

APPENDIX

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS, COUNSELORS, AND GROUP LEADERS

I originally developed this book to give teens a self-generated journey to success. But I tested and refined the activities with groups of teens ranging in number from five to fifty. Thus, although each reader will have to do the work required to set an individual course to success, most of these activities can be shared in a group setting.

To help you facilitate that process, I offer suggestions for sharing some of the activities with groups. Whenever appropriate, I also include personal comments on how to make each activity most effective.

ACTIVITY #1 SUGGESTIONS:

Depending on the size of the group, filling out and sharing the favorites list takes about half an hour. If you want this exercise to take an entire class period, (I always did because teens LOVE this “Return to Childhood” day), you may include warm-up exercises such as reading aloud a favorite children’s book or having them draw a picture with crayons.

Teens relish talking about their favorites even as they fill in the list. Encourage them to

save their comments until after everyone has finished writing, then allow them to say as much as they wish.

Let the sharing flow spontaneously. Each group will favor different topics to discuss. Some teens will have much to say, and their enthusiasm becomes contagious. Feel free to contribute your own favorites as much as possible. It humanizes you to the group and makes the entire process more inviting. Surprisingly, thanks to television reruns and pop culture nostalgia, your sharing will not date you, but rather create a common bond with your teen participants.

COMMENTS:

Teens of all ages relish the chance to remember and talk about their past. If you have a close-knit group, they'll feel even more free to share comic, embarrassing, even moving experiences.

Although this day is usually fun and happy, sometimes reminiscing brings up sad memories that deserve attention. On those rare times when teens have painful experiences to share, give them time to express and process their feelings. Their peers will be tremendously supportive, and by providing a safe environment to share and giving them encouraging feedback, you can help teens heal old wounds they've carried with them for a long time.

ACTIVITY #2 SUGGESTIONS:

To help teens generate possible answers, lead a brainstorming session. Let them suggest possible activities, events, hobbies, projects, skills, talents, etc. Once they realize how vast their range of answers can be, they'll more easily and thoroughly complete this activity.

ACTIVITY #3 SUGGESTIONS:

The biggest challenge most people have is discovering their passion. Many teens have only begun to explore what they like, and how those interests can translate into their life's Work.

Use yourself as an example, or find articles (or young adult biographies of people that teens like and have heard of) to illustrate the power of passion and pursuing one's real dreams. Illustrations abound, and they are often more convincing than direct instruction.

ACTIVITY #7 SUGGESTIONS:

Make sure that the new routines that your group members adopt are not counterproductive to their life's Work. The purpose of changing a routine is to stay passionate about their life and goals. Some teens mistakenly think that changing a routine requires choosing an entirely new dream. To the contrary, it requires finding new strategies to stay excited about the path they're already on.

ACTIVITY #8 SUGGESTIONS:

If you have the time and inclination, you can let your group members keep an extra copy of their "To Do" list in the room where you meet. Occasionally, peruse the lists to encourage their success, to note when they're not making much progress, or to watch for opportunities that might help teens achieve their goals.

ACTIVITY #9 SUGGESTIONS:

Counselors are especially adept at helping teens distinguish between issues that are theirs and someone else's. One verbal skill that helps teens take ownership of, and responsibility for, their own issues is expressing their feelings and thoughts in first person. Using "I" to describe a feeling, especially in relation to others, is empowering. If the "I" point of view doesn't fit well in the context of the issue they're exploring, it's probably one the teen could let go of.

COMMENTS:

Once, when practicing this first-person exercise, one of my students merely added "I think" to the beginning of the same thought he was expressing. When he said aloud, "I think she should . . .," he, as well as

everyone else, knew without doubt that “she should” held all the power of that sentence. Hearing himself say it aloud helped him recognize an issue that wasn’t his.

ACTIVITY #10 SUGGESTIONS:

If you’re in a retreat setting, this activity can be very effective. It gives you the opportunity to show a film in its entirety instead of dividing it into two or more class periods. (Sometimes having to interrupt viewing to fit into school schedules lessens the impact.)

Even though not all teens will share the same view of what is and isn’t life-affirming, there are universal themes of courage, fortitude, and self-sacrifice that impact nearly all people.

COMMENTS:

If you show an older film, sometimes you need to give teens background information about the context of the time period for them to understand certain challenges. For example, some teens cannot fathom a time when women or minorities were not permitted to enroll in some colleges.

“Not permitted?” they ask. “What do you mean, not permitted?” The concept seems totally beyond their grasp.

Although it never stopped me from showing *It’s a Wonderful Life* (my favorite inspirational film), some teens complain about having to watch black and white movies. Usually just warning them before you start the film (or, better yet, offering them a reading assignment as an alternative) eclipses any griping.

ACTIVITY #11 SUGGESTIONS:

This activity makes a great ice breaker. Often I pair teens up with someone they don’t know well and let them describe and explain their lifeboards to one another before we start sharing as a group.

As an alternative to having teens share their own lifeboards to the entire group, I sometimes invite teens

to describe their partner's lifeboard and explain what they learned about the other teen that they didn't know before.

COMMENT:

Whenever I have teens pair up one-on-one for an activity, I mingle among the pairs, offering suggestions or encouragement when appropriate. If there is an odd number of participants in a group, I become an active participant and pair up with one of the teens myself.

ACTIVITY #13 SUGGESTIONS:

If you have the time and inclination, you can let your group members keep an extra copy of their cards in the room where you meet. Occasionally, peruse the lists to encourage their success, note when they're not making much progress, or watch for opportunities that might help teens achieve their goals.

ACTIVITY #14 SUGGESTIONS:

As often as possible, notice and remark about teens demonstrating excellence. Often teens assume that the most studious member (and often not one of their more popular peers) has cornered the market on excellence by making perfect grades. By recognizing and praising students for expressing excellence in different ways and in different tasks, you invite all group members to consider how they may be demonstrating excellence in tasks they take for granted.

Consider social, artistic, athletic, and scholastic achievements. Note unique aptitudes, such as trivia knowledge, or hobbies that take skill, such as chess, skateboarding, even outfit coordinating. Though they feel uncomfortable asking for it, teens thrive on praise, especially when it allows them to explore their true passions without ridicule or condemnation.

ACTIVITY #16 SUGGESTIONS:

Most classroom teachers have extra activities on hand to give students who finish assignments early.

Often, however, students who've completed their class work don't want to fill in a worksheet, do word puzzles, or read a novel.

Thus, encourage your group members to leave in the room where you meet materials that allow them to work on their dreams whenever time permits. Let them store this material with the extra copies of the 3 x 5 cards you invited them to keep in the room.

With the materials at their disposal, they'll have no reason to complain of being bored. Even better, if there are exercises that don't apply to some group members, you can invite them to work on their own dream activities without your having to find something constructive for them to do.

ACTIVITY #18 SUGGESTIONS:

When you request that teens leave in the room materials that will help them use all their time wisely, do the same yourself. Keep some of your own back-up materials with the teens' index cards and materials. Whenever possible, demonstrate constructive use of your time by pulling out those materials when you're not doing anything pressing. As you retrieve the materials and work on your dream, let group members know what you're doing.

Telling teens that something is worthwhile makes a small impression. Showing them through action that you believe what you teach them makes an indelible impact.

ACTIVITY #19 SUGGESTIONS:

As always, use yourself as a model for success. Teens like the personalized touches that make a teacher, counselor, or group leader more human. Find your own trigger for happiness (or a replica of it if it's something you need to safeguard) and leave it in plain view. As always, explain to teens what you're doing so they can see effective life strategies in action.

ACTIVITY #20 SUGGESTIONS:

To begin this process, you may want to give each teen a seed of good luck and suggest they pass it on, then see what results. Another very effective strategy is to create a simple note that you can share with a teen at the appropriate time. For example, I draw a smiling face on a card and write, “Every time you look at this card today, you have my permission to feel happy for one full minute.” When teens have a bad day, I discretely slip them the card.

If they seem more troubled or concerned, and they don’t want to accept my invitation to talk, I sometimes give them another note that reads, “Sorry you’re having a hard time. You’re not alone. I’ll be thinking of you today, and wishing great things for you. Mr. Leslie.”

It’s a simple kindness that often makes a huge difference.

ACTIVITY #22 SUGGESTIONS:

Many teens aren’t clear about what values are, let alone what their values are. To help them identify their own values, you can dream up fun and enlightening moral dilemma questions for them to answer. I created about one hundred moral dilemmas and wrote each on an index card.

Sample moral dilemma card:

“You find a wad of money in a locker at the gym. Because no one else is there to claim it, you put it in your gym bag and head for the door. As you do, another person runs into the locker room and frantically begins searching for something. What do you do?”

I divide the group into clusters of about eight people, then hand each cluster part of the stack. I let them answer and discuss their responses, explaining their choices.

When clusters finish one stack, they exchange with another cluster until every teen has had the opportunity to answer and discuss every dilemma.

It's a fun exercise and a great learning tool. From it, teens recognize the values that inspire their decisions. They draw sometimes surprising conclusions about their thoughts and behaviors. They see how many different ways there are to perceive the same situation. They also (usually good-humoredly) pick out the honest and untrustworthy people in the group.

ACTIVITY #26 SUGGESTIONS:

Consider starting a Bravehearts Club. (Because this title may date the exercise, you might let your group come up with its own name for it.) The club is dedicated to challenging each member to take a wise risk that they know will enhance their life.

Invite teens to determine something they want to do but are afraid to. Allow them to discuss what mental or emotional roadblocks prevent them from going after what they want. Set a specific time period (usually a week or two) by which they must take some constructive action toward achieving their goal. Then let them pair off so every teen has a support partner who will encourage them and hold them accountable for taking action. After the deadline, discuss victories and setbacks. Those members who successfully take their risks should then plan to take another. Those who don't should recommit to their original goal and try again.

ACTIVITY #31 SUGGESTIONS:

Several variations for expressing gratitude work for groups. Some like to list "100 things we're grateful for" in a brainstorming session. Around the holidays, some teens choose a group project of doing something charitable for a group or individual who makes a difference in people's lives. At the end of each school year, my students picked favorite teachers in our school and gave them a special award.

Sometimes the most rewarding challenge is to acknowledge people whose tireless efforts often go unnoticed. Share some of these options with your group, then let them create their own way of expressing gratitude.

ACTIVITY #35 SUGGESTIONS:

Mentors are everywhere, but most teens have no idea where to look for them. Sometimes the best resource people are school or public librarians. They can point teens in the direction of local people who are succeeding in what they aspire to do. Many librarians have resource files of community members, contact lists that include local businesses and Chambers of Commerce, and reference books and web site addresses that can connect teens with mentors of all professions and interests. Sometimes the best way to help teens find a mentor is to visit a library media center as a group and research together.

Career counselors and teachers who coordinate high school and college independent studies classes are also outstanding resource people to contact. Either go to them or give them a list of the kind of mentors you seek. Give them time to do the research, then let them visit your group with their findings. Many teens are shocked to discover how many people very near their own home are excelling at what they dream of doing.

ACTIVITY #39 SUGGESTIONS:

Teens love a play day, especially if your group activities are usually challenging and work-intensive. After a particularly challenging work period, tell teens you're rewarding them with a play day. Invite them to bring materials that support fun. If your facility allows it, let them bring music or board games. If not, coordinate your own games that tie in (directly or indirectly) with your group goals or curriculum.

My regular level English classes loved playing "Literary Wheel of Fortune." (I used the word literary loosely. Besides quotations from Shakespeare, I included comic book heroes and titles of popular movies and television shows.) My Honors classes preferred "Literary Jeopardy."

COMMENTS:

If you let teens decide how they want to spend their fun day, many will vote for sitting and doing nothing. I always vetoed that suggestion. Whatever your teens do,

whether as one large group, in small clusters, or even independently, let it be something active and engaging. So many of today's teens grew up expecting to be entertained, they often need your help figuring out how to create fun. With minimal help from you, they can have the (self-created) time of their lives.

ACTIVITIES #41-
#43 SUGGESTIONS:

The goal setting section is comprised of systematic, sequential, left-brained activities. It is very appropriate to guide teens step-by-step through every part of this process. I spend much time explaining and modeling these stages even before we set our goals. It seems to help significantly.

When you do goal setting as a group activity, allow every teen to choose an individual goal, but make everyone's deadline the same. Also set a goal along with the teens. Leave your goal sheet in plain view, both to demonstrate how to chart your progress and to remind teens to keep working on their own goals.

During the period they're working on their goals, occasionally give teens some time to update their goal sheets and to ask questions, if necessary. At the end of the goal period, spend time sharing achievements and challenges. Invite volunteers to come to the front of the room and explain what worked (if they achieved the goal) or what didn't (if they didn't). Being able to identify why we didn't achieve our goals is often more valuable than accomplishing the goal too easily. (That usually indicates the goal was not well chosen.)

COMMENTS:

Each year, we set a six-week goal, then a twelve-week goal, then an eighteen-week goal. During each period, I set aside ten minutes or so every other week to help teens update their goal sheets and make sure they're monitoring their own progress. I write my own goal sheet in regular black ink, but chart my progress in red marker. Then I post it on a bulletin board near the entrance to my room. The placement and color help to draw teens' attention to it.

ACTIVITY #44 SUGGESTIONS:

Usually, adults are great about staying on-target with their goals and dreams until they get very close to achieving them. It's that final step that intimidates them most.

The toughest challenge for teens comes much earlier. They struggle to choose a path and to stay with it long enough to get results. They will often drift from one possibility to another, or keep exploring so they don't have to decide.

Do not accept a mere "I don't know what I want" as a response. They do know—or at least they're on the way to finding out. Help them recognize the routines in other areas of their lives that work for them, then encourage them to apply those qualities to pursuing their goals.

ACTIVITY #50 SUGGESTIONS:

After teens complete their self-assessments individually, invite them to share their results as a group. They learn much from their peers. Often, they gain entirely new perspectives about themselves by talking through their responses, rather than only answering the questions.

Soon after they complete this self-assessment, you might encourage the teens to take a vocational interest test. If you are not a counselor, you can send teens to their school counselor to take the test. If you prefer, you may invite a counselor to proctor the test, or secure a set of tests to give to teens yourself. Directions for taking the test and interpreting the results are clear and easy to understand.

Teens need help correlating their interests and passions to career choices. By completing both the self-assessment activity and a vocational interest test, they can use their personal strengths and preferences to explore career options.

Knowing their likes and aptitudes does more than help them see job opportunities. It enhances their self-

esteem, helps them build better relationships, and empowers them to choose the best path for their life.



*"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."
—Will Rogers*