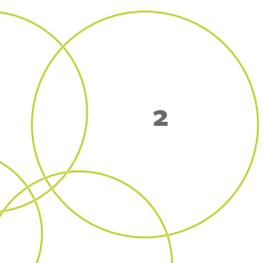




Youth Workbook

Sections 1-8



Health & Wellness Workbook

Dustianne North, M.S.W., Ph.D.

Jerry Sherk, M.A.

Sarah E. Kremer, MA, ATR-BC

Andrea Barrera

Siobhan Stofka



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



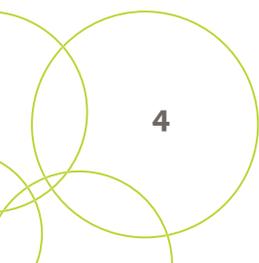
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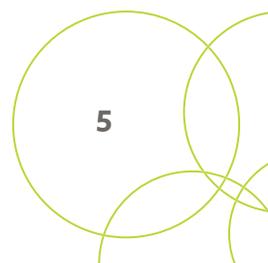
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Session 1:
Daily Wellness

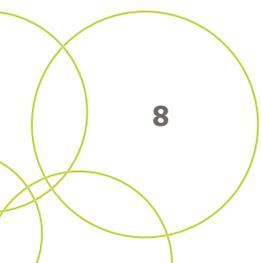
Why Should I Learn About Wellness And Self-Care?

California Foster Youth: Wellness and Health Concerns

- **Sex:** Learn how to recognize STDs, deal with sex, and practice safe sex.
- **Mental Health/Illness:** Recognize and cope with depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, insomnia, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm.
- **Self-image, Self-worth, and Body Image:** Learn about eating disorders and weight insecurities, how to love yourself, and how to find your inner strength.
- **Drugs and Alcohol:** Discover how to recognize addiction, deal with abuse by family members, and overcome peer pressure.
- **Violence:** Learn strategies for responding to bullying, gangs, violence at home, and feeling like you are “always in survival mode.”
- **Relationships:** Learn how to recognize healthy and toxic relationships, set boundaries, build trust, cope with “drama,” and deal with cliques.
- **Fitness:** Discover techniques for dieting, exercise, staying fit, and eating well.
- **Physical Health:** Know when it’s time to see a doctor and how to self-advocate.
- **Counseling and Support:** Figure out how to find a good therapist or doctor, discover resources for support, and find people to support you.
- **Life in the System:** Learn about living in a group home, defining your personal space at home, recognizing poor living arrangements, finding new housing options, and being home-schooled or schooled at a group home versus a regular high school.
- **Finances:** Learn how to cope with financial difficulties, work stress, and employment and unemployment.
- **Personal Care and Hygiene:** Figure out what you need to do every day to stay healthy and clean.
- **Emotional Stability and Stress:** Find ways to handle abandonment, manage emotions, cope with feeling overwhelmed, and find ways to calm down.
- **Decision Making:** Learn to understand the past and make good decisions now.
- **Time Management:** Manage how you spend your time, including school, work, and social commitments, and having too much free time or partying too much.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Develop better communication, social, and conversational skills and manage conflicts with others, including authority figures, and learn to be more aware of others’ feelings and manage your emotions.
- **Diversity:** Learn how to celebrate differences, create a more inclusive environment, and understand racism and ageism.
- **The Future:** Manage uncertainty about the future, set goals, and address a lack of goals.
- **Legal Issues:** Discuss strategies for staying out of trouble.
- **Parenting Issues:** Learn about having your own children in the system.
- **Supporting Each Other:** Share success stories with other foster youth.

What are some topics you would like to know more about in order to take better care of yourself?

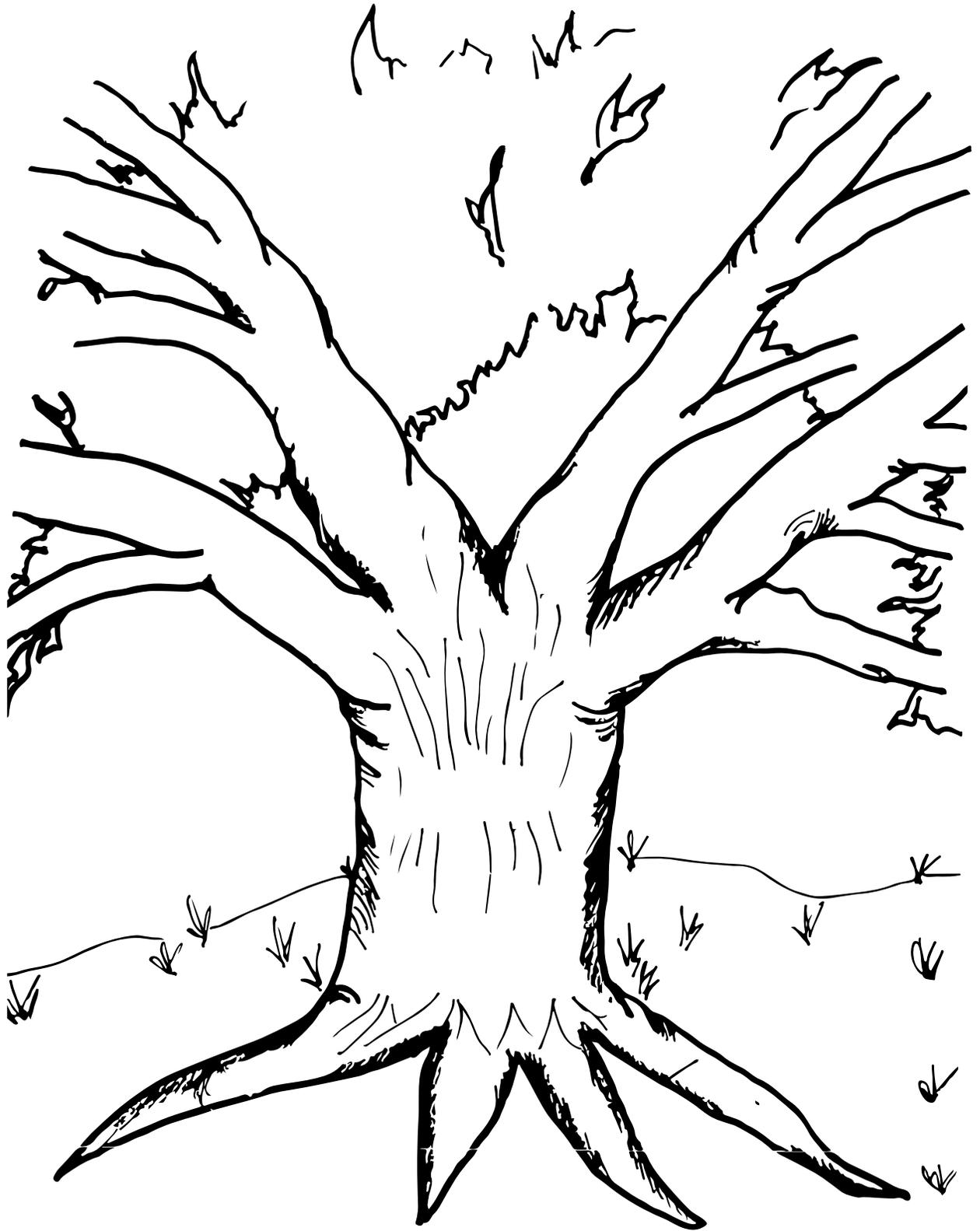
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The Tree That Is Me: Growing Toward Health and Wellness

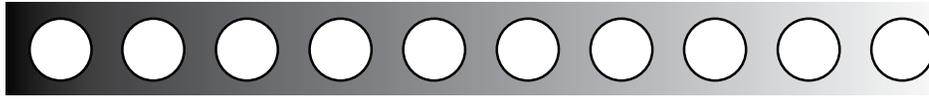
This exercise is all about how you see your journey toward wellness, health, and feeling whole. Write or draw in, around, under, and on top of the tree to identify and discover everything you have going for you. The following are suggestions, so feel free to be creative and make changes.

- **Ground:** What is your foundation? What are the thoughts, beliefs, people, and values that are central to your life and being?
- **Roots:** What are your roots? Just like a tree, people get their nourishment from various sources. What or who has “nurtured” you? What people, experiences, and beliefs have made you who you are today? You may want to use the ground too, as you work on this aspect.
- **Trunk:** What is your trunk? What is the biggest strength that you have in your life, the thing that keeps you going? What sources of strength and health are strong in you?
- **Big Branches (and smaller branches, too):** What are some of your other positive traits and qualities that help you take care of yourself and succeed in the world? What accomplishments have you made, and what have you been successful in doing?
- **Knots in the Branches:** Add the obstacles you’ve had to face or the difficult situations you’ve been in. What have you learned from these experiences? How have they served you? How can you build on them to become healthier and stronger?
- **Leaves:** Leaves dance around, especially when the wind is blowing. Think of these as your efforts to manage your everyday activities and responsibilities. How do you balance your life and take breaks? What do you do for fun and enjoyment—such as walking, spending time with family and friends, watching TV, reading, or exercising?
- **Fruit:** One could say that the fruit is the best part of the tree. Many trees produce something good for us to eat—apples, oranges, cherries, peaches. What is the “fruit” of your life? List everything you contribute to the world, big or small.
- **Sky:** How might you pass what you have learned to other youth becoming adults? What advice would you give other foster care youth? How can foster care youth support and help each other?



Wellspring Wellness

On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (optimum), mark your current health level in these seven essential areas:



10

1

Social Health

How well do you interact with others? Are you able to maintain long-term friendships? Are you comfortable in new social situations and the company of others?

Mental Health

Are you open to new ideas? Do you seek out new experiences and learn new skills? What is the quality of the information and entertainment you allow into your mind?

Spiritual Health

How connected do you feel to the higher power in your life? Do you enjoy a sense of purpose and peace? Do you regularly study, meditate, pray or worship?

Physical Health

What is your physical condition? Are you receiving good nutrition, drinks plenty of water, getting regular exercise and enjoying the proper weight for your height?

Career Health

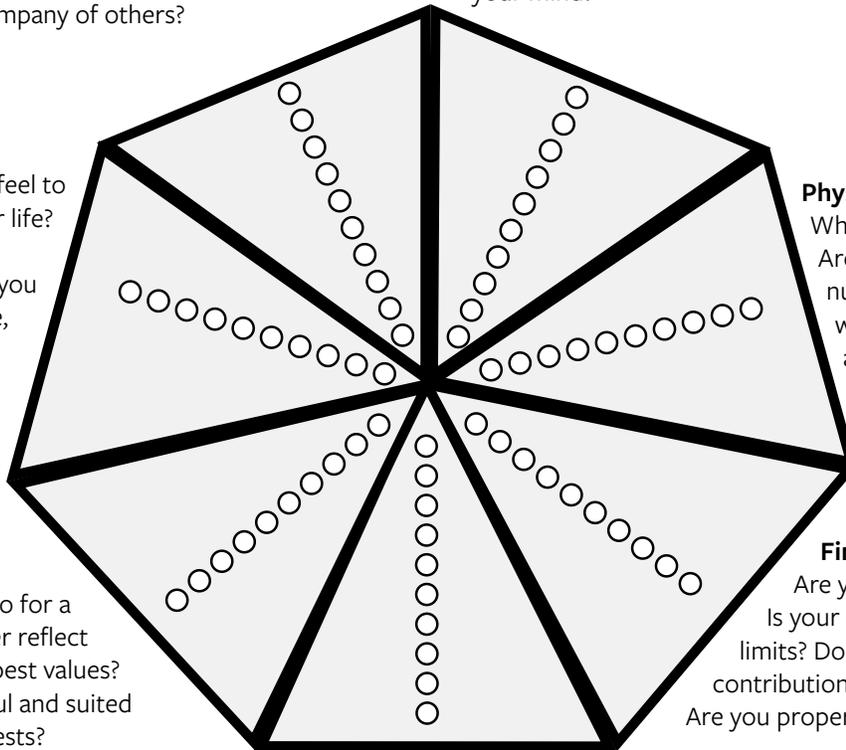
Do you like what you do for a living? Does your career reflect and advance your deepest values? Is your work meaningful and suited to your skills and interests?

Financial Health

Are you living within your means? Is your debt within manageable limits? Do you make charitable contributions and save for the future? Are you properly insured?

Family Health

Are you in a loving relationship with shared values? Do you give your family time and attention? Do you have a close connection with children, parents, and relatives?



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Session 2: **Daily Wellness**

How Do You Take Care of Yourself?

We asked community college students from all over California who are transitioning out of foster care how they take care of themselves day to day.

Here are some of their responses:

- Be healthy
- Keep a positive attitude
- Maintain good hygiene (bathing, brushing teeth, hair care, nail care, etc.)
- Eat right, control how much you eat, drink water, eat fruits and veggies
- Have clean clothes
- Get proper sleep
- Use music as stress relief and therapy
- Exercise and maintain a healthy body image
- Make and save money
- Maintain self-esteem and confidence
- Use cell phones for communication
- Continue to take medication
- Start the day in a positive frame of mind (ex. wake up with music)

How Do You Take Care of Yourself?

Draw Images and/or Write Down Strategies



California Youth Connection (CYC) “Recipes for Life”: A Cookbook and More for Foster Youth

CYC Mission:

CYC is a youth-led organization that develops leaders who empower each other and their communities to transform the foster care system through legislative and policy change.

CYC Vision:

Foster youth will be equal partners in contributing to all policies and decisions made in their lives. All youth in foster care will have their needs met and have the support they need to grow into healthy and vibrant adults.

CYC Values:

- E Empowering:** We value empowering current and former foster youth to assume leadership and advocacy roles.
- M Member Leadership:** We value members assuming leadership positions both within the organization and within the community.
- P Professional and Personal Development:** We value the professionalism and skills of our members and value providing the training needed to enable all members to reach their fullest potential.
- O Organizing Foster Youth:** We value organizing current and former foster youth on a county, state, and ultimately a national and global level to advocate for their rights and improve the foster care system.
- W Willingness for Responsibility:** We value the commitment and responsibility of our members and supporters to the organization and to improving the foster care system.
- E Expertise of Youth:** We value foster youth as experts with valuable and insightful information and ideas on the foster care system and how it can be improved.
- R Respect:** We value respect as the foundation of our organization and the basis for our relationships with each other.
- I Inclusion:** We value the inclusion and acceptance of everyone in the organization and value our strengths and diversity as a community.
- N Network of Committed Organizations and Individuals:** We value the network of committed organizations and individuals who share our common goals of improving the foster care system and youth advocacy.
- G Goals of Organization:** We value holding the goals and missions of the organization as our priority, and value putting self-serving interests aside for the betterment of the whole.

To Contact CYC: Go to www.cal youthconn.org and click on the link for your county.

Recipes for Life:

Because CYC recognizes that “food can be a source of comfort, nourishment, and social exchange if we learn a few basics,” its organizers have decided to create a cookbook for foster youth. It is more than a cookbook; it is “a companion and a guide into the world of food, a journal of recipes, tips for creating an urban organic garden, stories and words of advice from caregivers and foster alumni...information that youth in the general population might take for granted if they grow up in a stable home.”

Cooking and eating are important ways in which we not only attend to our health but also nurture ourselves and create a sense of home. Let’s participate in this exciting project!

Small Group Submission for “Recipes for Life” Cookbook

Instructions:

Browse the cookbook and select a recipe, story, or other cookbook page you like. Jot down a few notes about why you like that page. In small groups, share with each other what pages you selected and why. Then, work with your group members to come up with a new page or contribution idea for the cookbook.

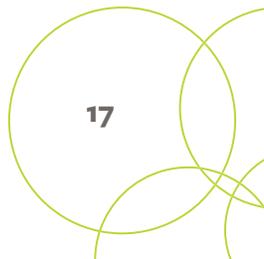
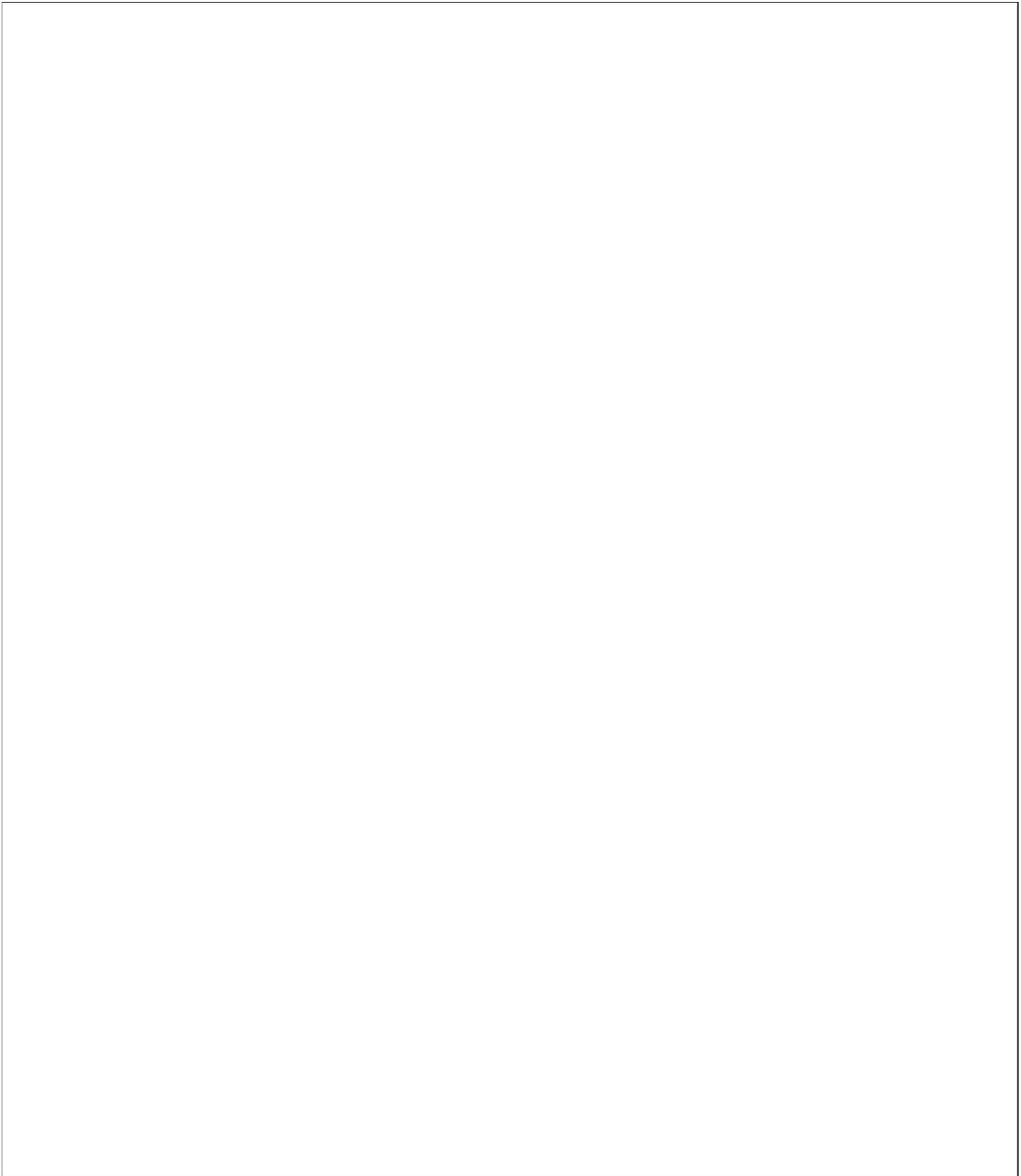
The page I like in the existing cookbook is _____

I like this page because _____

Small group brainstorm: Ideas for new pages

What submission would your group like to make?

Create your group entry for the book here:



Session 1 and 2:
Take It Home Activities

Having Fun with Fitness

With the Fitness Five-in-a-Row, you can make exercise fun by trying different kinds of activities while trying to complete five in a row. Mark off the activities you've done and see if you can complete five in a row or even the entire board. If one of these activities requires special equipment, many gyms will offer a free one-day pass or discounted pass for students, so ask to sign up for a trial day.

Touch your toes	Climb steps in a gym or stadium	Do cartwheels from both sides	Touch your toes – backwards!	Walk or run at least 1 mile
Squeeze then relax every muscle, holding for 10 seconds	Roller skate or inline skate	Learn stretches in a chair to do at work or school	Garden or plant trees or pull weeds	Go kayaking or canoeing
Do 100 sit-ups and 50 push-ups in one sitting	Run on sand on a beach or lake shore	Breathe	Swim laps	Wiggle all of your fingers and toes for at least 2 minutes
Take a yoga class	Go on a nature hike	Carry groceries or other bags for your family or friends	Walk backwards for 15 minutes	Ride a bike
Play soccer	Learn how to do tree pose and hold for two minutes	Shoot hoops or toss a ball	Dance to your favorite music or take a dancing class	Go indoor rock climbing

For homework, see how many activities you can try this week or month.

Daily Wellness Log

Use this daily wellness log to remind yourself of all the ways you take care of yourself, especially during this time of transition. It makes an excellent guide for anyone who wants to lead a healthy life. Before you start, you might want to make copies of the blank log to track your progress. Each day log the healthy activities you do for each category.

Examples:

- **Organization:** Keep a “To Do List” or write out your schedule daily to ensure you have everything you need before you leave the house.
- **Sleeping:** Try to get at least eight hours of sleep and go to bed around the same time every day.
- **Physical Activity:** Staying active includes everything from playing sports to running. However, it can be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- **Eating:** Try to incorporate fruits and vegetables with every meal. Drink lots of water and avoid soda.
- **Social Interaction:** Call an old friend who you have not heard from in a while or go to lunch with a family member you have not seen recently.

Day	Monday				
Activities	Organization	Sleeping	Physical Activity	Eating	Social Interaction

Day	Tuesday				
Activities	Organization	Sleeping	Physical Activity	Eating	Social Interaction

Day	Activities
Wednesday	
Organization	
Sleeping	
Physical Activity	
Eating	
Social Interaction	

Day	Activities
Thursday	
Organization	
Sleeping	
Physical Activity	
Eating	
Social Interaction	

Day **Saturday**

Organization
Sleeping
Physical Activity
Eating
Social Interaction

Day **Friday**

Organization
Sleeping
Physical Activity
Eating
Social Interaction

Day	Activities
Sunday	Organization
	Sleeping
	Physical Activity
	Eating
	Social Interaction

Prepare your Own CYC “Recipes for Life” Cookbook Daily Wellness Submission

As discussed in class, youth in this program are invited to contribute to the CYC cookbook project, “Recipes for Life.” This book, created entirely by current and former foster care youth, aims to help youth transitioning out of foster care learn to cook for themselves and nourish themselves more generally. It includes not just recipes but also nutrition and healthy living tips and personal stories about eating, cooking, and gardening for youth as they become adults. One daily wellness activity you can do on your own is to create a submission for this book that addresses healthy eating and other healthy living ideas.

Ideas:

- **Share a healthy recipe you know of, or create one yourself.** You can look online, in cooking magazines, in cookbooks, or get ideas from family ... whatever you like! Think about recipes that would be easy and healthy for transitioning youth to make on their own.
- **Compile your own “Tips for Healthy Living” recommendations.** You can use the information provided in the book, look for other information, or speak from personal experience.
- **Write a short story or personal account of your experiences with wellness, cooking, and eating.** Your experiences may help other youth. What successes have you had in keeping a good diet, exercising, and monitoring your health? What challenges have you had? What role does food and eating play in your health? Was there a key moment where you learned something important about taking care of yourself and eating well?

Session 3:
Taking Care and Keeping Your Balance

Adult Stress— Frequently Asked Questions

How it affects your health and what you can do about it

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

National Institutes of Health *NIH...Turning Discovery Into Health*

Stress—just the word may be enough to set your nerves on edge. Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events quicker than others. It's important to know your limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious health effects.



What is stress?

Stress can be defined as the brain's response to any demand. Many things can trigger this response, including change. Changes can be positive or negative, as well as real or perceived. They may be recurring, short-term, or long-term and may include things like commuting to and from school or work every day, traveling for a yearly vacation, or moving to another home. Changes can be mild and relatively harmless, such as winning a race, watching a scary movie, or riding a rollercoaster. Some changes are major, such as marriage or divorce, serious illness, or a car accident. Other changes are extreme, such as exposure to violence, and can lead to traumatic stress reactions.

How does stress affect the body?

Not all stress is bad. All animals have a stress response, which can be life-saving in some situations. The nerve chemicals and hormones released during such stressful times, prepares the animal to face a threat or flee to safety. When you face a dangerous situation, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival. In the short term, it can even boost your immune system.

However, with chronic stress, those same nerve chemicals that are life-saving in short bursts can suppress functions that aren't needed for immediate survival. Your immunity is lowered and your digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems stop working normally. Once the threat has passed, other body systems act to restore normal functioning. Problems occur if the stress response goes on too long, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided.

How does stress affect your overall health?

There are at least three different types of stress, all of which carry physical and mental health risks:

- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, family, and other daily responsibilities.
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness.
- Traumatic stress, experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or a natural disaster where one may be seriously hurt or in danger of being killed.

The body responds to each type of stress in similar ways. Different people may feel it in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, depressed mood, anger, and irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold, and vaccines, such as the flu shot, are less effective for them.



U.S. Department of Health
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of Mental Health

Of all the types of stress, changes in health from routine stress may be hardest to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorder, and other illnesses.

How can I cope with stress?

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to maintain your health and outlook can reduce or prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- Seek help from a qualified mental health care provider if you are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, have suicidal thoughts, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- Stay in touch with people who can provide emotional and other support. Ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations to reduce stress due to work burdens or family issues, such as caring for a loved one.
- Recognize signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- Set priorities—decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. If you can't do this on your own, seek help from a qualified mental health professional who can guide you.
- Exercise regularly—just 30 minutes per day of gentle walking can help boost mood and reduce stress.
- Schedule regular times for healthy and relaxing activities.
- Explore stress coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises.

If you or someone you know is overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional. If you or someone close to you is in crisis, call the toll-free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Where can I find more information about stress?

Visit the National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus at <http://medlineplus.gov>

En Español, <http://medlineplus.gov/spanish>

For information on clinical trials:

NIMH supported clinical trials
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/trials/index.shtml>

National Library of Medicine
Clinical Trials Database
<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov>

Clinical trials at NIMH in Bethesda, MD
<http://patientinfo.nimh.nih.gov>

Information from NIMH is available in multiple formats. You can browse online, download documents in PDF, and order materials through the mail. Check the NIMH website at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> for the latest information on this topic and to order publications. If you do not have Internet access, please contact the NIMH Information Resource Center at the numbers listed below.

National Institute of Mental Health
Science Writing, Press, and Dissemination Branch
6001 Executive Boulevard
Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
Phone: 301-443-4513 or
1-866-615-NIMH (6464) toll-free
TTY: 301-443-8431 or
1-866-415-8051 toll-free
Fax: 301-443-4279
E-mail: nimhinfo@nih.gov
Website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>



NIMH
National Institute
of Mental Health

The photo in this publication is of a model and is used for illustrative purposes only.

Holmes/Rahe Stress Test

Two doctors, Holmes and Rahe, conducted research and came to the conclusion that stress adds up. Another way of saying this is that dealing with one stressful event can be difficult, but dealing with five can be overwhelming.

Holmes and Rahe developed a scale of common stressful events and gave a number value to each, based on intensity of the stress (the higher the stress event, the higher the number). For example, on the original version of their stress test, the death of a spouse was 100, being imprisoned was 63, getting fired was 47, and change in schools was rated a 20.

These two doctors found that people who experienced enough stress to make their “stress number” reach 300 or more had a greater chance of becoming ill (of course, don’t forget that if you are experiencing a lot of stress there are strategies to manage and even reduce the effects of the stressors).

The following document, “The Student Stress Scale,” is an adaptation of Holmes and Rahe’s original test. Read the description at the top of the page and then take the test.

Student Stress Scale

The Student Stress Scale represents an adaptation of Holmes and Rahe's Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Each event is given a score that represents the amount of readjustment a person has to make in life as a result of the change. People with scores of 300 and higher have a high health risk. People scoring between 150 and 300 points have about a 50-50 chance of serious health change within two years. People scoring below 150 have a 1 in 3 chance of serious health change. Calculate your total life-change units (LCUs) three times during the semester and then correlate those scores with any changes in your health status.

Event	Life-Change Units
Death of a close family member	100
Death of a close friend	73
Divorce between parents	65
Jail term	63
Major personal injury or illness	63
Marriage	58
Being fired from a job	50
Failing an important course	47
Change in the health of a family member	45
Pregnancy	45
Sex problems	44
Serious argument with a close friend	40
Change in financial status	39
Change of major	39
Trouble with parents	38
New girlfriend or boyfriend	38
Increased workload at school	37
Outstanding personal achievement	36
First quarter/semester of college	35
Change in living conditions	31
Serious argument with instructor	30
Lower grades than expected	29
Change in sleeping habits	29
Change in social activities	29
Change in eating habits	28
Chronic car trouble	26
Change in number of family get-togethers	26
Too many missed classes	25
Change of college	24
Dropping more than one class	23
Minor traffic violation	20

My First Total: _____ Date: _____

My Second Total: _____ Date: _____

My Third Total: _____ Date: _____

Stress Reduction / Meditation Exercise

The Circle of Stillness

Do you know what meditation is? Have you ever tried to meditate? Here is a chance to try it out.

The purpose of meditation is to train your mind to help you relax, get still, and see your life more clearly and calmly. It can also be very enjoyable. But it takes a little discipline. When you try this by yourself for the first time, five minutes may be all you are ready to do. Even this is helpful! Then see if you can do this for longer periods with practice.

Instructions:

First, sit comfortably with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor in a chair, or sit cross-legged on the floor. You might choose to put your hands on your thighs, palms up and relaxed (cupped). You can try lying down as well, but you might go to sleep if you do ... which can also be helpful in reducing stress!

Begin with your eyes either open or closed, whichever makes you most comfortable. Start by breathing in slowly through your nose, and then exhale slowly through your mouth and repeat. Imagine a balloon low in your belly, which expands slowly as you inhale and shrinks again when you exhale. Complete several breaths this way.

The aim of meditation is not for thinking, planning, or solving problems, but to allow yourself to experience the *stillness* that is in your mind. The stillness is always there waiting for you. Focusing on your breath will help you to connect with your inner stillness, the peace within.

Now let's go a step further. Imagine you are in a large meadow under a sunny sky. It is beautiful out, and there is a path in front of you leading to a single tall tree. You follow the path and find a lovely little spot where you can sit and lean against the tree and look out over the entire meadow. It is beautiful.

Sitting under your tree, close your eyes, if you are comfortable doing so, and envision a circle. We call this the *circle of stillness*. You may have thoughts, feelings, worries, and other distractions floating around in your mind. Try to make the circle a space that is free of these things. Keep focusing on your breath by noticing the sensation of your gentle inhale and your gentle exhale. Take 2-3 breaths as you imagine clearing your circle.

Keeping the circle clear takes focus, but if you try too hard it won't work. Fighting against thoughts and feelings tends to make them more intense. So if a thought, feeling, worry, or distraction enters your circle, don't fret. Simply notice it, listen to it for a moment, and try not to have a judgment or reaction to it. Just let it exist and be heard for a moment. Then imagine escorting it to the edge of the circle and allowing it to exit. Return your focus to the center of the circle and your breathing.

When you are ready to return to your day, take three extra-long, extra-deep breaths. Allow the circle to dissolve and fade away. Send with it any anxiety, stress, or other negative emotions you'd like to be rid of. Very slowly, begin to open your eyes. Be gentle and slow coming out of this, and try to take the feeling of calmness and stillness with you as you resume your daily activities.

7 Myths of Meditation

By the Chopra Center

In the past 40 years, meditation has entered the mainstream of modern Western culture and has been prescribed by physicians and practiced by everyone from business executives, artists, and scientists to students, teachers, military personnel, and—on a promising note—politicians. Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan meditates every morning and has become a major advocate of mindfulness and meditation, as he describes in his book, *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit*.

Despite the growing popularity of meditation, prevailing misconceptions about the practice are a barrier that prevents many people from trying meditation and receiving its profound benefits for the body, mind, and spirit. Here are seven of the most common meditation myths, dispelled.

Myth #1: Meditation is difficult.

Truth: This myth is rooted in the image of meditation as an esoteric practice reserved only for saints, holy men, and spiritual adepts. In reality, when you receive instruction from an experienced, knowledgeable teacher, meditation is easy and fun to learn. The techniques can be as simple as focusing on the breath or silently repeating a mantra. One reason why meditation may seem difficult is that we try too hard to concentrate, we're overly attached to results, or we're not sure we are doing it right. In our experience at the Chopra Center, learning meditation from a qualified teacher is the best way to ensure that the process is enjoyable and you get the most from your practice. A teacher will help you understand what you're experiencing, move past common roadblocks, and create a nourishing daily practice.

Myth #2: You have to quiet your mind in order to have a successful meditation practice.

Truth: This may be the number one myth about meditation and is the cause of many people giving up in frustration. Meditation isn't about stopping our thoughts or trying to empty our mind—both of these approaches only create stress and more noisy internal chatter. We can't stop or control our thoughts, but we can decide how much attention to give them. Although we can't impose quiet on our mind, through meditation we can find the quiet that already exists in the space between our thoughts. Sometimes referred to as "the gap," this space between thoughts is pure consciousness, pure silence, and pure peace.

When we meditate, we use an object of attention, such as our breath, an image, or a mantra, which allows our mind to relax into this silent stream of awareness. When thoughts arise, as they inevitably will, we don't need to judge them or try to push them away. Instead, we gently return our attention to our object of attention. In every meditation, there are moments, even if only microseconds, when the mind dips into the gap and experiences the refreshment of pure awareness. As you meditate on a regular basis, you will spend more and more time in this state of expanded awareness and silence.

Be assured that even if it feels like you have been thinking throughout your entire meditation, you are still receiving the benefits of your practice. You haven't failed or wasted your time. When my friend

and colleague David Simon taught meditation, he would often tell students, “The thought I’m having thoughts may be the most important thought you have ever thought, because before you had that thought, and you may not have even known you were having thoughts. You probably thought you were your thoughts.” Simply noticing that you are having thoughts is a breakthrough because it begins to shift your internal reference point from ego mind to witnessing awareness. As you become less identified with your thoughts and stories, you experience greater peace and become open to new possibilities.

Myth #3: It takes years of dedicated practice to receive any benefits from meditation.

Truth: The benefits of meditation are both immediate and long term. You can begin to experience benefits the first time you sit down to meditate and in the first few days of daily practice. Many scientific studies provide evidence that meditation has profound effects on the mind-body physiology within just weeks of practice. For example, a landmark study led by Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital found that as little as eight weeks of meditation not only helped people experience decreased anxiety and greater feelings of calm; it also produced growth in the areas of the brain associated with memory, empathy, sense of self, and stress regulation.

At the Chopra Center, we commonly hear from new meditators who are able to sleep soundly for the first time in years after just a few days of daily meditation practice. Other common benefits of meditation include improved concentration, decreased blood pressure, reduced stress and anxiety, and enhanced immune function. You can learn more about the benefits of meditation in a recent post, “Why Meditate?” on the Chopra Center blog.

Myth #4: Meditation is escapism.

Truth: The real purpose of meditation isn’t to tune out and get away from it all but to tune in and get in touch with your true self—that eternal aspect of yourself that goes beyond all the ever-changing, external circumstances of your life. In meditation you dive below the mind’s churning surface, which tends to be filled with repetitive thoughts about the past and worries about the future, into the still point of pure consciousness. In this state of transcendent awareness, you let go of all the stories you’ve been telling yourself about who you are, what is limiting you, and where you fall short—and you experience the truth that your deepest self is infinite and unbounded.

As you practice on a regular basis, you cleanse the windows of perception and your clarity expands. While some people do try to use meditation as a form of escape—as a way to bypass unresolved emotional issues—this approach runs counter to all of the wisdom and teachings about meditation and mindfulness. In fact, there are a variety of meditation techniques specifically developed to identify, mobilize, and release stored emotional toxicity. If you are coping with emotional upset or trauma, I recommend that you work with a therapist who can help you safely explore and heal the pain of the past, allowing you to return to your natural state of wholeness and love.

Myth #5: I don’t have enough time to meditate.

Truth: There are busy, productive executives who have not missed a meditation in 25 years, and if you make meditation a priority, you will do it. If you feel like your schedule is too full, remember that even just a few minutes of meditation is better than none. We encourage you not to talk yourself out of meditating just because it’s a bit late or you feel too sleepy.

In life's paradoxical way, when we spend time meditating on a regular basis, we actually have more time. When we meditate, we dip in and out of the timeless, spaceless realm of consciousness ... the state of pure awareness that is the source of everything that manifests in the universe. Our breathing and heart rate slow down, our blood pressure lowers, and our body decreases the production of stress hormones and other chemicals that speed up the aging process and give us the subjective feeling that we are "running out of time."

In meditation, we are in a state of restful alertness that is extremely refreshing for the body and mind. As people stick with their meditation ritual, they notice that they are able to accomplish more while doing less. Instead of struggling so hard to achieve goals, they spend more and more time "in the flow"—aligned with universal intelligence that orchestrates everything.

Myth #6: Meditation requires spiritual or religious beliefs.

Truth: Meditation is a practice that takes us beyond the noisy chatter of the mind into stillness and silence. It doesn't require a specific spiritual belief, and many people of many different religions practice meditation without any conflict with their current religious beliefs. Some meditators have no particular religious beliefs, or are atheists or agnostics. They meditate in order to experience inner quiet and the numerous physical and mental health benefits of the practice—including lowered blood pressure, stress reduction, and restful sleep. The original reason that I started meditating was to help myself stop smoking.

Meditation helps us to enrich our lives. It enables us to enjoy whatever we do in our lives more fully and happily—whether that is playing sports, taking care of our children, or advancing in our career.

Myth #7: I'm supposed to have transcendent experiences in meditation.

Truth: Some people are disappointed when they don't experience visions, see colors, levitate, hear a choir of angels, or glimpse enlightenment when they meditate. Although we can have a variety of wonderful experiences when we meditate, including feelings of bliss and oneness, these aren't the purpose of the practice. The real benefits of meditation are what happens in the other hours of the day when we're going about our daily lives. When we emerge from our meditation session, we carry some of the stillness and silence of our practice with us, allowing us to be more creative, compassionate, centered, and loving to ourselves and everyone we encounter.

As you begin or continue your meditation journey, here are some guidelines to help you on your way:

- **Have no expectations.** Sometimes the mind is too active to settle down. Sometimes it settles down immediately. Sometimes it goes quiet, but the person doesn't notice. Anything can happen.
- **Be easy with yourself.** Meditation isn't about getting it right or wrong. It's about letting your mind find its true nature.
- **Don't stick with meditation techniques that aren't leading to inner silence.** Find a technique that resonates with you. There are many kinds of mantra meditation,

including the Primordial Sound Meditation practice taught at the Chopra Center. Or simply follow the in and out of your breathing, not paying attention to your thoughts at all. The mind wants to find its source in silence. Give it a chance by letting go.

- **Make sure you are alone in a quiet place to meditate.** Unplug the phone. Make sure no one is going to disturb you.
- **Really be there.** If your attention is somewhere else, thinking about your next appointment, errand, or meal, of course you won't find silence. To meditate, your intention must be clear and free of other obligations.

Session 4:
Taking Care and Keeping Your Balance

Gentle Sun Salutations

Each movement is coordinated with the breath. The Sun Salutation builds strength and increases flexibility. For the series below, a single round consists of two complete sequences: one for the right side of the body and the other for the left. On days when you think you have no time for yoga, try and do at least one or two rounds of the Sun Salutation. You'll feel the difference!

1. Mountain



Begin by standing in Mountain pose, feet about hip width apart, hands either by your sides or in prayer position. Take several deep breaths.

2. Hands up



On your next **inhale**, in one sweeping movement, raise your arms up overhead.

3. Head to knees



As you **exhale**, bend forward, bending the knees if necessary, and bring your hands to rest beside your feet, bending the knees for comfort.

4. Half way up



Inhale, flatten your back as you come halfway up, with your hands on your thighs, shins, or toes.

5. Head to knees



As you **exhale**, bend forward, bending the knees if necessary, and bring your hands to rest beside your feet.

6. Lunge / step back



Inhale, place hands on ground and gently step the right leg back, leaving the right knee up or lowering it to the ground. **Exhale**.

7. Half way up



Inhale, flatten the back as you come halfway up, with your hands on your thighs, shins, or toes.

8. Head to knees



As you **exhale**, bend forward, bending the knees if necessary, and bring your hands to rest beside your feet.

9. Hands up



On your next **inhale**, in one sweeping movement, bend your knees and raise your arms up overhead.

10. Mountain



Exhale, as you return to mountain pose, standing with awareness.

11. Repeat on the other side (stepping the left leg back under #6 above.

12. If you like, repeat up to 6 more times on each side before doing #13

13. Relaxation



Usually performed at the end of a session, the goal is to relax. Many people find the "conscious" part the most difficult because it is very easy to drift off to sleep while doing this pose. Begin by lying on your back, feet slightly apart, arms at your sides with palms facing up. Close your eyes and take several slow, deep breaths.

Self-Care Collage

Find collage images (pre-cut images from magazines) that represent the tactics we just discussed, including tactics that are both more and less constructive, that you found to be true for yourself.

Take a piece of paper that is at least 11" x 14" and fold it into three sections. Create a collage using only the less constructive tactics on the left side and another collage using only the more constructive tactics on the right side.

Now, think about what it will take to move from the left side to the right side. What do you need for yourself or who can support you to use more constructive tactics? What do you need to do to change yourself and let go of the less constructive tactics? Use the middle panel to draw, write, or use more collage images that represent this transformation.

Let's share!

Taking Care of the Basics



The Icarus Project www.theicarusproject.net
A Radical Mental Health Support Network

by and for people struggling with dangerous gifts commonly labeled as mental illness

Relationships: Assets or Stressors?

© Dustianne North, 2012

Some relationships provide us with nurturance, support, resources, friendship, mentoring, and love—these people in our lives can encourage us to be healthy and to honor ourselves. Others provide us with stress, conflict, jealousy, mean or abusive comments, or even physical or sexual violence. Sometimes people we are close with can guide us toward negative habits or lifestyles.

Consider the relationships that are most important in your life. On the left side, list the people in your life who are “assets,” or who provide you with acceptance, support, and assistance. On the right, list those that are “stressors,” or who create stress, make you feel bad about yourself, ask you to do things that are bad for you, or hurt you. In the middle, list those people who are both assets and stressors, or present to you a “mixed bag.”

ASSETS

MIXED BAGS

STRESSORS

Now consider:

How can you nurture and strengthen your asset relationships?

How can you work to heal and relieve stress from difficult but beneficial relationships?

Which relationships might need to be ended because they just aren't healthy?

What other strategies can you think of to improve the quality of your relationships?

Are Your Relationships Healthy?

1. Do you and your partner/friend(s) have fun together?
2. Do you feel that you are liked and respected for who you are?
3. Does “going out for a good time” with your partner/friend(s) usually involve the use of alcohol or other drugs?
4. Are you able to be yourself when spending time with your partner/friend(s)?
5. Do you feel comfortable about the ways in which you and your partner/friend(s) resolve conflict?
6. Is jealousy a stressor in your relationship?
7. Are you able to express warm and intimate feelings in your relationship?
8. Do you feel your partner/friend(s) is supportive during both easy **and** hard times?
9. Do you feel your partner/friend(s) holds you responsible for his, her, or their feelings or behaviors?
10. Would you like to get **out of** a relationship but don't know how?
11. Would you like to get **into** a relationship but don't know how?
12. Can you share and discuss with your partner/friend(s) your answers to all the previous questions?

University Counseling Service, The University of Iowa, 3223 Westlawn S, 52242-1100, 319-335-7294

Scenarios on Stress

Work together within your groups and answer these three questions for each scenario below:

What stressors are pressing on the person in the scenario? Which are positive stressors and which are negative?

1. What can the person in the scenario do to try and solve the issue at hand?
2. What can the person do to try and reduce and manage stress?

Scenarios:

1. Lisa, 17, is just starting community college. She has connected with a few students and made friends, but at times she has to deal with waves of depression and anxiety. Even though she is smart and has something to say, she doesn't speak up in class because in her mind she tells herself, "Why would they want to hear from me? I'm not anyone special." Sometimes at night she sits alone in her apartment and sobs, and she's thinking about dropping out of school.

2. Ben, 18, is in his second year of community college. He is working part time and taking three classes a semester, and just getting by with C-level results. He lived in several foster homes as a teen, and Ben is still very angry about being shuffled around for years. To keep his anger from exploding, he often sits inactive, eating fast food and playing violent video games. Ben has gained 30 pounds in the last six months.

3. Sonia, 18, is a freshman in college. Her boyfriend, Alfredo, broke up with her two months ago, as he was jealous about her being around "all those smart guys at school." Sonia is crushed because they had talked about marriage. Her friends encourage Sonia to date, but she won't have it. She has also lost interest in going out with the girls, going to her yoga class, and even in eating (she has lost 15 pounds in the last month). Sonia sits alone and watches hours of mindless TV in the evenings as a way to cope with her life.

4. James, 21, feels like nothing is going right lately. Like "Murphy's Law," anything bad that could happen to him has happened. He's had ongoing car trouble, recent disagreements with two of his professors, difficulties in paying for some old parking tickets, and he and his girlfriend are consistently bickering. To handle all this, James recently took up his old habit of smoking marijuana, and he does so consistently from morning until bedtime. This has more than calmed him down. In fact, almost all the time, he just sits listening to music and lighting up.

5. Mary Ann, 20, is a college sophomore who has always tried to be perfect in everything that she does. She's freaked out this semester because for the first time in her college career it looks like she will get a B instead of all As. To try to get the grade up (the problem class is chemistry), Mary Ann drinks cup after cup of strong coffee so she can stay up to 3 or 4 a.m. studying. She is beginning to get really run down from the lack of sleep and the excessive caffeine.

6. Marissa, 19, is a sophomore and is doing well in her schoolwork, and she has made lots of new friends. But it really bothers her when her friends receive phone calls from home. Even worse for Marissa is when a friend gets a “care package” with cookies and other treats, or when someone talks about going home for the holidays. This is when Marissa can, at least temporarily, become extremely stressed and depressed. She tried therapy, but she didn’t like her counselor so she stopped going.

7. Paul, 23, works part-time and he is financially responsible for his sister, who is 15 and living with him. Paul is taking five courses and is anxious about his major tasks of working and going to school and caring for his sister. He’s a brilliant guy, so understanding the schoolwork is no problem. It’s just that he’s unorganized and he keeps neglecting to hand in assignments on time—and this keeps him stressed out.

8. Sumiko is 24, and her concerns revolve around finances, transportation, and housing. She lives with her unemployed boyfriend, and she takes public transportation to and from school each day. After four years she’s almost completed her degree in child development, but her financial problems are coming to a head; she just doesn’t think she’ll be able to finish the last three months of school. Sumiko’s nerves are getting to her lately—her hands tremble, she can feel her eyelids twitching, and she has no outlet for managing her stress.

8 Tips for Getting Unstressed!

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We all have stress, so the key is to find ways to reduce it. Here are a few tips:

1. **Talk to a doctor:** It doesn't hurt to get a check-up now and then, especially if you are constantly tired or on edge. This will give you a chance to let your doctor know what's going on in your life, and to talk about diet, exercise, sleep, and ways of handling stress.
2. **Exercise:** If you don't like working out at a gym, then jog or walk for 20 to 30 minutes each day. Even a short walk can be enough to get your body tuned up and feeling good.
3. **Get enough sleep:** Eight hours of peaceful sleep can change your energy level and your outlook on life.
4. **Eat right:** Eat several servings of vegetables and fruits each day, along with protein. Hold back on consuming too much sugar, fat, caffeine and alcohol.
5. **Lose the news:** The media gets paid for putting out dramatic stories that get people worked up. Instead of tuning into the news, do something you enjoy.
6. **Dance to the music:** Doing something you enjoy could include listening to music. Listen to music as you work out or go for a walk, or turn on the music and dance!
7. **Prioritize—then get to work:** Take five minutes each evening or morning to write down your “need to do” list, and prioritize each item—1: very important, 2: semi-important, and 3: get to it when I can. When you start something, try to finish it before moving on to the next thing.
8. **Let it go!** Try to let go of the little things, and remember: “They are all little things.”

Session 3 and 4: **Take It Home Activities**

One Big Thing I Learned Today:

--

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

What I will do:
By the following date:

Signed,

How to Create a Stress Log

Keeping a stress log helps identify the “when,” “how,” and “why” of your stress. Stress logs also help you become more aware of thoughts and feelings that arise in stressful situations, and help you learn to focus and manage your stress.

In the log below, record the date and time of each stressor, what “triggered” the stress, and what thoughts, feelings, and actions resulted from it. In the last column, evaluate how you believe you handled the stress on a scale of 1 to 3:

- 1 = well
- 2 = okay
- 3 = not very well

Keep your log for one week or more, and then use the “Stress Evaluation Worksheet” to assess your stresses and decide on a plan to reduce them.

Sample Stress Log

Date/Time	Stress Event/Trigger	Stressful Thoughts, Feelings, Actions	Rating my Response
3/12 3:45 P.M.	I learned that I will have two major finals on the same day, and they are my most difficult classes.	I was completely overwhelmed. Stomach did some flips, then I got angry: “Why me? It’s not fair!” I felt like giving up. To manage my stress I over ate (a lot) and fell asleep early and got even further behind on my studying.	3
3/14 Early Afternoon	My boyfriend got really mad at me for talking to another male student, and he threatened to break up with me.	I got really upset at first, but I went for a walk alone, and then I realized that it’s his problem not mine. He’s a great guy, but he feels insecure. I’m glad I came to my senses.	1

(Begin your own stress log on the next page)

My Stress Log

(Make as many copies of this page as necessary)

Date/Time	Stress Event/Trigger	Stressful Thoughts, Feelings, Actions	Rating my Response

My Stress Log: Weekly Evaluation

Take approximately 15 minutes at the end of the week to evaluate your stress log and plan on how to manage stress in the future.

My most noteworthy events/stressors from this past week:

Events/Triggers	What I Did Well	How I Might Improve Next Time

Is there a pattern to when I get stressed?

What successful stress reducing strategies have I used?

How can I make improvements in these important areas?
Eating Habits:
Sleep:
Exercise:
Recreation:
Meditation/Relaxation:

Prepare Your Own CYC “Recipes for Life” Cookbook Stress and Eating Submission

As discussed in class, youth in this program are invited to contribute to the CYC cookbook project, “Recipes for Life.” Created entirely by foster youth, the cookbook aims to help youth transitioning out of foster care to cook for themselves. It includes recipes, nutrition and healthy living tips, and personal stories about eating, cooking, and gardening for youth as they become adults.

Create a submission for this book that addresses healthy eating as related to stress and relaxation.

Ideas:

- **Share a healthy recipe that helps reduce stress:** You can look in magazines, cookbooks, online, or get ideas from family. Do some research on what foods help manage stress.
- **Compile your own healthy “comfort food” recommendations:** What healthy foods calm you down and make you feel “at home”? You can use the information provided in the book, look for other information on your own, or speak from your experience.
- **Write a short story or personal account of your experiences with food, stress, and relaxation:** What successes have you had with cooking, eating, and gardening? How have you used healthy eating to stay balanced and manage stress? What stress eating habits do you have that might not be so good for you? Was there a moment where you learned something important about food and managing stress?
- **Create a playlist to cook to:** Cooking can be a fun, relaxing, and nourishing experience. Try picking out a recipe or planning a meal, then choose a list of songs that would feel good to listen to while preparing your meal. Try it on your own and see how it feels, then write up your playlist and submit!

Session 5: Healthy Mind, Healthy Heart

Drawing On Your Heart

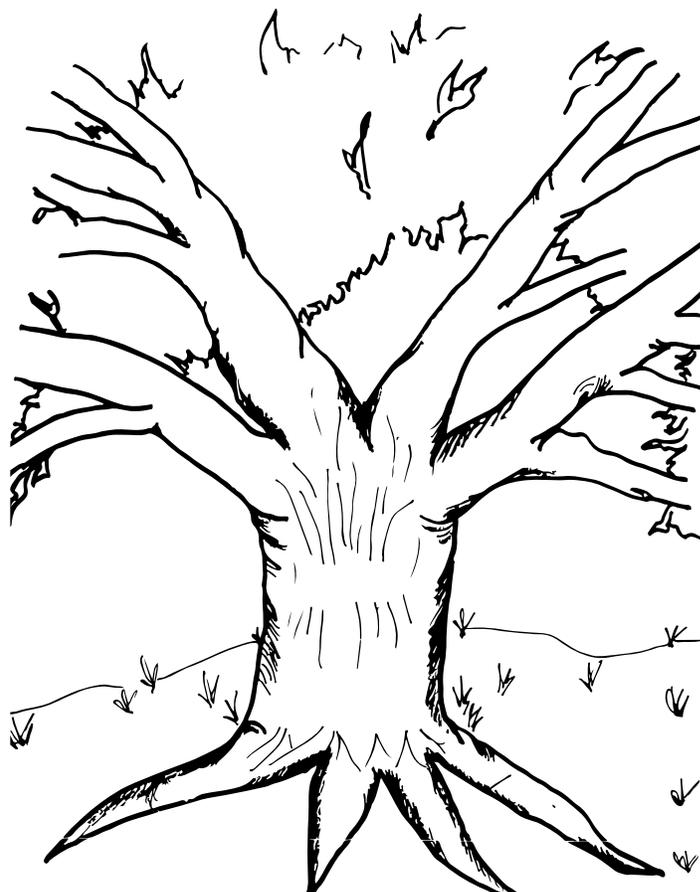
You may have learned what your heart actually looks like as a muscle in your chest, but how would it look having lived through all your life's experiences?

Draw an outline of your heart below, or on any size paper you want.

- How big or small is it? Think about who you “hold” in your heart and write their names inside. What does it take for someone to move to the inside of your heart? Is there anyone who is outside?
- Think about your feelings as colors—is your heart colorful? Are there areas of different colors? What do they represent?
- Are there scars or places where you've been hurt?
- Does your heart have any secret compartments, saved for special people or objects?
- Is your heart protected by anything, like a shield or a fence?
- Remember, in art you can represent your feelings and thoughts in images, colors, and symbols. Your personal meanings will stay safe since others may not know exactly what the symbols mean.

Session 6: **Healthy Mind, Healthy Heart**

The Tree That Is Me: Mindfulness Practice – Meditation



This exercise is all about how you see your journey toward wellness, health, and feeling whole.

Choose a position that feels comfortable for you (cross-legged on the floor, upright in a chair, or however you feel comfortable). The intention with mindfulness practice is not to empty the mind, but rather to notice our feelings and thoughts so that we are aware of them without judgment.

Close your eyes and feel your breath moving in and out of your body. Try to breathe through your nose, and breathe normally. Imagine that you're in a meadow or forest, and you are standing as tall as a beautiful tree. There are white clouds in the blue sky and birds singing and flying from one tree to another. The wind is gently blowing and it feels neither cold nor hot.

Roots: Imagine your thick and strong tree roots connecting you to the earth. Your roots help you sit and stand tall. Your roots are your source of nourishment for your body, mind, and soul. Your roots may be people who have nurtured you, the places you have been that make you feel peaceful and solid, your cultural background, your connection to God, your connection to music or art, experiences that make you feel strong, or whatever it may be for you. When there are storms around you, your roots help you feel solid in yourself, no matter how crazy it gets. No one can take your roots away from you—you are solid all on your own.

Trunk: Imagine your spine as your tree trunk. Your spine is strong, tall, and flexible. There are knots in the wood and bits of broken bark on your trunk from painful experiences in your life, but still your trunk grows, standing tall despite the wind, rain, snow, and heat. Sometimes when your trunk is damaged you need to bend in a different direction to adjust, but still you grow taller and stronger. Even when there are obstacles in the way, you adapt and push upward no matter what. Your trunk is where other people lean on you as well and depend on you to be nurturing, loving, and kind.

Big branches (and smaller branches, too): Your branches reach out in every direction, like the different ways you've explored life and new ideas. Some branches are big, thick, and heavy, while others are small and fragile. Some reach outward like arms to embrace or hug others, and some are focused on stretching out, looking for new experiences and new people. Remember that we can't add endless branches without having a solid, steady base of roots, so nurturing ourselves with the things and people in our lives that help us feel strong and solid are just as important as new experiences. Branches symbolize new growth, and the tip of the branches are the newest, most vulnerable parts that are growing without knowing what will happen in the future. Our branches are our desires, our goals, and our need to connect with others.

Leaves: Our leaves take in sunlight and turn it into nourishment. They blow in the breeze and help us balance our busy activities of the day. They allow us to move with change, inhale the sweet breath of life, and shake off tensions and stress. Let us remember to always be fluid and balanced. Let us remember that we can be pushed and moved without being damaged, even when the wind is strong. Drink in the sunlight and roll with the punches; your roots and trunk will remain steadfast.

Fruit: The tree wants to communicate with others, so it grows beautiful fruits that attract others. We can think of the fruits as our words—our kindness, humor, silliness, sweetness, and the ways we spread our feelings with other people. Inside the fruit is the hidden seed. Imagine the seed as the part of the fruit that is most connected to the struggles the tree has been through and that lasts longer than the fruit itself. If the tree is not healthy and nourished, then it will not produce fruit. What fruits are you producing now?

Sky: Feel your entire body reaching up toward the sky. Your roots continue to reach down and hold you steady while you stretch up. Consider your entire self, from root to fruit. Imagine yourself and everyone you know, even those you've never met, all looking up toward the same sky. Feel how we are all connected. Feel the shared experiences you have with other youth who have been through foster care. How might you pass your wisdom to others? How might you come together with other foster care youth, so all may benefit and become healthy adults?

Now feel all the parts of you as a whole tree. Feel your roots, trunk, bark, large branches, tiny branches, leaves, seeds, and fruit. Stay in touch with your strength, your tender parts, your parts that want to break off because they are not helping you grow, your parts that move and blow in the wind, and your parts that are sweet and loving. It is all you. Remember that no matter what struggles you have been through, you are a solid, steady, beautiful tree with much to give, and so are the people around you. Some have more knots on their trunks than others, and some have a more difficult time growing fruit to make connections than others. But we continue to feel all the feelings of being alive, from the sadness and hurt to the sweet fruits. We are whole.

Jigsaw Puzzle: Mental and Emotional Health Issues

Use the materials provided by your instructor and your own experiences to help you answer the following questions as a group, based on the topic you've chosen.

Issue/ Problem: _____

1. Why did each of you choose to discuss this issue?
2. How have you experienced it?
3. Where has it shown up in your life?
4. What did the problem look like?
5. Who was affected?
6. How has it affected you?
7. What do you think caused this issue to happen?
8. What strategies have you tried to cope with this problem?
9. Which have worked well?
10. Which have not worked?
11. What can we all do to help each other?

Session 5 and 6:
Take It Home Activities

Playlist for My Health

Now that you are familiar with the concepts of emotional health and mental illness, create a music playlist of at least 10 songs that reflect your mental and emotional healing process. You might think about your struggles coping with trauma and loss, mental illness, stigma, relationship toxicity, self-esteem, violence, or anything else that comes up.

You can choose songs or albums that reflect your difficult experiences, express how you experience a particular feeling, or help you feel better when you're down.

Once you have your playlist, you can burn it to a CD and share it with your classmates next week, or post it on your social networks. Make sure to give proper credit to all artists. You can also link to YouTube videos of your songs. You may also want to journal about each song, and how they all work together to affect you.

StoryCorps Interviewing¹

StoryCorps (<http://storycorps.org/>) is a national project that travels across the country and records audio interviews with everyday people, focusing on specific ideas or issues such as military families or teaching. For this project, you'll use a similar format to interview people around you about attitudes or experiences with mental illness.

First, listen to at least one recording from the StoryCorps archive. A great example is an interview between a mom and her 12-year-old son, Joshua Littman, who has Asperger's syndrome (<http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/sarah-and-joshua-littman/>). Asperger's syndrome is a disorder that makes it difficult to interact socially with other people. As you listen, take note of the questions Joshua asks his mom.

Thinking about the recording you just heard, see if you can answer these questions:

1. What surprised you in the interview?
2. What was the most interesting question Joshua asked? Why?
3. How do you think Joshua's mom felt during the interview?
4. How do you think Joshua felt?
5. Did Joshua ask good questions? Which ones?
6. What makes these good questions?

Now identify someone you want to interview about mental health or mental illness (a classmate, friend, family member, or acquaintance). You can create your own questions or choose from the suggested questions from StoryCorps:

Questions about the past:

1. What is your earliest memory?
2. What's the most exciting thing you've done?
3. What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
4. Who has been the biggest influence on your life?
5. What was the happiest moment of your life?

Questions about the present:

1. Describe your perfect day.
2. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be? Why?
3. If you could snap your fingers and make one thing better in the world, what would it be? Why?
4. What's the best thing about being a young adult [or other, like former foster child]? The worst?
5. Tell me a story about your name.
6. What are you proudest of in your life?

¹ Adapted from the Introduction to StoryCorps Lesson Plan, a customizable lesson plan for students in grades 8-12 that is designed to teach students interviewing and storytelling skills using StoryCorps content.

Questions about the future:

1. What does your future hold?
2. What do you think your life will be like when you get older?
3. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? 20 years?
4. What are your goals and ambitions for the future?
5. How would you like to be remembered?

You don't need to ask every question in the sample, or even every question you come up with yourself. Just focus on a couple of questions from the list and create follow-up questions. Be sure to prepare a list of alternate questions in case you start talking about something else. Bring a recording device to capture your conversation (most smartphones have a recording feature). Start the interview by introducing yourself and your interviewee, and explain why you're doing the interview.

When asking your questions, be sure to listen to what the interviewee is saying so you can modify upcoming questions. When the interview is complete, thank your interviewee and ask if he or she has any questions for you. You can then write up or play the interview for the rest of the class the following week.

Tips for Effective Interview Techniques

- "Follow-up questions can also elicit detail from a storyteller for a more vivid telling. The question 'How did that make you feel?' is often effective."
- StoryCorps: Listening for Production
- "Sometimes, you'll encounter a participant who, because of shyness, nerves, or something else, is somewhat stuck. In this case, you should ask questions to move the interview forward."
- StoryCorps: Listening for Production
- "If your question is of a sensitive nature, give the participants the option to not answer ... for example, 'Would you mind if I asked a question? You don't need to answer if you don't want to.'"
- StoryCorps: Listening for Production
- "The questioning's important—but what's the most important is that it shouldn't sound like questioning. 'What time did you get up yesterday morning?', 'What time did you go to bed?', and 'What did you do in between?'—none of that. 'So tell me, how was yesterday?' That's the right way of doing it. Making it sound like you're having a conversation."
- Studs Terkel, with Tony Parker, "Interviewing an Interviewer"
- "The first thing I'd say to any interviewer is ... 'Listen.' It's the second thing I'd say too, and the third, and the fourth. 'Listen ... listen ... listen'...You don't have to agree with them or disagree with them ... Don't push them, don't rush them, don't chase them or harass them with getting on to the next question ... Let them take their time."
- Studs Terkel, with Tony Parker, "Interviewing an Interviewer"
- "The key to making it a great interchange is to be curious and have an open heart."
-StoryCorps: Listening for Production

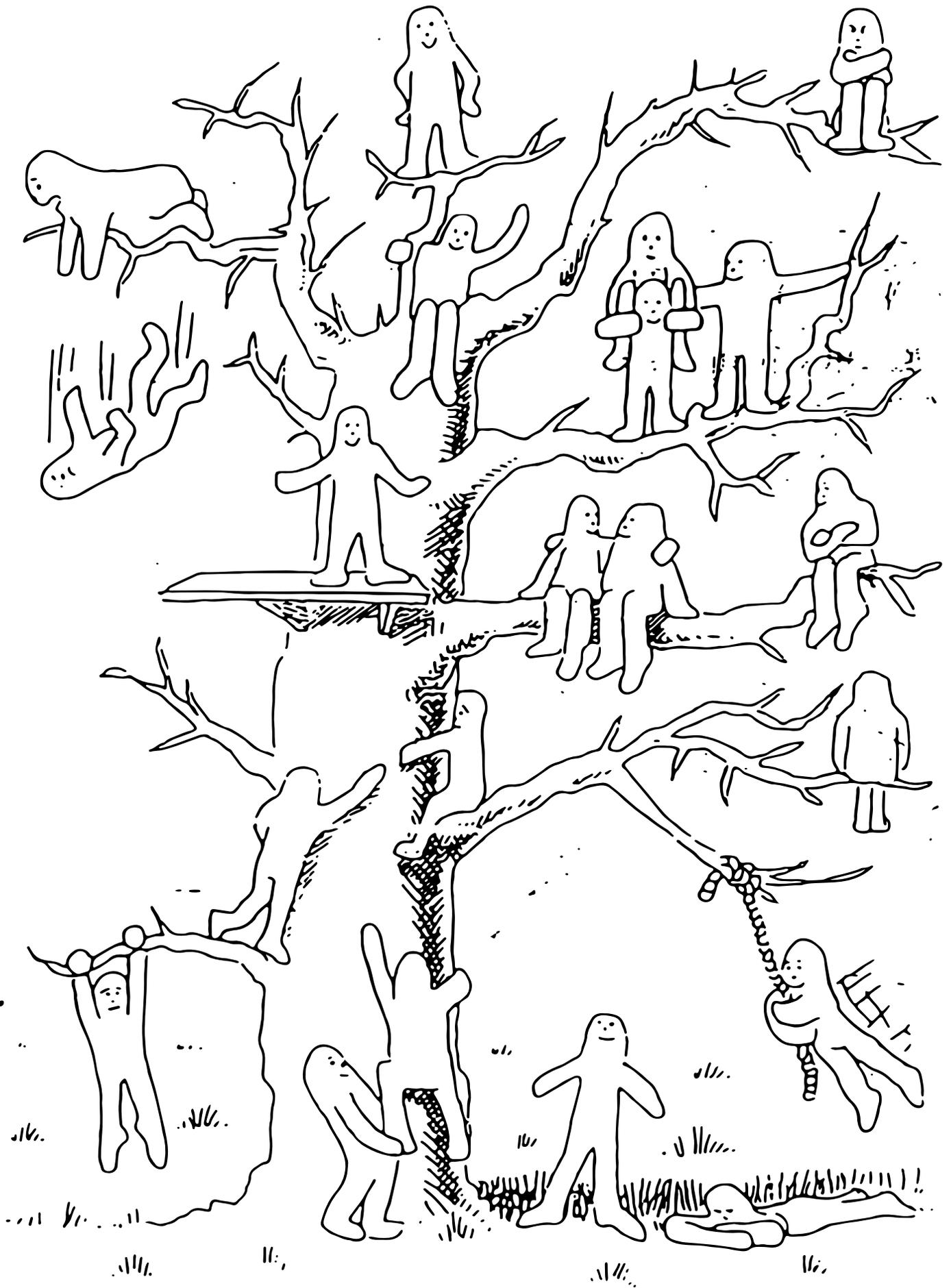
Session 7:

**Putting it All Together—
Empowering Ourselves
and Each Other**

Where Am I In My Tree?

Where are you today in your wellness tree? How do you feel about your journey to health and wellness?

Feel free to write or draw more about your wellness journey in the space below.



Steps to Wellness

1. Self-care: Build a healthy life from the start.

Cultivate a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep and relaxation. Make wise lifestyle choices and surround yourself with healthy people.

2. Self-monitor: Notice changes and problems early.

Pay attention to how you feel each day. Make note of small changes or new symptoms or problems. Do a regular check-in with yourself emotionally, mentally, and physically. Don't ignore it when that little voice tells you something is wrong. Ask someone knowledgeable if you think something might be a problem.

3. Seek help and support.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Build relationships with mentors and friends who care about your well-being. Make sure you have a doctor on file and know where to seek assistance and treatment if necessary. Go to the doctor regularly. Seek out counselors and other professionals if you are unhappy or having mental health or life problems.

4. Self-advocate: Decide what is best for you.

Learn to take charge of your health. Do research on any issues you are having so you know what to ask. Know your rights! Learn to speak with confidence to care providers and authorities in your life.

5. Provide assistance and work with others for mutual benefit.

Reach out to your peers at school or work, and other foster youth. How can you help others? How can they help you? How can you work together to address problems that affect you all? Learn how to lead a social action or a community service project, or join an existing one. Notice if someone is having trouble and offer to help. Think of other ways to build community.

Brain Map

Thoughts, feelings, and memories are going through your head all the time.

Using any materials on hand (markers, pens, paint, or collage), draw an outline of your brain—it can look however you want.

Then make a map showing the things that are on your mind today by using images and words inside your brain; the important part is that you represent as many things that were on your mind today as possible.

When you're done, notice what is represented the most or takes up the largest space, and what is represented the least. Are there any changes you'd like to make in terms of what is going through your head or how much space certain thoughts, feelings, or other things take?

Discuss as a group how you can make these changes happen.



www.hrtw.org

Transitions - Changing Role for Youth

Health & Wellness 101 The Basics	Yes I do this	I want to do this	I need to learn how	Someone else will have to do this - Who?
1. I understand my health care needs, and disability and can explain my needs to others.				
2. I can explain to others how our family's customs and beliefs might affect health care decisions and medical treatments.				
3. I carry my health insurance card everyday				
4. I know my health and wellness baseline (pulse, respiration rate, elimination habits)				
5. I track my own appointments and prescription refills expiration dates				
6. I call for my own doctor appointments				
7. Before a doctor's appointment I prepare written questions to ask.				
8. I know I have an option see my doctor by myself.				
9. I call in my own prescriptions				
10. I carry my important health information with me everyday (i.e.: medical summary, including medical diagnosis, list of medications, allergy info. doctor's numbers, drug store number, etc.)				
11. I have a part in filing my medical records and receipts at home				
12. I pay my co-pays for medical visits				
13. I co-sign the "permission for medical treatment" form (with or without signature stamp, or can direct others to do so)				
14. I know my symptoms that need quick medical attention.				
15. I know what to do in case I have a medical emergency				
16. I help monitor my medical equipment so it's in good working condition (daily and routine maintenance)				
17. My family and I have a plan so I can keep my healthcare insurance after I turn 18.				

A Bad Day, or a Mental Health Problem?

Do you ever...

- Feel very angry or worried?
- Do reckless things that could harm yourself or others?
- Feel grief for a long time after a loss or death?
- Think your mind is being controlled or is out of control?
- Use alcohol or drugs?
- Exercise, diet and/or binge eat obsessively?
- Hurt other people or destroy property?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you might want to check in with your mental health provider and consider seeking treatment. If you answered yes to MULTIPLE questions above, you are likely to need assistance.

Adapted from, "Understanding Mental Health and Mental Illness."
www.teenmentalhealth.org

Session 8:

**Putting It All Together—
Empowering Ourselves
and Each Other**

Empowerment Visualization

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Imagine what it feels like to be powerful, confident, and masterful over your own life affairs. What situations in your life make you feel this way?

Jot down a few notes or pictures ...

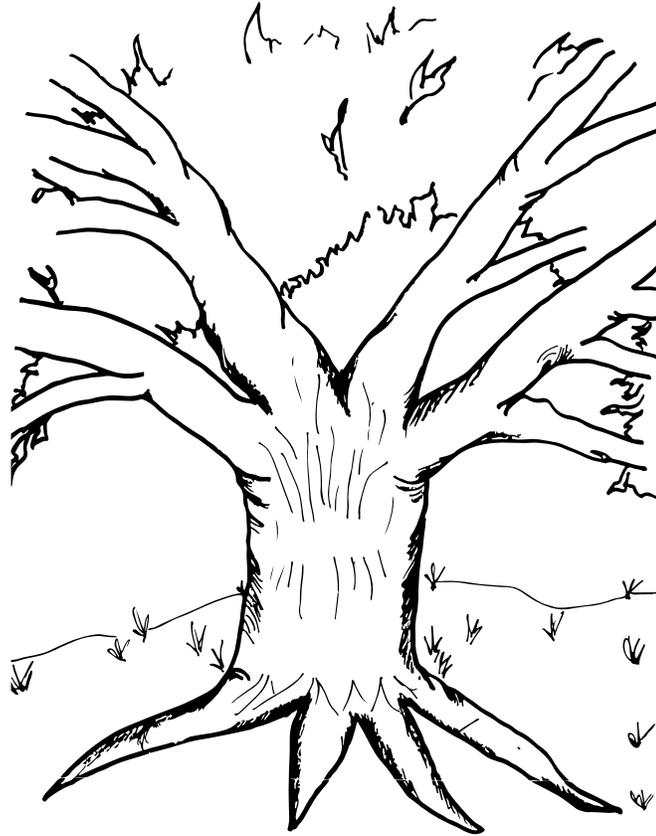
Set Your Goals the CHAMP Way

Copyright ©2012, Jerry Sherk

Challenge	What is the challenge I am facing (what is my goal)?	
Hurdles	What is stopping me from reaching my goal?	
Achievement	What do I get for reaching my goal?	
Mentors	Who can mentor me and help me reach my goal?	
Plan	What is my plan (the steps I will take to reach my goal)?	1) 2) 3) 4)

How Can We Have a Positive Effect? The Foster Youth Community Tree

For this brainstorm, feel free to draw or write your ideas below.



Sessions 7 and 8:
Take It Home Activities

Practicing Self-Advocacy

Standing up for ourselves to authorities, healthcare providers, mental health providers, teachers, professors, peers, parents, and others who have power over us can be difficult. If we practice being assertive, which is not passive and not aggressive, but just clear and strong about our needs, we can get more out of life and avoid being hurt or taken advantage of.

Self-advocacy takes practice. We can only learn it by trying it, sometimes failing, and trying it again. We must practice it in all aspects of our lives. To practice, try spending a few days going through your life with the specific intention of advocating for yourself. If you go to class, think about what you need to do well in that class, and go out of your way to ask for what you need.

If you go to the doctor, practice having the courage to ask questions and insist on answers you understand. If you have a therapist and aren't feeling good about the process, see what happens if you say so one day.

The Self Advocacy Log can help you track these efforts and experiences, so that you can continue to get better at advocating for yourself. You can keep track of the situation you are in, what your needs and challenges are, and what actions you took. You can reflect on whether you were assertive, passive, or aggressive, and what the results of your actions were. Reading over your log can help you advocate better for yourself the next time around. Use the final page to record the strategies you have learned.

Example Self Advocacy Log

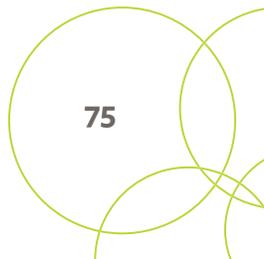
Date/ Time	Setting/ Situation	Needs/Challenges	Actions I Took	Rate: Passive, Assertive, Aggressive	Results/ Outcomes of Actions (positive, negative)
3/12 3:45 P.M.	Regular doctor's visit	I have been worried about not having enough energy and having trouble sleeping. My doctor is not easy to talk to because he doesn't listen carefully and is in a rush all the time. I have had bad experiences with doctors, and I don't like to share personal information.	When the doctor began examining me, I told him I had low energy. When he ignored me, I said it again, louder this time, and I told him I had trouble sleeping. I told him I am worried about it and would like to discuss in detail.	Assertive	(-): Doctor seemed annoyed at first and that scared me. I didn't like the way I felt. (+): Doctor stopped moving so fast and asked more questions. He gave me some options to consider and referred me to a sleep specialist.

(Begin your own stress log on the next page)

My Self-Advocacy Log

(Make as many copies of this page as necessary)

Date/ Time	Setting / Situation	Needs / Challenges	Actions I Took	Rate: Passive, Assertive, Aggressive?	Results/ Outcomes of Actions (positive, negative)



What Have I Learned for the Future?

Self-Advocacy

- In what situations do I have the hardest time self-advocating?

- In what situations do I feel confident and powerful?

- What are my challenges or blocks when speaking up for myself?

- What strategies have I learned?

My Commitment to Taking Steps to Wellness

Make concrete commitments to yourself below about ways to improve your health and wellness.

1. Self-care: Build a healthy life from the start.

2. Self-monitor: Notice changes and problems early.

3. Seek help and support.

4. Self-advocate: You have the right and responsibility to decide what is best for you.

5. Provide assistance and work with others for mutual benefit.

Build a Habit

During this course, you have had a chance to try an array of activities that can help you get to know yourself and become healthier and happier.

But doing these things just one time will only get you so far.

Repeating some activities, especially meditations, exercise, and yoga routines, can help deepen your learning and your connection to yourself.

Choose one activity we have done during this course that you really liked or found useful and try it again at home—you can do it once or even try it every day for a week.

See if you get more out of it than you did the first time!

Glossary of Terms

- **Coping:** The thoughts and actions we use to deal with stress. In large part, feeling stressed or not depends on whether we believe we have the coping resources to deal with the challenges facing us (Owen Kelly, Ph.D.).
- **Development:** The acquisition of skills through integration of experience (Denise Johnston, M.D.).
- **Disease/Illness:** A disordered or incorrectly functioning organ, part, structure, or system of the body resulting from the effect of genetic or developmental errors, infection, poisons, nutritional deficiency or imbalance, toxicity, or unfavorable environmental factors; illness; sickness; ailment (dictionary.com).
- **Empowerment:** Both a process and an outcome by which people gain mastery over their own lives and affairs. Can refer to a psychological or emotional sense of empowerment, as well as actual power and influence. (Copyright © 2009 Dustianne North, M.S.W., Ph.D., adapted from: Rappaport, Julian. "Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology." American journal of community psychology 15.2 (1987): 121-148. and Staples, Lee H. "Powerful ideas about empowerment." Administration in social work 14.2 (1990): 29-42.)
- **Health:** Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization).
 - **Physical Health:** Good body health, which is healthy because of regular physical activity (exercise), good nutrition, and adequate rest. Also can be called "Physical Well-Being" (Medical News Today).
 - **Mental Health:** A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization). The emotional and spiritual resilience that enables us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment, and sadness; a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own and others' self-worth. (Health Education Authority, UK, 1997)
 - **Emotional Health:** The degree to which you feel emotionally secure and relaxed in everyday life. An emotionally healthy person has a relaxed body, an open mind, and an open heart. The more emotional health you possess, the more self-esteem you have. Emotionally healthy people feel safe and secure with their own emotions and feelings. They feel their feelings and emotions instead of avoiding them or trying to control them (Doris Jeanette, Psy.D).
 - **Sexual Health:** Freedom from sexual diseases or disorders and having the capacity to enjoy and control sexual behavior without fear, shame, or guilt (World Health Organization).
 - **Social Health:** The ability to interact well with others and maintain long-term friendships, as well as feeling comfortable in new situations and in the company of other people (wellspring.org).

- **Mental Health Problems:** The more common struggles and adjustment difficulties that affect everybody from time to time. These problems tend to happen when people are going through difficult times in life, such as the end of a relationship, the death of someone close, conflict in relations with family or friends, or stresses at home, school, or work. Feeling stressed or having the blues is a normal response to the psychological or social challenges most people encounter at some time or another. Mental health problems are usually short-term reactions to a particular stressor, such as a loss, painful event, or illness. (Mental Illness Foundation, 2003).
- **Mental Illness:** A variety of psychiatric (emotional, thinking, and behavioral) problems that vary in intensity and duration, and may recur from time to time. Major mental illnesses include Anxiety, Mood, Eating, and Psychotic Disorders. Mental illnesses are diagnosable conditions that require medical treatment as well as other supports. (www.cmha.ca)
- **Mutual Aid/Assistance:** Efforts in which individuals are both recipients and providers of help, in a group or community setting where other people are also providing and receiving support and services, such as sharing information or skills (Shulman, 2006; Steinberg, 2004).
- **Recovery (from trauma or mental illness):** The process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities ... For some, this is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life despite a disability... For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms (President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- **Self-Advocacy:** An individual’s ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions (VanReusen et al., 1994).
- **Self-Care:** Decisions and actions that one can take to cope with a health problem or to improve his or her health (Gale Encyclopedia of Public Health).
- **Self-Esteem:** A realistic respect for or favorable impression of oneself; self-respect (Dictionary.com)
- **Self-Monitoring:** Paying attention to changes in your body, in your feelings, and in your life to notice when something might be going wrong.
- **Social Action:** A group, collective, or organized effort to change social and economic conditions (S. Rengasamy Madurai, Institute of Social Sciences); the realization of human responsibility and acting upon it for the betterment of society and the world in whole (Student Volunteer Connections).
- **Stress:** The body’s reaction to change that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response. Stress can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous, or anxious (Angela Morrow, R.N.).
- **Transition:** The internal process people go through when adjusting to and coping with external change. Transition is thought to consist of three phases: a period of “letting go” of the past, a neutral or awkward in-between period, and a time of “new beginnings.”

- **Trauma:** An experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, which [when unhealed can] result in lasting mental and physical effects (Psychologytoday.com, Diagnosis Dictionary).
- **Well-Being :** Preventing illness and raising the quality of life; includes ability to function well in school, career, or relationships.
- **Wellness:** A life-long process of moving toward enhancing your physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being; a state of optimal health and maximized potential (Mickinley Health Center, University of Illinois).

