they truly need to be their most successful selves—not just successful in school, but to feel happy and at peace in their spirit. Ask them to write a list of those supports—such as reliable and trustworthy friends or help with managing stress and feelings of sadness or anger—and to consider sharing it with a mentor, facilitator or other caring adult from *The Risings*.



SANKOFA\*THE SYMBOL OF LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO FIX THE FUTURE

## HERITAGE

“If you don’t understand yourself, you don’t understand anyone else”  
—Nikki Giovanni

The lack of historically balanced and culturally competent education, coupled with the onslaught of vulgar media images have left most of our young—indeed many of us—languishing in a place where we reject and even hate the very essence of who we are. On schoolyards across the nation we still hear, “Eeew, she so *Black*.” On television, we are inundated with images of babies with swollen bellies traumatized by war, but not of the beauty and balance of Ghana or Senegal—and surely not of the foreign manipulations and the funding of a few that create the torture and pain of the many.

The Black Power Movement of the 1960s and ’70s saw us embrace our legacy as one that stretched back to the beginning of our stories and was filled with more triumph than trauma. We learned of great societies that were matrilineal, that prized education, that honored the young as hope and promise. *Our history did not begin with slavery*, as has often been taught to young people. It is important to remind ourselves and our children every day that we are more than our worst experience. We are more than our greatest pain. We are a multi-faced and multifaceted collection of survivors and builders and dreamers and artists and thinkers and change-makers. And peacemakers. The exercises and discussions in this session mean to demonstrate these basic truths.

### HERITAGE WEEK ONE

#### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

FIRST ACTIVITY

SECOND ACTIVITY

JOURNAL PROMPT

CLOSE

#### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To help students understand  
and honor their  
cultural heritage through ritual

- **Name of Activity:** LIBATION
- **Materials Needed:** A plant, water pitcher and container for overflow
- **Length of Activity:** 20 minutes

**Description of Activity:** Pouring libation is an ancient tradition, a walk of remembrance, a way to say that we are neither the first nor alone. It has survived the Middle Passage and chattel slavery. It has survived Jim Crow and mass incarceration. Every time we pour out water—or beer—on the ground for a fallen friend, we are pouring libation. When we call their names in our music: libation! In this exercise, which can be used to open each assembly or during moments of note, we are living and being in the best traditions and practices of our ancestors.

With this ritual we do not grieve. Rather we remember, hold on to, honor and are edified by those who are no longer with us. We recall all that their lives gave us, and as we reflect on our own actions, those whom we've lost live again.

Take constructive care in explaining libation to students and why we do the ritual. Explain that in African philosophical thought, when we call the names of our ancestors we acknowledge that we stand on their shoulders; that we are rivers with sources; and that as we are here, so too are they because they live within us. We are all standing on the shoulders of those who have come before us. We honor ancestors and invite their wisdom and guidance. Acknowledge that the ritual, although ceremonial, is not religious, but cultural and affirms the value of living in community.

After each name is called, pour a small amount of water into the plant and invite the students to say with you, "Ashe." Ashe is a Yoruba word that means "and so it is" or "Amen." Begin with names from our collective memory and history, from Africa through the current day: Nelson Mandela, Shaka Zulu, Nanny of the Maroons, Harriet Tubman, Fred Hampton, Bob Marley, Tupac. Consider saying a word or two about each. For example:

**For transforming a nation and a world and never allowing his spirit to be imprisoned,  
we remember Nelson Mandela (Ashe!)**

**For courage and selfness and leading her people through the dark underground into  
freedom, we remember Harriet Tubman (Ashe!)**

Remember the lives of local young people and young people in our world whom we lost too soon, like Derrion Albert and Trayvon Martin. For example:

**And we remember the lights that had barely begun to burn, lights turned out too soon.  
We call your names:**

**Trayvon Martin  
Derrion Albert  
(Ashe!)**

### **Guided Group Discussion Questions**

- Who are your ancestors?
- How do you keep the memory of your loved ones alive?
- How did it feel to remember those who are no longer with us?
- Were there names or words you did not recognize?
- Where can you learn more about your heritage?

SECOND ACTIVITY OF THE WEEK

- **Name of Activity:** WHAT IS TRUE ABOUT US?
- **Materials Needed:** Paper and pens
- **Length of Activity:** 30 minutes

**Description of Activity:** The facilitator gives students a piece of paper and asks them to consider what strengths and powers they carry within their DNA. For example, you might begin by saying:

*In my DNA, there is the memory of the great empires built by our ancestors in our Motherland, Africa and also the memory of slavery in the South. These DNA memories were passed down to my mother (one of 13 from a loving family) and were joined with those of my father, a proud and ambitious boy whose Ashanti ancestors were enslaved on the island of Jamaica. He left Jamaica for Chicago to “make his fortune.” They met, married and struggled mightily together, which led to my courage and unwillingness to give up on a dream and my unconditional love for our people.*

GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To acknowledge and experience our connection to our history and the best traditions of our foreparents

Guided Group Discussion Questions

•What practices continue to be strong within our communities as a result of our shared heritage? (An example might be greeting Black people who are strangers as friends with a head nod and smile.)

**Close:** Students offer a line of gratitude for someone, living or dead, who has helped guide them in their lives or through a difficult time.

**Journal Prompt:** Ask students to go home and write in whatever form—paragraphs, poems, raps—about a person from their lives or from history who is no longer here, but whom they would like to spend one hour with and why.

HERITAGE WEEK TWO

AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To help students discern the insidiousness of internalized oppression

- **Name of Activity:** THE MYTH OF BLACK INFERIORITY

• **Materials Needed:** The video clip montage that includes scenes from Tom Burrell’s Resolution Project, *Bamboozled*, *School Daze*, Chris Rock’s *Good Hair*, the Boogie Down Productions music video

“Why Is That” and the YouTube video “The Africa You Never See on TV,” as well as the full clip from the Black Doll / White Doll experiment.

● **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Take students through the video clip montage, pausing after each clip for discussion. Your questions should help them reflect more deeply on what they have seen in the clip.

### **Guided Group Discussion Questions**

- Who is beautiful?
- How does the media shape our ideas about beauty?
- What is good hair?
- Why did the children say the Black doll was bad?
- Is light skin better than dark skin? Why?
- How do businesses make money perpetuating negative ideas and images about us?
- Why do we feel bad about ourselves and what is internalized oppression?
- Why do we talk about other people?
- How do we contribute to our own oppression?
- What images do you see in the media of Africa? Of Africans?
- Why don't you see the millions of people who vacation there? Businesses? Shopping Malls? Downtowns? Resorts?

**Closing:** Leave a graphic caricature from *Bamboozled* or another clip from the video up on the screen. Have students stand and repeat the following affirmation as call and response with the group leader: “This is not the truth about me. My Black is beautiful. My Black is beautiful. I am beautiful. Just the way I am. My hair is beautiful. My skin is beautiful. My people are beautiful. My heritage is beautiful. I love being me. I LOVE being me.”

Make sure to replace the clip with a more beautiful and powerful image as students raise their voices.



NYAME NTI\*THE SYMBOL OF FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD

## SPIRITUALITY

“My hope for my children must be that they respond to the still, small voice of God in their own hearts.” —*Andrew Young*

**S**pirituality is not religion. It is the understanding that we are bigger than what we appear to be, that we are connected to the Creator of life more than we or anyone can see.

This session is designed to help students understand that they are loved and protected by the Creator of life and to connect with that power, which resides in all of us. Here, we will link some of the customs of our heritage with worldwide practices of ritual and meditation, as part of a method we will refer to as “centering.” Our activities for this session will engage students in exploring the power of thought and openly discussing personal beliefs about how it operates in the unseen world. We intentionally selected spirituality as the launch to the second half of the curriculum and will use the idea of honoring our highest self as the basis for the work going forward. Once we invite our students to open the door to their own spirit, we can be assured that they will begin to blossom as expected and in ways we are working toward.

Explain that, for Black people, to divorce ourselves from our spiritual nature is to become disconnected from our essence. While we are limited in what can be said in classrooms about a specific religion, we can and must invite our students to reflect on how to activate the positive force of the Creator in their lives. Nothing can uplift the human experience more than a personal relationship with the Divine. Whether we encourage them to see the Majestic in nature all around them, become comfortable with silence or practice honoring their elders and ancestors, we must bless our students with the gift of introspection and opportunities for contemplation and stillness. They must become aware that the Divine lives in them as well.

In these activities, your aim as facilitators and mentors is to hold a safe space for everyone’s emerging self-awareness. The most helpful position is as guides pointing students to their own center of truth. Practice committed and compassionate listening. Our purpose is not to represent a particular faith or practice, but to simply open the way for students to find their own path and purpose and hear the calling of their own hearts. A useful tool for staying in the present moment and holding a conscious, safe space is to ask unobtrusive questions. It is important that students feel free to voice their questions and share their experiences without being confronted by the opinions of others. Your role in the Circle includes reminding the group to allow for all voices to be heard and every experience to be honored.

Facilitators and mentors are strongly encouraged to share their own spiritual practices and testimonies to bring a heightened awareness to this session.

## SPIRITUALITY WEEK ONE

### AGENDA

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

#### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To introduce students  
to the practice  
of centering

● **Name of Activity:** INTRODUCTION TO CENTERING

● **Materials Needed:** None

● **Length of Activity:** 15 minutes for pre-discussion, five minutes for the activity, 25 minutes for post-discussion

**Description of Activity:** Share with students this quote by Dr. Kofi Kondwani from the *A New Way Forward* manual: "Over time you will train your mind to remain peaceful and calm no matter what is happening around you." Elicit their responses to the passage and share moments when you yourself found calm in a place of chaos. Discuss how finding that sense of calm helped you.

Invite the students to remove everything from their hands and desks, turn off their cell phones and put them away and to get comfortable and still in their chair. Remind them that while meditation is a part of many faiths, centering is a habit used in everything from performing arts to Olympic competition. Lead the students through a five-minute practice of a simple meditation technique called Consciously Resting Meditation (CRM) using the instructions from page 29 of the *A New Way Forward* manual. After the meditation, invite students to remain in silence and to journal about their experience.

#### Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. Can the mind be trained? How do we train the mind?
2. Are you uncomfortable or comfortable being by yourself? Being still? Being quiet?
3. Do you ever completely unplug? Do you sleep with the television on? Music? Do you keep your phone by your bed?
4. How do you feel when you are out in nature? In a wooded park or forest? On the water? In a garden?
5. Have you ever been in a dangerous or confusing situation and experienced a sudden calmness? How would you describe that feeling? Is that a place you can consciously choose to go to in your mind when a challenging situation arises?

## SPIRITUALITY WEEK TWO

### AGENDA

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

JOURNAL PROMPT

CLOSE

● **Name of Activity:** WHAT ARE MY VALUES?

● **Materials Needed:** Values Cards (printed, cut and sorted into a stack of 20 for each student) and desk/table or floor space where students may work and view each other's work.

● **Length of Activity:** 20 minutes for the activity, 35 minutes for discussion

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**

To encourage students  
to reflect on  
their core values

**Description of Activity:** Young people rarely get the opportunity to reflect on their core values. The media, their peers and well-meaning adults consistently bombard them with messages and advice about which direction their lives should take. This exercise invites them to identify for themselves what is most important.

Distribute a stack of Values Cards to each student. Each card contains a different key word that may be meaningful to the student, such as "creativity," "adventure," or "achievement." Direct the students to sort the cards into two piles—values that are most important to them and values that are less important or not important at all. Let them know that they'll have just five minutes for the task; the short amount of time will inject a sense of urgency into the activity and force students to get engaged quickly.

Once the five minutes are up tell them to look through their top 10 values, pick the five that best represent them and lay them out on their workspace. Give them a little more time for this phase of the activity. Some students may ask for definitions of the words, but unless they are unfamiliar with a term, redirect the question and invite them to decide for themselves what they mean. This exercise is about their own understanding and definitions. Students may also ask if they can write in a value not listed. If so, invite them to write in values as they see fit. Other students may ask if they are supposed to pick values they believe in or values they practice. All of these questions are an important part of the activity—encourage them to pick values they believe in, but remember to come back to this contradiction in the group discussion.

Once they have selected five core values, ask them to put them in order of importance to them. Have the students walk around the room and silently observe their classmates' choices. Invite them to notice the differences and similarities. Ask them to return to their own workspace and select one value that is most important to them. Go around the room and ask students to share their value by saying, "My name is Jabari, and my most important value is ..."

**Guided Group Discussion Questions**

1. Was it easy or difficult to pick your values? (Ask for a show of hands.)
2. What values were easiest for you to eliminate?
3. What values were hardest for you to eliminate?
4. What similarities and differences did you notice as you walked around the room?
5. Why did you pick your top value?
6. Are there any values that you want to practice, but are not really living up to? Why?

**Journal Prompt:** Invite students to write in their journals—in whatever form they chose—about a value they want to create or strengthen in themselves and the steps and time frame that they will take to do it.



## SPIRITUALITY WEEK THREE

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

#### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To foster reflection  
on the power of the mind  
and spirit

- **Name of Activity:** HEAVY, HEAVY/LIGHT, LIGHT EXPERIMENT
- **Materials Needed:** A chair with no arms, five responsible student volunteers
- **Length of Activity:** 10 minutes for the experiment, 15 minutes for discussion

**Description of Activity:** Because this activity involves direct contact between students, it is vitally important to monitor all actions closely and ensure the safety of the subject throughout the activity. Your discretion is key.

Pick a student of average or above-average size to be lifted and four responsible student volunteers who will work together to lift the subject. Do not select a small student or the activity will not be as effective.

Direct the subject to sit in the designated chair. Position student volunteers around the subject while extending two fingers under each of the subject's arms and knees. Volunteers then clasp their free hands together and try to lift the student, which they will find very difficult to do. After this first attempt, share with the students the power of thought and how changes in thinking can alter the results of the experiment. Tell them thoughts are energy and just by changing your ideas you can change what happens. Explain how sharing thoughts or ideas can influence the belief of others if they accept the thought as true.

Next, ask students to each place one hand over the seated student's head and think of how heavy the person is. Direct them to repeat the word "heavy" in unison. Ask them to lift the student again and note the ease or difficulty of this attempt. Then, the volunteers are to imagine the student being very light and as easy to lift as a feather. Ask them to repeat the word "light" in unison. Direct them to lift the student again. The results are often remarkable as the student is lifted much higher than in previous attempts! Ask the participants to share how the exercise felt to them. Ask the group to share their feelings about what they witnessed. To what do they attribute the difficulty and the ease of lifting the person? After listening to their responses ask them to have a seat in the Circle and move into the guided questions for the discussion.

#### Guided Group Discussion Questions

Lead the group in this discussion with the understanding that common beliefs are not universal truths. Remind students that faith is a very powerful concept. The success of this conversation weighs on your leadership and ability to demonstrate respect for different opinions and beliefs. Students can be swift to perceive bias and we should not assume that everyone shares the same beliefs or even knows what they believe yet. Encourage students to share freely and to listen with curiosity.

## SPIRITUALITY

1. Do you have faith? If so, in what?
2. How would you describe your relationship to your faith?
3. What do you do when you are sad, confused and don't know where to turn?



DENKYEM\*THE SYMBOL OF ADAPTABILITY

## STRESS

“Give yourself to yourself before you give yourself to the world.”

—*Susan L. Taylor*

One of the most important aspects of mentoring is having compassion for young people who are handling levels of stress in their daily lives that we adults, too, would find overwhelming. From the fear of injury or death lurking in many of their neighborhoods and homes, to the loss of loved ones, from the intense peer pressure that all teens face, to the push to succeed academically with too few supports, our under-resourced children are carrying far too much.

In these sessions, the goal is to offer young people key resources to help them understand and manage stress. The sense of safety and support you are creating within your Circles will positively impact students—many of whom are longing for a listening ear. Now is the time to introduce them to formal and informal mechanisms that will support their journey to emotional wellness and psychological freedom. We begin by exploring the powerful tools of mindfulness and forgiveness.

Explain to the young people in your Circle that we live in a world of injustices—a world in which some people have caused others such pain and destruction that forgiveness seems unimaginable. Indeed, many of us are angry about what happened not just yesterday, but decades ago. But anger leaves a cloud over your head that travels with you. It turns to bitterness and destroys the host. Anger can also obscure a greater truth. For example, no people in human history have suffered the brutality African Americans endured over centuries—and survived. Indeed we have done more than survive. We have created life and love and music and art and institutions of learning, and houses of worship. We have been so harmed and yet created a movement—the Civil Rights Movement—that was defined by the deepest love. The reality is that our history is as painful as it is powerful. We are the people who refused to die.

All human beings will know pain, the kinds caused by others and also by our own choices. We will be left, disrespected, disregarded, lied on and abused—emotionally and, for some of us, physically. Let’s admit that while it is sometimes difficult to have compassion for those who’ve hurt us, it is the only path to inner peace, as well as peace in the community, in the country and on earth. Holding onto anger and resentment hurts us the most. We are here to learn to love and to grow in wisdom and understanding. The goal is to be able to see people’s woundedness, to see beyond their hurtful and often horrific behaviors. Each act of forgiveness is an act of love, and it’s a miracle and a marvel that we are able. To forgive is divine. This is how we become well in body, mind and soul.

As a facilitator or mentor, these next sessions require you to trust the process and let things unfold naturally. It is important in your role to serve not only as a guide but also as a listener. Your most important job is to create a space for our young people to feel safe sharing what is in their hearts. They will look to you to determine whether their emotions are valid. Many of them will be sharing their feelings and fears for the first time and need the encouragement and affirmation that it’s not



## STRESS

To help you determine the source of the stress in your life, check off all the events that have had an impact on you in the last year or more:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lost a friend to violence                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to meet expenses                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of job                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Survived an act of violence                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Failed a test                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sleeping                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Failed a class                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents' loss of job                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Digestion problems/upset stomach                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse (physical, verbal, sexual or emotional)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breakup of relationship                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Painful cramps                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship rejection                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to afford medical, vision or dental care   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lost a family member to violence            | <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed or belittled by an adult or loved one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health challenge                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure to get into college                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health challenge of friend or family member | <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble understanding class material              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Witnessed an act of violence                | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with a teacher                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss or change of residence                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure to get a job                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stopped by the police                       |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violence in neighborhood                    |  |

*\*A printable version of this chart appears at the end of this section.*

### Guided Group Discussion Questions

Explain to students that there is deep value in simply being heard and ask if anyone would be willing to share what they checked off or what they are feeling. Remind them that it is okay to cry—strong men cry too—and that our instinct will be to disrupt the crying in some gentle or loving way, but we don't have to. Tears can be cleansing, and too often we are not allowed to cleanse ourselves, which can turn our pain into anger.

#### **Closing:** Circle of Hope

Ask students to form a circle and to stand as close together as possible. Instruct each student to put out his or her fist and stick his or her thumb out to the left. Then ask students to grasp the outstretched thumb of the student to their right with their fist. All hands should form one continuous circle. Remind the students of the purpose of Wellness Mentoring Circles and the way in which we are rebuilding community and becoming supports for each other. Tell students to meet eyes with one student across the circle. Ask them to repeat the following words: "I've got you." (Repeat.) "You are not in this by yourself." (Repeat.) "Together we are stronger than any of the obstacles in our path." (Repeat.) Ask each student in the Circle of Hope to say one word that represents their gift to the circle. Leaders should set the example by saying, "I bring the gift of hope," or laughter, support, truth, etc. End with a group affirmation. Have the students say together: "Together we are stronger than any of the obstacles in our path."

**Journal Prompt:** Peace to me means\_\_\_\_\_.

## STRESS WEEK TWO

## AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** LET IT GO
- **Materials Needed:** Clip from the film *Antwone Fisher*, balloons, paper, pens
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To provide students with a way of releasing harms done to them and anger they may still hold

**Description of Activity:** Show the clip from the film *Antwone Fisher* in which Dr. Jerome Davenport—Denzel Washington’s character—explains the importance of forgiveness, and lead a brief discussion about why forgiveness matters so very much. Be real with students by acknowledging that this is a place in which many of us adults get stuck. We live in a world of injustices. Some people have caused others such pain and destruction that forgiveness may seem like too much to ask of us. The annihilation of First Nation peoples and the theft of their land; the brutality we endured during the enslavement of our people; the European Holocaust, and the Holocausts in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, Tibet. And how do you forgive apartheid? Or the displays of cruelty that go on in communities throughout the U.S. each day? Each act of forgiveness is an act of love, and it’s a miracle and a marvel that we are able. To forgive is divine.

Personally, so many of us are mad at what happened not just yesterday but decades ago. As wise woman and teacher Iyanla Vanzant explains, we often experience stress and unhappiness because we think about whatever situation has caused us pain as if it’s still going on. It’s our thoughts and feelings about the event, rather than the actual event itself, that ultimately cause wounds to fester. The majority of adults who are suffering with depression not caused by chemical imbalances, are hurt, angry and blaming others for hurts in their past. As stated previously, the reality is that in our lifetime we will be hurt by others and also by our own choices; we will be left, disrespected, disregarded, lied on, lied to and abused. Facilitators: It is critical that you bring your own personal experience to the front here, encapsulated so that it does not take much time away from the students’ sharing. Your sharing will engender trust among the students and help them to feel safe enough to share. In sharing truths, we adults and the children we serve begin to heal.

To help students open themselves up to the process, ask them to privately write down the name and role of a key figure in their life with whom they may be having an upset or feel betrayed by. Next, ask them to silently consider this prompt: “I haven’t been able to forgive blank for blank.” The goal is to have them create a simple sentence that describes the upset. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts aloud, but first have a facilitator or mentor do the exercise while others watch, to help students find the courage to share. Encourage the group to acknowledge and support each speaker by reciting the following four phrases in succession: “I hear you,” “I am so sorry,” “You didn’t deserve it,” and “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Afterwards, distribute a balloon to each student and ask them to make a list of all of the people or incidents they have had trouble forgiving. Ask them to look at each item on their list and, one at a time, blow a breath into the balloon for each person or incident. Ask them to notice how their body

## STRESS

feels as they think of the person or incident and the energy it takes to blow up the balloon. Have them hold their balloon up and reflect on whether they are living their life like the balloon, by being full of resentments. Have them try to conduct a simple activity, like writing their names on a piece of paper while keeping the balloon tightly closed. Remind them, as Sister Iyanla has suggested, that when you're holding on tight to an upset, you don't have the energy to do much else. Now tell them you want them to let go of all these resentments. Have them let the air out of the balloon. Invite them to notice how easily the air leaves the balloon compared to how hard it was to blow up. Once the resentments have been released, have the students return to the circle.

### Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. How long have you been holding onto resentments toward people who have hurt you?
2. How did you feel when you were thinking of them?
3. Was it hard to complete your task while trying to hold onto the balloon? Do your resentments sometimes make your life harder?
4. Was there one resentment that stood out to you that you would be willing to share with the group?
5. What would it take for you to really forgive and let your resentments go?

**Journal Prompts:** Not forgiving (person/situation) makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_. Releasing my anger makes me feel\_\_\_\_\_.

# STRESS CHECKLIST

To help you determine the source of the stress in your life, check off all the events that have had an impact on you in the last year or more:

- Lost a friend to violence
- Loss of job
- Failed a test
- Failed a class
- Parents' loss of job
- Divorce
- Pregnancy
- Breakup of relationship
- Relationship rejection
- Lost a family member to violence
- Health challenge
- Health challenge of friend or family member
- Witnessed an act of violence
- Loss or change of residence
- Stopped by the police
- Violence in neighborhood
- Unable to meet expenses
- Survived an act of violence
- Difficulty sleeping
- Hunger
- Digestion problems/upset stomach
- Abuse (physical, verbal, sexual or emotional)
- Headaches
- Painful cramps
- Unable to afford medical, vision or dental care
- Embarrassed or belittled by an adult or loved one
- Pressure to get into college
- Trouble understanding class material
- Conflict with a teacher
- Pressure to get a job





SESA WO SUBAN\*THE SYMBOL OF TRANSFORMATION

# WELLNESS

“Healing begins where the wound was made.” —Alice Walker

What does it mean to be well? Not to simply survive or cope, but to thrive? How can we create the lives we want? What is our role in teaching our young people that love is a verb and there are actions they can take which will liberate and empower them in any situation? In this section we explore the powerful choices that bring us peace, health and true happiness.

One of the many ways we can support the success of our students is by helping them navigate the world around them. As they mature, they become more empowered to make decisions about everything that concerns them. Our role as mentors is to help educate them about the potential impact of their choices. We do this not through rebuke or by evoking fear and shame, but by providing them with sound information and a supportive, safe environment to which they can bring their authentic self.

Throughout these workshops, it is important that we acknowledge our own challenges and shortcomings. Our young people need to see that adulthood is an ever-unfolding series of leaps and stumbles, not a peak of perfection, which we know is unattainable. It is okay for us to admit that we haven't attained all of these goals, yet. Our purpose is to help students understand the importance of critical thinking, which leads to informed decision making and a lifelong commitment to sustaining our health and vitality. As we engage them in discussions about the negative choices that impact their lives, we must also remember not to focus solely on the symptoms of self-defeating behavior, but on the new healthy patterns to replace ineffective coping strategies.

## WELLNESS WEEK ONE

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** HOW I GET THROUGH
- **Materials Needed:** Coping handout, pens and a surface to write on
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To help students identify which coping mechanisms are really working for them and which are not

**Description of Activity:** As with the stress checklist, the group should sit in a circle and, for 10 minutes, check off coping mechanisms they use to get through their days. There is no judgment here and this must be underscored. All of us are seeking to just get through the day feeling as good about ourselves as we possibly can—even when and if the choices we make don't actually serve us. When we are loved, honored, supported and given options, most of us will make better choices. This exercise is meant to help students along that path, rather than to judge them for the roads they may have been walking.

COPING – What strategies have I used to deal with the stress in my life? When I am angry, stressed or upset the things I am most likely to do are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watch TV                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Argue with friends or siblings                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music          | <input type="checkbox"/> Argue with parents                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play video games         | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat junk food   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talk on the phone        | <input type="checkbox"/> Have sex  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visit social media       | <input type="checkbox"/> Go to a party   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visit sex sites          | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise/play sports                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hang out with friends    | <input type="checkbox"/> Create art (dance, sing, write, draw, paint, etc.)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pray                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Smoke cigarettes                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go to church             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in bullying, gossiping and putting others down |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talk to a trusted friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Go to the movies                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talk to a trusted adult  | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a bath   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smoke weed               | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with family or loved ones                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drink alcohol            | <input type="checkbox"/> Play with little children                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use other drugs          |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steal                    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fight                    |  |

*\*A printable version of this chart appears at the end of this section.*

### Guided Group Discussion Questions

After reminding students again that there is deep value in simply being heard, invite them to share a coping mechanism that they have checked off, if they choose. But first, begin by sharing the coping mechanisms you, as adults, have chosen that have not served you. Talk about why you chose them and how you've learned to choose differently. Be mindful to condense your remarks so the students have time and space for self-discovery. Again, remind everyone that tears are not a sign of weakness, but rather point to the ability to think and feel deeply, so it is okay to cry. Then ask if anyone would be willing to share from what she or he has checked off or is feeling.

### Closing: Group Commitment

Have students stand in a circle. Remind them that in order to have something different they have to do something different. Ask them to pick one coping mechanism they intend to let go of and one they intend to embrace. Starting with mentors, have each member step in the middle and declare his or her one-sentence commitment. For example, a group member might say, "I let go of smoking and I embrace exercising three times per week." The group should respond to each speaker with "We've got your back." After each person makes a commitment, repeat the stress affirmation as a group: "Together we are stronger than any of the obstacles in our path."

## WELLNESS WEEK TWO

## AGENDA

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

JOURNAL PROMPT

## GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY

To help students identify which coping mechanisms are really working for them and which are not

- **Name of Activity:** WHAT TYPE OF LUXURY VEHICLE ARE YOU?
- **Materials Needed:** Wellness essay by Susan L. Taylor on p. 53 of the *ANWF* Manual, pens and paper and a dry-erase board
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Too often, we determine our bodies' value based on what we see in the media, from magazines to movies. Are we tall enough, curvy enough? Do we have the right size body parts? What we see manipulates us into judging our bodies according to the value placed on it by those who are selling us everything from clothes to diet plans. But our bodies are powerful far beyond that. This exercise is meant to remind each student of the miracle of our bodies and all the things a body can do—beyond looking a certain way—and to illustrate what extraordinary and efficient machines they are. Because what we know for sure is that when we love our bodies, and only when we love our bodies, we will take care of them.

To begin the exercise, ask students to list all the possible benefits of having a vehicle. If they could have a car would they want one? What do cars enable people to do?

Prompt the students to go a step further and think about their dream car. What kind of car would it be? Who would they allow to drive it? What might they have to do to make sure the car remained in top condition? How would they feel if the car was defaced or harmed in anyway? Allow students to call out answers, and capture them on a sheet of paper or a dry erase board.

Then, encourage the students to see their bodies for what they are: vehicles that will get them through life. To help them along, ask them to thoughtfully fill in the blanks below, comparing vital parts of the body to key parts of a car.

The heart is the \_\_\_\_\_.

The lungs are the \_\_\_\_\_.

The stomach is the \_\_\_\_\_.

The legs are the \_\_\_\_\_.

The kidneys are the \_\_\_\_\_.

The liver is the \_\_\_\_\_.



## WELLNESS

- What healthful foods do you enjoy eating?
- What foods can lead to illnesses? Which illnesses?
- Do you know any older people with hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and that these major killers of African Americans are related to stress, lack of exercise and poor eating habits?
- Is there a respectful way we could shift to healthful, tasty food in our cafeteria? (This is a great research project; students should identify ways in which students at other schools made the shift.)
- What are the healthful choices in fast food restaurants today?
- Another research project: What types of food are easily available in their neighborhoods?

**Closing:** Have students check in on how they are doing with their commitments from the Stress and Coping weeks. Are there any new commitments they want to make regarding nutrition?

**Journal Prompt:** One thing I am doing to make myself healthier is \_\_\_\_\_.  
One thing I'm going to start doing today to make myself healthier  
is \_\_\_\_\_.

# COPING CHECKLIST

COPING – What strategies have I used to deal with the stress in my life? When I am angry, stressed or upset the things I am most likely to do are:

- Watch TV
- Listen to music
- Play video games
- Talk on the phone
- Visit social media
- Visit sex sites
- Hang out with friends
- Pray
- Go to church
- Talk to a trusted friend
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Smoke weed
- Drink alcohol
- Use other drugs
- Steal
- Fight
- Argue with friends or siblings
- Argue with parents
- Eat junk food
- Have sex
- Go to a party
- Exercise/play sports
- Create art (dance, sing, write, draw, paint, etc.)
- Smoke cigarettes
- Engage in bullying, gossiping and putting others down
- Go to the movies
- Take a bath
- Spend time with family or loved ones
- Play with little children



OSRAM NE NSOROMA\*THE SYMBOL OF LOVE, FAITHFULNESS AND HARMONY

# RELATIONSHIPS

“How can I love somebody else / If I can’t love myself...” —Mary J. Blige

The most important relationship we’ll ever have is the one we have with ourselves. Self-acceptance is the cornerstone of self-esteem. When we practice loving ourselves fully, healthy choices and relationships follow. Many young people are challenged by having difficult relationships at home, in school and in their neighborhoods. A constant refrain heard from our students at Chicago’s Harlan High was, “I wish I had better friends.” Choosing friends who have a positive attitude about life and show by their words and actions that they see the best in us and care about us helps us to feel nourished, encouraged and inspired. When we find ourselves surrounded by toxic and demoralizing personalities, we often internalize their struggles and negative attitudes and adopt them as our own.

We’ve spent time looking inward, examining and encouraging ways for us to love ourselves. Now we will ask students to consider the influence of their key relationships on their own attitudes and beliefs and assist them in developing strategies for coping with damaging influences and finding creative ways to claim their personal power. By exploring the topics of family, peers and intimate relationships, we can support our young ones in transcending any limitations and finding the courage to make choices that honor and support their well-being.

## RELATIONSHIPS WEEK ONE

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

JOURNAL PROMPT

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To share the impact of our family of origin on our self-image through creative expression.

- **Name of Activity:** THE “WHERE I’M FROM” POEM
- **Materials Needed:** Poem template worksheets, poem examples
- **Length of Activity:** 15 minutes

**Description of Activity:** “Who am I?” is a question on the minds of many adolescents. “Where I’m From” poems get beyond aspects of identity that are obvious (such as ethnicity, gender and age) by

## RELATIONSHIPS

focusing on other factors that shape our identities, such as experiences, relationships, hopes and interests. Writing “Where I’m From” poems help students clarify important elements of their identity. When these poems are shared they can help build peer relationships and foster a cohesive classroom community. “Where I’m From” poems can also provide a creative way for students to increase needed writing skills and demonstrate what they know about historical or literary figures.

Prior to asking students to write their poems, share with them the following example of a “Where I’m From” poem. Please don’t feel pressured to do so, but it would be helpful in bonding with the students for you to write your own “Where I’m From” poem and share it with the group. Give students the opportunity to think about what it means to be “from” some place. Reading other “Where I’m From” poems provides an effective prompt for this conversation.

### I AM FROM

I am from old barbershops with new styles  
I am from brownstones  
I am from East 108 summer porch talks, human size speakers and my cousin teaching my sister to ride a bike where others now are afraid to walk  
I am from collard greens  
I am from my grandmother’s homemade jam  
I am from Obama Fried Chicken  
I am my Aunties’ African baskets  
My mother’s one faded childhood photo  
And her sister’s purple lavender blanket  
The one she knitted when I went away to college  
Even as her fingers knotted into themselves in pain.

Brainstorm specific words and phrases that represent where students are from. Here are some categories they might consider as they brainstorm:

- Names of important people related to this place (relatives, friends, etc.)
- Special foods or meals eaten in this place
- Traditions practiced in this place
- Favorite songs and stories
- Familiar phrases used in this place
- Ordinary items found there
- Important beliefs valued in this place
- Heroes of this place
- Significant events (happy and/or sad) that have happened there
- Images, sounds and smells that represent this place

Referring to the “Where I’m From” poem example as a guide and drawing from the students’ brainstorming, ask them to begin writing their own poems. “Where I’m From” poems do not all follow the exact same structure, but they do begin with the phrase “I am from...”

Students learn a great deal about each other and/or about other people, by reading each other’s “Where I’m From” poems. There are many ways students can share their work:

- Students can share them in pairs or small groups.
- Students could read their poems to the whole class. Each reader could be assigned a “responder.” After the poem is read aloud, the responder would comment about something





**Guided Group Discussion Questions**

1. Are there times when it is hard or confusing to be a young man or young woman?
2. Do you think gender roles are fair? Why or why not?

**SECOND ACTIVITY OF THE WEEK**

- **Name of Activity:** IF YOU REALLY KNEW ME
- **Materials Needed:** None
- **Length of Activity:** Remainder of session

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To practice sharing and listening to self truths.

**Description of Activity:** The instruction is simple, but will likely require a few examples from the adults to help participants get started sharing. Separate students into two single-gender groups and have them sit in a circle, close to one another. Start a sentence with the prompt, “If you really knew me, you would know...” As facilitators and mentors, you should volunteer one or two examples. Let them know they have 15 minutes to complete the activity. Ask everyone to share at least one statement. Remind students that this has become an ever-more judgmental society, and that resulting mean-spiritedness among young people is given a space to live and grow in social media where it can cause real hurt, pain and loss of life, even. Also remind them that what others think of us is none of our business. We cannot change how others think and behave. What we think about ourselves is what really matters. Sharing with trusted ones from the depths of our hearts frees and heals us and creates intimacy, as others open up and trust us with their own secrets and truths. Trust is primary in all relationships. Building it takes time—especially for children whose primary caregivers may have shattered their trust of others.

**Journal Prompt:** Is it hard for you to share personal insights in a group? Why or why not?

**RELATIONSHIPS WEEK THREE: REAL LOVE**

**AGENDA** .....

- WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS
- ACTIVITY
- CLOSE
- JOURNAL PROMPT

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To have students examine the harsh, negative language of modern youth culture and consider how it may impact the relationships that mean the most to us.

- **Name of Activity:** WHAT’S IN A NAME?
- **Materials Needed:** Flip charts and markers
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Ask students for examples of some of the words they have heard used for females. Remind students that there are no penalties for being honest. Encourage them to participate and challenge them to come up with more examples if needed. Invite their forthrightness. Give no further instruction or explanation. In this activity, more often than not, the majority of

## RELATIONSHIPS

names they've heard used are mean and negative. After you finish with women, repeat the activity focused on terms for men.

After the names are shared and written down, ask students to explain why they think so many of the names are negative. Share with them shifts you've seen in slang terms for women and men in your lifetime. Ask them how many of them use these negative names to describe themselves or people of their own gender and why they think that is so.

Finally, ask students to go around and call out, popcorn-style, one word they would love to permanently erase. If there's one word that is stated over and over, can the Circle make a group agreement not to use it anymore and to check each other from this moment forward? If there's not a collective word, each student should pick the one they individually will no longer use and select a buddy to check them if they do.

**Journal Prompt:** Think about someone who really loves you. What are their nicknames for you? Make a list of what words and names make you feel good about yourself.



ACTIVITY

CLOSE

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
 To identify and examine messages we receive from the media about African Americans

- **Name of Activity:** WHAT THEY SHOW, WHAT WE KNOW
- **Materials Needed:** Markers and a board, or butcher paper that sticks to the wall, for the breakout group brainstorms.
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Show Tom Burrell’s Resolution Project video. Invite students to brainstorm about images of African-Americans they’ve observed in the media. After 20 minutes, ask your participants to select the top three toxic messages they’ve received. Divide the class into three breakout circles, assign each group a toxic message and ask them to refashion it into a positive message that shows the truth about us. Each circle will share their re-creation with the entire class. Write these messages on the butcher paper.

**Guided Group Discussion Questions**

1. What is media?
2. How does the media depict us?
3. To what degree are the depictions true?
4. To what degree do we participate in creating messages and images that portray us negatively?
5. What is the truth about us, and what messages would you send if you had/when you have the power to do so?
6. What can we do to change the negative messages in the media about and to young African Americans?

**Journal Prompt:** Is it easier to disrespect and abuse people whom we label with derogatory names like nigga, bitch and fag? How does it feel when you or someone you love is labeled?



## CREATIVITY

**Description of Activity:** As an introduction, remind students of their experiments with the power of thought during the session on faith. Encourage students to use the power of their thoughts and their creative imagination to design their lives. Tell students to imagine their own present and future success. What do they want to achieve? Explain that a vision board is simply a tool that will help them focus on their goals, keep them top of mind and achieve them. Invite students to think about all they have learned this year and to think not just about material wealth, but about what will really nourish their lives and bring them peace and happiness. Remind them that the question to ask and answer for themselves is not what will I get, but what will I give? Giving to life and to others from our overflow gives our lives meaning, nourishes the soul and creates profound joy. Nothing else satisfies for long. And when we live for the betterment of life, our people and community, the Holy Spirit places in our hands all that we need—the people and resources—to succeed. This is the secret elixir that too few people trust and practice. Suggest they find inspirational words and phrases to help them remember what matters most in life and what is paramount to them. Invite the children to mix and mingle words and pictures and or affirmations for a vision of success that depicts their personal goals and the world they want to create. The vision boards are their reminder that their best is yet to come. They are intended to support students and inspire them to have faith in themselves and the courage to achieve their dreams. Encourage them to complete the project within the time given, rather than taking home an unfinished vision board. Tell them they have 25 minutes to work on their board before they need to begin clean up. Remind them when they have 10 minutes remaining.

**Journal Prompt:** Where do you see yourself in five years? In 10?



BESASAKA\*THE SYMBOL OF UNITY AND ABUNDANCE

# PROSPERITY

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do and liking how you do it.”  
—Dr. Maya Angelou

**H**aving a personal definition of prosperity and the necessary education and support to pursue it are essential to personal growth. Too often, we fail to educate our young about the core values they need to stay sane in an increasingly commercialized world. Helping them understand the difference between collecting a paycheck and building wealth, the relationship of education to upward mobility and the intentional aggrandizement of consumerism is a key component of any comprehensive youth-education program.

By helping youngsters learn that money does not bring people peace or happiness and encouraging them to examine their values about money, we begin to break the stranglehold of overspending and doing whatever it takes to get paid. This chapter is created to instill in our children that they can develop the skills needed to generate, retain and build wealth by pursuing an education and following their passions, and by working hard and thinking critically about what they invest their precious time and resources in. Here we want to encourage students to not spend frivolously, but rather to make saving a habit and, no matter what their career path, to also have some entrepreneurial pursuit.

## AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

JOURNAL PROMPT

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To stimulate critical thinking about consumerism vs. ownership

- **Name of Activity:** BALLERS VS. SHOT CALLERS
- **Goal of the Activity:** To stimulate critical thinking about consumerism vs. ownership
- **Materials Needed:** White board or chart pad and easel and markers
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Write the words “Baller” and “Shot Caller” on opposite sides of the Board and ask what they mean. Know, but don’t say, that ballers are spenders. They are brand conscious and focused on impressing others. They buy all sorts of things that most people covet—clothes,



jewelry, cars—and they drop big money in clubs and for the best seats in the house. Shot callers are entrepreneurs and property owners. They invest their money in things that grow in value and are the ones ballers have to go to purchase what they want.

In this exercise, remind students that there are no right or wrong answers. Reflect on the increasing popularity in the media of celebrities, reality-TV stars, athletes and entertainers. Ask students to describe the qualities of a baller. Here, ask young people to call out names of people who seem to be spending lots of money but not saving or building. Allen Iverson, for example, after all of the millions he's made in the last few years, is broke now. Next, ask them to brainstorm qualities of Shot Callers. Have ready examples like Oprah Winfrey, Will Smith or local business and civic leaders like Chicago's John Rogers, who founded Ariel Capital Management, the largest Black-owned investment-banking and money-management firm in the nation. Draw attention to behind-the-scenes figures in entertainment and sports like agents, owners, managers and attorneys.

Once the brainstorm is complete, ask students how many of them have been tricked into trying to be ballers? Ask how much sneakers cost to make. The big brands are foreign made and cost manufacturers only a few dollars a pair. Ask how many have ever spent more than \$50 on sneakers, or more than \$100. Cite examples of how students commonly tease each other for not having expensive brands and are often willing to pester their parents or even commit a crime to purchase popular sneakers. Extend examples to jackets, jeans, purses, shoes, weaves and accessories. Invite students to discuss parallels. Why do they want expensive items? What kind of clothes does Bill Gates wear? Why? Why does Warren Buffet live in his old house? How do marketers manipulate people to buy what they don't really need, things that add no lasting pleasure or any value to their lives? What techniques do they use?

**Journal Prompt:** Does everything that gets me attention get me respect?



NKONSONKONSON\*THE SYMBOL OF UNITY AND HUMAN RELATIONS

# COMMUNITY

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Community has traditionally been the chief value for people of African descent. From the beginning of time itself, our ability to move as a collective has been our greatest triumph. Everywhere we have stumbled harks back to a lack of unity, harmony and an agreed-upon plan. The training you have delivered is designed to assist *Rising* students in learning to love and value themselves and form authentic relationships with each other. These are the building blocks of happiness, connection and community. You are encouraging our young to become stewards of their environment, take ownership of their school and neighborhood and have pride in themselves, our heritage and one another. Through videos, online searches and, if possible, a community field trip, invite our children to consider the world around them and what role they will play in improving it.

Here we ask that you share triumphs and challenges faced by youth movements around the world, from Soweto to Oakland, and over the course of three weeks, encourage them to use their critical thinking skills to identify, research and develop solutions to address a problem in their community.

## COMMUNITY WEEK ONE

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** COMMUNITY POEM
- **Materials Needed:** An 11x17 sheet of paper and a pen or pencil
- **Length of Activity:** The poem should be treated as an activity in progress over the course of the session. Take no more than five minutes at the beginning of the meeting to explain the process to the group. Allot five minutes at the very end of the meeting for a participant to read the poem aloud to the group.

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
This is meant to be a fun opening exercise that establishes equal validity of voice and creates unity within the Circle.

**Description of Activity:** Begin by explaining the community poem process. Pick a Circle participant, give the student the paper and a writing utensil and ask the student to write the first two lines of a poem. The lines should be about the wellness of our people and community. After writing the lines, the participant should fold the sheet of paper so that only the second sentence is visible. For example, if the student has written something like, “I say promise where others say perish/I see hope where others see hell,” the following Circle participant would only be able to read, “I see hope where others see hell.” When the next participant receives the poem-in-progress, he or she contributes the next line. The poem will circulate until every Circle participant has written two lines. At the end of the exercise, unfold the sheet of paper and select someone to read the collective contribution aloud—as a single poem.

## COMMUNITY WEEK TWO

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** FOR THIS IS OUR HOME
- **Materials Needed:** The poem from the last session, Descriptions of Youth-Led Actions for Change, pencils and paper
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
 To introduce students to successful youth-led models for community problem-solving and inspire them to claim and uplift their own community (school or neighborhood)

**Description of Activity:** Introduce today’s activity by reading the poem written in community at the last session. The following steps will help you to guide the students through the activity and ensure that the group stays on track to complete the assigned tasks.

- Assemble the students into three circles.
- Ask each group to name its team and assign a Team Leader and a Note Taker to write down answers.
- Each group will read an article about a youth-directed service project and is responsible for guiding the circle in answering the assigned questions on paper.
  1. What was the project?
  2. Why did they decide to work on it?
  3. What did it change in the community?
  4. What resources did the project require?
  5. Why was the project successful?
- After the teams have completed the activity, direct students to come back together as a large group to begin reporting back and the guided discussion.
- Teams will report back by answering the assigned questions within the large group.
- Ask Team Leaders to facilitate their teams’ portion of the report back by fielding



## COMMUNITY WEEK FOUR

### AGENDA .....

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS

ACTIVITY

CLOSE

- **Name of Activity:** Our Community, Ourselves
- **Materials Needed:** Flip chart and markers
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Description of Activity:** Identify three or four subgroup areas for planning teams, e.g., resources needed, marketing/recruiting, communication, logistics and implementation plan. Have students join one team and brainstorm and vote on top strategies/ideas and report back to the whole group. Offer leadership opportunities for those who are ready or volunteer. Leave time for questions/feedback for each team.

#### Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. What are you naturally good at doing that would be helpful to the team?
2. What contributions are you excited to make to the team you've chosen?
3. Are you ready to step into a leadership role? Why or why not?

**Journal Prompt:** I am an agent for positive change because\_\_\_\_\_.

**GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY**  
To develop roles,  
benchmarks and outcomes  
of the student-determined  
service plan