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Our Stories: Facilitator's Guide

Foundation of Our Stories

The *Our Stories* curriculum has been conceptualized and developed through the collaboration between developmental psychologist, Gil Noam, Ed.D., Ph.D., (Habil). and PEAR (Partnerships in Education and Resilience). Through theory, practice, and research, *Our Stories*, along with the other Clover Groups, aim to provide an inclusive, strength-based model of intervention that helps build youth competence and resilience through relationships with peers and positive adult figures, and works in collaboration with families, teachers, school administrators, community programs, mental health professionals and others to support youth success.

About PEAR

PEAR works with schools, afterschool programs, and other youth-serving organizations to update educational practices by taking into account the critical tie between social emotional development and health and life success. PEAR redevelops capacity of school systems to assess and address the challenges youth face through assessments, data analysis, professional development and school interventions. Dedicated to building resiliency in young people, PEAR helps schools and after-school programs to know every child, strengthen school support teams, find youth promotion, prevention and intervention opportunities, and use data to drive decision making in school planning.

Development of *Our Stories* Curriculum

Our Stories uses group-based methodologies of appreciative inquiry and storytelling to leverage a youth's existing strength of Reflective capacity to cultivate an ability and confidence for self-expression and speaking up. Additionally, *Our Stories* is designed to develop a youth's sense of belonging and self-compassion. Through increased skills in expression, youth can better connect with peers and speak up to get their needs met and their opinions or ideas heard.

Our Stories Curriculum Goals

Goals	Description
Emotion Regulation	We will practice changing our thinking to respond to challenging emotions
Connection	We will develop connections with others through shared interests and understanding
Identity	We will explore what makes us proud and what has shaped who we are
Expression	We will communicate our experiences, thoughts, ideas and opinions

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Group Structure and Participant Selection

Group Structure

Below is a description of the basic structure of *Our Stories*. The group can and should be adapted to meet the needs of your population and the context in which it is being implemented.

Component	Details	Recommendations
Group Size	Small Group	4-6 youth
Ages	10-15 years old	Age of participants no more than 2 years apart
Number of sessions	12	1-2 sessions per week
Length of session	60 minutes	Some customization is possible
Co-Facilitators	Two	Mental health providers preferred

Group Participant Selection

It is important to understand youth from multiple perspectives in order to determine whether or not they are a good match for the group. Considering all of the following factors, rather than relying on just one, is the best way to determine who should be an *Our Stories* group participant.

- **Key Strengths:** Often spend time contemplating what they are learning and doing and are observant and analytical of the world around them. Are likely introspective and self-aware and therefore, choose their actions based on deeply held values and beliefs. Youth strong in reflection are more likely to be able to see events or situations from multiple points of view.
- **Key Struggles:** Moving beyond thinking to doing, “analysis paralysis.” Ruminating on ideas, questions, or social problems, which can lead toward feelings of anxiety. Youth strong in reflection are often perfectionists, leading to self-criticism or inability to complete work. Can get bored easily and disconnect from work that doesn’t have personal meaning.
- **Key Needs:** Opportunities for reflection, thinking time and acceptance of a careful and intentional way of processing. Youth with a strong reflective capacity need support in strategies and ways of expressing their thoughts, ideas and opinions such as writing, art, music, and other self-expression activities.

When selecting participants, it is important to use your school/program policy for guardian permission. PEAR may supply you with a consent form.

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Suggested Materials and Preparation

Materials

The materials listed below are a guide to plan ahead for purchasing and budgeting. Within each session's description in the curriculum there is a more specific "Materials" section. Always look ahead at the following session for more specifics about materials needed and preparation. You will need to have access to a printer or copy machine to make copies of materials provided in the manual itself.

Recommended Materials	Amount
Writing materials (Pens and/or pencils)	Enough for all
Drawing materials (Markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)	Enough for all
Tape, glue & scissors	Enough for all
Paper (white office & construction paper)	Enough for all
Music (Stereo, speakers, or computer to play)	1
Journals (provided in curriculum)	One for each
Suggestion box (optional)	1
Poster board (Large white board or butcher paper)	
Post-it notes	Enough for all
Beach Ball	1
Hole punch, string or binder ring	Enough for all
Collage materials (pre-cut magazine/newspaper images and words)	Enough for all
String/yarn	1-3 rolls
Special snack, utensils and plates	Enough for all

Art Kit

Use some of the materials listed above to create an art kit for your group. Each session, youth will start off by writing in a journal. They should be encouraged to be creative in expressing their thoughts through words and images. Additionally, one of the key goals of this curriculum is for youth to gradually develop and create a final story or personal narrative. Some may choose to tell this story through a drawing or painting.

Put together an easily accessible box, a specific drawer, or section of the room that has art materials for youth to use throughout each session. Make sure to set clear expectations about how to respectfully use, share and clean up the materials provided.

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Session Components

1 Idea Sparks 5 minutes	2 Group Pledge 5 minutes	3 Group Warm Up 15 minutes	4 Tell Me About It 30 minutes	5 Check Out 5 minutes
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1. Idea Sparks

Curriculum Goals of Idea Sparks – Identity & Expression

The purpose of the Idea Sparks is to allow youth to not only individually reflect, but also to share and express personal insight and information in a group format. Throughout the 12 sessions, youth will start by entering the room and individually answering the Idea Sparks prompt in their journal. Youth can write or draw as a way to respond to the prompt and then each group member will choose one word from their response and write it on a beach ball. Each session they will add on to the same beach ball, which will symbolize the collective power of individual stories. This process allows for youth to have the time and safety of responding on their own, but also encourages them to make their ideas public. Every session starts with this ritual, which begins when the first person enters the room and ends once everyone has had a chance to answer the prompt.

2. Group Pledge

Curriculum Goal of the Group Pledge – Connection

The Group Pledge is an agreement that is read out loud every session. The purpose of the Group Pledge is to remind everyone of the reasons they are in this group, introduce the goal of that session, and what the group agreements are. Ideally, each session a different member will have a chance to read the Group Pledge. It is not necessary to review all of the group agreements every session; just choose two or three that you (or the group) feel are most important. The group may also want to choose different agreements every session, so the group is reminded of all of their group agreements. It may feel repetitive but keep it up – it helps the group members internalize the agreements, purpose and goals of their time together.

3. Group Warm Up

Curriculum Goals of the Group Warm Up – Emotion Regulation, Expression & Connection

The purpose of the Group Warm Up is to transition into the session through a fun, community building activity. The activities focus on developing new skills meant to improve self-compassion and expression and to help group members build connections with one another. The activities support youth in finding ones' voice, and reflecting on identity, opinions, beliefs and values. The activities will encourage youth to “get out of their head” and find connections with their peers.

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4. Tell Me About It

Curriculum Goals of Tell Me About It – Identity & Expression

Tell Me About It is a workshopping section where group members will get the chance to gradually develop their final story each session. This will be a time where youth can build on their strength of reflection in order to continue to build and develop skills in expression. During this section, youth will have time to stop, think and reflect on aspects of their lives that are meaningful and have contributed to their identity. They will then thoughtfully plan, organize and craft a story that expresses who they are and what is important to them. The final product of their story can be expressed in multiple forms such as a painting, spoken word, short story, video blog, etc. These stories will be shared at the end of the 12-week curriculum.

5. Check Out

Curriculum Goals of the Check Out – Expression & Connection

This is an important but brief time to bring the group back together and wrap-up the day's session. During the Check Out, students can share feedback with facilitators about the session, or take a moment to share a final thought on the day's activities. The facilitator should end the session by reiterating any important messages from the day (about both content of the session and the group's process together) and reminding the group members of their next session.

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Session	Idea Sparks 5 minutes	Group Pledge 5 minutes	Group Warm Up 15 minutes	Tell Me About It 30 minutes	Check Out 5 minutes
Session 1	Welcome	Group Pledge Our Image	Web of Connections	Intro to Storytelling & Mentor/Sample Narratives	One Takeaway
Session 2	Skills	Group Pledge	Categories: About Us	Life Map	One Takeaway
Session 3	Thoughts & Feelings	Group Pledge	The Medicine Bag	The Heart of my Story	One Takeaway
Session 4	I am Grateful	Group Pledge	Positive Affirmations	Choosing My Story	One Takeaway & Showcase Ideas
Session 5	Embracing Imperfection	Group Pledge	I Can't Stand...	Story Organizer	One Takeaway
Session 6	Being Proud	Group Pledge	Categories: Identity	Final Project Details Brainstorming and interview questions	One Takeaway

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Session	Idea Sparks 5 minutes	Group Pledge 5 minutes	Group Warm Up 15 minutes	Tell Me About It 30 minutes	Check Out 5 minutes
Session 7	Lesson Learned	Group Pledge	Stage Fright	Storytelling Project Workshop	One Takeaway & Showcase Decision
Session 8	Challenges	Group Pledge	Uncovering our Strengths	Storytelling Project Workshop	One Takeaway
Session 9	Feedback is a Gift	Group Pledge	Fresh Eyes	Storytelling Project Workshop	One Takeaway
Session 10	What I'm Proud Of	Group Pledge	Owning our Strengths	Storytelling Project Workshop	One Takeaway
Session 11	Sharing Your Story	Group Pledge	Storytelling Project showcase		One Takeaway
Session 12	Reflection	Group Pledge	Our Stories Survey	Web of Connection & Celebration!	One Takeaway

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Session 3: GROUP WARM UP

The Medicine Bag

Time: 15 minutes

Materials

- The Medicine Bag story (Also in Idea Sparks Journals)
- 3 different colored markers/highlighters

Facilitator Guide

- Today, group members will talk about the interaction and connection between thoughts, feelings and actions. The hope is that youth will get a chance to discuss how, once they have an understanding of and can acknowledge their thoughts, they can start to take control over their feelings and therefore their actions.
- First, briefly go over the definitions of thoughts, feelings and actions and ask for some examples to check for understanding.
 - **Thoughts:** are the ideas we have in our heads (what our brains tell us). Sometimes we say things to ourselves in our heads (not out loud), and these are also thoughts. For example, you might think, “I did a great job on my homework.” Can you think of some other thoughts?
 - **Feelings:** are the emotions and sensations we have in our bodies and hearts What are some feelings you know about?
 - **Actions:** are the things we do with our bodies! For example, we walk, dance, talk, draw, laugh, cry, etc. Can you name some other actions?
- Explain to youth that today they will read a story about a boy and his great grandfather to discuss how a person’s thoughts can impact their feelings and actions either for good or for bad.
- While reading, the group should highlight or underline moments where the boy’s thoughts about his great grandfather had a negative impact on his feelings and actions. Choose a different color marker/highlighter for thoughts, feelings and actions.
- After reading and discussing the character, the group should practice suggesting other thoughts that the boy could have had, and how that might have had a more positive impact on him, his family or his friends.

Facilitator Notes

Tip: To ensure that there is enough time, facilitators might want to read the story for group members as they follow along and highlight, instead of having group members taking turns reading aloud.

Below is the link to the full version of “The Medicine Bag” for group members who might be interested in reading the full story outside of the group.
<https://www.btbooces.org/Downloads/7-The%20Medicine%20Bag%20by%20Virginia%20Driving%20Hawk%20neve.pdf>

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Session 3: GROUP WARM UP (CONTINUED)

Debrief

- Gather group in small circle.
- Share the goal of the activity: **Emotion Regulation**
- Ask what, so what, now what debrief questions, based on your group's readiness for reflection.

What?

Invite group members to share observations, thoughts, and emotions about their thoughts on **Emotion Regulation** during the activity.

So What?

Ask questions about why **Emotion Regulation** was important in this activity.

Now What?

Ask about what it looks like outside of the group and why it is important in their daily lives.

Facilitator Notes

Example Debrief Questions

“What do you notice about thoughts, feelings and actions?”

“Why is it sometimes difficult to take control of our thoughts?”

“What can you do to try and control some of your thoughts?”

“Think back to your Idea Sparks journal entry from today. What is the connection between your answers to each of those questions?”

“Why is it helpful to try and reshape some of our thoughts into more positive thoughts?”

“How have some of your thoughts had an impact on your feelings and actions? Maybe in the story you are thinking about telling in this group.”

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SESSION 3: TELL ME ABOUT IT

The Heart of my Story

Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- Heart of my Story examples (Also in Idea Sparks Journals)
- Heart of my Story Blank Hearts (Also in Idea Sparks Journals)
- Art Kit

Facilitator Guide

- Last session, group members reflected on experiences and moments throughout their lives. This session, they will continue this reflection and brainstorming process, but will focus more on places, people and things that are the “heart” of their story, or the “heart” of who they are.
- They should think of moments or places in their lives that have been meaningful and impactful, people that have been influential or that are important to them, and items or gifts that have sentimental value, etc.
- Use “The Medicine Bag” as an example. The boy in the story might include his great grandfather in the heart of his story.
- Just like the Life Map, the purpose of this activity is to get group members thinking about and brainstorming for the storytelling project.
- Each youth has a large heart in their Idea Sparks Journal. They should draw a smaller heart in the center, and then use lines, arrows, squiggly marks, etc. to create smaller areas/boxes/compartments that they will fill in with what makes up the heart of who they are. (See the samples for youth to model off of).
- Encourage youth to get creative! They can use different colors and draw pictures or write words to fill in the spaces.
- They do not have to fill in all of the empty spaces today. They can use additional sessions to continue to add on. (See sample that has spaces left blank).
- Take the last few minutes to bring the group back together and have them share something from their hearts!
- Remember to have group members continue to check off tasks on their timelines in their Idea Sparks Journals.

Facilitator Notes

Part of the purpose of this activity is to encourage group members to see how something does not have to look perfect or be finished in order to be meaningful or worthwhile.

There can be blank spaces left over at the end of the activity. Talk with the group about how anything they work on get be changed, fixed or added on to later. It does not have to be perfect after the first draft.

