

## Lead a series of youth workshops – *Lesson 2: Finding Balance*

A balanced lifestyle sets the stage for optimal health and happiness, now and for the long term. Creating a lifestyle that is satisfying, maintainable, realistic, and supportive of all of one's personal values is balance. Use the steps that follow to help teens explore what balance looks like for them and how they can achieve it.

### What You Need

- Electronic devices for each participant or one with a larger screen that can be seen by all
- Internet connection
- Smart Board or projector
- Copies of the [“Values Circle” worksheet \(pdf\)](#) or blank pieces of paper (one for each participant)
- Copies of the [“Gratitude” worksheet \(pdf\)](#) (one for each participant)
- Copies of the [Affirmations Activity \(pdf\)](#) (one for each participant)
- Pen or pencil (one for each participant for writing)
- Small, individually wrapped candy (chocolate, chewable fruit) or other food that will work for a guided mindful eating meditation

### Step 1: Check In- Determine Your Stress Factors

Ask how many people took the Stress Quiz and explored the recommendations provided at the end of the quiz. If not everyone took the quiz or it seems a refresher is needed, complete the quiz as a group. As a group, talk about different ways stress affects the participants and what they can do to help relax and relieve stress. Do participants experience symptoms they didn't realize are caused by stress? Did they find a new recommendation to help them reduce stress? After a bit of discussion, spend a few minutes doing some deep belly breathing or other relaxation techniques before getting started with the session.

Stress Factor Quiz: <http://www.changetochill.org/stress-factor-quiz/>

### Step 2: Life Balance

The Achieve Balance section of the site focuses on becoming aware of how teens are balancing their life. Explain to the group that leading a life that isn't in alignment with their values and priorities can be a huge source of stress. Do the activity that follows.

*Values Circle*—Distribute the “Values Circle” worksheet or blank pieces of paper to each participant along with a pen or pencil. Follow the directions for the activity as they are listed on the handouts and website. When participants are done filling in the two worksheets as directed spend a few minutes discussing the following:

- What do you notice about how your values compare with how you spend your time?
- Are you happy with what you discovered by doing this activity? Why or why not?
- What's one thing you'd like to do differently in order to have your life more aligned with your values?

[“Values Circle” worksheet \(pdf\)](#)

### **Step 3: Gratitude**

Ask participants if they have ever thought about what it takes to be happy? More money, more stuff? Ask the group to share their ideas on what material items people think make them happy.

Then, explain that people who take time to appreciate what they have in the moment are actually happier than those who don't! Research shows only about 10 percent of our happiness depends on our situation. In other words, WE are responsible for our own level of happiness! One of the keys to happiness is our resilience and ability to successfully manage stress.

Tell the group that resilience can be learned. The more we practice stress management and resilience skills, the happier we can become. Change to Chill includes many techniques and skills to help participants manage stress (deep breathing, meditation, better sleep and more). Another great tool to help build up the “resilience muscle” is gratitude. Think about it – how often do we take the small things like a beautiful sky, amazing sunset and family or friends for granted? Research shows expressing gratitude truly makes us happier people, especially if we do it often and in-person.

Explain to the group that the following activities will help build the “resilience muscle” through practicing gratitude.

#### **Gratitude Worksheet**

Walk participants through the “Gratitude” worksheet, taking time to discuss each question, as time allows. Once they have completed the worksheet have participants intentionally set aside time to write a thank you letter to someone they are grateful for.

[“Gratitude” worksheet \(pdf\)](#)

#### **Gratitude Meditation**

Listen to the audio or read the meditation aloud to the group. After the meditation, ask the group how they can practice gratitude every day. Give the following examples, if they are not brought up by the group.

- Live in the present. Notice what is today instead of focusing on yesterday or tomorrow's worries.
- Start the day with gratitude. Practice giving thanks before you go on with the day's activities, and notice new opportunities to be grateful for throughout the day.
- Start a gratitude journal. Write down the things you are grateful for every day, then look at it at the end of the month or when you struggle to notice anything good.

Reiterate the idea of practicing being content, focusing on what we have, not on what we don't.

[Gratitude Meditation Audio](#)

[Gratitude Meditation Script \(pdf\)](#)

#### **Step 4: Positive Affirmations**

Ask participants if they know that your thoughts help shape your reality? We all have an inner voice in our heads that helps us navigate each day. We hear neutral thoughts like, "I should go to the bathroom," positive thoughts like, "I did a great job!" and negative thoughts like, "I'm not good enough."

Then, explain that thoughts that get repeated the most change the structure of our brains. They do this by strengthening the connection between the brain cells responsible for that thought pattern. When you pay more attention to your negative thoughts, you strengthen those brain cells and will hear those messages more often. It can start to feel impossible to escape negative thoughts. But you can re-train your brain to strengthen your positive thought patterns instead.

One way to do this is by practicing positive affirmations. Positive affirmations are encouraging messages you speak, write or think to yourself to support yourself. They help interrupt patterns of negative thought, build self-compassion and help achieve desired behaviors.

Practicing daily affirmations can help increase positive thought patterns and the way you see yourself. Explain that only speaking affirmations doesn't retrain your brain. To really see results, you must take time to:

1. review your thoughts
2. set an intention
3. practice
4. take action.

Walk participants through the [Affirmations Activity](#). Invite participants to establish an affirmations practice routine and reflect on how it feels to hear these encouragements from themselves.

### Step 5: Introduction to Mindfulness

Ask participants the following questions:

- Have you ever had a time when your mind is so caught up in what happened earlier in the day that you can't focus on the now?
- Or maybe you are worried about something for tomorrow?

Explain that sometimes we spend so much time worried about the past or being anxious about the future that we can't focus on what's happening now.

That's where [mindfulness](#) can help. Mindfulness is the observation of the present moment, without any judgement. It reduces anxiety by focusing on the present moment—not the past or the future, both of which can create anxiety and stress.

Tell the group that instead of reacting right away to a situation, they can take the time to notice, without judgement, how they are feeling. Taking the time to notice how they are feeling can help them decide how they want to react.

Sometimes the worst part about a stressful event is what goes through our heads as we are worrying or wondering. Ask the group to think of a time when they were late for something, maybe for school.

- What was going through your mind as you were on your way?
- Perhaps scolding yourself for not getting up early enough (past), worrying about what your teacher might say (future) and generally making yourself miserable?

By practicing mindfulness and staying in the *present moment*, we can acknowledge when we are anxious about being late and then concentrate on things that are happening right now. Ask the following questions:

- How does your body feel when you are anxious?
- What do you notice about what is happening around you?

It can be difficult to remain in the moment when we are worried about the past or the future. One of the best ways to practice mindfulness is in situations where it is easy. The more we practice mindfulness in our day to day activities, the easier it will be to be to stay in the moment when a stressful situation comes up. Below are a few examples of ways teens can use mindfulness in their daily lives.

#### *Mindful Eating*

Many of us eat on the go – in our cars, at our desks, in front of the TV or with others at a restaurant. This exercise will help participants tune into all the sensations while eating to make it a more meaningful experience. This exercise will also help them to become aware of the

bodily sensations while they eat: hunger, when they stop feeling hunger, and when they feel satisfied.

[Mindful Eating Exercise \(pdf\)](#)

*Brushing your teeth*

This is an exercise for teens to use while brushing their teeth. Teens should start by breathing deeply several times to clear their mind. Then, they can slowly and carefully brush their teeth, focusing on each detail – noticing how the toothpaste tastes and how it feels on their teeth. Teens can ask themselves, what sensations they feel in their mouth as they brush? They can observe their thoughts, but not interact with them.

*Mindful Walking*

This is an exercise for teens to use when out for a walk or just walking as part of their daily routine. Teens should start by taking a deep breath and clearing their mind as they begin their walk. Then, they should walk slowly and feel the sensation beneath their feet. They should breathe slowly and feel the movement in their legs and sensations across their body. Suggest that teens practice this for 2 minutes or as long as they feel comfortable.

[Mindful Walking Exercise \(pdf\)](#)

**Step 6: Mindful Movement**

As time and space allow, pick and choose as many or as little of the following mindful movement relaxation activities to follow along with. These simple, short exercises provide teens with more options to help them feel better and stress less.

- Front Stretch Right: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSs06opurd0>
- Front Stretch Left: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBDSIH\\_t--k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBDSIH_t--k)
- Basic Spine Flex: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRxbqzq1oEw>
- Neck Turns: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmY85gSirlc>
- Washing Machine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutpgAQZj6Y>
- Shoulder Rolls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK6VtanFiZI>
- Shoulder Shrugs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaICnGnZ7NY>
- Half-Moon Neck Rolls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9SF1e7B8h4>