A NEW WAY FORWARD
Wellness Mentoring Circles
For Young Parents

A GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS AND MENTORS

DRAFT
The Rising: Elevating Education, Expectations and Self-Esteem

The activities and framework for engaging young parents that fill these pages are part of The Rising: Elevating Education, Expectations and Self-Esteem and are designed to shift consciousness and vision. It is our signature group-mentoring program, a consciousness-changing initiative that is being demonstrated at four exceedingly challenged high schools—one on the South Side of Chicago, two in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and one in Detroit. The program aims to transform the lives of children trapped in intergenerational poverty by engaging them with an exciting, culturally appropriate curriculum that is executed by trained psychologists, other wellness professionals and mentors. The curriculum is rooted in prevention and support efforts that provide coping and other mechanisms needed to mitigate the impact of the disparities and dysfunction ruining their young lives. Integral to The Rising is the cultivation of cultural pride and high self-esteem, the development of literacy and critical-thinking skills, and a love for learning among young Black parents. The innovative, transformational curriculum is designed to ensure that as students come to know their proud heritage and painful but triumphant history, they will avoid gangs, addictions and incarceration, and graduate from high school prepared to succeed not only as parents but in college or industrial-training programs and 21st-century careers.
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The Mission and Vision

of the

National CARES Mentoring Movement

The National CARES Mentoring Movement envisions a nation in which all Black children are loved, have access to quality, culturally competent education, and are supported by well-resourced families and communities living in harmony and guided by faith.

Our mission is to secure and transform the lives of Black children by inspiring, recruiting, training and mobilizing masses of caring Black men and women to mentor and nourish them. Toward that end, our national affiliate network connects adults to local youth-serving organizations, including our own group-mentoring programs that focus on the emotional, social and academic development of our children and the wellness of the adults who parent, mentor and educate them.
A Message from Our Founder and CEO, Susan L. Taylor

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

This 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 the well-being of 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.

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 Brain Trust 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, institutionalized racial discrimination (Jim Crow practices) and racial hatred. 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 that was launched in Oakland and led by our Oakland Bay Area CARES affiliate. Our work is guided by a philosophy that our Brain Trust 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, lifesaving 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 feeling overwhelmed 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 helpful 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 strategies and the 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.
Sandra* smiles when she recalls how Josh used to make her feel so special. The two met at their Detroit church where Josh, then 19, played the organ. He was talented, well mannered and handsome. Most important, he made Sandra feel adored, something she desperately lacked at home. “He talked to me like I was the prettiest girl in the world,” she recalls. “He really boosted my self-esteem.” Outgoing and full of charm, Sandra’s sunny disposition belies her difficult past. When she was young, Sandra’s mother would routinely abandon her five children, leaving them to fend for themselves for days at a time. They were placed in foster care when Sandra was eight. “My mother chose men over her children,” she explains matter-of-factly. “She wasn’t a drug addict, but she acted like it. She was just really messed up.”

After they began dating, things between Sandra and Josh got physical fast. Three months into their relationship, Sandra found out she was pregnant. “I was totally shocked,” she says. She hadn’t been using birth control, but Josh had promised her he’d be careful.

Sandra hoped Josh would prove himself a good partner and parent, but she was constantly disappointed. “I guess in the back of my head there was a little shot of hope that he would do good,” she says with a sigh. “But it never happened.” A few months after their daughter, Dakota, was born, the couple split up for good. These days Sandra is raising their seventh-month old baby on her own. She’s 16 years old.
The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world, with more than 300,000 babies born to girls between the ages of 15 and 19 in 2012. And while the rate of teen pregnancy among African American girls has been dropping steadily since the 1990s, Black girls—who disproportionately live in segregated, under-resourced communities with a dearth of positive activities for young people—have a pregnancy rates almost twice as high as their White counterparts.

Girls like Sandra, who lack basic family support and a stable home, are the most at risk of an unintended pregnancy (girls in foster care are twice as likely as other girls to become pregnant before 19). For high-risk teens whose parents may be incarcerated, drug addicted or mentally ill, support services are vital to ensure their and their children’s well-being. However, many teenage parents report that when they do reach out for help—from service providers, school officials or doctors—they often receive admonishments instead of assistance, judgment instead of care. Pregnant or parenting teens need support, guidance and stability. Most of all, they need to know that someone cares.

“No one is trying to hear what we have to say,” says Elijah, who had his son when he was just 16. “Why? Because they think they already know who we are: deadbeats and failures. When my son was born, my father, who didn’t even raise me, was the first person to come to the hospital. He was also the first one to have everything bad to say. On what should have been the happiest day of my life, he actually made me cry. I knew he wasn’t going to be the one to show me how to be a father. Basically, I was going to have to figure it out myself.” For young girls, who are often left with the majority of child-caring responsibilities, the challenges can feel even greater.

For many teenagers the path from pregnancy to successful parenting is riddled with what feels like insurmountable obstacles. They must quickly learn to provide and
care for their children, figure out how to continue their education, secure employment, and possibly housing, all while negotiating their journey through adolescence. Supporting young parents over this rocky terrain is one of the greatest gifts mentors can give.

As mentors we have the power to talk back to the negative messages teen parents hear all around them and replace them with messages of hope. You can reignite deferred dreams, show teens the greatness that is possible and provide the life-changing affirmation, guidance and encouragement needed to empower young people to believe they can surmount the hurdles that lay ahead.

Our work with teen parents is critical. But before we begin, we must get to know those who are entrusting us to guide them. Who are the thousands of teenagers parenting while they are still children themselves? What are their challenges and fears? Most important, how can we support their journey toward adulthood and enable them to better nurture themselves and the children in their care?

To answer these questions, we convened focus groups of teen parents in Detroit and New York. We asked the participants to share their deepest concerns, greatest triumphs and describe what they wish for in their mentors. Then we followed up with one-on-one interviews to dig deeper. We also spoke with scores of service providers who work with pregnant and parenting teens across the country, in Oakland, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Miami and New York City. Everyone contacted—from educators and social workers to health officials and researchers—generously shared their insight, wisdom and best practices. Each of those we spoke to is a warrior in the fight to secure for our youngest parents the promising futures they are entitled to. Following, you will find important lessons and guiding principles gleaned from experts and young parents alike. We hope you will see this
as a beginning, the first step in giving our pregnant and parenting teens the support and love they need to soar.

**Listen with Compassion**

In a small classroom at Pathways Academy, located on the east side of Detroit, seven pregnant or parenting teenage girls have gathered to share their experiences. They come to this newly opened charter school from all over the city, attracted by Pathways’ promise of free child care and an opportunity to graduate. Some of these girls have been out of school for more than a year, forced to drop out of their old high schools to care for their children. Pathways represents a chance at a new beginning, and the girls speak shyly about their plans. One 18-year-old girl wants to be a veterinarian, another, 16, hopes to be a pediatrician. Two girls, both 16, want to go into cosmetology. Another girl announces proudly that she wants to be both a veterinarian and a part-time cosmetologist.

Even as they hold their babies in their laps, it's clear that these mothers are still very young girls, given to animated discussions about who said what to whom in the school corridors that week. Like most adolescent girls, they are acutely attuned to what people around them think. Each girl admits she was terrified to reveal her pregnancy. “I still haven’t told my uncle,” says Jennifer, 18, whose son is almost two years old. Kendra, 16, shares that before she told her mother she was pregnant, she investigated homeless shelters certain her mother was going to kick her out of the house.

Coping with rejection and ridicule are some of the most difficult emotional challenges pregnant girls across the country face. They are labeled fast and loose even if they were coerced or forced into sex; even if they got pregnant the first time they had intercourse; even if they are only 13 or 14 years old. Once they become
pregnant, some girls feel they are responsible for any ill treatment they receive. “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard girls say, ‘I spread my legs, so I deserve this,’” says Kris Ahmed, program director of Teen Success Inc., a nonprofit organization serving teen mothers in Northern California.

Ahmed, like many experts, points out that teen mothers are often crippled by feelings of shame: shame that they had sex; shame that they got pregnant; shame that the father of their baby has abandoned them. This toxic emotion prevents some girls from asking for the help they need and deserve, whether it be in the form of public assistance, health care or child support. “They don’t think they are entitled to any help,” says Ahmed. “Instead, they see their babies as a punishment.”

Our girls are in pain; sometimes that pain is turned inward. Ahmed notes a recent survey of more than 600 girls in the Teen Success program, almost half reported feelings of depression. Shockingly, 12 percent said they had attempted suicide after learning they were pregnant or becoming a mother. Mentors need to give young mothers and fathers a safe place to vent their fears, frustration and anger. At the same time, it’s critical that mentors, facilitators and leaders be aware of any warning signs, such as sudden changes in mood or behavior, that their mentees may need additional support. [For more information on warning signs of depression see http://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/depression-signs-and-symptoms.htm]

Sometimes, the first step in healing your mentees distress begins with the most simple displays of encouragement, affirmation and love. Keshana Enoex, a case worker with Detroit’s Children’s Aid Society, teaches parenting classes at Pathways and mentors other teen parents across the city. She showers her girls with affection. “I give plenty of hugs,” she says. “Some of these girls get so little tenderness,
especially from a woman. You can feel them exhale when you wrap your arms around them.”

**Speak with Purpose**

Ask young men and woman what they’d like in their mentors and they’ll eagerly share their laundry list of “must haves”: someone who can answer parenting questions, won’t judge them, and can help them feel less alone. But some of these girls have been let down so often, they’ve become self-protective and guarded, especially around adults who appear to be interrogating them without disclosing anything in return.

“I had a mentor once who wouldn’t tell me anything about herself,” complains Tanisha, 17, mother to a chubby-cheeked 1-year-old baby girl “When you’re secretive how am I suppose to trust you?”

Striking the right balance between disclosure and over-sharing can feel like a tight-wire act. It’s important to offer enough information to let your mentee know you can relate—for instance, by sharing a quick anecdote about your own fears surrounding parenthood—but you don’t want to monopolize the conversation. A quick rule of thumb: Answer questions directly, share your experiences when they illustrate a point, but never be the most vocal participant in the Circle.

Teenage parents often feel that whatever they are going through is only happening to them. The goal of personal disclosure is, ultimately, to affirm your mentees’ experiences, validate their emotions and create a safe place in which they can speak. Showing them they are not alone in feeling fear, confusion or frustration can be very helpful. It’s also critical that mentors help remind mentees of the gift and joys of parenthood. For teenagers like Sandra, motherhood can be a positive catalyst for growth and maturation.
“Before I got pregnant I was all over the place,” she recalls. “I was reckless. But when I got pregnant I realized I had to get it together. I didn’t want my daughter to end up in the same position I was in, growing up in foster care because her mother didn’t take care of her. My daughter gave me discipline and self-control. She made me think about things before I do them. Like, I used to be such a hothead. But now, anytime I think about fighting someone, I realize I could go to jail. I don’t want my baby to go into the system, so I do my best not to put myself in situations where I have to be aggressive in the first place.”

Keep Them Safe

There is perhaps no group as maligned as pregnant and parenting teens. In many cities, billboards featuring tearful infants warn young people of the dire outcomes of teen pregnancy. The message is clear: If you parent while still a teenager you’ve failed not only yourself but also your child. This shaming can leave young parents feeling reluctant to share the most difficult details of their lives. But it’s critical that you learn the living arrangements of your mentees in order to offer them the most appropriate guidance and ensure that they are connected with best services and service providers to keep them and their children safe.

Where does your mentee live, and with whom? Is there enough food? Warm clothes? A safe place for the baby to sleep? Some teen parents are fortunate and well provided for. But for many, especially those living in chronically underserved communities, housing and food instability are realities they live with every day. In
situations of extreme poverty, girls may be living in homes with no running water, heat or electricity.

Homelessness is a constant threat for some teenage parents. They may be kicked out of their family home or leave voluntarily after tensions flare in the wake of their pregnancy. They end up in shelters or moving from place to place, staying with a cousin one week and a girlfriend the next. Program leaders, facilitator and also mentors must be aware of these circumstances and be able to direct teens to resources for family counseling and emergency housing, which school officials can often provide or have access to. Our role is to make sure that young parents, dealing with a host of pressures, get connected.

Sometimes the greatest risk to a teen mother and her child is posed by her relationship her baby’s father. Some young mothers move in with their boyfriends, lured by the promise of love and support, even though their boyfriends may be engaged in criminal activity, and the homes may contain weapons or drugs. Other girls find themselves locked in constant battle with the father of their children, engaging in nonstop verbal and even physical altercations—subjecting their infants to harmful amounts of environmental stress and putting themselves and their babies at risk.

Even when the living arrangements are stable, sometimes the emotional chaos of adding a pregnancy to an adolescent relationship can take an enormous toll. Teen parents may struggle with feelings of jealousy and despair, anger and loneliness. This is why mentoring is so critical. Wellness Mentoring Circles surround these precious young people—who have fragile lives in their hands—so that they can grow to know and love themselves. With support, even the most at-risk teen parents can discover his or her power and resilience and get on a path to high achievement and stability.
For young parents, particularly young mothers who are living in emotionally unhealthy environments, mentors can do the important work of guiding them to the awareness that they, and their children, deserve so much more. “I remind my girls that this may be what you are used to, but it’s not healthy,” says Enoex. This is why the wisdom embedded in *A New Way Forward* is so pivotal. We are surrounding our precious young who are living fragile lives with the principles of loving themselves and learning how to make life-affirming and enhancing choices, which come alive in the Wellness Mentoring Circles.

Engage, for example, your Wellness Mentoring Circle in conversations about the qualities of a healthy, loving relationship. Show your mentees they are worthy of respect, and empower them to safely ease away from toxic relationships without placing themselves and their children in harm’s way. Engage mentees in exercises to promote self-care, love and acceptance. The more your mentees can depend on themselves for positive affirmation the less likely they are to seek attention from those who do them harm.

Mentors should also be aware of the risks posed by large age difference between teen mothers and the father of their children; it’s not uncommon for girls to be preyed upon and impregnated by men in their 20s and even older. This power imbalance heightens a girl’s risk for emotional and physical abuse. Be particularly mindful of indications that a mentee gives that she feels she has little or no control over her life, her body, her access to birth control and prenatal and postnatal care. Ask your mentee: Who makes the rules in the house? Who takes you to the doctor? Who makes decisions about the baby’s care? What happens when you and your boyfriend argue?
If you suspect your mentee, or her baby, is in danger, immediately alert your program director, who will be connected to in-school and external services designed to address immediate threats. Protect and secure the future of our girls and their children by steering them from danger.

**Set Goals**

One of the unspoken tragedies for many teen parents is the loss of faith that a bright future is theirs to have. Before they became pregnant, many young mothers had been planning for life beyond high school. But with the arrival of a child, their focus turns to fulfilling their most immediate needs—securing diapers, formula and clothes. Meanwhile, the important task of setting goals and creating a long-term plan for success falls by the wayside.

A subsistent mindset is often reinforced by the teen’s peer group, or even family members. “Many of our students are typically dealing with people who are trying to help them get the most from Medicaid or Welfare to take care of their critical needs,” explains Pathways Academy Principal Nathaniel King. “What they get is information about how to exist right now. What they really need also is information about their future. The more people we can get to tell them how wonderful they are, and show them the possibilities, the better.” Helping young people envision—and plan for—a productive life for themselves and their children is one of the most transformational acts of mentoring.

“I know a lot of people look at us and think all we have to offer is being loud, fighting and getting pregnant,” says Kara, 17, who is raising her 9-month-old daughter alone. “They are wrong. But a lot of girls don’t have good role models. We need to see different examples of other women who raised their children alone and went on to
become successful. I’d love to see a mentor who shows us how to carry ourselves as young Black women; someone who can show us how to do better and be better.”

Ask your mentees to describe what a full and rewarding life looks like. Fuel confidence and a sense of agency by reminding them they have the power to create their own destiny. Working together, help them translate their dreams into concrete action by devising a plan with manageable weekly tasks. Check in regularly about progress, recognizing efforts and providing plenty of encouragement along the way.

**Discuss Consequences**

Kara, a bubbly 17-year old Pathways student, has thought about mentoring a lot. Before she became pregnant, she says proudly, she mentored younger students at her old high school, helping freshman acclimate to their new school. She has some advice for would-be mentors planning to work with teen mothers. She describes it as a three-step plan for self-esteem. “Exercise One should be to write down all the things you like about yourself,” she says eagerly. “Exercise Two is to stop caring about what people say about you by writing down why you care. Exercise Three is to stop comparing yourself to other people. A lot of girls have low self-esteem because they compare themselves to others. That’s why they are constantly fighting. They feel so bad about themselves the only way they can feel better is to point out each other’s flaws.” Kara, who moved in with her brother and his family after her mother moved to another city to be with a boyfriend, plans to graduate high school this year. She wants to go to beauty school so she can get a job and support her daughter. Her big dream is to one day become a therapist.

Kara says the guidance and support she has received from her mentors has helped her become more aware of the relationship between her behavior and her child’s well-being. Now she even tries to relay those messages to other teen mothers. “I saw this girl at school who was cussing at her baby,” she says. “So I tried to tell her that
when you are violent toward your child, then the baby becomes more violent. I learned that in my parenting class.”

The supportive and nurturing atmosphere of a Wellness Mentoring Circle is specifically designed and uniquely suited to encourage young people to examine the consequences of their behavior. With much love and without judgment, you can help your mentees see how poor choices—from engaging in physical fights to not showing up for school—may negatively impact their children, or further keep them from their goals. Case worker Keshana Enoex says she routinely talks to her girls about the choices they make. “I ask them to think things through. For instance, if they are getting into fights, I’ll say, ‘you thought you would just slap the other girl, but what if something goes wrong and she falls down and dies, now what? You’re in jail and someone else is caring, or possibly not caring, for your child.’ The girls appreciate me being real.”

These are not scare tactics; they are reality checks. Prompt your mentees to talk about emotion (“anger”) versus action (“throwing a punch”). Discuss the possible outcomes of various choices they might make in situations that trigger high emotion. Teach them to explore other ways of coping when they feel overwhelmed, such as talking, meditating, journaling, praying or problem solving. Most important, encourage your mentees to see themselves as responsible young adults, in control of their behavior and in charge of their lives.

**Engage Fathers**

In a small meeting room in the Dream Center community space in Harlem, New York, Elijah, who became a father at 16, sits up straight in his chair. He’s here with other young men to discuss the challenges and joys of teen fatherhood. Like the girls in Detroit, these young men complain of the harsh judgments and low expectations
levied against them. But they also want to give thanks for the invaluable mentoring they’ve received since becoming fathers, support they say changed their lives.

Every young man in this room belongs to a fatherhood mentoring initiative run by the Harlem-based youth services program, Union Settlement. The program provides wraparound services, including counseling, parenting-skills workshops, conflict resolution and job-readiness training. But what these young men say they appreciate most is the opportunity to talk.

“Finding out my girl was pregnant was like getting punched in the face,” says Akil, 18. “I was scared. I didn’t know anything about how to take care of a baby. I had so many questions, but I thought people would think, ‘Why did you have a baby if you don’t know how to do this or that? So I didn’t talk to anyone. Then I got into this group. Here I can talk about things I couldn’t ask anyone else. Like how to raise my child the proper way. In the group, everyone has an open mic, and all my burdens are lifted.”

Teenage boys who become fathers may feel trapped, anxious or depressed. These emotions are compounded by the belief, shared by many young Black men, that asking for guidance is a sign of vulnerability. So instead, they grapple with their feelings alone, causing their frustration to escalate. For many, it feels as though the life they envisioned for themselves has been snatched away. Some blame the girls for their predicament, lashing out in anger. Others simply check out, fed up by what feels like their girlfriend’s unreasonable demands and unpredictable moods.

“The kids are often not in stable relationships to begin with,” says Lena Green, clinical social worker and founder and executive director of New York’s Akira Center, a community-based counseling center. “Then suddenly there is a pregnancy. For the boys, it can feel like a minefield. They are trying to navigate her emotions along with their own. As teenagers, they are not equipped to do all that.”
A pregnancy can also ignite strife within a boy’s family. While young girls are often shamed for getting pregnant, young men are blamed. “How could you be so stupid?” they’re asked, sometimes by members of their own family.

Tragically, many of our young Black men have not been given the tools they need to identify and articulate the strong emotions they may experience. Instead, they’ve been brainwashed into believing that power comes from force, patience is weakness and parenting one’s child is optional. So they stomp down their feelings only to lash out with self-destructive behavior. This is exactly where a mentor can step in, guiding young men toward the emotional maturity they’ll need to parent and partner successfully.

Jaden, another young man in the fatherhood program, says with the help of his mentors he’s learned important lesson about managing the rage that used to overwhelm him. “I’m not going to lie,” he says, “I used to be a real whack job. Like one time I saw my child’s mother and another dude was pushing the stroller. I was so mad I almost blacked out.” Jaden admits he assaulted the other young man, an action he now regrets.

Perhaps the single greatest challenge a young father may face is negotiating the relationship with the mother of his child, especially if either parent begins dating someone new. When Jaden mentions his discomfort at seeing his child’s mother with another man, the other young fathers at the table erupt in groans of recognition. Mentors can be instrumental in helping teen fathers tease apart their feelings for their child’s mother, no matter how negative, from the love and responsibility they feel toward his child.
“I used to have so many anger problems and so much trouble communicating,” Jaden adds. “But being in the program I am learning how to let things go so I can do what’s best for my child. I learned that it’s not about my ego. It’s about my son. This program is helping me become a better version of myself.”

Every day thousands of underserved teenagers—like Sandra, Kara, Akil and Jaden—struggle with the emotional demands of parenting. They are expected to nurture their own children and raise themselves while fielding an onslaught of damaging cultural stereotypes, low expectations and shaming tactics. They need our support.

The whole-school assembly topics and small group activities that you will find in the following pages have been carefully designed to foster the deep and meaningful conversations that will guide teenage parents toward a life of patience, good communication and emotional fortitude. Together we can fuel the confidence of these most valuable teens, validating their experience and empowering them to achieve their greatest goals. This is the transformative power of a Mentoring Circle.

With loving gratitude, thank you for embarking on this important journey.

* The names of the young parents have been changed
The Curriculum in Context:
Understanding the Program
by
asha bandele

Thank you for answering the 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 do not 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.

The Rising seeks to transform the lives of children trapped in intergenerational poverty by engaging them with a culturally appropriate curriculum that is executed by trained wellness professionals and mentors. We believe, and there is early data to suggest, that our healing curriculum mitigates the impact of the disparities and dysfunctions that conspire to ruin young lives; and undergirded with the knowledge of their proud heritage and painful but triumphant history, they will graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college or industrial-training programs and 21st-century careers.

Our transformational program, The Rising, emerged from the crises we were alerted to by teachers Tanya Blake and Alison Brooks in two Fort Lauderdale alternative schools—Seagull, which has 300 teen mothers and fathers, and Whiddon-Rogers, which has 1,700 students, most of them boys 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.

It was with this support that National CARES was first able to adapt for our mentee population a program originally designed to support our mentors, some of whom themselves were weighed down by life’s stressors, including racism. Our first guide for young people came to life in Chicago and in less than a year’s time, in a school that had been targeted for closing, test scores had a full point uptick; students felt safer in the schools and avoided self- and community-harming activities. Some left gangs permanently. Some received full scholarships to college. And in Florida, the program so shifted the lives of students that it was adopted by nine other schools—and now is being planned for replication for every school in Broward County.

The guide you are holding not only reflects learnings we have gathered across the years, but also our initial foray into developing a set of activities for a very specific audience—teenagers who are pregnant and parenting. They deserve and need our arms wrapped all the way around them: Of the roughly 750,000 high school girls who become pregnant each year, fully 90 percent will drop out of high school. Similarly, teen fathers are far more likely to drop out, and despite that the majority wish to be involved in the lives of their children, there is an extraordinary dearth of programming designed to ensure that they have the wherewithal to sustain themselves or their children.
Derided, discarded, often depressed because they've been disconnected, teen parents are written off before they've ever had a chance to be written in. For too long we have asked young people to succeed even as we have failed them time and again. We've built prisons when we should have built schools. We invested in hedge funds when we should have invested in our children. We have wagged our fingers at them when we should have lent a hand; and for the entire history of this country, this has been the pattern we have offered young people most in need, and it has created a world where despair is more common than faith, where pain is more prevalent than promise.

The *Rising* exists to disrupt that pattern.
The Rising in a Snapshot

What is The Rising: Elevating Education, Expectations and Self-Esteem?

The Rising is one of two Rising programs and is our signature group-mentoring program. The program you are a part of is designed specifically for high school students in underserved Black communities. Our other Rising program partners with HBCUs and undergirds middle-schoolers in S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) education.

Why is The Rising needed?

The Rising was created in response to a climate in which more than 50 percent of all public school students live at or below the poverty line; in which there are Black children so beset by violence that they are suffering from levels of PTSD heretofore unseen except in adults returning from the Afghan theater of war; in which mass incarceration and criminalization has made the United States the leading incarcerator in the world, a major factor in children—our children—living dislocated lives; and in which the disruption of school budgets for at least 30 years has produced a generation of young people largely unable to read or do math at anywhere near grade level, effectively counting them out of life-sustaining jobs and careers.

How is The Rising executed?

The Rising is characterized by five distinct pillars:

1. **This Curriculum**, which is executed weekly.

2. **The Wellness Mentoring Circles (WMC)**, which is the vehicle through which the curriculum comes alive. The schools work them into one period during the school week, often a gym period. The Circles are small and intimate and single-gender to allow for the most open and honest sharing from all. Generally, a Circle shouldn’t grow beyond about 12 students, although effective facilitators and mentors have adjusted to work with more young people as needed.
3. **The Mentors**, who are recruited by our local Affiliate leaders, and guided and sustained by our program leaders, facilitators and our national staff. Mentors may come and work with the students in WMCs each week, or they may come and lead an electrifying whole-school assembly. Mentors who come each week are given more extensive training and support, and are required to get background checks.

4. **The All-School Assemblies**, which are generally executed monthly and seek to provide the whole student body with a pivotal life lesson rooted in one of the pillars found in the *A New Way Forward* manual. Please review the section on assemblies for specific guidance on assembly execution.

5. **A Committed Program Staff**, which is populated by a mix of dedicated program leaders—both at the director level and the manager level—and trained facilitators, preferably those with degrees in psychology and who have a history of working successfully and lovingly with young people.
Best Practices in Developing and Executing the Program

Read the Manual: All of our curricula is derived from our manual, *A New Way Forward: Healing What’s Hurting Black America*, which contains our overarching philosophy developed by our Brain Trust; they 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 Brain Trust offered and, accordingly, why the curriculum contained here was developed as it was.

Build Trust with School Officials: While you do not work for the school, it is essential that you partner with the administration and faculty in the school. You are responsible for building and maintaining the program, so communicating with key members on programmatic implementation and execution regularly and clearly—and listening closely to their concerns—is imperative to success.

Build Partnership with the Service Providers in the School and Community: The work we do is not designed to address every area of disruption in a young person’s life. For example, some young people may need housing assistance; others may need help with a financial aid application for college; and still others may have serious emotional challenges. We are not prepared to address all of these concerns. However, what we must be prepared to do is to guide them to, and if needed, through, the appropriate office on campus or in the community that can assist them with these real-world needs. In short, the work we do is dependent on all of us knitting ourselves together, bringing to the table the skills and services we have in order to ensure safest passage for our precious young.

Listen: CARES is a learning organization and we should always be ready, willing and able to refine our work, respond to developing needs and share these with the national office and other staff so that we are assured of serving our children at the highest levels at all times.

Adhere to the Existing Structure to the Maximum Extent Possible, But Don’t Be Afraid to Be Nimble: Our program’s success is dependent upon the accurate capturing and maintenance of data. To that extent, we have several electronic and
other reporting protocols in place. Please adhere to these, along with adhering to the activities—but never be afraid of making suggestions about better ways to execute the program. Your national program manager, who meets with you once weekly, is available to talk through these and any other suggestions.

**Prepare for the Week:** In preparation for each session, please read not only the corresponding chapter in the manual but also meet with your team of facilitators and, if possible, mentors, to walk through the next week’s activity. Answer questions and reach out to the national office if you have questions. For those mentors you cannot meet with in person, be sure you send them the materials and are available to answer any questions that they may have.

**Be Patient, Be Loving:** Including with yourself. You are part of a team and we are here to support you. We know that the work of reclaiming a community of children is not easy work, but it is the most honorable and rewarding work we can do. We are forever aware that our children not only carry the harms visited upon them in their young lives but also the harms we adults have carried for years, for generations. Remember to be patient and be mindful that hurt people often hurt people. But ultimately love will do what it has always done: transform.
ESSENTIAL ALL-SCHOOL ASSEMBLY TOPICS

The All-School Assemblies are generally executed monthly and seek to provide the whole student body with a pivotal life lesson rooted in one of the pillars found in the *A New Way Forward* manual. The assemblies work best when students are included in the discussion, which is to say, pillars can be demonstrated by showing a film, pulling together a panel or having one speaker, but whichever format works best in your school, there should always a vibrant question-and-answer period.

- **Heritage:** It’s often said that the role of a parent is to provide a child with two things: roots and wings. A child, it is said, must know where he or she comes from but also know what it takes—and be provided the needed skillset—to soar on his or her own. Similarly, no group of people can be expected to thrive if they have been wholly dislocated, which was the case with African people, not only because of slavery but also because of the many adversities that disrupted our communities—from Jim Crow to mass incarceration—and severed the passing of wisdom, history and truth, our roots, down through the generations. Heritage assemblies, then, are the connectors, the great grounding force and the landscape upon which all other information is built. In other words, how might one understand the full breadth of loving and healthy partnership if all one is presented with is violent sexual images ever present in pop culture? How might one imagine a future of greatness if all one is given as his or her tomorrow is the image of imprisonment? Heritage assemblies tell us we do not begin—or end—in hurt and hate. We begin with a mighty and gorgeous history, and one that can and should inform our destiny.

- **Conflict Resolution:** Living with the stressors many of our young people (and adults) do, small infractions or upsets often get spiraled out of control. How do we become the peace we seek? How do we help de-escalate tensions—and avoid them all together? This topic is always timely and can be approached again and again.

- **What Makes a Man/What Makes a Woman?:** These are envisioned as single-gender assemblies designed to help combat the onslaught of narrow images of manhood and womanhood—often informed by the worst stereotypes borne of White supremacy. As with conflict resolution, because our young men and women experience these narrow and ultimately dehumanizing tropes over and again vis-à-vis 24-hour media cycles, this can and should be revisited again and again.

- **Living in Excellence:** These assemblies should locate students firmly in the practice of excellence. Too often our children are told that mediocrity is the
highest level to which they can climb. No! They are brilliant. They are supernovas, and presented with the right study skills or habits of the successful, they can indeed be the superstar they were born to be.
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.

**YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TALKING.** Too often as adults we are eager to share our wisdom and advice with young people without giving them opportunity 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.

**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.

**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.

**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 problems do arise. Every challenge can be seen and worked with as a teachable moment. This is the importance of having supportive wellness professionals facilitating Circles in addition to caring men and women mentors.

**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 such distractions 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...” or “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/her participation and discuss with your lead trainer how we can offer additional support and services to the student and perhaps the 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 makeup. 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.
THE OPENING SESSIONS

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

Your first Circle sessions are designed to help establish both trust with your students and a tone for your time together with the young people in your community. After these 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* program. Remember, too, that young people don’t care what you know until they know that you care. Model committed listening. Young people—especially young parents—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 parents 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**

**First Activity of the Week**

- **Name of Activity**: Establishing Circle/Group Covenants
- **Goal of Activity**: Creating a Safe Space
- **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 their thoughts 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 replicate it 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.

Second Activity of the Week

Name of Activity: LISTEN, DON’T LISTEN

- Goal of Activity: To develop active listening skills
- 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**

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

**Close:** Everyone say the pledge together
THE OPENING SESSIONS: WEEK TWO

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

- Goal of the Activity: Learning to build trust
- Materials Needed: Paper and pens
- Length of Activity: Entire session

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 lighthearted 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**

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

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
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 young Black people 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 young parents—and yourself—with the opening sessions, the mentoring begins, because what we know to be 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. And perhaps nowhere will that be more important than in the work we do with those who have the vital responsibility of guiding a young life themselves. Often stigmatized, stressed and without the familial and community supports they—anyone—would need to succeed, our aim is to stand in the gap. We aim to not only mentor these beautiful young lives, but by extension, the lives that are in their hands. The next weeks’ activities ask young parents to consider what many have told them is impossible: success. And woven into the activities is: “Who Are You?” This is an activity that allows them to truly be seen—and honored. The activities in this section are intended to provide tangible skills to achieve goals as well as the space to shed the masks we’ve all been taught to wear, and embrace the strength, truth and beauty of who they are and who they can one day become.

MENTORING WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- WELCOME AND REVIEW OF COVENANTS
Name of Activity: QUALITIES OF A MENTOR

- **Goal of the Activity:** Understanding what we're here to do together
- **Materials Needed:** "What is a Mentor?” handout, butcher paper, marker, timer, individual journal for each participant in the Mentoring Circle, pens
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

Description of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to talk about mentoring in general and create excitement about the process of group participation. This activity is also a wonderful time to distribute journals to the students and introduce them to the process of journaling by giving them their first journal prompt, which they can begin (and possibly complete, if time permits) during the session.

Begin this activity by sharing the “What is a Mentor?” handout and engaging the Circle in a 10-minute discussion about mentoring. You may find the following prompts helpful to guide your discussion:

- What support can a mentor provide?
- What responsibilities are NOT those of a mentor?

Next, have the group join in the “Supportive Adult/Challenging Adult” exercise by having the students seat themselves in pairs. Prompt each participant to think about one adult in his or her life who’s been very supportive and one adult who’s been challenging. These adults may be parents or other relatives, teachers, mentors, employers or adult friends. Each participant should describe to his or her partner the particular way in which this adult has been supportive or challenging. Use a timer and allow each partner five minutes to speak, then switch.

Finally, call the participants back into the group. On the top of two separate sheets of butcher paper write the words “Supportive” and “Challenging.” Ask the group to think back to the exercise they just did and list the qualities (for instance, “patient,”
“generous,” “rude,” “hot tempered,” etc.) that fall under each category. With both sheets visible to the group, pose the following questions:

- As a parent, which of these qualities do you see in yourself?
- Which of these qualities would you like to develop?

Twenty minute before the close of session, wrap up the conversation and distribute individual journals, if you haven’t done so already, to each participant. Explain the benefits of regular journaling and let your mentees know that they will receive a journal prompt at the end of each Mentoring Circle. Encourage the participants to use their journal prompts in any way they choses, for instance to compose poems, prose or letters. Then give the students their first journal prompt [below] and 15 minutes to get started writing.

**Journal Prompt:** Write about what kind of mentor you want to be for your child. What qualities do you already have that you’d like to celebrate and what quality would you like to develop?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
MENTORING WEEK TWO

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
  - Journal Prompt
  - Close

Name of Activity: WHO ARE YOU?
- Goal of Activity: Learning to see and honor the truth of who we and each one of us are
- 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:
• Who do people say you are?

• 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**
1. How was the experience of asking?
2. How was the experience of answering?
3. What was most difficult part of this exercise?
4. 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*.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
HERITAGE

“You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.” — Maya Angelou

The lack of historically balanced and culturally competent education, coupled with the onslaught of vulgar media images—“absent Black fathers; Black mothers as baby mamas, welfare queens, gold diggers”—have left most of our young languishing in a place where they reject and even hate the very essence of who they are—including who they are as parents.

But the truth is, we were snatched painfully away from our families during chattel slavery. The truth is, at the end of slavery, some of us walked as much as 100 miles to find our families. The truth is, policies of the 1970s disrupted marriage and partnership for myriad poor Black men and women. The truth is that with often few resources, a mainstay of Black culture is the family reunion. And the ultimate truth is that we are more than our greatest pain. We are a multifaceted collection of survivors and builders and dreamers and artists and thinkers and change-makers. And peacemakers. The exercises and discussions in this session are intended to demonstrate these basic truths.

HERITAGE WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity One
- Activity Two
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: LIBATION
Goal of the Activity: Learning how to honor and draw upon the strength of our ancestors

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**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 on the ground for a fallen friend, we are pouring libation. When we call their names in our music, that’s 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 enlightened 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, *Ashé* (pronounced ah-shay), which is a Yoruba word that means, among other things, “and so it is” or “Amen.” Begin with names from our collective memory and history 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—*Ashé!
For courage and selflessness in leading our people from the atrocity of slavery through the Underground Railroad to freedom, we remember Harriet Tubman—Ashé!

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
Michael Brown
Rekia Boyd
Freddie Gray—Ashé!

Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. Who are your ancestors?
2. How do you keep the memory of your loved ones alive?
3. How did it feel to remember those who are no longer with us?
4. Were there names or words you did not recognize?
5. 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 Africa, our Motherland, and also the memory of slavery in America. 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.

Guided Group Discussion Question

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.)

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.

Special 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; and then everyone says the pledge together.
HERITAGE WEEK TWO

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: THE MYTH OF BLACK INFERIORITY

- Goal of the Activity: To begin the process of unlearning the lies about us that have been sold to us
- 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 Doll Choice 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

1. Who is beautiful?
2. How does the media shape our ideas about beauty?
3. What is good hair?
4. Why did the children say the Black doll was bad?
5. Is light skin better than dark skin? Why?
6. How do businesses make money perpetuating negative ideas and images about us and about Black parents?
7. Why do we feel bad about ourselves and what is internalized oppression?
8. Why do we talk about other people?
9. How do we contribute to our own oppression?
10. What images do you see in the media of Africa? Of Africans?
11. Why don’t you see the millions of people who vacation in the various countries in Africa, or the businesses, shopping malls, downtowns, resorts?

Special Close: 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.

Everyone says the pledge together.
HERITAGE WEEK FOUR:

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: CHOOSING OUR DESTINY

- **Goal of Activity:** Learning to believe that we can create our own realities
- **Materials needed:**
  A video clip or written biography of Maya Angelou that highlights her experience of becoming a teenage mother.

  A video or text clip of LeBron James speaking about his childhood experience of being raised without a father, and the way in which it inspired his commitment to becoming an involved parent to his own children. For instance, the clips below:
  [http://www.today.com/video/today/54076915#54076915](http://www.today.com/video/today/54076915#54076915)

- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

Description of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to help participants recognize that they have control and power over their lives. We do this primarily by showing young people the ways in which those they most admire were able to chart their own course for success despite their challenges.

Begin this activity by distributing reading passages or viewing clips. Then open the floor to a group discussion by posing the following questions:

- What kind of difficulties did this person face?
- What choices did he or she make to overcome their challenges?
- How did he or she use their experience to become a better parent?
- What other choices could they have made that might have changed their path?
- How do you relate to this person’s story?

**Journal Prompt:** What choice have I made in my life that I am most proud of? How has this choice positively impacted my life?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
HERITAGE WEEK FIVE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: LIVING THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA

- **Goal of Activity:** Embracing the principles of success
- **Materials Needed:** “Seven Principles of Kwanzaa” handout (available online), “Living the Principles of Kwanzaa” worksheet, butcher paper or white board, markers, pens,
- **Length of Activity:** Two sessions

Description of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to help participants become familiar with the seven principles of Kwanzaa and to inspire students to incorporate these guiding principles into their daily lives.

Begin by distributing a “Seven Principles of Kwanzaa” handout. Then, for about 15 to 20 minutes, review each of the seven principles with the group by posing the following questions:

- What do you think this principle means?
- Who have you seen incorporate this principle in his or her everyday life?
- What are other ways a person might honor this Kwanzaa principle?

If a participant is unable to come up with concrete examples that illustrate the principles of Kwanzaa, feel free to supply examples from your own life. For instance, you may share with the group that you practice the principle of *Ujamaa* by choosing to shop at a Black-owned grocery store in your neighborhood instead of at a national chain. Share your thoughts briefly. Once you have given one or two examples, pose the questions again to the group and encourage them to come up with examples.
Following the group discussion, hand out the “Living the Principles of Kwanzaa” worksheet. Give the students 10 minutes to fill out the worksheet by describing one way in which they can incorporate a principle of Kwanzaa into their daily life. Then bring the group back together for a group discussion by posing the following questions to each participant.

- What principle did you choose?
- How do you think you can incorporate this principle into your life?

Encourage the students to listen to each other and value one another's perspectives. While they listen, they should take notes on what they hear. Guide participants to write down on their worksheet at least one or two ideas that they like.

At the end of the 15-to-20-minute group discussion, ask the participants to put a star beside the principle they are going to act on during the week. Remind them that it can be the principle they chose initially or an idea shared by another member in the group. At the bottom of the worksheet is a space for the students to write a goal from themselves. Ask the group to each set a goal for themselves.

This week I am going to act on ________ principle of Kwanzaa by ______________.

**Journal Prompt:** Which of the seven principles of Kwanzaa am I already good at, which principle is the hardest for me to follow, and why?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
HERITAGE WEEK SIX

“The difference between a dream and a goal is a plan.” — Anonymous

AGENDA

• Welcome and Review of Covenants
• Activity
• Journal Prompt
• Close

Name of Activity: MAKING PLANS A REALITY

• Goal of the Activity: Planning for success
• Materials: “SMART Goals” worksheet, butcher paper, pens, markers
• Length of Activity: Full session (this exercise is part two of the Heritage activity “Living the Principles of Kwanzaa”)

Description of Activity: Before this activity, facilitators should familiarize themselves with the concept of SMART goals. Here is one helpful website:


The purpose of this important session is to introduce the Circle to the concept and practice of setting SMART goals, which is critical to students’ ongoing success. We will return to the practice of setting SMART goals later in the curriculum, so it is helpful that we lay this groundwork.

Begin this session with a 15-minute report back on the “Living the Principles of Kwanzaa” goals the group set for themselves the previous week. It’s important for facilitators to remember that students often internalize an inability to meet a goal as “failure.” Be sensitive to this and remind your mentees that falling short of a goal is a wonderful opportunity for self-reflection and learning. With that in mind, ask the students to be open and honest as they share the experience of the previous week. Go around the Circle and prompt discussion with the following questions:

  ● What was your goal?
  ● Did you meet your goal?
● If so, how did you measure your success?
● If not, what were some of the things that stood in your way?
● How do you feel having set a goal and meeting it/not meeting it?
● Have you ever tried to meet this kind of goal before? Is this a pattern?

Next, distribute the “SMART Goals” worksheet and explain to the group the concept of a SMART goal by discussing what each letter stands for. You may have noticed that various websites designate slightly different definitions for the SMART acronym. For our purposes, the letters represent the following:

● SMART = Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Realistic and Time-bound

Help make the conversation meaningful by leading your group in a discussion of the difference between vague or unrealistic goals and SMART goals. For instance:

● “My goal is to get better at my homework” is not a SMART goal because it is not specific and measurable, and because there is no accountability.

● “My goal is to do five hours of homework every night” is not a SMART goal because it’s not realistic.

● “My goal is to do 30 minutes of homework a night and report back to the Mentoring Circle about my progress next week” is a SMART goal.

Review the sample SMART goals on the “SMART Goals” worksheet and ask the group to brainstorm other SMART goals. Write their ideas on the butcher paper. Brainstorm for about 10 minutes.

For the final 15 minutes of this important session, have the students get into pairs. These pairs will be “Accountability Partners.” Guide the pairs to think back to the Kwanzaa goal they set for themselves during the previous session. With this thought in mind, each student is going to write down a new Kwanzaa goal on his or her “SMART Goals” worksheet, only this time the goal should encompass all the elements of a SMART goal. Have each student share that goal with their Accountability Partners.

As the session comes to a close, encourage the group to check in with their Accountability Partner during the week to ask how things are going, and offer one another encouragement and support.
Journal Prompt: How are you doing with your SMART goal? What are some obstacles getting in your way? What can you change to achieve your goal?

Close: Everyone says the pledge together.
SPIRITUALITY

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

Spirituality 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.

These sessions are designed to help students understand that they and their babies 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.

SPIRITUALITY WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: INTRODUCTION TO CENTERING

- **Goal of the Activity:** To learn to hear our own voices and hearts
- **Materials Needed:** None
- **Length of Activity:** 15 minutes for pre-discussion, 5 minutes for the activity, 25 minutes for post-activity 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?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
SPIRITUALITY WEEK TWO

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: WHAT ARE MY VALUES?

- Goal of Activity: To encourage students to reflect on their core 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

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. But as they guide new lives, developing and honoring a healthy set of values is foundational—especially because they are going to be questioned often and sometimes unfairly when it comes to parenting. It's imperative for young parents to consider, unpack and finally assert their core values. 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.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.

**SPIRITUALITY WEEK THREE:**

**AGENDA**

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close
Name of Activity: MAKING THE CONNECTION

- **Goal of Activity:** Learning how to feel and connect with the Divine in you
- **Materials Needed:** The Dr. Maya Angelou pledge; paper and pens
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

Description of Activity: Ask a volunteer to read the pledge aloud but this time to consider its spiritual theme. You do it if no one wants to (Remember that some students might struggle with reading.) Ask students to focus on these lines:

\[
\text{We add our voices to the voices of your ancestors,} \\
\text{Who speak to you over ancient seas and across impossible mountaintops}
\]

After everyone has had a moment to silently reflect on the meaning of the poem, lead the group in a 15-minute discussion by posing the following questions:

- What did you feel *this time* when you heard the pledge?
- Was there a line that resonated with you the most?
- Did any part of the pledge make you think about circumstances in your own life?

After you’ve discussed the pledge, distribute blank paper to the participants and tell them you are going to do a quick warm-up writing exercise. Ask them to sit comfortably, close their eyes and reflect as you pose the following question:

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt a connection to a higher power or experienced a feeling of connection to guidance and support outside of yourself?

Now ask them to open their eyes and take five minutes to write down a few words about the time when they felt a connection to a power greater than themselves.

- What was the experience that inspires this feeling?
- If you have never experienced something like this, what does that feel like?
When the group has finished the warm-up writing, transition into the rest of the exercise. Share with the Circle that many parents report feeling a connection to something greater than themselves during pregnancy or the birth of their child. Some people say it is the first time they felt the presence of God or a connection to the Circle of Life. Sometimes, this feeling is expressed most simply as gratitude.

Finally, distribute fresh paper to the participants and let them know they will have approximately 20 minutes (until the end of the session) to write a gratitude letter or poem to their child. Encourage your mentees with the following prompts:

- In what way has your child been a blessing to you?
- What are your hopes and dreams for your child?

**Journal Prompt:** Look at the gratitude letter or poem you’ve written to your child. Is there anything you’d like to add to enrich the letter?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
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 would also 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. Add to that the responsibility of caring for a new life in a world that stigmatizes you, often there is a fear in asking for help because the ask alone risks rejection, which for them may be emotionally too high a price to pay.

And yet, they must learn to manage these heavy stressors so that despite whatever the statistics say, they can thrive and help their babies to thrive as well. In these sessions, the goal is to offer young parents key resources to help them recognize, 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. And we live in a world that so many don’t have access to the basic resources that they need for themselves and their children. It’s infuriating and yet we lose when we are ruled by our fury, our anger. We don’t achieve our goals. Even as we acknowledge unfairness, we must train ourselves to focus our lens on victory: This is the legacy bestowed upon us by our foremothers and forefathers!
Our young parents need to know that anger can obscure a greater truth. 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 raised the children, often on little love and less resources, who built this nation 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 on to 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 wounds, 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 do so. 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 just okay to do so, it’s important to their emotional wellness and lifelong happiness. Don’t feel the need to rush in with tissues or advice, impulses that can often be a sign of the listener’s discomfort. Be compassionate and let them experience what they are so often yearning for—caring adults who will listen without judgment. Students are building community and will comfort one another when necessary. As always, it is important to model the behavior we are seeking. If you are able to share your own painful experiences and how you overcame them or how you may still be working through them without dominating the conversation, it will encourage young people to express their feelings and not feel so vulnerable. That you have and continue to work to overcome life’s many challenges is the confirmation our children need that the same is possible for them.
Remember in this section to caution youngsters about confidentiality practices, and that you must be mindful of mandatory reporting and trauma response.

STRESS WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close
- Journal Prompt (This Week the Prompt Comes After the Close)

Name of Activity: GETTING TO THE SOURCE
Goal of the Activity: Learning to identify our stressors
Materials Needed: Stress handout, pens and a surface to write on
Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: Explain to students that often we do not feel the right or the safety to speak to what is burdening us. Black people are almost programmed to declare themselves capable of handling anything and everything. We are nearly programmed to deny what we need. This activity is not about learning how to complain or declare ourselves victims. It is to acknowledge all those things that are happening and that may be getting in the way of our success. In speaking truth, we speak power. We are capable of talking ourselves into solutions, but first we have to tell the truth and have it be heard and honored. This exercise is designed to do just that.

Hand the Stress Checklist to students and ask that they privately check off anything that applies to them. Remind them that they don’t have to share what they check off; but after five minutes or so, ask if anyone wants to. And then wait. Often it’s good to have a mentor prepared to share first—albeit very briefly—as a way to warm up the space. When adults share their own challenges, it encourages young people to trust them.
Remind students that what is said in Circle stays in Circle; even when one is trying to be caring, do not bring up what someone shared. If he or she chooses to confide in a mentor or student outside of Circle, that’s fine. But it must be their choice. Also, let people cry. Support is shown through active listening—not rushing in to get them to stop crying or to wipe away their tears. Have tissues on hand if someone wants or really needs one, but again, let the speaker direct the support he or she needs.

**STRESS CHECKLIST**

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

- Breakup of a relationship
- Loss of sleep
- Loss of home
- Loss of job
- Unable to meet expenses
- Survived an act of violence
- Failed a test
- Failed a class
- Loss of social circle/friends
- Loss of school or familiar routine
- A parent’s loss of job
- Relationship rejection
- Loss of a family member to violence
- Health challenge
- Lack of social support services
- Health challenge of friend or family member
- Witnessed an act of violence
- Change of residence
- Stopped by the police
- Violence in neighborhood
- Hunger
- Loneliness
- 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 loved one
Embarrassed or belittled by an adult you must regularly interact with (e.g., a doctor)
Pressure to get into college
Trouble understanding class material
Conflict with a teacher
Pressure to get a job
*A printable version of this chart appears at the end of this section.

**Special Close: 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 collectively: “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
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: LET IT GO
Goal of Activity: Learning to release anger, and forgive
Materials Needed: Clip from the film Antwone Fisher, balloons, paper, pens
Length of Activity: Entire session

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 indigenous peoples and the theft of their land; the brutality we endured during the enslavement of our people; the European Holocaust, and the genocide 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 do so. 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 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 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 name 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 on to 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 a 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_______________________.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
STRESS WEEK THREE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: NO MATTER WHAT

- **Goal of Activity:** Creating a space in which pregnant and parenting teens can speak openly and honestly about the challenges they face, and remind them of healthy ways they can reduce their stress.
- **Materials Needed:** Chairs, butcher paper, markers
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

Activity: Begin the session with a 20-minute group brainstorm in which participants call out their most pressing challenges and struggles. Remind young parents that the Circle is a safe space, free of judgment. They can share whatever is on their mind. Use these prompts to get them started:

- What are some things that stress you out most as a parent?
- What do you worry about most often?
- What burden feels too great for you to carry?

As the students brainstorm, write the “Challenges” on a sheet of butcher paper taped to the wall.

Once you have a list of pressing challenges and concerns, remind the group that as parents, and especially young parents, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed. Part of being a parent is that we sometimes face challenges for which there is no easy solution. Even so, there are things we can do to help us focus and feel less stressed. The blessing we all share is the ability to calm ourselves down. Tell the Circle that connecting with that path to finding quiet and calm is what they are going to practice today.

Next, ask the group to pair up for the “No Matter What, I Can Always ...” exercise.
For this 10-minute exercise, two students will sit opposite one another and take turns completing the phrase, “No matter what, I can always...” Encourage your mentees to complete the phrase with healthy, positive activities they can always do, that may bring them joy, comfort, quiet and peace. Share with the group examples such as:

- No matter what, I can always breathe deeply.
- No matter what, I can always go for a walk.
- No matter what, I can play with my baby.

Finally, bring the Circle back together. Take a new piece of butcher paper and tape it on top of the list of challenges. At the top of this new paper write, “No Matter what, YOU Can Always:” Then ask your mentees to call out their favorite suggestions to de-stress along with two ideas they learned from their partner. Fill up the paper with suggestions.

**Journal Prompt:** What is your favorite way to reduce stress? How can you incorporate this activity into your life more often?

**Close:** Say the pledge together.
STRESS CHECKLIST

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

- Breakup of a relationship
- Loss of sleep
- Loss of home
- Loss of job
- Unable to meet expenses
- Survived an act of violence
- Failed a test
- Failed a class
- Loss of social circle/friends
- Loss of school/familiar routine
- A parent’s loss of job
- Relationship rejection
- Loss of a family member to violence
- Health challenge
- Lack of social support services
- Health challenge of friend or family member
- Witnessed an act of violence
- Change of residence
- Stopped by the police
- Violence in neighborhood
- Unable to meet expenses
- Hunger
- Loneliness
- 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 loved one
- Embarrassed or belittled by an adult you must regularly interact with (e.g., a doctor)
- Pressure to get into college
- Trouble understanding class material
- Conflict with a teacher
- Pressure to get a job
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 parents that love is a verb—even as so many of them are living with love disrupted? Our young parents, especially our young mothers, often get disrespect and disregard from the fathers of their children, from the doctors they spend so much time with throughout their pregnancy and first years of their child’s life, from school officials and social services—not to mention their own families. What actions can we help them take that will liberate and empower them in these or any difficult situation they may face? 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 young parents 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—on themselves and their children. 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 parenthood and 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 young parents understand the importance of critical thinking, which leads to informed decision making and a
lifelong commitment to sustaining our health and vitality. And in modeling it for their children, they are passing it on—a new and more healthy world.

WELLNESS WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: HOW I GET THROUGH

- Goal of Activity: To examine the habits we embrace in the face of stress and ask ourselves: Are they helping or are they hurting?
- Materials Needed: Coping handout, pens and a surface to write on
- Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: As with the stress checklist, the group should sit in a circle and for 5 or 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.

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.

**COPING CHECKLIST**

What strategies do I use 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
- Use social media
- Troll the internet
- Hang out with friends
- Pray
- Go to church
- Play with my baby
- Talk to a trusted friend
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Yell at my baby
- Sleep
- Fight (physically)
- Argue with friends or siblings
- Argue with parents
- Argue with other adults in my life
- Eat junk food
- Drink
Have sex
Exercise/play sports
Go for a walk
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
Hang out “in the street”

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

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**Special 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
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: WHAT TYPE OF LUXURY VEHICLE ARE YOU?

- Goal of Activity: Claiming our body as a temple
- Materials Needed: Wellness essay by Susan L. Taylor on p. 53 of the ANWF manual, pens, paper and a dry-erase board
- Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: Too often we determine our body’s 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 body 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—something young parents have just experienced.

This exercise is meant to remind each student of the miracle of our body 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 body, and only when we love our body, we will take care of it.

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 body for what it is—a vehicle 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 ____________________.

Guided Group Discussion Questions

When the students have finished writing in their answers, ask them:

1. Whom would they allow to drive their car?
2. Whom would they allow to touch their body?
3. What kind of fuel does their car need to run?
4. What kind of fuel does their body need to run?
5. What might they have to do to make sure the car remained in top condition?
6. Same question related to their body and the body of their children, and then these questions:
   ● How would they feel if the car was harmed in anyway?
   ● What are some of the things young people are doing today to harm their body?
   ● What should they do to keep their car/themselves/their babies in tip-top shape?

Begin closing the discussion by asking students to describe times when they were grateful for the strength and power of their “vehicle.” What kind of shape is their vehicle currently in? Is their vehicle cruising through the day smoothly or stalling at
various points? Are they putting poison in their vehicle or choosing the best possible fuel? Are they giving their body and mind needed rest, with more than eight hours of sleep each night? Ask participants to share, popcorn style. Let the conversation flow. What about their babies?

To end the activity, come back together in a circle of healing. Let all the students stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the circle and say one thing about why their body is an amazing gift of life.

Journal Prompt: One thing I could do to make myself healthier is __________.

Close: Everyone says the pledge together.
WELLNESS WEEK THREE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: EAT TO LIVE
Goal of Activity: Honoring the Temple that is our body
Materials Needed: An excerpt from the film Soul Food Junkies by Byron Hurt and clips from other films about healthful eating
Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: Show clips from the films before moving into a guided group discussion.

- 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?
- Why are fresh fruits, vegetables and unprocessed food good for growing children?
- What healthy eating habits can you model for your child?
- What healthy foods can you find on a budget?
- What is a healthy food choice you can make that will positively impact your child?
**In Class Journal Prompt:** One thing I am doing to make myself healthier is ____________. One thing I am doing to make my child healthier is ____________.

**Special 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?

Everyone says the pledge together.
COPING CHECK LIST

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
- Use social media
- Troll the internet
- Hang out with friends
- Pray
- Go to church
- Play with my baby
- Talk to a trusted friend
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Drink
- Yell at my baby
- Sleep
- Fight (physically)
- Argue with friends or siblings
- Argue with parents
- Argue with other adults in my life
- Eat junk food
- Have sex
- Exercise/play sports
- Go for a walk
- 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
- Hang out “in the streets”
RELATIONSHIPS

“How can I love somebody else/If I can’t even 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 healthy relationships follow. Many young parents 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, including those who were parenting, was, “I wish I had better friends.” Choosing a support circle of 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 persons, 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 parents in transcending any limitations and finding the courage to make choices that honor and support their well-being—and that of their children.

RELATIONSHIPS WEEK ONE

AGENDA
Welcome and Review of Covenants

Activity

Journal Prompt

Close

Name of Activity: RELATIONSHIP ROLE MODELS

Goal of Activity: To understand the building blocks of a healthy relationship

Materials Needed: “Five Rules of Relationships” worksheet, butcher paper, marker, pens

Length of Activity: Entire Session

Description of Activity: The purpose of this exercise is to discuss the qualities of healthy relationships. Begin this activity by asking the Circle to name well-known couples whose relationship they admire (for instance Michelle and Barack, Jada and Will, or Beyonce and Jay Z). Then lead them in a guided group discussion using the following prompts:

- What is it about the way they conduct themselves that makes you think they have a good relationship?
- How do the partners show respect for each other?
- What do you admire about this couple?

As the group is sharing, record on butcher paper the qualities of a good relationship. Keep this sheet on the wall so it remains visible during the entire session. Also, remember as facilitator this is an opportune time to challenge any negative ideas about relationships that may arise, such as, “I like the way he won’t take any shit from her.”

Next, distribute the “Five Rules of Relationships” worksheet. Keeping in mind the positive qualities they’ve identified, have participants think about the relationship they would one day like to have. Based on these thoughts and feelings, ask them to list their own five rules for a good relationship on their worksheets. Once they are done, have the group break into pairs and share their relationship rules with their partners. Encourage the pairs to listen to one another and record, on their own worksheets, any good ideas they hear from their partner. Give them 10 to 15 minutes to write and discuss ideas with their partners.
Last, call the students back to the Circle. For the remainder of the session, have the students each share their own favorite relationship rule and a rule they heard from their partner. Record these on a piece of butcher paper. As you write, engage the group in conversation about the rules they are sharing. Be sure to lovingly challenge and/or support the students’ ideas, as appropriate. Your guidance and wisdom is so critical in helping our young people envision and move toward healthy relationships.

**Journal Prompt:** What relationship rules have you not followed in the past? What can you change to make sure you follow them in the future?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.

**RELATIONSHIPS WEEK TWO**

**AGENDA**

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- First Activity
- Second Activity
- Close

**FIRST ACTIVITY OF THE WEEK**

**Name of Activity:** REAL WOMEN, REAL MEN

- **Goal of Activity:** To reset the boundaries and definitions of manhood and womanhood
- **Materials Needed:** None
- **Length of Activity:** 10 minutes

**Description of Activity:** What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a woman? Share with students what it meant to you when you were a youngster, and then invite them to call out the names of women and men they admire.

Once they've done that for about five minutes, ask them to identify why they admire the men and women they identified. What are positive characteristics of these men
and women? What makes the characteristics positive? What positive characteristics do they share with them? How do they work to nurture those characteristics every day?

Once you’ve developed the list, transition to the second activity of the week:

SECOND ACTIVITY OF THE WEEK

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

**Description of Activity:** The instruction is simple but will likely require a few examples from the adults to help participants start 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 them that this has become a 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.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
RELATIONSHIPS WEEK THREE:

- Agenda
- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: WARNING SIGNS

- **Goal of Activity:** To help students identify when they or a friend is in an abusive relationship—and what to do
- **Materials Needed:** “Warning Signs of Domestic Abuse” handout, lots of butcher paper, numbers for domestic and sexual violence hotlines, and contact information for local shelters for victims of domestic violence
- **Length of Activity:** Entire session

**Advance Preparation for this Activity:** The purpose of this activity is to help students recognize the warning signs of abuse. Due to the sensitive nature of this activity, it is imperative that facilitators prepare well in advance by familiarizing themselves with the warning signs and dynamic of domestic violence. In particular, please be aware of the many links between physical abuse and teen pregnancy*:

- Several studies have found that pregnant teenagers are at an elevated risk of physical abuse during pregnancy, compared to adult women.
- Approximately 50 to 60 percent of pregnant teens have a history of childhood physical or sexual abuse.
- Many young mothers in abusive relationships report that their partners do not let them use birth control (also known as birth-control sabotage), thus increasing their risk of additional pregnancies.


To prepare for this session, please be sure to read these valuable resources for background information:

Description of Activity: Open the discussion by recalling the last week's conversation about healthy relationships. Have the group list the qualities they previously identified as essential components to healthy relationships. Write them down on butcher paper. Discuss positive relationships for approximately 10 minutes, then gently turn the group's attention toward the dangers of abusive relationships by posing the question:

- What are some signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationship?

On a fresh piece of butcher paper, record the responses from the group.

Next, based on your preparation in advance of the session, take some time to walk the students through the complicated dynamics of abuse. Be sure to share the following information:

- Emotionally and physically abusive relationships often begin with over-the-top displays of “love” and attention that can feel flattering. For instance, always wanting to know where you are. (Facilitators, please note that it is not uncommon for young girls to describe an abusive boyfriend’s behavior as “passionate,” “intense” or even “romantic.”)

- Physical abuse often escalates, no matter how much he apologizes after the fact.

- Abusers often blame their victims for causing the conflict.

- Sexual abuse may include forcing a partner to engage in unwanted or unsafe sex.

- While females are most often the victims of abuse, males can also suffer physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

- As parents, they are responsible not only for their own safety but for the safety of their children.

Now, pose to the Circle the following questions for group discussion:

- What are forms of physical abuse?
- What are forms of verbal abuse?
What are forms of emotional abuse?
What are forms of sexual abuse?

On a four new sheets of butcher paper, record their answers. Make sure you add examples of abuse the students may not have considered, such as berating and belittling, public humiliation, controlling behavior, sexual coercion and birth-control sabotage. The purpose is to alert students to the insidious nature of abuse so they can recognize the warning signs in their own lives. For students who’ve been raised in violent and/or verbally abusive households, negative relationship dynamics may have become normalized. This is an opportunity to challenge those misconceptions by labeling this negative behavior for what it is: dangerous, abusive and cruel.

Distribute the “Warning Signs of Abuse” handout and discuss the signs with the students.

Last, and most important, talk to the group about what they can do if they feel they are in an abusive or potentially abusive relationship. Put up a new sheet of butcher paper and at the top of the sheet write down the number of the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) and the National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE (4673). Let the students know that both these numbers are available for them to call, anonymously, 24-hours a day.

Engage the group in a community brainstorm for ideas about what to do if they feel that they, or their children, are at risk. Be sure to include your own suggestions, such as:

- Speak to your guidance counselor
- Call a hotline
- Go to a local shelter [have contact information]
- Call the police

Facilitators, please be prepared for the possibility that students may reveal troubling aspects of their relationships during this session.

**Journal Prompt:** What steps can you take to keep yourself and your child safe in current and future relationships?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
RELATIONSHIPS WEEK FOUR

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

**Name of Activity:** LET IT GO—Part II  [Found in the “Stress” section]
- **Goal of Activity:** To understand our parenting skills by understanding our parents
- **Materials Needed:** Paper and Pen
- **Length of Activity:** Entire Class

**Description of Activity:** To move forward with our children in a healthy way, we often have to release patterns we learned from our own parents and guardians. This is not to discount parents who do not deserve discount, but it is to acknowledge that each generation should build on and go past the wisdom offered by the previous generation.

Go back to the Stress section of the guide. Remind students of the day they let the “balloons” go. As you sit in Circle, focus students on the relationships participants have had with their own parents (or guardians) that they are having trouble letting go. Then, pose the question:

- What did you learn from your parents that you do not want to do with your baby?
- How might any resentment you feel toward your own parents impact your relationship with your child?
- What strategies have you learned so that you can let go of any resentment?
Let participants share and then ask that everyone write down five characteristics they would want their babies to use in describing how they were parented.

**Journal Prompt:** The best parents always make the effort to______________.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.

**RELATIONSHIPS WEEK FIVE:**

**AGENDA**

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

**Name of Activity:** I HEAR YOU

- **Goal of Activity:** Learning to resolve conflict
- **Materials Needed:** Butcher paper, markers
- **Length of Activity:** Entire class

**Description of Activity:** The purpose of this activity is to help the students become better listeners by practicing reflective listening, which is an important tool for conflict resolution. This builds on the listening exercise learned at the very start of your journey together.

Introduce this activity to the group by prompting the Circle to acknowledge that one of the factors that create conflict is an inability to calmly listen to the other person.

Begin by asking everyone to sit in pairs facing each other. Ask each partner to spend five minutes telling the other a story about a particularly bad conflict they’ve had with someone in their life, for instance a parent, boy/girlfriend or guardian. Use a timer and make sure each participant has the opportunity to share their story but that they limit their time to five minutes each.
Next, join the group together to discuss conflict in a way that will help them identify their triggers and better recognize their physical response to conflict. Ask them to think about the story they shared. At the top of a piece of butcher paper, write, “TRIGGERS.” Ask the group to call out their conflict triggers by using the prompts:

- What sets you off?
- What makes you lose your temper?
- What is the most frequent source of conflict with this person?

On the top of another piece of butcher paper write “RESPONSES.” Ask the students to imagine themselves in the middle of a conflict and then call out the physical sensation they are experiencing (for instance, a racing heart, sweaty palms, etc.).

Engage your students in a discussion about their various triggers and responses for approximately 10 minutes. Be sure to point out that the hardest thing to do in a conflict is to stay calm.

Before the group moves on to the reflective listening exercise, which is at the heart of this activity, remind them that during the centering exercises they did in “Introduction to Centering” (Spiritual Activity One), they were able to connect with an inner sense of quiet and calm. Tell them, “We are going to use that skill now.”

Prepare for the reflective listening exercise by having the students get back into pairs facing each other. Have each pair choose one of the scenarios they discussed earlier to act out. Instruct them to follow this format.

Each partner should give the other an affirmation.
Person A states his grievance.
Person B repeats back the grievance.
Person A points out any omissions.
Person B restates the grievance, this time with the part they left out. And so on until Person A is satisfied that Person B has fully “heard” him/her.
Both Person A and B close with an appreciation.

It’s helpful if this exercise is demonstrated by two adults. Below is a sample script you may find helpful.

Person A: Jennifer, a teenager
Person B: Jennifer’s mother
Conflict: Jennifer and her mother are arguing about curfew.

Person A: I appreciate that you care about me enough to make sure that I am safe.
Person B: I appreciate that you are sitting down with me to have this discussion.

A: I really think it’s unfair that you don’t let me stay out past 10 p.m. I’m not going to mess up. I am really responsible and I am doing well at school, and I promise I will text you the address of where I am going and call before I get on the bus to come home. I would like you to move my curfew to 11 p.m. You can trust me.

B: I heard you say that you think I should trust you and that you are a good kid and that you’ve never let me down before. And you’d like me to move your curfew to 11 p.m.

A: Yeah, I said that. But I also said I would text you with the address and let you know when I am on my way home.

B: Okay, you also said that you would text me your address and let me know when you will be coming home. Did I get that right?

A: Yes you did. Thank you for hearing me.

B: Thank you for sharing your concerns. I will certainly think about extending your curfew.

Use a timer and instruct the students to each express an appreciation to their partner, and give them three minutes to role-play a conflict. Then they should switch and role-play the second conflict.

Next, gather the group together to debrief. For the remainder of the session discuss the reflective listening exercise, using the following prompts:

- What was the most challenging part of the exercise?
- How can you use this technique in your life?
- What difference do you think it will make to “hear” the other person?
- What difference do you think it will make to begin and end the conflict with an appreciation?

**Journal Prompt:** Try reflective listening with a challenging person in your in your life. Did it make a difference? Write down how it felt to confront them in this way.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
MEDIA WATCH

“The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” —Malcolm X

It has been widely recognized that one of the most profound impacts on our children is their incessant intake of the negative, violent and self-defeating images, messages and ideas they are bombarded with by popular music and videos. No group, it seems, is more disparaged in the media than young Black mothers and young Black men. It’s hard to come up with many images of young Black parents that aren’t imbued with violence, hysteria and buffoonery.

Yet many of our attempts to combat these ideas have been dismissed as “censorship” or attempts to suppress the expression of our young. During these sessions we are charged with helping our students develop one of the most powerful tools that will serve them lifelong—critical thinking. In our Media Watch segment, you will invite them to explore for themselves the powerful linkages between what they consume and how they feel about themselves and one another. The goal is to challenge them, engage them in debating among themselves and instill in them a high regard for the power of personal choice, as well as an understanding of media’s power to shape people’s sense of self and also how we see and treat one another. And all of this—some of the most important work to be done with our young—must be delivered without judgment and condemnation, recognizing that rebellion is a natural aspect of maturing, that our generations, too, had a music and style that most adults rejected and that our role as adults is not to limit young people’s options but to strengthen their ability to make informed decisions.

In offering bold, unapologetic critiques of music that degrades women, movies that celebrate murder and marketers that seek to profit from the fragile esteem of our children, our goal is to empower our young by helping them to see beyond the beats,
rhymes and style to the not-so-subtle messages that contribute to the debasement of women and the female body and the abuse that plagues women’s lives. As we shine the light on how these ideas threaten women’s very safety and sanity, we move beyond the rhetorical debate and enlist young people in forcing a shift to the positive in how young African Americans are portrayed by their local media as well as the artists they have come to love. The point should be made that most people in our society believe what the media say about young Black people—that they are inarticulate, violent and criminal, thugs who dress like fools, are a menace to society and should be removed. Make the point that the nation would never allow millions of White children to be regularly snatched out of their communities and sent into a profit-making prison system.

MEDIA WATCH WEEK ONE

AGENDA

● Welcome and Review of Covenants

● Activity

● Journal Prompt

● Close

Name of Activity: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

● Goal of Activity: To learn to think before we speak; and to learn that language has power.
● 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 girls, women and mothers. 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 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, read them aloud. It’s often jarring for students to hear these names spoken by an adult. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, ask the group to call out the names for young men, and again read those aloud. Last, ask the group for the names of young mothers and young fathers and read those aloud.

Many of the names will be negative. Ask students why they think so many of the names are mean. 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.

Next, 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.

Finally ask for two volunteers.

Ask the first student, a young man, to repeat the sentence:

- That bitch ain’t shit.

Then ask them to try to say:

- That Sister ain’t shit.

Do the same with young woman:

- That nigga ain’t nothing.

Then ask them to try to say:

- That Brother ain’t nothing.

Ask them how it feels to say these words about a Brother or Sister. Illuminate for students the connection between language, media and culture. Explain that that this
is a new phenomenon, that 40 years ago we did not refer to ourselves this way. Lead students to think about the influence of media on the way we label one another.

**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.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.

**MEDIA WATCH WEEK TWO**

**AGENDA**

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

**Name of Activity:** WHAT THEY SHOW, WHAT WE KNOW

- **Goal of Activity:** To learn how to analyze the images and language we hear repeated about ourselves—and discard what is untrue as we embrace what is true
- **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 clips that present a contrast between positive and negative images of young parenting.

Some samples include:

- A clip from reality TV show “Love and Hip Hop” contrasted with a clip from the TV show “All of Us.”
- The video of Tupac Shakur’s “Brenda’s got a Baby” contrasted with Lauryn Hill’s “Zion.”
A clip from the TV show "Empire," in which Lucious Lyon, played by Terrence Howard, tells his son Jamal that he is not fit to be a father because he is gay contrasted with the heartwarming Nikon video of gay fathers Kordale and Kaleb with their children.

https://vimeo.com/116654583

After viewing the contrasting clips, engage the Circle in a discussion about how media can be used to uplift or diminish.

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 Circle into smaller groups and assign each 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 are media?
2. How do 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 you as a parent 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 and young Black parents in general?
7. What images do you want your child to see?

**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?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
CREATIVITY

"You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."

—Dr. Maya Angelou

Who can do it better than us? In every aspect of art and culture, Black people have contributed to some of the greatest offerings of humankind. In these sessions, we celebrate self-expression and elevate for our students the important difference between the goals of art and entertainment. Our creativity—whether it was Michael Jackson’s moonwalk or Jay Z’s ability to tell stories, whether it was George Washington Carver’s discovery of hundreds of new uses for the peanut or Madam C.J. Walker’s invention of hair products—or our foreparents’ ability to make a delicious meal seemingly out of air, a vacation space out of a back lot—our ability to make up what we were never meant to know has always been our walk, dance, song, speech or march into freedom. That power to create ourselves with little assistance or encouragement from others is who we are.

This session is designed to encourage young people to imagine themselves using all their gifts and power and in ways they may never have envisioned before, and to use their creativity to figure out how they will discover their purpose and become who life needs and intends them to be. Explain that this is a lifelong exercise as our goals and purpose shift as we grow older, wiser and more and more confident and competent. Let them know that we were born to utilize our innate creative intelligence to shape a better world; and that we need this creativity to dream a new world for our precious babies. We need to bring peace and love into practice—this is the real purpose of art. Students should come back to these pages in their notebooks repeatedly with new ideas for shaping their lives, reaching their goals, renewing their communities and shaping a new world. Ask that they keep a list of what they must do and forego doing to achieve their dreams, and that they make a habit of checking in with themselves and reviewing their list each day, which will keep them on course.
AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: CREATING OUR VISION BOARDS
- Goal of Activity: To learn how to envision and claim our future
- Materials Needed: Magazines, copies of poems, glue sticks, markers and tape
- Length of Activity: Entire session

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 as well as their children’s. What do they want to achieve? What do they want for their babies? Explain that a vision board is simply a tool that will help them focus on their goals, keep them at the top of their 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? The question is: What will I give? Giving to life and to others from our overflow gives our life 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 students 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 and help their babies realize theirs. 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. And then remind them when they have 10 minutes remaining.

**Guided Group Questions:**

- Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten?
- Where do you want you and your baby to live?
- Who do you imagine your baby being as an adult?
- What five things do you most want for the two of you?
- What five things are you doing to achieve your dreams?

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
PROSPERITY

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do and liking how you do it.”

—Dr. Maya Angelou

Often young parents hear that having their baby means that they are doomed to a lifetime of poverty and failure. We’re here to show our students that this does not have to be their destiny. Will it be harder for them to succeed? Probably. But is true success impossible? Absolutely not.

We begin by sharing with our young parents a definition of prosperity that challenges what is sold to them via mass media: having the newest Jordans or designer clothes. Prosperity is first an inside job: It’s teaching young parents to see what they have already as foundational and beautiful, as wealth itself—their beautiful minds and beautiful babies. With those as starting points, we know that they already have the capacity to create life itself and to fashion some measure of creativity just to have gotten through pregnancy and childbirth and still be coming back to school. Bravo!

Start there. Explain that education is essential to personal growth—intellectually, spiritually and financially. Help our young parents understand the difference between collecting a paycheck and building wealth, and the relationship of education—and fortitude—to upward mobility.

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 the belief 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. 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 engage in some entrepreneurial pursuit.
PROSPERITY WEEK ONE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: BALLERS VS. SHOT CALLERS
Goal of the Activity: To help students understand what real wealth and power is
Materials Needed: White board or chart pad, 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. For example, former basketball star Allen Iverson is now broke, after all of the millions he made during his career. Next, ask them to brainstorm qualities of Shot Callers. Have ready examples like Oprah Winfrey, Will Smith, or Chicago’s John Rogers, who founded Ariel Capital Management, the largest Black-owned investment-banking and money-management firm in the nation, or their
local business and civic leaders. 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 do 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 billionaire Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates wear? Why? Why does billionaire business investor Warren Buffet still live in the house he bought in 1957? 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?
Close: Everyone says the pledge.
PROSPERITY WEEK TWO

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Journal Prompt
- Close

Name of Activity: THE VALUE OF A WORK ETHIC
Goal of the Activity: To show students the power of a strong work ethic and to help them apply that work ethic to completing high school
Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: More than third of Black girls who’ve dropped out of high school cite pregnancy or parenthood as the cause. The guidance and support of a strong mentoring Circle can help them remain in school.

First, hang three sheets of butcher paper on the wall. At the top of the first page write the word “Perseverance;” on the next write “Discipline;” and on the third write “Dedication.” Begin with a group discussion by posing the following questions:

- What does it mean to be dedicated?
- What does it mean to be disciplined?
- What does it mean to persevere?
- What examples can you give of people exhibiting these qualities?

You may wish to guide the conversation by offering the following definitions:
Dedication: deciding you want to achieve a goal, no matter what it takes; discipline: moving toward that goal every day; perseverance: working toward your goal and overcoming any and all obstacles that present themselves.

Distribute the “Education SMART Goal” worksheet and have the students take five minutes to fill out the first part of the sheet by writing down their definitions of dedication, discipline and perseverance, and an example of a time they’ve displayed these qualities.

Next, show the “60 Minutes” clips “Philly Raised” and “Work Ethic,” in which Will Smith describes his father teaching him a work ethic, and how that work ethic ultimately propelled him to success.

Now it’s time to turn the attention of the group to the way in which having a strong work ethic can impact them directly. Distribute the “Education and Prosperity” information sheet that illustrates the connection between education attainment and income. When the group has finished reading, join them in a new conversation with the following prompts.

● What do we know about the connection between education and prosperity?
● How does this impact you as parents and providers?
● Would you agree that education is the main frontier for you to practice your work ethic?
● How can we apply a work ethic to education?

Distribute the “Education SMART Goals” worksheet. This worksheet will include the definition of SMART goals, as discussed in previous weeks. Please review the definition with the group.

Give participants five minutes to write down one Education SMART Goal on their worksheet. Then go around the Circle and have each participant share their goal with the group. Let participants know that they will all be discussing their progress at the next session. Encourage them to work together, reminding them of the success they had when they worked with their Accountability Partners.

Journal Prompt:
How have you helped other members of the group meet their education goals this week?
**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.
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.

We hear it said all the time: *It takes a village to raise a child.* This truism is meaningful for all parents, but for none is it likely more true than for our youngest parents, many of whom are already coming from disrupted communities. The truth is, parenting is a difficult and ever-evolving role. The best parents are most often the most supported parents: As they are actively caring for their babies, by extension, they become engaged community actors. Think about PTAs, MAD DADS, mothers of murdered children who led peace marches through Chicago and Detroit.

Community has traditionally been the chief value for people of African descent. And 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—and their children—for 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.

As we thank you for your guidance these last many months, remember to share in image or story the triumphs and challenges faced by young parents from around the world—parents in Soweto; mothers of the missing girls in Nigeria; mothers of children killed by police; MAD DADS; 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
Goal of Activity: To create a collective vision
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.

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 from a parent’s perspective.

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.

Journal Prompt: What is present in the community you want your baby to grow up in?
**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together.

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**COMMUNITY WEEK TWO**

**AGENDA**

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

**Name of Activity:** FOR THIS IS OUR HOME  
**Goal of Activity:** Build a teamwork ethic  
**Materials Needed:** The poem from the last session, descriptions of parent-led actions for change, pencils and paper  
**Length of Activity:** Entire session

**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 parent-directed service project and is responsible for guiding their 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 on the guided discussion.
- Teams will report back by answering the assigned questions within the large group.
- Ask team leaders to facilitate their team’s portion of the report by fielding questions if they arise.
- This is also a time to check in with the teams about their experience working together to complete the assignment.
- Close each team’s presentation with the guided questions to prompt the giving and receiving of supportive feedback.

**Guided Group Discussion Questions**

1. What inspired you the most today about what you learned?
2. What would you most like to change in your community?

**Journal Prompt:** If I had the power to change just one thing that impacts my community, it would be_______.

**Close:** Everyone says the pledge together
COMMUNITY WEEK THREE

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: SERVICE BRAINSTORM
Goal of the Activity: Learning how to plan for change
Materials Needed: White board and markers
Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: Ask students for some ideas of service projects they would like to plan to implement in their school community. Tell them there are no right or wrong answers when brainstorming and that later you will evaluate for feasibility. Brainstorm ideas for five to seven minutes. Now ask students to look at the list and decide which are the most important and which are the most feasible. Vote to choose the two best project ideas.

Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. What important contribution do you want to make to this community? Why?
2. Do you have any ideas for how we can make our work fun?
3. What do you think it will take to accomplish our goals?
4. How do you think the community will receive our service project?
5. How do you feel about getting started?

Journal Prompt: The community change agent I admire most is ________
because______________________________.

Close: Everyone says the pledge together
COMMUNITY WEEK FOUR

AGENDA

- Welcome and Review of Covenants
- Activity
- Close

Name of Activity: THE FAMILY AS COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY AS FAMILY
Goal of the Activity: Learning that “when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion”
Materials Needed: Flip chart and markers
Length of Activity: Entire session

Description of Activity: If everything goes as planned, your young parents will have identified a community project that they are going to embark on together. It can be anything: a website for young parents; a childcare collective; a resource library for young parents; a volunteer hotline for young parents in emotional distress. It’s up to them.

For today, 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__________.
Close: Everyone says the pledge together
APPENDICES

- The Impact of Education on Earning Potential
- SMART Education Goals Worksheet
- SMART Life Goals Worksheet
- Principles of Kwanzaa Worksheet
- Healthy Relationship Rules Worksheet
- Warning Signs Worksheet
- SMART Life Goals Worksheet
The Impact of Education on Earning Potential

Average salaries based on educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>$11,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduates, no college</td>
<td>$36,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associate degree</td>
<td>$37,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree and higher</td>
<td>$46,813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wyman's goal is to help teens graduate and persist to enroll and complete a college degree.

SMART EDUCATION GOAL WORKSHEET

What is a SMART Goal?
Specific
Measurable
Accountable
Realistic
Time-bound

A strong work ethic means being dedicated, disciplined and able to persevere, no matter what. —Anonymous

What does DEDICATION mean to me?
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

What does DISCIPLINE mean to me?
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

What does PERSEVERANCE mean to me?
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

One example of a time I was dedicated, disciplined and persevered was when I
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

My Education SMART Goal is:
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
SMART LIFE GOAL WORKSHEET

What is a SMART Goal?

S specific
M measurable
A accountable
R realistic
T time-bound

For the best chance at achieving your goal:

1. Be very specific about the condition or behavior you want to change.

   Not: “I want to be a better person.”
   But: “I want to learn how to control my temper when I am feeling frustrated.”

2. Make sure you can measure your progress in time, amount or frequency.

   Not: “I want to stop flying off the handle.”
   But: “I want to count to ten before I speak when I am feeling angry.”

3. Make a commitment to be accountable to the group, a partner, or a friend.

   Not: “I’m going to make sure I do it.”
   But: “I am going to report back to [fill in the blank] when I do it.”

4. Make sure the goal is realistic. It’s better to set small, short-term goals first, and soar from there.

   Not: “I’m never going to get angry.”
   But: “I’m going to develop skills that help me control my anger so I do not lash out at those around me.”

5. Give yourself a specific timetable for when you are going to meet your goal.

   Not: “One day, I’m going to do better with my anger.”
   But: “At least one time every day this week, I am going to practice counting to ten before I speak.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your SMART Goal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>____________________________________________________________________________________________________</td>
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What makes your SMART goal **Specific**?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

What makes your SMART goal **Measurable**?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

What makes your SMART goal **Accountable**?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

What makes your SMART goal **Realistic**?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

What makes your SMART goal **Time-bound**?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
LIVING THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA WORKSHEET

The Kwanzaa principle that I find most meaningful is:

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

I can incorporate this into my daily life by:

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Other ideas for incorporating this principle into my daily life include:

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

My Kwanzaa Goal:

Rewrite this sentence below, filling in the blanks:

This week I am going to act on ________ principle of Kwanzaa by ____________.
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WORKSHEET

My Five Relationships Rules:

1. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

2. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

3. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

4. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

5. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

Two great ideas from my partner:

1. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________

2. ___________________________________________________________  __________________________
## SIGNS THAT YOU’RE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Inner Thoughts and Feelings</th>
<th>Your Partner’s Belittling Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Does your partner:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel afraid of your partner much of the time?</td>
<td>Humiliate or yell at you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?</td>
<td>Criticize you and put you down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that you can’t do anything right for your partner?</td>
<td>Treat you so badly that you’re embarrassed for friends or family to see?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?</td>
<td>Ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder if you’re the one who is crazy?</td>
<td>Blame you for their own abusive behavior?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel emotionally numb or helpless?</td>
<td>See you as property or a sex object rather than a person?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Partner’s Violent Behavior or Threats</th>
<th>Your Partner’s Controlling Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does your partner:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Does your partner:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a bad and unpredictable temper?</td>
<td>Act excessively jealous and possessive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt you or threaten to hurt or kill you?</td>
<td>Control where you go or what you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaten to take your children away or harm them?</td>
<td>Keep you from seeing your friends or family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaten to commit suicide if you leave?</td>
<td>Limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force you to have sex?</td>
<td>Limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroy your belongings?</td>
<td>Constantly check up on you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WARNING SIGNS