

# Relaxation, Meditation, Contemplation

## Purpose

Nearly all spiritual traditions have at their base meditation and contemplative practices. In recent years many of these techniques have also been recommended as a basis for good health. Deep breathing as a daily practice promotes greater creativity and richer thinking. Simple meditation techniques are not connected to any religious practice. They are easy to teach, hard to maintain.

## Materials

Homemade books (see page 40)

## Preparation

1. Schedule a time for daily relaxation.
2. Establish reflection groups, maintaining the same group membership for a number of sessions.
3. Schedule reflection group meetings on a regular basis.

## Activity Instructions

During the silent period, you have a variety of choices; the common experience is silence. Possible uses for silent time are formal meditation techniques such as counting breaths or observing the mind, quiet prayer, reading, or simple quiet thought. In addition, the following activities can be encouraged:

### Sketching

Sketching can be pictures or words, or both. Sketching helps intensify and preserve experiences in the moment. Encourage simple sketching, asking youth to note or draw the essentials for later reflection and more in-depth work.

### Journaling

Here is a simple plan for keeping an ongoing journal. Entries should be made several times each week:

*Observation:* Write a detailed description of an event. Be as clear and vivid as possible in recording the event, conversation, inspiration, idea, or dream. Be as objective as possible; put off reflections and interpretations until later.

*Feelings:* Describe in detail any feelings evoked.

*Reflections:* Think about, ruminate, and process the event and your feeling reaction. Generalize and analyze. Record any ideas or further inspirations evoked.

### Noting

Since inspiration comes at the oddest moments (for example, when waking from a deep sleep or in the shower), it's important to quickly jot down ideas before they evaporate.

## **Composing**

The sketchbook is an excellent place to work on poems, essays, aphorisms, and observations. Here is the place to write and rewrite, polish and hone.

## **Favorite Quotes**

Keep favorite lines, poems, inspirational sayings, and moving aphorisms as inspiration and support.

## **Planning**

Create the plans for long-term projects. Sketch out ideas, try things out, and use a variety of approaches. Write out a timeline or schedule of the steps for meeting your goal.

## **Discuss**

1. Do you notice any special themes that seem to recur in your observations and sketches?
2. What kinds of things do you tend to keep in your journal?
3. What similarities and differences do you find in your journal compared to those of others?
4. What else might you want to include?
5. Would it be a good idea to concentrate on one or two types of entries for a time?

# Sweet Talk

LOW RISK

## Purpose

Youth have the opportunity to examine their personal characteristics and express them in a group setting.

## Asset Built

#33 Interpersonal Competence

## Materials

one-pound bag of candy  
(one per group of eight to ten youth); M&M's, Reese's Pieces, and Skittles work well

## Preparation

1. Pour the candy into a large mixing bowl.
2. Arrange the group in a circle, either on chairs or sitting on the floor.

## Activity Instructions

1. Pass the bowl of candy around the group circle.
2. Say to the group, "Take as many pieces as you like, but do not eat any candy until I give you permission."
3. Say to the group, "Think of all the wonderful characteristics you have as a person. Think of the many facts about your life that define you as a person. For each piece of candy you took, disclose one characteristic or fact so the group will come to know you better. You can eat a piece as you give a fact or you can wait until you have finished." Sample disclosures:
  - I am 5 feet 8 inches tall.
  - I am sixteen years old.
  - I have a sister and a brother.
  - I love to go skateboarding.
  - I had a girlfriend until last week.
  - My favorite movie is [movie title].
  - We travel to Florida every spring break.
  - I am good at soccer.
  - I keep a journal.

## Discuss

1. What is the most intriguing fact you heard about someone?
2. What characteristics did you disclose that were similar to several others in the group?
3. What characteristics mark each person as unique?
4. Which facts were funny? Telling? Highly descriptive?
5. If you had it to do over, would you take as many pieces of candy?

# Local Heroes

MEDIUM RISK

## Purpose

Youth identify heroes in their community.

## Asset Built

#14 Adult Role Models

## Materials

blackboard, whiteboard, or flip chart

## Preparation

1. Create categories to identify people in your local community who perform acts of heroism or leadership. Possible categories:

Sports	Volunteers
Community Action Groups	Government Agencies
Judges	Politicians
Police, Fire, Emergency Services	Artists, Writers
Media	Ordinary Citizens
2. You might want to scan the newspaper for several weeks, cutting out and filing appropriate articles.
3. For a few weeks before this activity, ask participants to keep a list of names they encounter in the news. Ask them to clip particularly compelling stories.
4. Create a series of columns on a blackboard or on flip-chart paper where you can list brainstormed names.

## Activity Instructions

1. Select a person to record the names of leaders and heroes on the chart.
2. Ask the group to brainstorm. List their responses under the appropriate category of local leaders and heroes.
3. Ask each participant to select three to five names they find most intriguing or compelling, and have detailed knowledge of his/her qualifications as a leader.
4. Ask each participant to present to the group a brief discussion of the characteristics this person has as a role model, leader, or hero.

## Discuss

1. What characteristics do these heroes and leaders have that you would like to possess?
2. What actions can you take now in your life to develop these characteristics?
3. What actions can you take to be more like your heroes?
4. If someone were to describe you as a leader or hero, what characteristics would they note?

## **Variation**

### **Hero Interviews**

1. Contact one of your local heroes and request an interview.
2. Before the interview, make a list of at least ten questions you want to ask.
3. Take a tape recorder and ask permission to tape the interview.
4. Report to the group a description of your interview experience.
5. Write and send a letter thanking the person you interviewed.
6. Discussion questions:

Was the person you interviewed just as you imagined or different from your mental picture?

What new information did you find?

What characteristics about him or her do you most admire?

# Personal Mission Statement

MEDIUM RISK

## Purpose

Youth create a concise mission statement that helps them focus their direction in their life journey.

## Assets Built

#30 Responsibility

#39 Sense of Purpose

#40 Positive View of Personal Future

## Materials

My Personal Mission worksheet  
(see page 134)  
pens or pencils

## Preparation

Make enough copies of the My Personal Mission worksheet so each person will have one.

## Activity Instructions

1. Distribute the worksheets.
2. Ask youth to use the work they did on the previous activities in this section to develop their own personal mission statement.
3. Place participants in groups of three to five.
4. Ask them to commit to their mission statements by reading them aloud.
5. Ask for volunteers to read their statements to the large group.

## Variation

1. Ask youth to rewrite the mission statement in their own words and then decorate it.
2. Make sure they sign their mission statements.
3. Display the mission statements in a central location.

## Discuss

It may be more powerful to simply have the youth read their statements to one another in a small group. If you want to discuss, here are some questions:

1. What makes these statements powerful?
2. Do any of the statements surprise you?
3. How often do you think you ought to look at your statements in the future?
4. When do you think you ought to revise your statements?
5. Would you recommend this experience to others?

# My Personal Mission

I want to live a positive life, fulfill my dreams, and contribute to making this world a better place. In order to do this I will...

1. Seek to fulfill the following dreams during my lifetime:

2. Value each of the following:

3. Develop the following characteristics I admire in others:

4. Use my strengths and increase my talents:

5. Work on overcoming these roadblocks:

6. Seek to make the following contributions in the roles I live:

# Elder Circle

MEDIUM RISK

## Purpose

Youth hear from elders concerning the passage from youth to adulthood.

## Assets Built

#3 Other Adult Relationships

#14 Adult Role Models

## Materials

no materials necessary

## Preparations

1. Invite a minimum of seven adults; fifteen to twenty work well. Invite several from different age groups — twenty-one to thirty, thirty-one to forty, forty-one to fifty, over fifty.
2. Set up a circle of chairs in the center of the room.
3. Provide one chair per elder.

## Activity Instructions

1. Ask the group of elders to sit in the chairs.
2. Ask youth to sit around the elders so they can hear.
3. Caution youth to listen, maintain silence, and avoid side comments. Tell them questions can be asked at the end of each session.
4. Ask the elder circle to discuss the questions that are relevant for the group of youth and their community. Consider asking one question at a time before going on to the next one. Sample questions:

What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were younger?

In what ways were you initiated as a youth into the adult culture? School? Military service? Religious ceremony? Relationships with older members of the community?

What did you learn from that initiation?

What rights and responsibilities do you have as an adult?

Do your rights and responsibilities differ from those of the opposite sex?

How do you know you are a man? A woman?

5. Allow youth to ask questions of the elders.

## Discuss

1. Do you think the elders are in touch with today's youth?
2. Which of the responses was most interesting? Useful? Practical?
3. Did you hear anything that might change an opinion you hold?
4. Who among the elders would you ask for advice?
5. Are there any questions left unanswered? If so, where would you go to find the answers?



# What Does Respect Look Like?

MEDIUM RISK

## Purpose

Youth describe in specific detail what it would look like if boys and girls respected one another.

## Asset Built

#12 School Boundaries

## Materials

flip chart  
poster board (one)  
color markers

## Preparation

On a flip-chart sheet, write in large letters the following questions for the group to consider:

What would it look like if males and females respected each other?

What specifically would you see and hear?

Post this so everyone can read the questions.

## Activity Instructions

1. Select a recorder to record responses on the flip chart.
2. Post the two questions and ask the group to imagine respectful relations between the sexes.
3. Facilitate a discussion of the above questions. In addition, examine the overriding question of whether males and females should be treated differently.
4. Recorder writes down all responses.
5. When the group runs out of answers, examine the list created.
6. Ask the group, "Which of these behaviors could you do at school? In your neighborhood? At school functions? Throughout your life?"
7. Circle or mark in some way those responses the group would be willing to perform at school.
8. Ask for one or two volunteers to rewrite the circled responses neatly on a large poster-size piece of paper.
9. Suggest these statements as a code of ethics for the group to follow. Ask each person to sign this code of ethics at the bottom of the poster.
10. Display the poster at a central location.

## Discuss

After this activity, periodically check in with the group to see how they feel they are doing in living up to their code of ethics.

1. Are you following the code as it was intended?
2. What parts of this code are you following?
3. In what areas do you need to make changes?
4. What difference has following this code made in your community?