Toolkit for Professionals Working with Emerging Adults

A Companion Resource to the Life Launch Playbook

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Introduction

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed as a flexible, hands-on companion to the *Playbook for Professionals*. It includes worksheets, scripts, visuals, and conversation tools that professionals can use to engage with emerging adults ages 16–25 across a variety of settings and topics, from first meetings and casual check-ins to structured sessions and crisis planning.

These tools are meant to spark connection, build trust, support skill-building, and invite collaboration. You can print and use them as-is, adapt them to fit the language or style of your setting, or use them as a springboard for deeper conversation. While some materials are designed for you as a professional, many are intended to be completed directly by the young person either alone, with your guidance, or with a peer, caregiver, or group. Materials are color-coded by type (checklist, worksheet, visual, cheat sheet, role-play script/conversation guide, activity, and template) and audience (youth-facing materials have a white background and professional-facing materials have a grey background).

This tool is for any professional who works with young people. Whether you're a clinician, case manager, teacher, school counselor, coach, volunteer, or employer, these tools are for you and you can adapt them as needed for your specific circumstances. These resources are meant to be picked up and used when they're most helpful. You can work through them in any order, return to them as needed, or offer them to a young person as optional take-home materials.

Understanding Emerging Adults: Key Considerations

Emerging adulthood (ages 16–25) is a complex stage of life full of major turning points. It's marked by big transitions and deep questions: *Who am I? What matters to me? What kind of life do I want to build?*

Many young people are navigating systemic challenges, education and employment, housing or financial insecurity, health and mental health issues, discrimination, and family pressures, all while trying to establish autonomy and a sense of belonging.

This age group is developmentally wired for experimentation, risk-taking, and identity exploration. Their brains are still developing, particularly the parts responsible for impulse control, emotional regulation, and long-term planning, but their ideas, values, and feelings are very real and valid.

Many are fiercely protective of their independence, deeply sensitive to perceived judgment, and still building the confidence to ask for help. Some young people may come into services guarded, skeptical, or unsure if the offerings will truly support their needs. Others may be eager to dive in but unsure where to start.

A youth-centered approach recognizes their expertise in their own life and emphasizes partnership over prescription. Supporting emerging adults means respecting their pace, affirming their identities, and helping them develop tools to move through the world on their own terms in order to meet them where they are, not where we think they "should" be.

Navigating This Guide: Jumping Between Domains

The toolkit is divided into topic-specific sections that align with the chapters of the *Playbook for Professionals*:

Outreach & Engagement

Healthy Relationships

Working with Parents & Caregivers

Peer Support

Substance Use

First Episode Psychosis

Suicide Prevention

Employment

Each section contains ready-to-use materials that address a particular theme or challenge. You do **not** need to move through this toolkit in a set order. Instead, let the young person's needs, interests, or current situation guide your approach. For example:

- A young person navigating friend drama might benefit from the healthy relationship scripts and visuals.
- Someone beginning a new job could use the employment readiness tools.
- A youth in early recovery or facing peer pressure may connect with the substance use resources.

Each tool is designed to work in short, flexible sessions. You can select one or two tools per meeting, create a personalized packet for the young person to complete on their own, or refer to materials during real-time moments of need.

Youth-Centered Practice: Autonomy, Respect, and Engagement

At the heart of this toolkit is a commitment to **youth-centered work**, an approach which treats emerging adults as experts in their own experiences and full partners in their care.

Youth-centered practice isn't about fixing, diagnosing, or instructing, but about listening, validating, offering choice, and walking alongside.

Respect is foundational. Many young people have been spoken over, dismissed, or misunderstood in school, medical, or family systems. When professionals slow down, ask before advising, and respond with curiosity instead of correction, it signals that their voice matters.

Autonomy is essential. Youth are more likely to engage when they feel ownership over their path. Even if a young person's choices don't match adult expectations, your role is to offer information, support reflection, and leave space for growth, not steer them toward a predetermined outcome.

Engagement doesn't always look like eye contact or enthusiasm. Sometimes it starts with silence, resistance, or "I don't know." These responses are opportunities to build trust and safety over time. A youth-centered approach invites young people to come as they are and helps them build the skills, confidence, and clarity to move toward who they want to be.

1. Outreach & Engagement

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental period defined by transitions, exploration, and the search for autonomy. However, it can also be a time of instability, isolation, and unmet needs, particularly for youth navigating behavioral health challenges. The Outreach & Engagement tools in this chapter are designed to help professionals build authentic, respectful relationships with young people, often before they have formally entered services. These materials emphasize connection over compliance and aim to break down barriers that may prevent youth from seeking support, such as mistrust of systems, stigma, or fear of being judged.

Each resource in this section supports professionals in practicing youth-centered engagement strategies which center listening, building rapport, and meeting the young person where they are. Tools such as the "Where Is This Youth At?" Checklist and the "Say This, Not That" Visual help providers assess readiness and avoid alienating language, while conversation scripts and interactive worksheets invite collaboration from the start.

These tools are not about jumping into diagnosis or treatment but opening the door. Used consistently and thoughtfully, they can lay the groundwork for trust, helping youth feel seen, heard, and empowered to take the next step on their own terms.

"Where Is This Youth At?" Checklist

A tool to support first conversations with emerging adults (ages 16–25)

Purpose: Use this checklist to guide your first interactions. Observe, listen, and build rapport — this is not about judgment or diagnosis, but understanding how to meet the young person where they are.

First Impressions & Observations

(Check any that seem to apply based on your initial interaction.)

- ☐ Appears calm and open to conversation
- ☐ Seems anxious, distracted, or overwhelmed
- ☐ Avoids eye contact or gives short responses
- ☐ Appears energized or "amped up"
- ☐ Seems tired, flat, or withdrawn
- ☐ Shows interest in being here
- ☐ Unclear if they're here by choice

Notes on tone, body language, energy level:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Getting to Know Them: Conversation Starters

(Use these questions to learn more — pick what feels natural.)

- "What brought you here today?"
- "What's been on your mind lately?"
- "Is there something you're hoping to get help with?"
- "Are there parts of your life that are going well right now?"
- "Any stressors or stuff getting in the way lately?"

Write down any key concerns, interests, or goals they mention:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How Do They Communicate?

(Check all that describe their communication style today.)

- ☐ Talkative and open
- ☐ Reserved but responsive
- ☐ Hard to read / minimal talking
- ☐ Asks thoughtful questions
- ☐ Needs time to warm up
- ☐ Uses humor or sarcasm
- ☐ Prefers texting/writing over talking

Preferred way to connect (if mentioned):

☐ Text ☐ Phone ☐ Email ☐ In Person ☐ Unsure

Readiness & Comfort Level

(How ready do they seem to engage right now?)

- ☐ Ready and interested in getting support
- ☐ Unsure: might need more time/info
- ☐ Guarded: may not trust the process yet
- ☐ Just checking things out today
- ☐ Here because someone else encouraged it

What might help build more trust or comfort for them?

(e.g., quiet space, snacks, peer connection, time alone before talking)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Next Steps (for you, the provider):

- What **initial support** or **referrals** might be a good fit?
- How can you follow up in a way that **respects their pace and style**?

“Where Do I Want to Start?” Worksheet

A worksheet to help me figure out what’s most important to me right now

There’s no right or wrong way to use this! You can write, circle, draw, or talk through it. This is just to help your support team understand what *you* want.

Which Parts of Life Feel Most Important to Me Right Now?

(Circle up to 3 that you want to focus on first — or add your own!)

- 🗨️ Friendships
- 🏠 Family / Caregivers
- 🧠 Mental Health
- 💼 Work / Job Stuff
- 📚 School / Learning
- 🧍 Independence
- 🩺 Health & Wellness
- 💊 Substance Use
- 💞 Dating & Relationships
- 😣 Stress or Tough Emotions
- 🌈 Identity / Self-Discovery
- 🧘 Coping Skills
- 🙏 Spirituality or Values
- 👫 Peer Support
- ⚠️ Crisis or Safety Stuff
- 🎨 Hobbies / Creativity
- 💭 Something else: _____

What’s on My Mind Lately?

(Write a few words, or even a whole paragraph, if you want!)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What Do I Want to Work On First?

(Short-term goal or topic you want to explore)

I’d like to start by… _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What’s Going Well Right Now?

(Check anything that feels true — or leave blank if nothing fits today.)

☐ I have people I can count on
☐ I’m doing okay at school/work
☐ I have goals I’m working toward
☐ I know what helps me feel better
☐ I’m learning more about myself
☐ I’m making progress, even if it’s slow
☐ I’m good at _____
☐ Other strengths I want to share:

_____

_____

What’s Been Getting in the Way?

(Write or doodle any challenges, stressors, or barriers you're facing)

Things I Want You to Know About Me

(Anything that might help you understand me better — boundaries, context, goals, or heads-up info. Share as much or as little as you want.)

_____

_____

_____

“Say This, Not That” Visual

A guide to building respectful, youth-centered communication by avoiding jargon and replacing “psych speak” with clearer, more engaging alternatives

Purpose: Use this tool to check your language when working with emerging adults (ages 16–25). Many common phrases—especially in healthcare, education, and human services—can sound judgmental, confusing, or cold. This guide offers more effective ways to communicate with empathy, clarity, and collaboration.

Decision-Making

Keep in Mind: Emerging adults want to feel in charge of their own lives. Even if they’re unsure or ambivalent, framing choices as theirs to explore helps preserve autonomy and increases long-term engagement.

“You made a bad choice.”	→	“That must have been tough. Want to think through what happened together?”
“Why would you do that?”	→	“Can you walk me through what led up to that?”
“You should’ve known better.”	→	“We all make decisions based on what we know in the moment — what would you want to do differently next time?”
“You just need to set goals.”	→	“Is there anything you'd feel proud of making progress on right now?”
“What’s your 5-year plan?”	→	“Is there anything you’re curious about trying or learning more about?”
“You need to make a decision.”	→	“Want to look at some options together and see what feels right for now?”
“That won’t work.”	→	“Want to brainstorm a few different ways to go about it?”
“That’s not realistic.”	→	“Let’s think about what steps could make that more possible.”

Respect & Boundaries

Keep in Mind: Emerging adults are still developing identity, boundaries, and a sense of self. Corrective feedback should be delivered respectfully, without shame or power trips. Model clear, kind boundary-setting and self-expression.

“That’s inappropriate.”	→	“Let’s talk about how that might land for others.”
“You can’t talk to me like that.”	→	“I want to keep this space respectful — let’s take a pause and start over.”
“You’re being disrespectful.”	→	“Sounds like something’s coming up for you — want to talk about what’s behind that?”
“You need to calm down.”	→	“I want to help — what would feel grounding or helpful right now?”

Behavioral Critiques

Keep in Mind: Youth are often sensitive to perceived criticism. Instead of labeling or pathologizing struggles, take a strengths-based, solution-focused approach. Lead with curiosity rather than blame or judgment.

"You're high-risk."	→	"It sounds like you're going through a lot. How can we support you?"
"You have poor insight."	→	"Everyone makes sense in their own way — let's explore what's true for you."
"You're resistant to help."	→	"Is there something about this process that feels off or hard for you?"
"You're not following through."	→	"Want to talk about what's been getting in the way?"
"You need to self-regulate."	→	"What helps you feel calmer or more in control when things get overwhelming?"
"You're in denial."	→	"It's okay if things don't make sense yet — we can figure it out together."

Mental Health

Keep in Mind: Many emerging adults are still making sense of their emotions and experiences — or may feel shame, confusion, or fear around mental health topics. Avoid clinical terms unless the young person uses them first. Speak in plain, human language that normalizes struggle and centers personal meaning.

"Do you have a diagnosis?"	→	"Has anyone ever talked to you about mental health or how your brain works?"
"What are your symptoms?"	→	"What have you been noticing or feeling lately?"
"Do you have triggers?"	→	"Are there certain things that really throw you off or make things harder?"
"Do you have any behavioral issues?"	→	"What kinds of situations are tough for you to navigate right now?"
"What are your coping strategies?"	→	"What helps you get through hard stuff?"
"I'm referring you to a specialist."	→	"I know someone who could be a good fit to help with this — want to meet them?"
"We need to create a treatment plan."	→	"Let's make a plan together that actually works for you."
"Let's process your trauma."	→	"Want to talk about what's been heavy for you?"

Crisis & Safety

Keep in Mind: When youth are in distress, fear-based or punitive language can make them shut down or conceal what's really going on. Safety conversations should prioritize trust, consent (where appropriate), and shared planning.

"We'll have to hospitalize you."	→	"Right now, I'm focused on making sure you're safe — let's talk through your options."
"You're a danger to yourself."	→	"Sounds like you've been feeling really overwhelmed. Want to talk about what's been going on?"
"You're just doing this for attention."	→	"It makes sense to reach out when you're in pain — thank you for telling me."
"If you do that, you'll be kicked out of the program."	→	"Let's talk about what's going on underneath that and how we can support you."
"That behavior is unacceptable."	→	"Let's take a breath and figure out what happened — your safety matters."

Family & Caregiver Dynamics

Keep in Mind: Family dynamics in this age group can be complex, strained, or out of the youth's control. Avoid assuming closeness or safety, and always prioritize the youth's own boundaries and definitions of family.

"Your parents just want what's best for you."	→	"What's your relationship with them like these days?"
"You should talk to your mom about that."	→	"Is there anyone in your life you'd feel comfortable talking with about this?"
"We'll need to call your caregiver."	→	"Are there people in your life you'd want involved — or anyone you'd prefer we don't contact?"
"You need to be more respectful to your parents."	→	"It sounds like there's been some tension — want to talk about it?"
"That's a family issue."	→	"Let's think through how that's been affecting you and what support you might need."

School & Employment

Keep in Mind: Academic and work-related struggles are often tied to mental health, executive functioning, or systemic barriers — not laziness. Youth may feel shame or embarrassment about these areas. Use affirming, practical language that fosters hope and self-efficacy.

"You just need to show up."	→	"What makes it hard to get there some days?"
"You're failing."	→	"What's been getting in the way lately?"
"That's just an excuse."	→	"Sounds like that's been a real barrier — want to work through it together?"
"You need to be more professional."	→	"Let's talk about how to show up as yourself and be taken seriously."
"That's not a real career."	→	"What draws you to that idea?"
"Just apply to more jobs."	→	"Would it help to break it into smaller steps — like updating your resume first?"

Values & Identity

Keep in Mind: Young people are actively discovering who they are — and they need room to explore without being boxed in. Honoring personal values, beliefs, and identities (even when they differ from your own) helps build trust and agency.

"That's not appropriate for someone your age."	→	"What's important to you about that choice?"
"You're too young to understand."	→	"I'd love to hear your perspective on this."
"That doesn't make any sense."	→	"Help me understand where you're coming from."
"You shouldn't feel that way."	→	"Your feelings are valid — can you help me understand them better?"
"That's not a good value to have."	→	"What matters most to you right now?"
"You need to be more realistic."	→	"How can we make space for your dreams and your current needs?"

Relationships

Keep in Mind: Whether it's friends, mentors, crushes, coworkers, or casual acquaintances, young people are still learning how to navigate complex relationships. Be mindful not to minimize or mock their experiences — relationships at this age are formative, powerful, and deeply personal.

"That relationship is toxic."	→	"How do you usually feel after spending time with them?"
"You should cut them off."	→	"Want to talk through what you're getting from that relationship and what's been hard?"
"Don't worry about them."	→	"It makes sense that you care about this — want to figure out what feels right for you?"
"You're just being dramatic."	→	"Sounds like this hit you hard — I'm here to listen."
"Are you dating anyone yet?"	→	"What kinds of relationships or connections feel important to you right now?"
"You need better friends."	→	"What do you want more of in your friendships?"
"You just need to network."	→	"Want to think about who makes you feel seen or supported in different parts of your life?"

Compliance & Following Rules

Keep in Mind: Framing services around obedience or rule-following can create power struggles or shutdowns. Replacing "compliance" language with collaboration and flexibility increases buy-in and preserves dignity.

"You're being non-compliant."	→	"It sounds like the plan doesn't feel like a good fit right now — want to tweak it?"
"You need to comply."	→	"Let's talk about what might help and what feels doable for you."
"We need to monitor your compliance."	→	"Let's check in on how the plan is feeling — anything we should shift?"

Endings & Transitions

Keep in Mind: Youth may experience service endings or progress updates as abandonment or rejection. Be clear, compassionate, and affirm the ongoing availability of support — even if your current role is ending.

"You're stable now."	→	"How are you feeling these days? What's been working for you?"
"We're closing your case."	→	"We'll be stepping back for now, but you can always reconnect when you're ready."

Common Barriers to Engagement Cheat Sheet

A quick guide to recognizing disengagement in emerging adults and strategies to reconnect with respect and purpose

Purpose: Youth and young adults disengage for many reasons, and it's rarely because they "don't care." Use this cheat sheet to identify what might be getting in the way and respond with empathy, flexibility, and curiosity.

Barrier #1: "I Don't Trust You Yet"

What it looks like:

- Minimal eye contact, guarded answers
- Avoids personal topics
- Doesn't follow up or return messages

Try this:

Start with small talk, don't dive into heavy topics right away

Show consistency and follow-through (even with little things)

Be transparent: "Here's what I can do, and here's what I can't"

Ask what *they* want from this space

Barrier #2: "This Doesn't Feel Relevant to Me"

What it looks like:

- Boredom, sarcasm, zoning out
- Says things like "I don't need this" or "Why am I here?"

Try this:

Ask what would feel helpful or worth their time

Link support to their real goals ("You said you want a job — can we help with that?")

Offer choices or alternatives: "Would you rather start with ____ or ____?"

Avoid lectures

Invite collaboration

Barrier #3: "I'm Overwhelmed or Emotionally Flooded"

What it looks like:

- Shuts down, withdraws, or gets visibly distressed
- Seems tense, tearful, or overstimulated

Try this:

Normalize strong feelings

Offer breaks, grounding exercises, or movement

Let them decide how much to share

Be a calm, steady presence

Barrier #4: "I'm Not Used to Being Heard"

What it looks like:

- Repeatedly says "whatever" or "I don't know"
- Seems skeptical or resigned

Try this:

Validate their perspective without fixing

Ask open-ended questions that don't require a "right" answer

Reflect back what you're hearing to show you're listening

Share decision-making power

Barrier #5: "Life is Too Chaotic Right Now"

What it looks like:

- Missed appointments or disappearing
- Distracted, exhausted, juggling responsibilities

Try this:

Acknowledge and validate their experiences

Focus on one small, doable step

Be flexible with timing and format (texts, check-ins, shorter sessions)

Offer support connecting to other needs (housing, food, transportation)

Final Tip: If It's Not Working, Name It Gently

"It seems like this isn't feeling helpful right now. Would you like to talk about what's not working or what you'd rather focus on?"

Engagement is a relationship, not a requirement. Stay patient, keep the door open, and meet them where they are.

The Traveler's Phrasebook Cheat Sheet

A plain-language guide to help you understand the words adults use in services, programs, and meetings

You deserve to understand what's being said about your life. This phrasebook is here to help you figure out what's going on if you're filling out forms, sitting in a meeting, or talking about your options.

Mental Health & Support Terms

They Might Say…	Which Means…
Diagnosis	A label used to describe certain patterns of thoughts, feelings, or behavior. Some people find it helpful, some don't.
Symptoms	The things you're feeling or noticing that are causing stress or problems.
Treatment	A plan for helping you feel better or deal with challenges.
Medication	Pills or other medicine that may help with mood, focus, energy, sleep, etc.
Therapy	Talking to someone trained to help you sort through things.
Crisis	A time when things feel unsafe, overwhelming, or out of control.
Inpatient	Staying at a hospital or facility overnight to get help.
Outpatient	Going to appointments but living at home.
Trauma	Hard experiences that may still affect how you think, feel, or react.
Trigger	Something that brings up strong memories or feelings, often connected to past hurt.
Coping skills	Tools that help you deal with stress, anger, sadness, or other big emotions.

Case Management & Service Terms

They Might Say…	Which Means…
Case manager	Someone to help you figure out what help you need and connects you to services.
Referral	Sending you to a person or program that might help with something specific.
Intake	The first meeting where they ask questions to understand what you need.
Assessment	A way to check what supports would help. This might involve questions or forms.
Consent	Giving permission for something (like treatment or sharing your information).
Release of information (ROI)	A form you sign to allow people or programs to share info about you.
Eligibility	Whether you qualify for a program or service based on age, income, needs, etc.
Discharge	Ending services (for now). You can often come back later if you want.
Service plan	A written list of your goals and what support you'll get to reach them.
Goals	What *you* want to work on or move toward.
Progress notes	The notes your provider writes after meeting with you. You can ask to see them.

Communication Terms

They Might Say…	Which Means…
Check-in	A quick conversation about how you're doing.
Debrief	Talking about what happened and how you feel afterward.
Touch base	Another way to say "check in" or "talk soon."
Follow-up	Checking back in to see how something went or what's next.
Rapport	A good vibe or working relationship between you and someone helping you.
Boundaries	Rules or limits that help people feel safe and respected.

Your Rights & Participation

They Might Say…	Which Means…
Confidentiality	Your info is private. Providers usually can't share it without permission.
Mandated reporter	Someone who must report if they think you or someone else is being hurt.
Advocate	Someone who helps make sure your voice is heard and your rights are respected.
Self-advocacy	Speaking up for yourself and your needs.
Lived experience	Personal experience with something — like mental health, foster care, or recovery.
Peer support	Talking to someone who's been through something similar.

Extra Terms You Might Hear

They Might Say…	Which Means…
System-involved	You've had contact with systems like juvenile justice, child welfare, etc.
Transition-age youth (TAY)	A fancy term for people roughly age 16–25.
Wraparound services	Multiple supports that work together as a team to help you.
Warm hand-off	When one provider personally connects you to the next one, instead of just giving you a name.
Barrier	Anything that's making it harder for you to reach your goals.

Navigating Difficult Conversations: Role-Play Scripts

Supportive practice for helping youth prepare for real-life conversations that feel hard to start

Purpose: Many emerging adults feel anxious or unsure about how to bring up serious topics — especially with people they depend on. These short scripts give youth a chance to rehearse their words, explore different ways of saying things, and build confidence before the real conversation happens. These can be adapted to the youth's specific tone, language, and comfort level. The goal isn't perfect delivery, it's helping them feel more prepared.

Script #1: Talking to a Caregiver About Mental Health

Scenario: Help the youth rehearse how to let a parent/caregiver know they've been struggling emotionally or mentally.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's pretend I'm your [mom/dad/grandparent/etc.], and you're trying to tell me that your mental health's been rough lately. I'll start: 'Hey, you've seemed off lately. Is something going on?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "Yeah... I've actually been having a hard time, but I didn't know how to bring it up."
- "It's more than stress. I've been feeling [overwhelmed/anxious/kind of down/etc.]."
- "I'm not totally sure what I need yet, but I wanted to be honest with you."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"
- "Is this just normal teenage stuff?"
- "What are you hoping I can do?"

Script #2: Setting Boundaries with a Friend

Scenario: Support the youth in practicing how to name something that's not working in a friendship and express a boundary.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your friend. You care about me, but I've been doing something that's making you feel overwhelmed or hurt. I'll start: 'Hey! Want to hang out again this weekend? I feel like I haven't seen you enough.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I've been feeling kind of off after we hang out lately, like I'm more drained than recharged."
- "I think I need a little space right now to take care of myself."
- "I'm not mad at you. I just need to set some boundaries for my own mental health."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "Oh... did I do something wrong?"
- "I just thought we were close."
- "Wow, okay. So you don't want to be friends anymore?"

Script #3: Advocating for Accommodations at School or Work

Scenario: Help the youth practice asking for flexibility or support when they're struggling with focus, energy, or attendance.

Provider says to begin:

"Okay, I'm your teacher, boss, or program leader. Let's say you want to ask for support or a little flexibility. I'll start: 'Hey. I noticed you've been behind on a few things. Is everything okay?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "Yeah, I've been dealing with some stuff that's made it hard to keep up, but I'm still trying."
- "I'm wondering if I could get some extra time on deadlines or have check-ins, something to help me stay on track."
- "I really want to keep showing up, but I might need a few adjustments to make it work."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "What kind of adjustments are you talking about?"
- "We don't normally make exceptions."
- "I appreciate you letting me know. Let's figure something out."

Guided Reflection (ask after role-play):

- What parts felt natural, and what felt tough to say?
- How do you think your real conversation partner might respond?
- Is there anything you'd want to write down or say differently in real life?
- If they reacted badly, what could help you stay grounded?
- What might make these things easier or harder to say?
- Do you feel clearer about what kind of support you'd ask for?
- Would you want to say this in person, by message, or with someone backing you up?

Welcoming Environment Checklist

Quick adjustments to make your space feel safe, inclusive, and youth-friendly

Purpose: Physical spaces and the way we show up in them send a message. This checklist helps you set the tone for trust and connection before a single word is spoken. Use it to make your office, classroom, or shared space feel less clinical and more human.

Physical Environment

☐ Lighting is soft and adjustable (avoid harsh fluorescents)
☐ Seating is comfortable and flexible
☐ Space includes inviting touches (plants, art, pillows, color)
☐ Private or quiet options are available when needed
☐ Bathroom is nearby, clean, and easy to find
☐ Consider sensory needs (avoid strong scents, clutter, noise)
☐ Space is physically accessible

Materials & Visuals

☐ Signs, posters, and handouts reflect diverse identities and experiences
☐ Language on forms and signage is plain, respectful, and jargon-free
☐ Optional materials available: fidgets, notepads, snacks, water, etc.
☐ Community resource info is accessible and up to date

Behavior & Communication

☐ Greets youth warmly and respectfully
☐ Describes what to expect
☐ Explains roles and rights clearly, without condescension
☐ Offers choices when possible (where to sit, how to communicate, etc.)
☐ Maintains a calm, nonjudgmental tone, especially during difficult conversations
☐ Uses body language that shows openness (not rushed, arms uncrossed, eye contact)

Icebreaker Activities

Quick, low-pressure ways to build trust and get conversation flowing

Purpose: These short activities help ease first-meeting awkwardness, spark real conversation, and show that you're open, curious, and not here to judge. Use them to help young people feel seen and heard — without forcing anything too personal too soon. Each one takes about 3–10 minutes and can be used casually at the start of a session.

"This or That?"

A fast-paced game that shows you're interested in their preferences and gives them low-stakes control.

How to use: Ask a series of quick "this or that" questions. Let them explain answers if they want.

Examples:

- Text or call?
- Sunrise or midnight?
- Book or movie?
- Stay in or go out?
- Be invisible or read minds?

Why it works: It invites humor, opinion, and choice without pressure to open up emotionally.

"What's in Your Rotation?"

Invite the youth to share a snapshot of their personality and current mood through music, shows, or hobbies.

How to use:

"What's one song, show, or video you've been into lately?"

"If your week had a soundtrack, what would be on it?"

Why it works: It connects on a cultural and emotional level and positions you as someone who values their voice and taste.

"Tiny Brags"

A light, confidence-boosting activity that surfaces strengths without being cringey.

How to use:

"What's something small you're proud of lately, even if no one else noticed?"

"What's something weird or random you're surprisingly good at?"

Why it works: It builds self-esteem and flips the usual deficit-based intake vibe.

"The No-Pressure Question Jar"

Write light, creative, or unexpected questions on slips of paper or use a digital randomizer. Let the youth pick one to answer.

Examples:

- "If you could swap lives with any character from a movie or game, who would it be?"
- "What's your go-to snack combo?"
- "If you could time travel for a day, where and when would you go?"
- "What's a skill you wish more adults had?"

Why it works: Feels playful, spontaneous, and youth-centered; a good way to disrupt stiffness or anxiety.

Setting Expectations & Boundaries Worksheet

A guide to making this space work for you

This collaborative worksheet helps us figure out how we'll work together. Going through these questions together helps us determine what's helpful, what isn't, and what we need to know for our work to go well.

What You're Hoping For

What are some things you'd like support with? *(Examples: mental health, getting a job, housing, school, setting boundaries, dealing with stress)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

Boundaries & Preferences

What are some things that would help you feel safe, respected, or more comfortable here?
(Examples: "Don't call my parents without asking," "Give me a heads-up before changes")

_____

_____

_____

Communication Plan

What's the best way to reach you?

☐ Text ☐ Phone Call ☐ Email

☐ Other: _____

How often will we check in?

☐ Weekly ☐ Every other week ☐ Monthly

☐ As needed ☐ Not sure yet

If I don't hear from you, here's what I'll do:
(Example: "Send a check-in text after a week, then leave the door open if no response")

_____

_____

_____

What Our Work Together Might Look Like

What days/times usually work for you?

_____

_____

_____

How long do you think our work might last?
(This can always change.)

☐ Just for a little while

☐ For a few months

☐ I don't know yet

☐ As long as it's helpful

Anything Else You'd Like Me to Know?

(Anything you want me to keep in mind, or things that help you stay connected like reminders, food, breaks, movement, silence, music, humor, etc.)

_____

_____

Let's check in on this together every so often and update it as needed.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

"Who Can I Reach Out To?" Worksheet

A one-page plan for building your support system and knowing where to turn when things get hard

When things feel overwhelming, it can be hard to think clearly or know who to talk to. This worksheet can help you determine who can help and how to reach them. Consider keeping it somewhere easily accessible (such as in your backpack or on your wall) or saving it in your phone to find it easily when you need it.

My Personal Support People

Name	How They Help *(emotional support, distraction, rides, etc.)*	Best Way to Reach Them

My Professional & Community Supports

Name or Organization	Role *(therapist, peer support, case manager, etc.)*	Contact Info

Crisis & Emergency Contacts

Resource	What They're For	Contact Info
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Any mental health or substance use crisis	Call or text 988
Crisis Text Line	Text support in a crisis	Text HOME to 741741
Local Crisis Line		
Trusted Emergency Contact		
Other (School, Shelter, etc.)		

Asking for Help Script

Sometimes it's hard to find the words, especially when you're overwhelmed. You can use or adapt this script:

"Hi, I'm really having a hard time right now and I don't know what to do. I don't need you to fix everything, but I could really use some support."

OR

"I'm not okay, and I don't know how to talk about it yet. Can I just be with you or call you until I feel safer?"

Write your own version below, or highlight one above:

_____

_____

_____

2. Healthy Relationships

Strong, healthy relationships are essential to well-being, but many young people have not had access to healthy models of communication, boundaries, or trust. This chapter provides tools to help youth explore the different types of relationships in their lives, recognize the qualities which make them supportive or harmful, and develop the skills to build safe, fulfilling connections.

The tools in this section are built around five key relationship pillars: trust, respect, honesty, equality, and communication. With practical materials like the Working Through Conflict Visual and role-play scripts for boundary-setting, youth can build comfort practicing difficult conversations in a safe, low-pressure environment. Activities such as the "What's a Red Flag?" Sorting Activity and Apology & Repair Worksheet foster reflection and personal accountability without shame or blame.

Professionals using these resources should keep in mind that many young people have experienced trauma, manipulation, or instability in their relationships. These tools help frame healthy relationships as something that can be learned and cultivated over time rather than a binary of "good" or "bad." They are also inclusive of different relationship types (romantic, familial, and platonic) and adaptable to youths' unique contexts.

Identifying Supportive vs. Harmful Relationships Worksheet

A worksheet to help you think about how the people in your life are affecting your well-being

Not every relationship is perfect, but some leave you feeling safe, respected, and like your full self. Others might leave you feeling confused, drained, or like you're always walking on eggshells. This worksheet can help you to notice positive and negative patterns. You can use this to reflect on any kind of relationship: friends, family, romantic partners, roommates, coworkers, mentors… anyone who plays a part in your life.

Supportive Relationships Often Feel Like:

☐ I can be myself
☐ I feel respected, even when we disagree
☐ They listen without judging or talking over me
☐ They want good things for me
☐ I feel calm/happy after spending time with them
☐ I can say no and they still treat me with care
☐ They apologize and take responsibility when they mess up
☐ We both make time and effort
☐ I feel safe emotionally and physically
☐ I don't feel pressured, controlled, or guilted

Harmful Relationships Might Feel Like:

☐ I feel anxious or drained after talking to them
☐ I can't be honest without starting a fight
☐ They ignore my boundaries or try to control me
☐ I feel like I'm walking on eggshells
☐ They put me down, even as a joke
☐ I'm always the one reaching out or apologizing
☐ They guilt me for saying no
☐ I feel worse about myself when I'm around them
☐ They cross lines and don't take accountability
☐ I feel unsafe, confused, or stuck in the relationship

Reflection: Let's Take Stock

Is there a relationship you want to think more about?

(You can name someone or just describe them: "a friend from school," "my sister," etc.)

_____

How do you usually feel after spending time with them?

_____

_____

Do you feel respected in that relationship? Why or why not?

_____

_____

What's one thing you *wish* felt different about it?

_____

_____

Moving Forward

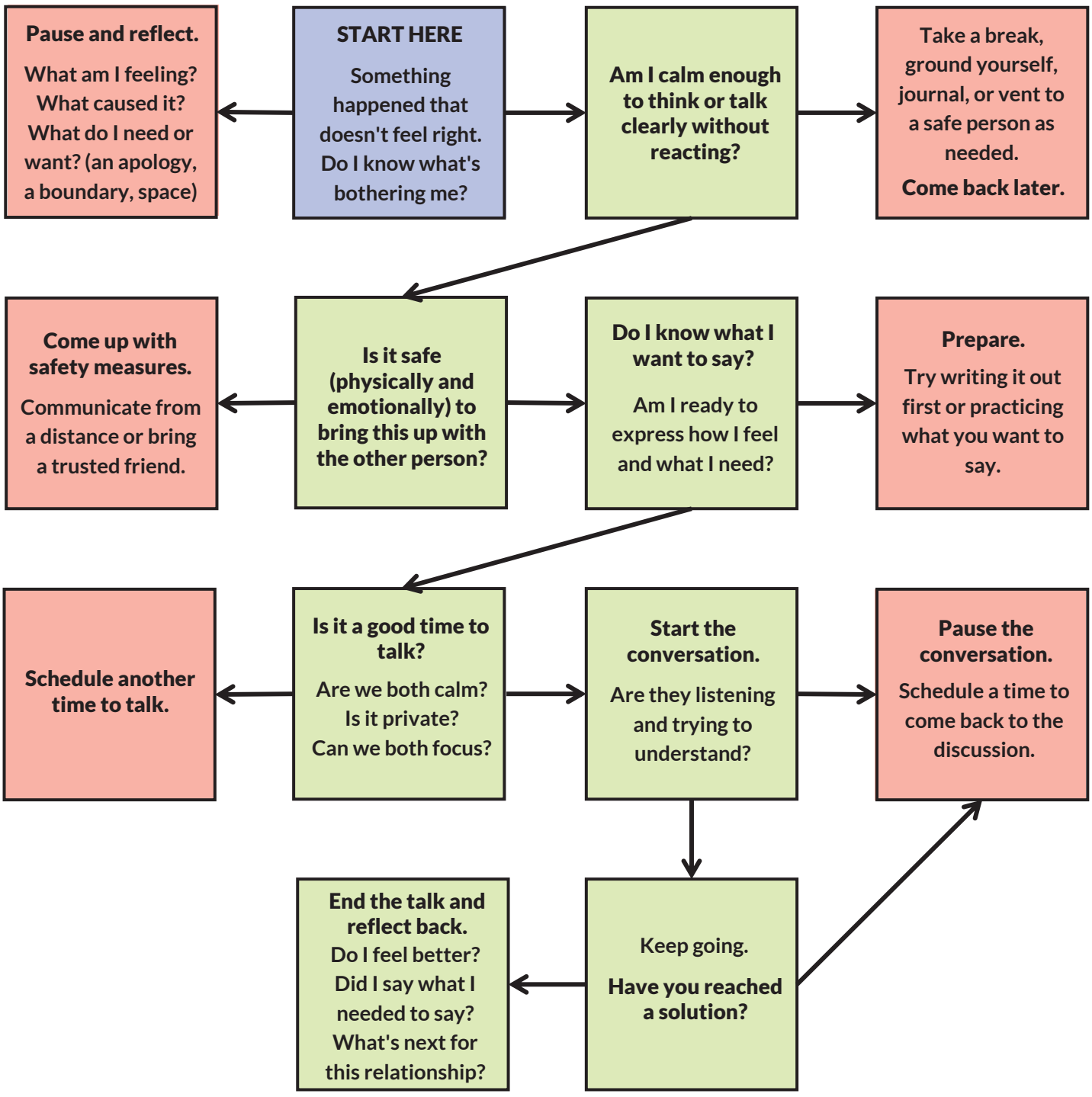
Is this a relationship you want to keep, change, or let go of?

☐ I want to keep it as-is
☐ I want to make a change or set a boundary
☐ I'm thinking about stepping back
☐ I'm still figuring it out

Working Through Conflict Visual

A step-by-step guide to help you handle conflict in a healthy, respectful way — with friends, family, partners, or anyone in your life

Conflict is normal. Every relationship, even healthy ones, has moments of tension, hurt feelings, or misunderstanding. What matters is how we handle it. This guide can help you think through what's going on, figure out how to talk about it, and move forward.



Boundary-Setting Role-Play Scripts

Supportive practice for helping youth speak up for their needs with care and confidence

Purpose: Setting boundaries can feel awkward or scary, especially when the other person is close to us. These short scripts help youth practice saying what they need, staying grounded, and handling pushback. Use these with a warm, supportive tone and encourage youth to adapt the words to feel natural for them.

Script #1: Setting a Boundary with a Parent or Caregiver

Scenario: The youth wants more privacy or independence and needs to speak up about feeling micromanaged, judged, or overwhelmed by their caregiver.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your parent or guardian. I'm trying to help, but maybe I'm being too involved. I'll start: 'I noticed you didn't go to your appointment — I told you that was important. What's going on?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I know you care, and I'm trying to take care of things in my own way right now."
- "I want to keep you in the loop, but I need more space to figure things out myself."
- "It helps when you check in, but it doesn't help when I feel pressured."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "I'm just trying to help you make good decisions."
- "You still live under my roof. I have a right to know."
- "So you don't want me involved at all?"

Script #2: Setting a Boundary with a Friend

Scenario: The youth has a friend who's been texting nonstop, asking for a lot of emotional support, or ignoring their boundaries.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your friend. I've been texting a lot and leaning on you heavily. I'll start: 'Hey, you didn't answer me yesterday — are you mad at me or something?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "No, I'm not mad, I just needed some space yesterday."
- "I care about you, but I've been really overwhelmed and can't always be there right away."
- "Sometimes I need time to recharge without talking. It doesn't mean anything's wrong."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "But I needed you. I thought you'd understand."
- "So you're ghosting me now?"
- "You're my only real friend, you can't just disappear."

Script #3: Setting a Boundary with a Romantic Partner

Scenario: The youth is in a romantic or dating relationship where they feel pressured (emotionally, physically, or socially) and want to set a clear limit.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm someone you've been dating or seeing. I've been pressuring you to hang out more or do things you're not ready for. I'll start: 'I just don't get why you're being distant. Don't you care about me?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I do care, but I need us to slow down and respect each other's pace."
- "I like spending time with you, but I also need time for myself."
- "It's not about not caring. It's about feeling safe and respected."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "So you don't love me then?"
- "I guess I'm just not enough for you."
- "Fine. If you need space, maybe we shouldn't even be together."

Guided Reflection (ask after role-play):

- How did it feel to say that?
- What felt hardest to say out loud?
- What helped you stay calm in that moment?
- Is there a part of this boundary that feels non-negotiable for you?
- What would you do if your loved one doesn't take the boundary well?
- How do you want to follow up if they don't respect your request?
- What's the difference between pressure and support in a relationship?
- What would it take to feel safe keeping that boundary in real life?

"What's a Red Flag?" Activity

A relationship scenario card-sorting activity

Purpose: This activity helps youth and young adults think through the behaviors they might notice early in a friendship or dating relationship, and how those behaviors make them feel. Sorting these scenarios together creates a safe space to reflect, build insight, and learn how to trust their gut.

Cut out these cards in advance of meeting with your youth. Together, sort them into piles according to whether the behavior is a:

Green flag:	**Yellow flag**:	**Red flag**:
healthy, respectful, supportive	feels a little off, needs attention	unsafe, controlling, harmful

---

Green Flag Cards (Healthy Behaviors)

They listen when you talk, and remember what you said	**They respect your time, energy, and boundaries**	**They don't get mad when you say "no"**	**They take responsibility and apologize when they hurt you**
They cheer you on when you're working toward something	**They support your other friendships and independence**	**They give you space when you need it, without guilt-tripping**	**They make you feel safe, seen, and like your full self**

Yellow Flag Cards (Early Concerns / Mixed Behavior)

They always want to know where you are and who you're with	**They joke about your insecurities but say "you're too sensitive" if it hurts**	**They overwhelm you with attention, then suddenly go cold**	**They say "trust me" but don't want to answer your questions**
They say things like "you're lucky I put up with you" during arguments	**They make big decisions for you "because they know what's best"**	**They show up unannounced or keep pushing to hang out when you're not sure**	**They ask for total honesty from you but avoid sharing about themselves**

Red Flag Cards (Harmful / Controlling Behavior)

They yell, threaten, or break things when they're angry	**They blame you for their bad behavior or moods**	**They try to isolate you from friends, family, or support**	**They pressure or guilt you into physical intimacy**
They deny things they said or did to confuse you	**They constantly put you down, even in front of others**	**They use jealousy as proof of love or loyalty**	**They ignore "no," keep pushing, or violate your boundaries**

Communication Styles Cheat Sheet

A quick guide to ways people express themselves

Everyone communicates differently, and how we speak up (or don't) can affect our relationships, boundaries, and confidence. This guide helps you notice the patterns and figure out what works best for you.

Assertive ***clear, respectful, and honest***	Aggressive ***loud, demanding, or hurtful***
You speak up for yourself in a way that shows respect for both you and the other person. *Example:* "I'm not okay with that, and I'd like to talk about a different option." You say what you need without blaming or attacking Helps build trust, boundaries, and confidence	You speak in a way that disrespects or intimidates the other person. *Example:* "You never listen! You always mess everything up!" Might feel powerful in the moment, but damages relationships Often leads to fear, pushback, or guilt later
Passive ***quiet, avoids conflict***	**Passive-Aggressive** ***indirect, sarcastic, or guilt-based***
You keep your thoughts or needs to yourself, even when something feels wrong. *Example:* "It's fine… I guess…" You may feel ignored, walked over, or resentful later Can lead to stress or being treated unfairly	You don't say what you really feel but show it in other ways. *Example:* "Sure, whatever. It's not like my opinion matters anyway." Can confuse others and leave problems unresolved Might avoid conflict temporarily, but builds tension in the long run

---

What to Aim For:

Assertive communication helps you:

- ✅ Set boundaries
- ✅ Express needs clearly
- ✅ Handle conflict respectfully
- ✅ Build stronger relationships

You don't have to be perfect, just practice being honest, kind, and clear at the same time.

Apology & Repair Worksheet

A tool to help you make things right

Nobody gets it right all the time. If you've hurt someone, even on accident, it doesn't make you a bad person. It just means there's an opportunity to own it, learn from it, and maybe repair the relationship. This worksheet can help you think through what happened and what you want to do next.

Step 1: What Happened?

Who did I hurt or upset?

_____

What did I do or say that caused harm?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What was going on for me at the time (feelings, stress, situation)?

☐ I was feeling overwhelmed

☐ I acted before I thought it through

☐ I said something I didn't fully mean

☐ I didn't realize how my actions would affect them

☐ Other: _____

Step 2: What Do I Understand Now?

How might the other person have felt?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What do I wish I had done differently?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What do I want to take responsibility for?

_____

_____

_____

Circle one:

I'm ready to apologize now

I'm still thinking it through

I want help figuring it out

Step 3: What Could I Say?

If you're ready to apologize, use this as a guide or write your own version: *"I want to say I'm sorry for _____. I understand that it hurt you, and that wasn't okay. I take responsibility, and I want to make things right."*

What might you want to say in your own words?

_____

_____

Step 4: What Can I Do to Repair or Rebuild?

What's one action I can take to show I mean it?

_____

Is there something I can stop doing that might help?

_____

What are my next steps?

☐ I'm planning to talk to the person

☐ I might write it out first or send a message

☐ I want to role-play it with someone I trust

☐ I'm not sure if I want to reach out. I just want to reflect for now

3. Working with Parents & Caregivers

The relationship between an emerging adult and their parents or caregivers (PCs) can be complex. As young people gain independence, caregivers must learn to adapt their roles and expectations, often without a clear roadmap. This chapter equips professionals with tools to support youth in navigating these transitions and communicating more effectively with the adults in their lives.

These resources focus on improving mutual understanding, preparing for conversations and family meetings, and exploring areas for compromise. Tools like the "Help Me Understand" Communication Worksheet and "What's Negotiable?" Compromise Activity offer scaffolding for challenging conversations about boundaries, autonomy, and family values. Others, like the Decision-Making Visual and Understanding Different Perspectives Worksheet, help both parties reflect on generational differences in expectations, communication styles, and cultural norms.

Professionals are encouraged to use these materials to foster empathy, not create conflict. Caregivers are often doing their best with the tools they have; these resources can help both youth and adults name their needs, acknowledge each other's efforts, and work toward solutions that feel respectful and sustainable. Whether used in shared sessions or with individuals, these tools prioritize collaboration and support over blame or hierarchy.

"Help Me Understand" Communication Worksheet

A tool to help you speak honestly with your parent or caregiver — and prepare for a conversation that goes both ways

Talking with caregivers about what you need can be tough, especially when you're trying to become more independent, or when you've had conflict in the past. This worksheet helps you slow down, figure out what you want to say, and think about how to say it in a way that makes you feel heard *and* helps the other person understand where you're coming from.

Step 1: What's on My Mind?

What do I want to talk about?

_____

_____

Why is this important to me right now?

_____

_____

Examples: "I want more privacy," "I need space to make my own decisions," "I need help with something," etc.

Step 2: What Do I Need?

What am I asking for in this conversation?

(Check all that apply or write your own)

☐ More freedom or space
☐ More emotional support
☐ Help with something specific (money, transportation, etc.)
☐ For them to respect a boundary
☐ A change in how we talk to each other
☐ To be treated more like an adult
☐ Other: _____

How do I hope things could change moving forward?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step 3: What Might Be Hard for Them?

How do I think my parent/caregiver might feel about this?

(Circle any that seem likely)

😟 Worried 😠 Frustrated 🤷 Confused
💔 Hurt 💬 Defensive ✅ Open

What might make it hard for them to say yes or understand right away?

_____

_____

_____

Tip: Try to imagine their side— not to excuse harmful behavior, but to plan a calmer, more productive conversation.

Step 4: How Can I Say It?

Practice using "I" statements that express your needs clearly and respectfully.

"I feel _____ when _____, and I'd like _____."

Try it:

_____

_____

_____

What Might Help the Conversation Go Better?

☐ Writing down what I want to say ahead of time
☐ Having someone else join the conversation
☐ Asking to talk at a calm time
☐ Starting with appreciation or something positive
☐ Giving them time to think before expecting a response

Family Meeting Planning Template

A guide to help get ready for a productive conversation

Family meetings can help clear the air, solve problems, or just make sure everyone is on the same page. But to go well, it helps to have a plan. This worksheet helps you think through what you want to talk about and how to keep the conversation respectful and focused, even if things get emotional.

Who Will Be at the Meeting?

People we want included:

_____

_____

Anyone we'd rather not include (and why):

_____

_____

Do we want someone to join us to help guide the meeting?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure yet

What's the Goal of the Meeting?

(Check any that fit, or write your own)

☐ Talk about a recent issue or conflict
☐ Set or reset boundaries
☐ Make a plan for next steps (school, treatment, housing, etc.)
☐ Ask for more support
☐ Talk about independence and decision-making
☐ Clear up a misunderstanding
☐ Other:

_____

What We Want to Avoid

(Check or write your concerns)

☐ Yelling or interrupting
☐ Getting blamed or attacked
☐ Talking about things we're not ready to share
☐ Being shut down when we speak
☐ Feeling ganged up on
☐ Other:

_____

Topics We Will Cover

(List up to 3 things you want to make sure get discussed)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Ground Rules

(Pick or write your own)

☐ Let each person finish speaking
☐ No yelling or name-calling
☐ Use "I" statements
☐ Focus on the present, not just the past
☐ Take a break if things get too intense
☐ Put phones away (unless used for notes/support)
☐ Other:

_____

Follow-Up Plan

What might happen after the meeting?

☐ We'll check in again in: _____ days/weeks
☐ We'll try a written agreement or plan
☐ We'll follow up one-on-one if needed
☐ Not sure yet — let's see how the meeting goes

Advocating for Independence Role-Play Scripts

Supportive practice for helping youth prepare to discuss autonomy and independence with parents and caregivers

Purpose: These short, guided scripts model a variety of common scenarios to help emerging adults practice speaking up about their need for more autonomy with caregivers. Many youth feel tension between wanting more freedom and wanting to stay connected. These scenarios give them a safe space to find their words, anticipate reactions, and stay grounded.

Script #1: Asking for More Space and Fewer Check-Ins

Scenario: Youth wants their caregiver to stop calling or texting constantly and respect their space.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your parent. I text you multiple times a day and get upset when you don't answer. I'll start: 'Why didn't you respond to my text this morning? I've been worried all day!'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I get that you worry, but the constant messages make me feel like I can't breathe."
- "I want to keep a connection, but I need more room to handle things on my own."
- "Can we agree on check-in times that work for both of us?"

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "But what if something happens and I don't know?"
- "I'm your parent. I have a right to know what's going on."
- "Fine, so you just don't want me involved anymore?"

Script #2: Asking for a Say in Treatment Decisions

Scenario: Youth wants to be more involved in decisions about their therapy, medication, or services.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your caregiver. I usually make all the decisions about your treatment. I'll start: 'I made you an appointment with that therapist we talked about. It's best not to overthink it.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "Thanks for helping, but I'd like to be part of choosing who I talk to."
- "I know you want what's best for me, but I need to be part of the process."
- "I want this to be something *I* buy into, not just something happening to me."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "You don't always know what's best for you."
- "This is serious, we don't have time for trial and error."
- "Are you saying you don't trust my judgment?"

Script #3: Asking for Flexibility on Curfew or Social Freedom

Scenario: Youth wants to stay out later, visit friends, or go to an event/trip without strict supervision.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your parent. I've always been strict about where you go. I'll start: 'You're not staying out past 9. I don't care what your friends' parents allow.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I'm trying to earn more trust and responsibility."
- "I'll check in and let you know where I am, but I also want space to live my life."
- "Can we come up with a plan or compromise that works for both of us?"

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "This is how kids end up in trouble."
- "You're still under my roof. You follow my rules."
- "You're acting like I'm the enemy."

Script #4: Talking About Moving Out or Living Independently

Scenario: The youth wants to talk to their caregiver about planning to move out, live on their own, or transition to a more independent living situation.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your caregiver. You've brought up wanting to move out, and I'm not sure you're ready. I'll start: 'There's no rush to leave. You don't even know how to do your own laundry.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I appreciate that you want to help, but I'm starting to feel ready to learn and take on more."
- "I know I'm not perfect at everything yet, but I want to build those skills, and I need space to do that."
- "Can we talk about a realistic plan or timeline that we're both comfortable with?"

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "You're not ready for the real world. It's harder than you think."
- "This is coming out of nowhere. Why now?"
- "You're acting like you want to get away from me."

Script #5: Asking for Privacy or Confidentiality

Scenario: The youth wants more privacy (in therapy, in communication with providers, or just in their day-to-day life) and needs to express this to a caregiver who may be used to being looped into everything.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your caregiver. I usually talk to your providers and ask about your progress. I'll start: 'I want to know what you're working on in therapy. I should be part of that.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I get that you care, but I want space to work through some of this privately."
- "It's not that I don't want you involved at all, but I need some things to be just between me and my provider."
- "Privacy helps me open up and feel more in control of my own growth."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "So you're keeping secrets now?"
- "I'm just trying to make sure you're not getting bad advice."
- "If I'm the one helping pay for it, I deserve to know what's going on."

Guided Reflection (ask after role-play):

- Did the caregiver's reaction match what you expect in real life?
- How did it feel to speak up for your right to grow?
- What felt empowering about what you said?
- What helped you stay calm and clear in that moment?
- What part of this conversation felt easiest? Hardest?
- Was there anything you'd change or say differently next time?
- What boundary do you want to set, and how will you hold it?
- What might you say if this boundary gets tested later?
- How do you balance freedom and safety in conversations like this?
- What's the difference between support and control, for you?
- How can you stay involved in future decisions?
- Would it help to suggest a plan or compromise?
- What would trust-building look like over time?
- What support would help make this transition smoother?

Understanding Different Perspectives Worksheet

A two-part worksheet to help youth and caregivers see where each other are coming from

Page 1: For the Young Person

This page is just for you. It's okay to feel misunderstood sometimes. A lot of young people do! This worksheet is about getting clearer on what matters *to you*, and also trying to understand where your parent or caregiver might be coming from. No one has to be right or wrong, just honest and open.

What matters most to me right now:

(Check 2–3)

☐ Being trusted to make my own choices
☐ Feeling emotionally safe in my home
☐ Being accepted for who I am
☐ Having space to figure things out
☐ Being heard without judgment
☐ Having my boundaries respected
☐ Getting support without pressure
☐ Other: _____

What gets in the way of feeling understood:

(Check all that apply)

☐ They treat me like a kid
☐ They don't listen, just lecture or give advice
☐ They compare me to how they were at my age
☐ They shut me down
☐ They don't care about what I'm going through
☐ They think being strict is showing love
☐ They mean well, but it still hurts
☐ Other: _____

Flip the script: What might they be worried about?

(Check any that could be true — even if you don't agree)

☐ My safety
☐ My ability to handle responsibilities
☐ Me making a mistake that's hard to come back from
☐ Not knowing what's really going on with me
☐ Losing influence or connection
☐ Feeling like I don't need them anymore
☐ Other: _____

What I wish I could say to them:

"I want you to know that even when I'm asking for _____, it doesn't mean I don't care about _____."
Fill it in:

_____

_____

_____

One way I could show them I'm ready for more trust:

_____

_____

Understanding Different Perspectives Worksheet

A two-part worksheet to help youth and caregivers see where each other are coming from

Page 2: For the Parent or Caregiver

This page is just for you. Parenting a young adult can be tricky. They want freedom, you want to protect. This page helps you reflect on what you value, how you've been showing up, and what your young person might need from you right now, even if they don't always say it clearly.

What I want most for my child right now:

(Check 2–3)

☐ To be safe
☐ To make good decisions
☐ To grow into a capable adult
☐ To feel supported and loved
☐ To have tools I didn't have at their age
☐ To avoid mistakes I made
☐ Other: _____

What makes this stage of parenting hard:

(Check all that apply)

☐ I'm used to being more in control
☐ I worry they're not ready
☐ I feel left out of their world
☐ I'm scared they'll make a mistake they'll regret
☐ It's hard to trust what I can't see
☐ I want to stay close, but don't know how
☐ Other: _____

What might *they* be needing from me right now?

(Check any that feel true, even if you're not sure how to give it)

☐ More privacy
☐ A chance to prove themselves
☐ Support without being judged
☐ To be seen as their own person
☐ Space to make (and learn from) mistakes
☐ To feel accepted, not compared
☐ Other: _____

What I wish I could say to them:

"I may not always show it the right way, but I care deeply about _____, and I'm trying to find the balance between _____ and _____."

Fill it in:

_____

_____

_____

One way I could show trust while still offering support:

_____

_____

"What's Negotiable?" Activity

A hands-on activity to help youth and caregivers find middle ground

Purpose: This card-based tool helps emerging adults and their caregivers talk through common areas of conflict, from curfews to privacy to decision-making. Instead of jumping straight to yes or no, this activity encourages both parties to name what they want, explore what the other person might need, and work toward a possible compromise.

How to Use:

- Print and cut out two copies of this deck
- Pick 3–5 cards that match the youth-caregiver dynamic and give each person a copy
- Use the blank cards on the next page to create custom topics as appropriate
- For each card, ask both sides to fill in the template
- Use these to open conversation, highlight misconceptions, and brainstorm shared agreements

Phone Privacy

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Staying Out Late

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Sharing Personal Info with Extended Family

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Social Media Rules

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Dating and Relationship Boundaries

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Screen Time

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Respect and Tone

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Chores and Household Responsibilities

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Taking a Mental Health Day

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Going to Therapy (or Choosing Not To)

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Using the Family Car

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Rules About Friends Coming Over

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Who Makes Treatment Decisions

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Money and Spending

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Prioritizing School and Work

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Sleep Schedules

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Handling Conflict

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

Substance Use

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

_____

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

_____

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

_____

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

Possible Compromise:

_____

_____

What I Want:

_____

What They Probably Want:

_____

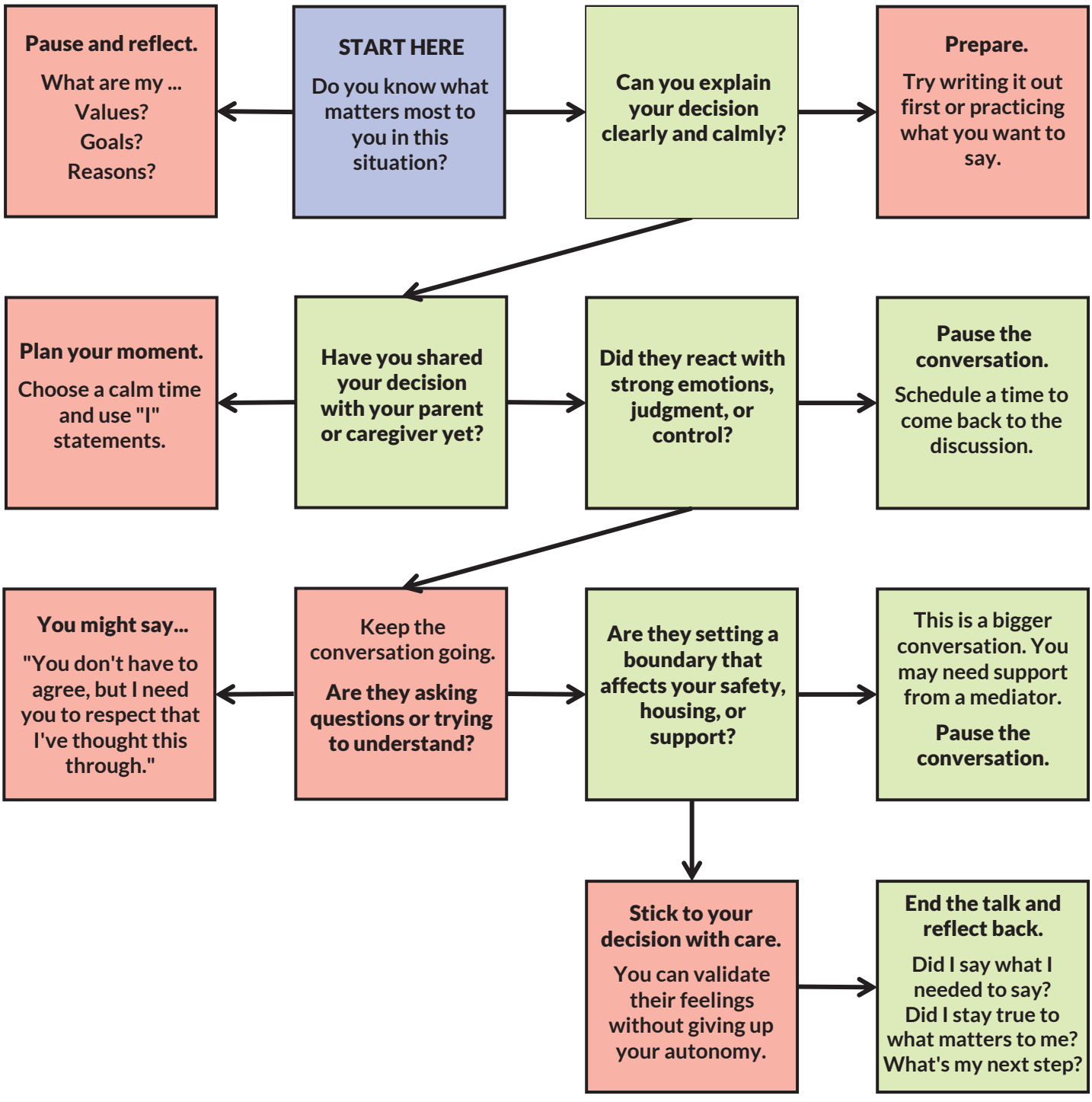
Possible Compromise:

_____

When Parents Disagree with My Choices Visual

A step-by-step guide to help you hold your boundaries when your caregiver pushes back

This tool helps you think through what to do when you and your parent or caregiver don't see eye to eye, especially when you're trying to make a choice about your life and they don't agree. It's okay to want more independence *and* to want to keep the relationship strong.



4. Peer Support

Peer support is a powerful, evidence-informed model which centers mutuality, shared experience, and hope. This chapter is specifically designed for peer support professionals and includes tools to help youth identify their social networks, strengthen friendships, and build confidence in social situations. Rooted in the belief that healing happens collaboratively, the tools here are designed to support connection while engaging in skill-building and reflection.

Activities such as the Circles of Support Mapping Activity and Trust-Building Worksheet help youth assess their current relationships and envision new ones. Role-plays and checklists provide accessible ways to discuss common social stressors like peer pressure or misunderstandings and develop skills to navigate them with confidence. The tools are strengths-based and affirming, while remaining practical and relevant to the day-to-day realities of being an emerging adult today.

Because peer support relies on shared humanity, many of these tools can be used in both one-on-one and group settings. Peer providers are encouraged to share their own relevant experiences when appropriate and create space for youth to explore identity, community, and voice.

Circles of Support Activity

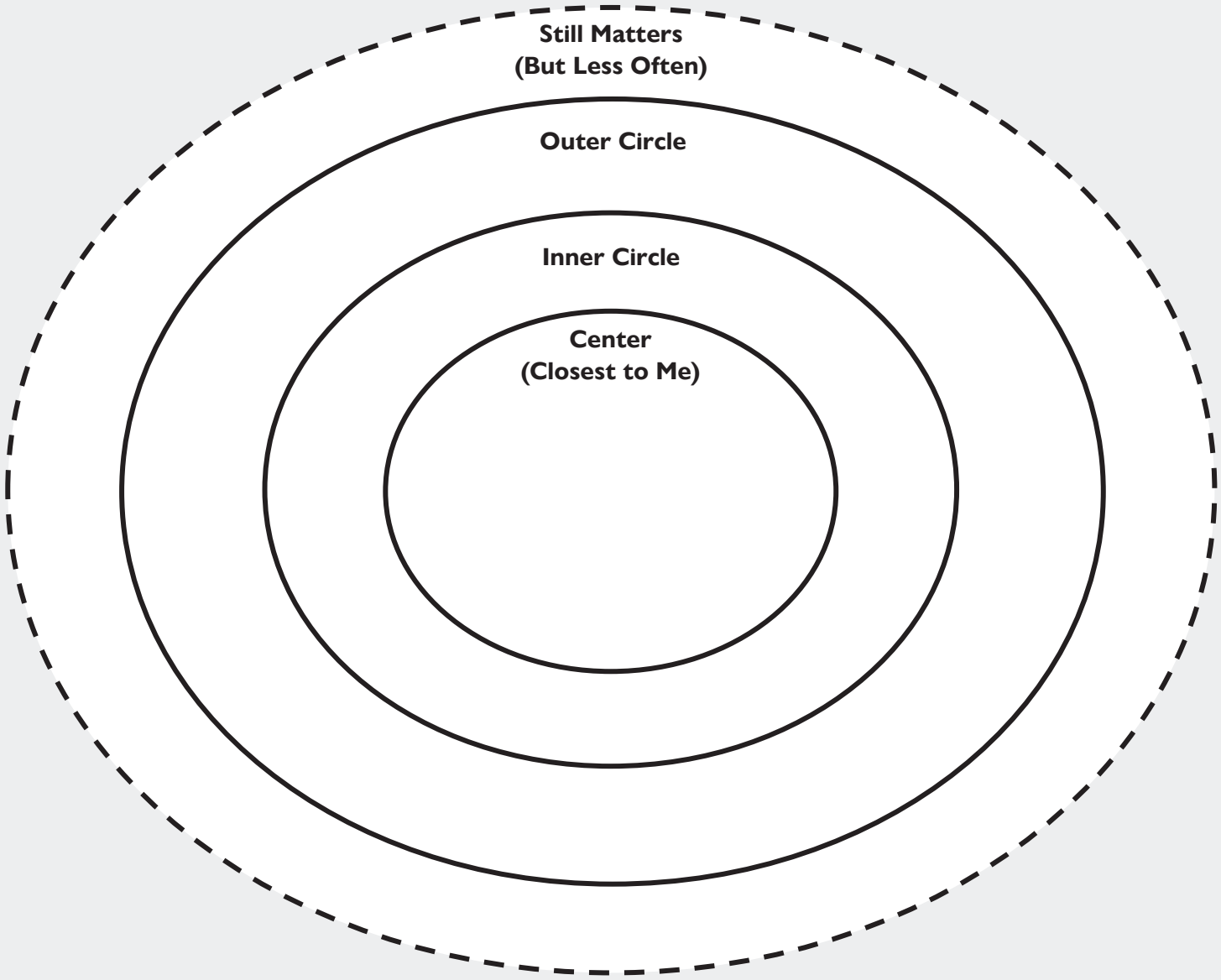
A guide to help emerging adults visualize their social support network

Purpose: Help the young person explore who's part of their world, from close connections to distant support. This can include people, pets, programs, or places that make them feel safer or stronger.

How to Use

- Print and cut out the circle diagram below
- Invite the young person to write names, roles, or even draw people/places in the circles
- Ask reflection questions:
  - Who do you go to when you're overwhelmed?
  - Who checks in on you?
  - Who makes you laugh or feel like yourself?
  - Are there people you'd *like* to be closer to?
- Encourage the youth to keep this map in an easy-to-access place and consult it when they need support

Tip: Let them include nontraditional support (a bus driver, their cat, a Discord server, etc.). The goal is mapping what feels real to them, not what's "supposed" to count.



Friendship Maintenance Checklist

A guide for keeping the people who matter close

You don't have to be perfect to be a good friend. Friendships take effort, but they don't have to be overwhelming. This checklist gives you ideas to help keep your connections strong, whether you're just getting to know someone or wanting to stay close with someone you care about. You can check the ones you already do, and star the ones you might want to work on.

Communication

☐ I check in regularly — even if it's just a quick "hey" or meme
☐ I listen more than I talk sometimes
☐ I ask how they're doing and mean it
☐ I follow up if they told me about something hard or exciting
☐ I respond when I can, or let them know that I need space

Being Real

☐ I let people get to know the real me (even a little at a time)
☐ I'm honest about how I feel, even if it's awkward
☐ I say sorry when I mess up
☐ I don't try to be "perfect", I show up as myself
☐ I let them be real with me too

Respect & Boundaries

☐ I respect their time, energy, and space
☐ I ask before venting or unloading heavy stuff
☐ I don't take it personally if they're busy or overwhelmed
☐ I listen when they share a boundary or need
☐ I ask for what I need too, instead of bottling it up

Shared Joy & Support

☐ I celebrate their wins, big or small
☐ I make time for fun, not just deep talks or serious stuff
☐ I show up when things are hard (even just to say "I'm here")
☐ I remind them of their strengths

When Something Feels Off…

☐ I check in instead of assuming they're mad
☐ I bring up problems calmly instead of ghosting or lashing out
☐ I give people chances, but I also notice patterns
☐ I take breaks if I need to protect my peace
☐ I believe that a strong friendship can handle honesty

Peer Pressure Resistance Role-Play Scripts

Practice scenarios for responding to social pressure with confidence and clarity

Purpose: These role-play scripts help emerging adults practice setting boundaries and staying true to themselves in situations where they feel pushed or pressured by friends, peers, or social groups. The goal isn't to be perfect. It's to build confidence and prepare for real-life situations.

Script #1: Substance Use at a Party

Scenario: A friend is pressuring the youth to drink or use something at a hangout.

Provider says to begin:

"Come on, just try it once — everyone else is. Don't be boring."

Youth practices saying things like:

- "Nah, I'm good, that's just not my thing."
- "I'm here to chill, not to get messed up."
- "Thanks, but I promised myself I wouldn't."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "It's not a big deal."
- "You're acting like you're better than everyone."
- "Fine. Be like that then."

Script #2: Pressure to Fit in or Change Yourself

Scenario: A friend or group is making the youth feel like they have to dress, act, or talk differently to be accepted.

Provider says to begin:

"Why do you always dress like that? You'd look way better if you tried a little harder."

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I dress for me, not for other people."
- "That's not really my vibe, but thanks."
- "I'd rather be real than try to fit in."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "We're just trying to help you glow up."
- "Don't you want people to take you seriously?"
- "You're being so sensitive."

Script #3: Being Pushed to Skip a Responsibility

Scenario: A peer is trying to convince the youth to skip school, an appointment, or something important.

Provider says to begin:

"Dude, just skip it. It's not like it matters. Come hang out instead."

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I made a commitment — I'm not trying to mess it up."
- "If I skip this now, I'll regret it later."
- "Not worth it. I've got goals to hit."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "You're seriously ditching me for that? I can't believe you."
- "Wow, you've changed."
- "Whatever, it's your loss."

Guided Reflection

- Which response felt most like you?
- What made it easier or harder to say no?
- How do you want your friends to respond when you say no?
- How would you handle this if it was someone you really like or admire?
- What helps you stay focused on your priorities?
- What does it mean to you to be real in friendships?
- What would a good friend say if they didn't like something about you?
- What's one way you can practice holding your boundaries next time they're challenged?

Social Strengths Inventory Worksheet

A tool to help you recognize what you're already good at and what you want to get even better at

Talking to people, making friends, and being yourself in social spaces can be hard, and they take practice. This worksheet helps you figure out your strengths in social situations and where you might want to build more confidence.

What I'm Already Good At

Check anything that feels true most of the time.

☐ I'm a good listener
☐ I can ask follow-up questions to keep a convo going
☐ I notice how others are feeling
☐ I give compliments or positive feedback
☐ I know how to give people space when they need it
☐ I can say hello or introduce myself when I need to
☐ I can keep eye contact (when I want to)
☐ I remember details people share with me
☐ I can share my thoughts and feelings honestly
☐ I support friends when they're going through something

What I'd Like to Get Better At

Check up to 5 things you want to work on. You can add your own.

☐ Starting conversations
☐ Speaking up in groups
☐ Making new friends
☐ Keeping friendships going over time
☐ Knowing what to say in awkward situations
☐ Saying no or setting boundaries
☐ Dealing with conflict or tension
☐ Asking for help or support
☐ Being more open or vulnerable
☐ Other: _____

How I Usually Feel in Social Situations

Circle or mark where you land on each line most of the time. There's no wrong answer.

I feel comfortable being myself around others:
Rarely — Sometimes — Often — Almost always

I feel included and accepted:
Rarely — Sometimes — Often — Almost always

I worry about saying the wrong thing:
Constantly — Sometimes — Not really — Rarely

I trust that people genuinely like me:
Rarely — Sometimes — Often — Almost always

Putting It All Together

Something I'm proud of socially is:
_____
_____

Something I'd like to try doing more of:
_____
_____

One way I can take a small step this week:
_____
_____

Who can support me while I grow?
_____
_____

Recognizing Unspoken Social Cues Cheat Sheet

A quick guide to understanding body language, tone, and what's not being said

People don't always say what they mean, and it's not always easy to figure out what someone's feeling or thinking in the moment. This cheat sheet breaks down common unspoken social cues so you can feel more confident reading the room.

Body Language: What Their Body Might Be Telling You

Body Language	What It Might Mean
Crossed arms	Feeling defensive, closed off, or uncomfortable
Leaning in	Interested, paying attention
Stepping back	Needing space, unsure, uncomfortable
Nodding	Agreeing or encouraging you to keep talking
Fidgeting or avoiding eye contact	Nervous, overwhelmed, or distracted
Smiling with eyes	Genuinely happy or engaged
Smiling without eyes	Possibly masking discomfort or faking interest

Tone of Voice: Not Just What They Say, But How They Say It

Tone	It Might Sound Like	What It Might Mean
Flat or monotone	"That's fine."	Disinterest, hurt, or shutdown
Overly excited	"OMG, no way!"	Enthusiastic or possibly sarcastic
Quiet or hesitant	"Um… yeah, I guess."	Nervous, unsure, trying to please
Loud or sharp	"What are you doing?!"	Angry, upset, or setting a boundary
Playful or teasing	"Oh really?"	Friendly or testing comfort

Context Clues: The Vibe Around the Words

Situation	What It Might Mean
They give short answers and avoid eye contact	They might be upset, anxious, distracted, or not ready to talk
They laugh, but their face seems tense or forced	It could be a nervous laugh or a way to hide discomfort
You're talking and they keep checking their phone or seem zoned out	They may be distracted, bored, or feeling disconnected
They say "I'm fine" but their tone is flat or they look away	They might not be fine — they could be hurt or shutting down
You bring something up and they suddenly change the subject	They might feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed, or unsure how to respond

☑ What You Can Do

- Don't assume. It's okay to check in. *("Hey, I noticed you seem quiet. Everything okay?")*
- If you feel confused, trust your gut and ask gently.
- Not everyone shows feelings the same way, and that's okay too.
- Your own body language matters too. Try matching your tone to your message!

"Who's Safe to Trust?" Trust-Building Worksheet

A guide to help you think through which relationships feel safe, solid, and supportive

Not everyone earns your trust the same way. This worksheet helps you check in on how you feel around different people. You can use the same questions to reflect on friends, family, coworkers, or anyone else.

Person #1: _____

How do I usually feel after spending time with them?

_____

_____

Can I be myself around them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not really

How do they respond to boundaries?

☐ Respect it ☐ Push back a little ☐ Ignore or cross it

Do they show up when they say they will?

☐ Consistently ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

Do I feel emotionally safe with them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

Would I go to them if I was going through something hard? Why or why not?

_____

_____

Person #2: _____

How do I usually feel after spending time with them?

_____

_____

Can I be myself around them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not really

How do they respond to boundaries?

☐ Respect it ☐ Push back a little ☐ Ignore or cross it

Do they show up when they say they will?

☐ Consistently ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

Do I feel emotionally safe with them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

Would I go to them if I was going through something hard? Why or why not?

_____

_____

Person #3: _____

How do I usually feel after spending time with them?

_____

_____

Can I be myself around them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not really

How do they respond to boundaries?

☐ Respect it ☐ Push back a little ☐ Ignore or cross it

Do they show up when they say they will?

☐ Consistently ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

Do I feel emotionally safe with them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

Would I go to them if I was going through something hard? Why or why not?

_____

_____

Person #4: _____

How do I usually feel after spending time with them?

_____

_____

Can I be myself around them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not really

How do they respond to boundaries?

☐ Respect it ☐ Push back a little ☐ Ignore or cross it

Do they show up when they say they will?

☐ Consistently ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

Do I feel emotionally safe with them?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

Would I go to them if I was going through something hard? Why or why not?

_____

_____

Listening vs. Hearing Visual

What's the difference, and why does it matter?

People often think they're listening, when they're really just hearing. This quick-reference guide breaks it down so you can notice when someone (or you) is really tuned in or just going through the motions.

Hearing	Listening
Sound goes in, that's it	You're focused and tuned in
Thinking about other things	Trying to understand
Zoned out, looking around	Eye contact, nodding, present
"Uh huh." "Yeah." "Mhm."	"That makes sense." "Tell me more."
Dismissive or distracted	Respectful and supportive
Missed connection	Real trust, better convo

✅ Quick Check-In

Ask yourself:

☐ Am I actually paying attention?

☐ Could I repeat what they just said?

☐ Am I making space for their words or just waiting to talk?

5. Substance Use

Substance use is a sensitive topic, and one that can make many youth feel misunderstood. The tools in this chapter are designed to help professionals and youth approach these conversations with openness, clarity, and compassion. They aim to reduce stigma, promote harm reduction, and support youth in reflecting honestly on their experiences and choices.

Whether a young person is experimenting, actively using, in recovery, or simply navigating peer influence, these tools offer pathways for dialogue and support. The Self-Assessment Worksheet and Coping Plan Template promote reflection and strategy-building, while the Substance Use & the Law Cheat Sheet provides vital safety information specific to Missouri. Non-judgmental conversation prompts and peer support visuals help youth feel less alone and more empowered.

Professionals using these materials should avoid assumptions or scare tactics. Instead, these tools are meant to help youth explore the "why" behind their use, identify safer alternatives, and make informed decisions. When used well, they also provide opportunities to build trust that can lead to further engagement in services, treatment, or recovery supports if and when the youth is ready.

Substance Use Self-Assessment Worksheet

A judgment-free worksheet to check in with yourself about your use

You don't have to label yourself or commit to any big decision to start thinking about your relationship with substances. This worksheet helps you reflect honestly and safely on what's working for you, what's not, and what you might want to explore next.

What Substances I Use

(Circle the frequency you use each substance below)

Substances	How Often Do I Use Them?					
Alcohol	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Marijuana (THC, Delta 8, Delta 9, etc.)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Nicotine (Vape, Cigarettes)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Prescription Drugs (Mine or Someone Else's)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Over-the-Counter Meds	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Hallucinogens (Mushrooms, LSD, etc.)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Stimulants (Adderall, Cocaine, Meth)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Opioids (Percocet, Fentanyl, Heroin, etc.)	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All
Other: _____	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Once Every 1-2 Weeks	Once a Month	A Few Times a Year	Not at All

When do I usually use?

(Check any that feel true)

☐ When I'm bored
☐ When I'm anxious or stressed
☐ At parties or social events
☐ To help me sleep
☐ When I feel down or numb
☐ When I want to celebrate or feel good
☐ Other: _____

What's It Doing for Me?

What do I like about using?

- _____
- _____
- _____

What are some things I've noticed that aren't so great?

_____
_____
_____

Has My Use Ever Led to…

(Check any that apply)

☐ A fight or misunderstanding
☐ Memory gaps or blackouts
☐ Missing work, school, or appointments
☐ Doing something I regret
☐ Health issues or close calls
☐ Feeling more anxious or low afterward
☐ Spending more than I meant to
☐ Legal trouble or getting caught
☐ None of these

What Do I Want?

Right now, I feel…

(Check one or more)

☐ Pretty good about where I'm at
☐ Curious about cutting back
☐ Ready to stop or take a break
☐ Not sure, but open to talking about it
☐ Not ready to change — just thinking
☐ Pressured to quit, but not feeling it
☐ I don't use, but I want to support someone else

If I made one small change, it might be:

_____

If I talked to someone about this, I'd want them to:

☐ Listen, not judge
☐ Help me plan my next step
☐ Share info, not pressure
☐ Respect my privacy
☐ Understand where I'm coming from

Harm Reduction Strategies Checklist

Tips for reducing risk and supporting safer use among emerging adults

Purpose: Use this checklist to explore practical, respectful ways to reduce potential harms related to substance use, whether the young person is exploring, occasionally using, using regularly, or seeking to stop. This tool can support education, safety planning, and honest conversations rooted in trust instead of shame.

General Mindset

☐ Approach with curiosity, not judgment
☐ Focus on what the youth wants from the conversation
☐ Validate any steps they've already taken to stay safe
☐ Offer info
☐ Don't assume knowledge or readiness to change
☐ Let them set the pace for change

Safer Use Basics

☐ Don't mix substances (especially depressants like alcohol + opioids/benzos)
☐ Use with people you trust, not alone
☐ Know your source and test if possible (fentanyl test strips, etc.)
☐ Start slow, especially with new substances or sources
☐ Eat, hydrate, and sleep before and after using
☐ Have a plan to get home safe (rideshare, sober driver, etc.)
☐ Avoid sharing straws, vapes, pipes, or syringes
☐ Carry naloxone (Narcan) if there's risk of opioid use and know how to use it
☐ Take breaks to give your body and brain time to reset

If Trying to Cut Back or Change Use

☐ Set a goal (cut back, pause, or quit for the short or long term)
☐ Track patterns: when, why, with who, and how you feel before/after
☐ Try reducing frequency or quantity first
☐ Create "use-free" spaces or days
☐ Make a list of alternative coping tools or social activities
☐ Identify triggers and plan ways to handle them
☐ Let someone you trust know your plan and how to support you

Building Trust in the Conversation

☐ Ask: "What does safe look like for *you*?"
☐ Offer support whether they want to change or not
☐ Normalize that many people make gradual shifts
☐ Avoid scare tactics and use real info and shared decision-making
☐ Leave the door open: "I'm here whenever you want to talk more"

Non-Judgmental Substance Use Conversation Starters

Prompts for opening respectful, real conversations about substance use

Purpose: This tool offers language and prompts to help professionals, parents, and other trusted adults discuss substance use with emerging adults in a way that supports openness, trust, and personal agency rather than shame and fear. These aren't scripts to read word-for-word but conversation tools to build trust and create space for honest dialogue.

Starting the Conversation Gently

These openers are useful when you're not sure if a young person is using substances, or they haven't brought it up directly.

- "Hey, I know there's a lot of stuff out there about alcohol, weed, and other drugs. I'm always down to talk if you want real info or just someone who won't freak out."
- "Have you or your friends been around substances much? What's that been like for you?"
- "No pressure, but I'm someone you can talk to about this stuff without worrying about judgment."
- "I don't assume anything, but I know a lot of young people are curious or trying things. If that's ever part of your world, I'd rather you have support than feel alone."

Exploring Use (Without Shaming)

Use these when a young person has shared that they're using, or you have an open conversation going.

- "What do you like about it? What works for you?"
- "What's usually going on when you use? Is it to relax, feel more social, escape stuff?"
- "Are there things you've noticed that you're not super into when it comes to using?"
- "What's helped you stay safe or avoid stuff that feels sketchy?"
- "Do you feel like your use is in your control, or does it sometimes take over?"

Talking About Risk Without Scare Tactics

These prompts help discuss consequences or patterns without lecturing or catastrophizing.

- "When things have gone sideways, what was usually going on around that?"
- "Do you ever feel like using gets in the way of stuff you care about?"
- "Is there anything you've seen, in your own life or people around you, that made you stop and think?"
- "If you ever wanted to take a break, what do you think would make that easier or harder?"

Tips for Keeping the Conversation Supportive

- **Lead with curiosity, not control.**
- **Avoid labels** like "addict," "problem," or "bad choices".
- **Stay present**. Focus on *their* experience, not your assumptions.
- **Validate honesty** even if it's hard to hear.
- **Let the door stay open**. Not every conversation has to be "the big talk".

Understanding My Triggers & Coping Plan Template

A space to reflect, plan, and take back control, one step at a time

You don't have to figure everything out at once. Whether you're trying to cut back, take a break, or stop using completely, this worksheet is here to help you understand *why* you use, *when* the urges come up, and *what you can do instead*.

My "Why" (Mission Statement)

I want to make a change because:

_____

_____

_____

It's important to me because:

_____

_____

_____

My Common Triggers

What makes me want to use? *(Check all that apply or add your own)*

Situations:

☐ Being at a party
☐ Feeling bored or restless
☐ After work or school
☐ When I'm alone
☐ Around certain people
☐ When I see or smell it
☐ Other: _____

Feelings:

☐ Stressed
☐ Angry
☐ Sad or numb
☐ Anxious or overwhelmed
☐ Tired
☐ Celebrating
☐ Other: _____

What I Can Do Instead

When I feel triggered, I can try to... *(Check or write down a few go-to strategies)*

☐ Go for a walk or move my body
☐ Text or call someone I trust
☐ Journal or voice memo my thoughts
☐ Distract myself with music, art, games
☐ Use a grounding or breathing exercise
☐ Take a shower or change scenery
☐ Eat, hydrate, or nap
☐ Go to a support meeting or text a hotline
☐ Other: _____

When I Want to Use, I Will...

1. First, I'll notice what I'm feeling:
   _____
   _____
2. I'll remind myself of my "why":
   _____
   _____
3. I'll try one of these coping tools first:
   _____
   _____
4. If I still feel stuck, I'll reach out to:
   Name: _____
   Name: _____
5. If I slip up, I will:
   ☐ Be kind to myself
   ☐ Try again
   ☐ Ask for support
   ☐ Reflect without shame
   ☐ Other: _____

Substance Use & the Law Cheat Sheet

For youth and young adults in Missouri

Understanding Missouri's laws on substance use can help you make informed decisions and avoid unintended legal consequences. This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

Possession of Controlled Substances

- **Marijuana:**
  - **10 grams or less**: Class D misdemeanor
    - **Penalty**: Up to $500 fine
    - **Impact**: May appear on background checks, affecting job or school applications
  - **More than 10 grams but less than 35 grams**: Class A misdemeanor
    - **Penalty**: Up to 1 year in jail and/or up to $2,000 fine
    - **Impact**: Potential jail time, higher fines, and a criminal record
  - **35 grams or more**: Class D felony
    - **Penalty**: Up to 7 years in prison and/or up to $10,000 fine
    - **Impact**: Felony record can severely limit employment, education, and housing opportunities
- **Other Controlled Substances (e.g., cocaine, heroin, meth):**
  - **Possession**: Class D felony
    - **Penalty**: Up to 7 years in prison and/or up to $10,000 fine
    - **Impact**: Long-term incarceration and significant barriers to reintegration into society

---

Driving Under the Influence (DUI)

- One “drink” is defined as 12 oz beer, 5 oz wine, or 1.5 oz distilled spirits (such as vodka or whiskey)
- **Under 21 ("Zero Tolerance" Law):**
  - **BAC of 0.02% or higher** (1 drink)
    - **Penalty**: 30-day license suspension; possible fines and mandatory alcohol education programs
    - **Impact**: Loss of driving privileges can affect work and school attendance
- **21 and Over:**
  - **BAC of 0.08% or higher** (3-4 drinks)
    - **Penalty**: 90-day license suspension; possible fines and mandatory substance abuse programs
    - **Impact**: Transportation challenges and potential increase in insurance costs

---

Juvenile Offenses (Under 18)

- **Possession or use of illegal substances**:
  - **Consequences**: Referral to juvenile court, possible detention or probation, and mandatory counseling or treatment programs
  - **Impact**: Juvenile records can affect future educational and employment opportunities
- **Certification as an Adult**:
  - For serious offenses (such as drug trafficking), individuals 12 years or older may be tried as adults following a certification hearing
  - **Impact**: Adult convictions carry more severe penalties and long-term consequences

Seeking Help Without Parental Consent

- **Minors (under 18)** in Missouri can **consent to medical treatment** for substance abuse without parental approval. This includes:
  - Counseling services
  - Inpatient or outpatient treatment programs
  - Medical care related to substance use

School Policies

- **Substance use on school grounds**:
  - **Potential Consequences**: Suspension or expulsion, mandatory participation in drug education programs, and possible notification of law enforcement.
  - **Impact**: Disciplinary actions can hinder academic progress and future opportunities.

Missouri's Good Samaritan Law

Your safety comes first. Missouri's Good Samaritan Law encourages individuals to seek emergency medical help during a drug or alcohol overdose without fear of legal repercussions.

Key Points:

- If you **seek medical assistance** for someone experiencing an overdose—or for yourself—you are **protected from arrest, charge, prosecution, or conviction** for:
  - Possession of a controlled substance
  - Possession of drug paraphernalia
  - Possession of an imitation controlled substance
  - Minor in possession of alcohol
  - Possession of an altered ID
  - Sale of alcohol to a minor
  - Keeping or maintaining a public nuisance

Important: This protection applies **only if the evidence for these offenses was obtained as a result of seeking medical assistance**. It does **not** protect against:

- Active warrants
- Drug distribution or manufacturing charges
- Other unrelated crimes

Bottom Line: If someone is overdosing, **call 911 immediately**. Your action could save a life, and the law is on your side.

Key Takeaways

- **Know the Law:** Familiarize yourself with Missouri's substance use laws to make informed choices.
- **Seek Help:** If you're struggling with substance use, resources are available without needing parental consent.
- **Think Ahead:** Legal consequences can impact education, employment, and housing opportunities.
- **Stay Informed:** Laws can change; always consult official sources or legal professionals for the most current information.

Helping a Friend Who's Struggling Visual

What to do when you're worried about a friend's substance use

It's not always easy to know how to help. This guide walks you through some steps you can take if someone you care about is using drugs or alcohol in a way that feels unsafe, harmful, or just not like them.

Something Feels Off...

You've noticed changes in your friend's behavior, mood, or health, and you're wondering if substance use might be part of it. Ask yourself:

Are they using more often or in riskier situations?
Are they acting distant, anxious, depressed, or not like themselves?
Are they missing school/work/hangouts or seeming out of it often?

↓

Talk To Them.

Start a calm, private conversation. Use "I" statements. Keep it kind, not preachy. Listen more than talk. Don't threaten, accuse, or try to "fix" them. You might say:

"I've noticed you don't seem like yourself lately. I care about you. Is something going on?"
"No judgement, I just want to check in. I'm here if you want to talk."
"It seems like [substance] is showing up a lot. I'm worried about you."

↓

If They Shut Down, Say:

"That's okay. I'm here if you ever want to talk."

If They Open Up, Help Them Think About Options.

You don't have to be an expert, just supportive. Respect their pace, offer info, and let them choose what feels best for them. You might say:

"What helps you feel more in control?"
"Have you thought about taking a break or cutting back?"
"Would it help to talk to someone who knows more about this?"
"Do you want me to help you find help, like a therapist or a hotline?"
"Would it help if I check in with you from time to time?"
"Could it be helpful to go with you to talk with someone about getting help?"

If It Feels Like an Emergency

- If they've passed out, can't wake up, are breathing slowly, or seem confused after using — call 911.
- Say: "You don't look okay, and I'm not risking your life. I'm calling for help."
- Stay with them. Don't leave them alone.

You're a Friend, Not a Fixer

You can:

- ✔ Show up
- ✔ Listen
- ✔ Help them feel less alone
- ✔ Share resources

You're not responsible for their choices, but your care might be what helps them find a safer path.

6. First Episode Psychosis

Experiencing psychosis for the first time can be overwhelming, isolating, and frightening. This chapter offers tools to help young people make sense of what's happening, reduce fear, and access the support they need to move forward. It is designed to be trauma-informed, hopeful, and accessible to youth who may be newly diagnosed or still struggling to understand their experiences.

The materials in this chapter align with Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) and ACT-TAY models used in Missouri. Tools like the First Steps After a Diagnosis Visual and Medication Plan Tracker Template help youth navigate early treatment decisions and manage symptoms. Others, like the Explaining My Experience Conversation Guide and Grounding & Coping Strategies Cheat Sheet, focus on practical tools for communication, regulation, and self-advocacy.

Each tool is intended to validate the youth's experience without over-medicalizing it. The goal is to help them reclaim agency, build insight, and stay connected to their support systems during and after their first episode. Providers should approach these tools with sensitivity, allowing space for emotion, questions, and uncertainty while holding hope and clarity for what's next.

Understanding My Experience Worksheet

A reflection worksheet for making sense of what I've been through

Going through something like a first episode of psychosis can feel confusing, scary, and overwhelming, but you're not alone, and you don't have to make sense of it all at once. This worksheet is a place to sort through some of your thoughts, feelings, and questions.

What Happened?

Can you describe the experience in your own words?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When did you first notice something felt off or different?

_____
_____

Was there anything or anyone that helped you get through it?

_____
_____

How did people around you respond?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What were you thinking or believing during that time?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What Did It Feel Like?

(Check any feelings you had)

☐ Confused
☐ Scared
☐ Energized or unstoppable
☐ Disconnected from people
☐ Like time or reality shifted
☐ Embarrassed or ashamed
☐ Like I wasn't myself
☐ Like something bigger was happening
☐ Other: _____

How do you feel about that now?

_____
_____
_____

What Questions Do You Still Have?

(Check or add your own)

☐ What *was* that, exactly?
☐ Will this happen again?
☐ What caused it?
☐ Does this mean I have a mental illness?
☐ Can I still have a normal life?
☐ Will people treat me differently?
☐ Can I talk about this with others?
☐ Other: _____

What's Next for Me?

Since this happened, I've learned or noticed…

_____

I want people to know that I…

_____

Something I'm proud of about myself is…

_____

One thing I need support with moving forward is…

_____

My Early Warning Signs Tracker Template

A personal tool to notice patterns, protect your peace, and stay one step ahead

Everyone's experience of psychosis is different. This three part tracker helps you recognize the early signs that you might be heading toward a tough time so you can take action early, ask for support, and stay in control of your recovery.

Part 1: My Personal Warning Signs

When things are starting to shift or get harder, I usually notice...

(Check any that apply and/or add your own.)

Thoughts

☐ Feeling like my thoughts are racing or stuck
☐ Believing things I usually wouldn't believe
☐ Feeling like others can hear my thoughts
☐ Having trouble telling what's real
☐ Getting fixated on specific ideas or symbols
☐ Feeling watched, followed, or unsafe
☐ Other:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Behavior or Communication

☐ Withdrawing from people or skipping responsibilities
☐ Talking faster, louder, or jumping topics
☐ Becoming more reactive or angry
☐ Saying things others don't understand
☐ Texting/calling more, or completely going silent
☐ Other:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Feelings

☐ Suddenly more anxious or panicky
☐ Feeling numb, flat, or disconnected
☐ Sudden bursts of energy or restlessness
☐ Feeling down or hopeless
☐ Having trouble sleeping or needing less sleep
☐ Other:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Body or Health

☐ Trouble eating or big changes in appetite
☐ Headaches, stomach issues, or body tension
☐ Sensory overload (lights, sounds, smells)
☐ Feeling hyper-aware or overstimulated
☐ Feeling like my body isn't mine
☐ Other:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Part 2: My Patterns Over Time

Think about the last time you experienced a psychosis episode. What happened in the days or weeks before?

Time	What I Noticed	What Helped or Might Have Helped
1–2 weeks before		
A few days before		
The day of		

Part 3: My "What to Watch For" Plan

Top 3 signs that tell me I might need to slow down, get support, or check in with myself:

1. _____
   _____
2. _____
   _____
3. _____
   _____

If I notice these signs, I can...

☐ Talk to someone I trust
☐ Use grounding or coping strategies
☐ Rest or cancel plans
☐ Adjust my meds (with support)
☐ Get ahead of stress (school, work, etc.)
☐ Go to a peer support group or appointment
☐ Other: _____

People Who Can Help Me Check In:

Name	Role (friend, therapist, etc.)	How they help

First Steps After a Diagnosis Visual

A supportive guide to help you figure out what comes next

Getting a psychosis-related diagnosis can feel scary, confusing, or even hard to believe. You might be wondering what it means and where to go from here. This guide walks you through the first steps.

STEP 1: Take a Breath

Hearing a diagnosis doesn't mean something is "wrong" with you. It means you've had an experience, and now you get support to understand it and build a future that works for you. You're still you. You're not alone. You get to be part of what happens next.

Ask: "Can someone explain what this diagnosis actually means in everyday words?"

Tip: It's normal to have mixed feelings, including relief, anger, or confusion. All of it is valid.

Reminder: A diagnosis is a tool, not a label for who you are or who you'll become.

STEP 2: Meet Your Team

In Missouri, most young people with early psychosis are supported by **CSC** or **ACT-TAY** programs. These teams specialize in different parts of your life: mental health, education, work, family, and peer support.

Ask: "Who is on my team, and what do they each do?"

Tip: You can request a peer support specialist, someone close to your age who's been through something similar.

Reminder: You don't have to open up to everyone right away. Start where you feel comfortable.

STEP 3: Talk Through Options

You'll have conversations about what's been going on, what helps, and what choices you have. This might include therapy, medication, school or job support, and how to feel more in control.

Ask: "What are my options, and what happens if I don't want to do something?"

Tip: It's okay to take time before making decisions. Ask about pros, cons, and how it might affect you.

Reminder: You have a say in your care. Your voice matters.

STEP 4: Build a Support Plan

Your team will help you make a personalized plan to keep you steady and safe. This might include coping tools, warning signs to watch for, and next steps if you need extra support.

Ask: "Can we make a plan together that fits how I actually live my life?"

Tip: Your plan should reflect your strengths and goals.

Reminder: A support plan isn't forever. It can grow and change with you.

STEP 5: Take One Step at a Time

Recovery is a process. You might feel great some days and overwhelmed others. That's okay. What matters is staying connected and taking care of yourself in a way that feels real.

Ask: "What should I do if I start to feel overwhelmed again?"

Tip: Keep a list of people, places, and things that help you feel grounded.

Reminder: You don't have to do everything alone. Progress is personal and it's never too late to keep going.

Medication Plan Tracker Template

A simple way to stay on top of your meds

This sheet helps you keep all your important medication info in one place. You can use it to track what you're taking, how it's working, and what to talk to your provider about. Bring this to appointments for reference.

Questions I Want to Ask My Provider

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Side Effects I've Noticed (check any that apply)

☐ Tiredness
☐ Nausea
☐ Dizziness
☐ Weight/appetite changes
☐ Trouble sleeping
☐ Emotional changes (mood swings, irritability, etc.)
☐ Other: _____

Anything That's Bothering Me Lately or Feels New:

_____

_____

_____

Basic Info

(Create one copy for each medication you're taking. Print extras as needed for long-term tracking.)

Medication Name (Brand & Generic): _____

What It's For / Why I'm Taking It: _____

Dose & Frequency (ex: 1 pill twice a day): _____

Prescribed By: _____

Pharmacy: _____

Refill Date(s): _____

Tracking

Date	Took it? *(Circle one)*	Notes *(Dosage, time, side effects, etc.)*
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	
/	Yes / No	

Explaining My Experience to Others Conversation Guide

A guide to help you talk about psychosis with people in your life

You don't owe anyone an explanation, but sometimes it helps to share what you've been through. Whether you're telling a friend, family member, teacher, or boss, this guide gives you simple ways to start, questions to ask, and responses to common reactions so you feel more confident, safe, and in control of your story.

Family / Caregivers

You Might Say:

- "You might've noticed I've been acting differently. I've been dealing with something called psychosis."
- "I wanted to tell you myself, so you don't have to guess or worry."
- "I'm getting support now and I'm learning more about what helps."

You Can Ask Them:

- "What do you want to know about it?"
- "Can you be patient with me while I work through this?"
- "What would help you feel more included in my support?"

If They Say… / You Might Say…

- "Are you dangerous?" / "No. Psychosis is about thoughts and perceptions, not violence. I'm safe and I'm getting help."
- "Is this my fault?" / "It's not about blame. It's something that happened and now we focus on moving forward."

Friends

You Might Say:

- "I've been dealing with something called psychosis. It's intense, but I'm still me."
- "I might've seemed off lately. I wanted to tell you why instead of hiding it."
- "It's okay if you don't know what to say. Just being here means a lot."

You Can Ask Them:

- "Have you heard of psychosis before?"
- "Want me to explain a little, or just let you know how to support me?"
- "Is there anything you want to ask that you're unsure about?"

If They Say… / You Might Say…

- "That sounds scary." / "Yeah, it felt scary at first too. But I'm learning how to manage it."
- "Do you need space?" / "Only if you need it. I still want to hang out and be around people who care."

Teachers / Employers

You Might Say:

- "I've recently been diagnosed with a mental health condition that affects my thinking sometimes."
- "I'm managing it with support, but I may need some flexibility here and there."
- "I'm doing my best to stay on track, and I wanted to be upfront."

You Can Ask Them:

- "Who do I talk to if I need accommodations or time off?"
- "Is there a way to adjust my schedule if I'm overwhelmed?"
- "Can I check in weekly so we're on the same page?"

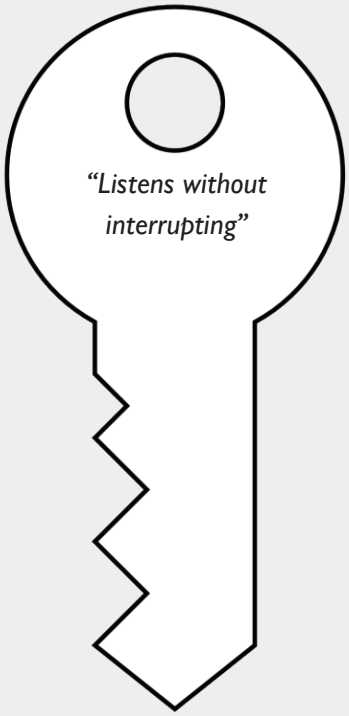
If They Say… / You Might Say…

- "Are you still able to do this job/class?" / "Yes — I might need some tools to help, but I'm committed."
- "Thanks for telling me. How can I support you?" / "Mostly just being patient and open helps. I'll let you know if anything comes up."

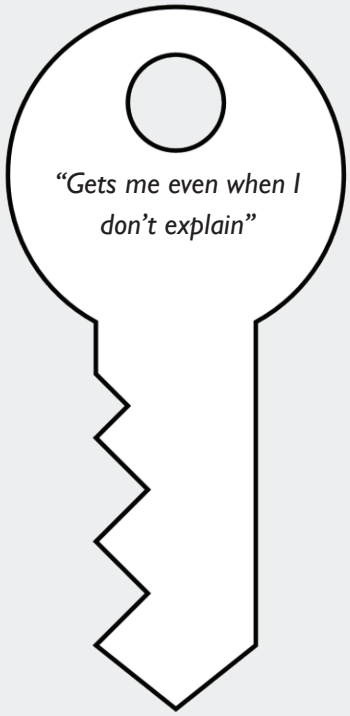
Keys to Support Activity

A hands-on way for youth to identify the people who support them and how they help

Purpose: Each key represents a *kind* of support emerging adults might need. On each, they can write the name of someone who helps them in that way or leave it blank if they're still figuring it out. There's no pressure to fill every key. Print and cut out these keys and guide the youth through identifying their keys to support, then hole-punch them and thread a piece of string or ribbon through to create a support keychain.














"Knows how to support my mental health"

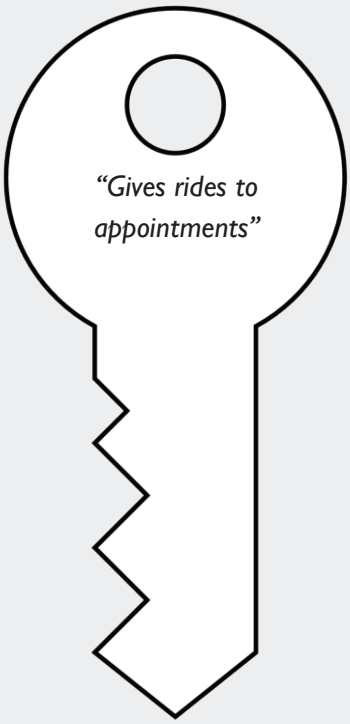

"Talks me down when I'm spiraling"


"Checks in after appointments"


"Helps me track meds or symptoms"


"Believes I can get better"


"Knows the difference between helping on controlling"

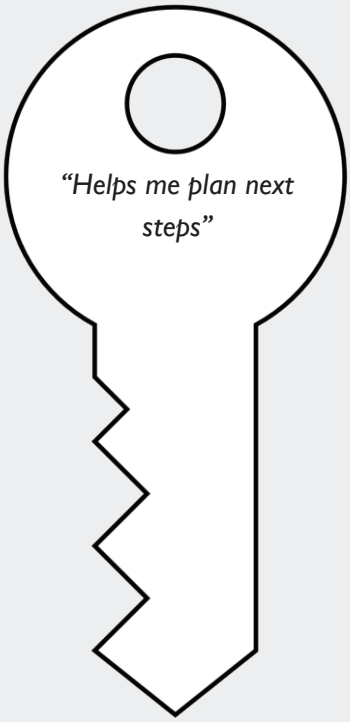

"Gives rides to appointments"


"Helps me manage my schedule"

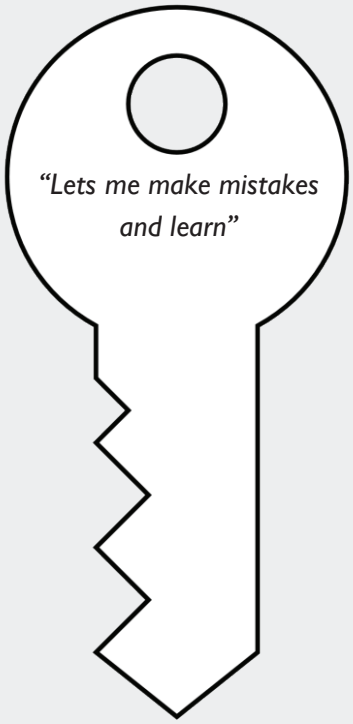

"Brings food or checks on basics"


"Helps with paperwork or phone calls"


"Texts back quickly when I need them"


"Helps me plan next steps"

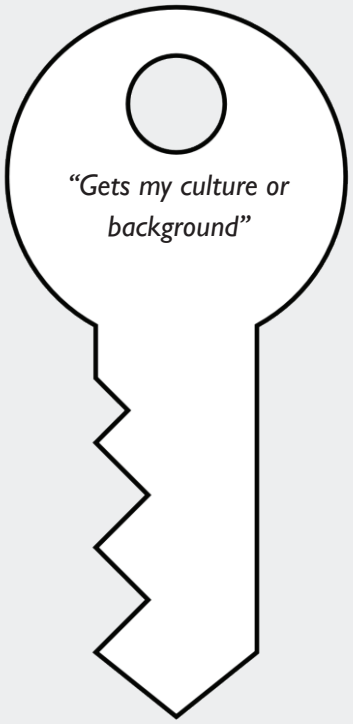

"Supports my choices even if they disagree"


"Lets me make mistakes and learn"

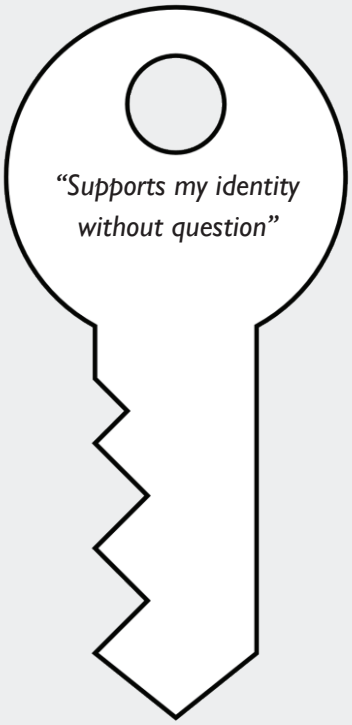

"Speaks up for me when I can't"

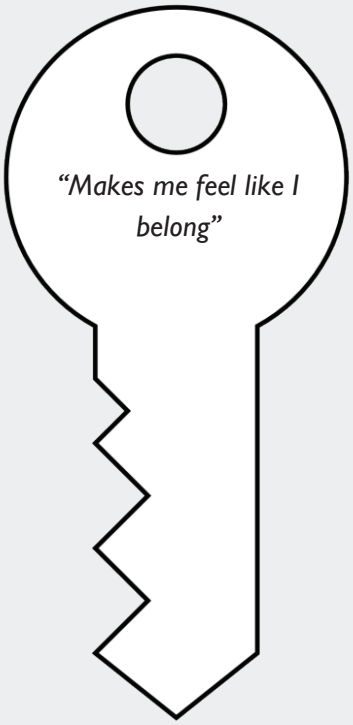

"Helps me self-advocate"

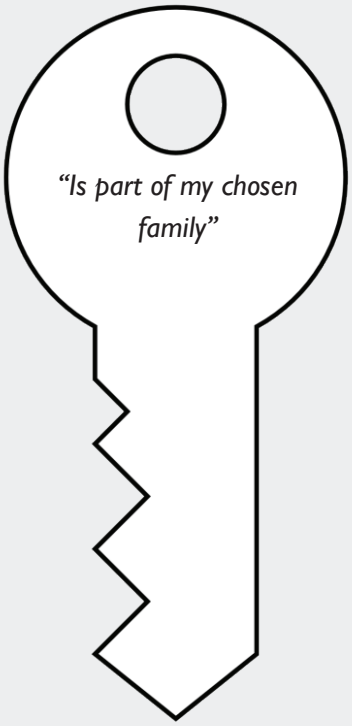

"Asks before giving advice"

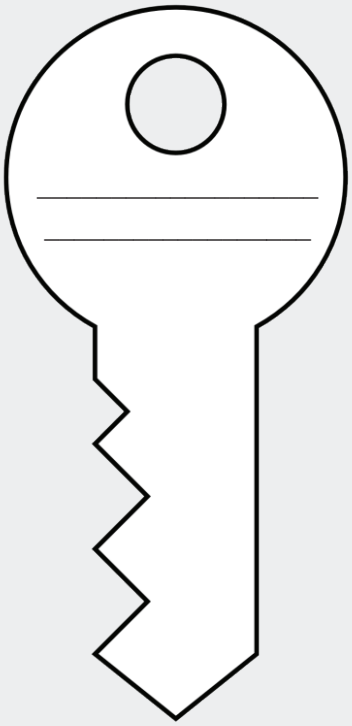

"Gets my culture or background"

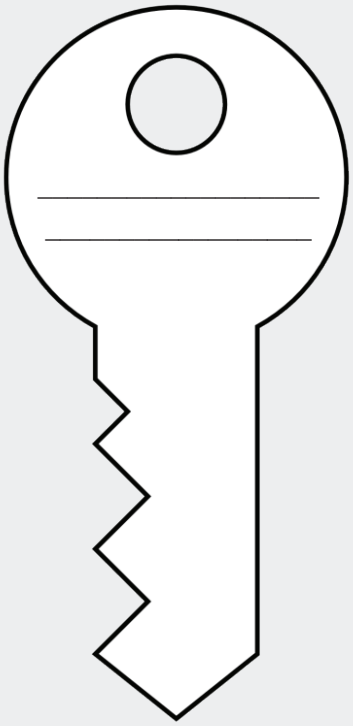

"Shares lived experience with me"


"Supports my identity without question"


"Makes me feel like I belong"


"Is part of my chosen family"





Grounding & Coping Strategies Cheat Sheet

For when things feel overwhelming, unreal, or hard to manage

When you're dealing with symptoms like intense thoughts, voices, paranoia, or feeling out of touch with reality, grounding can help bring you back to the here and now. These are tools to slow down, reconnect with your body, and get through tough moments. You don't have to do them all, just try what feels right for you.

Body-Based Grounding

- **Hold something cold** like an ice cube or a cold soda can.
- **Stomp your feet** on the ground or press them firmly into the floor.
- **Press your hands together hard** for 10 seconds, then release and feel the difference.
- **Go for a walk** even just to the mailbox or around the room.
- **Name 5 things you can feel physically** such as your chair, the shirt you're wearing, or the floor.

Mind-Based Grounding

- **Name categories:** "3 fruits," "3 TV shows," "3 people I trust," etc.
- **Talk to yourself out loud:** "I am safe. This is temporary. I've gotten through this before."
- **Listen to grounding sounds** like music, white noise, nature, or calming voices.
- **Look around & describe your environment out loud.**
- **Write down what you're feeling** don't filter yourself, just empty it out.

Psychosis-Specific Tools

- **Reality check with someone you trust**: "Can you help me make sense of this?"
- **Avoid arguing with voices/delusions**, instead, say: "I hear you, but I don't have to follow you."
- **Use sound layering** (music, white noise, fan) to help quiet voices.
- **Stick to your daily routine.** Even one small habit (shower, snack, get dressed) can anchor you.
- **Keep a "grounding object" with you** to hold and remind you what's real (such as a keychain, rock, or photo)

Anchor Prompts

When you're feeling lost, try finishing one of these out loud or in writing:

- "Right now, I am in…"
- "I know I'm safe because…"
- "The date is ___ and I am ___ years old."
- "One thing I'm proud of myself for is…"
- "The next small thing I can do is…"

Tip: Practice grounding even when you're not in distress — that way it's easier to remember and use when you need it most.

7. Suicide Prevention

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among youth and young adults in the US, and prevention requires more than a checklist. Connection, recognition, and ongoing support are crucial. The tools in this chapter provide emerging adults and professionals with clear and compassionate frameworks for understanding risk, building safety, and providing support.

The Personalized Safety Plan Template and Coping Strategies Toolbox Worksheet offer practical, personalized strategies for youth who are struggling. The "Do's & Don'ts" Cheat Sheet and Accessing Mental Health Support Visual equip youth with the skills to notice warning signs and respond for both themselves and others. These tools are grounded in the "Recognize, Respond, Connect" framework and are designed to be used early and often, not only in crisis.

Providers should use these materials to build protective factors: connection, skills, and hope. They can be completed during calm moments as part of a broader wellness plan, or adapted for use during difficult conversations. Above all, these tools affirm that no one has to face suicidal thoughts alone, and that help is available.

Suicide Warning Signs Cheat Sheet

Quick-reference guide for spotting signs something's wrong

Purpose: This resource helps professionals (including teachers, coaches, case managers, mentors, peer supporters, employers, and others) recognize early signs that a young person may be struggling with their mental health. These signs don't confirm a diagnosis or crisis, but are important clues to check in, offer support, or connect to help.

Changes in Thinking or Mood

- Increased hopelessness, sadness, or emotional numbness
- Talking about feeling worthless, "like a burden," or that life doesn't matter
- Sudden mood swings, anger, or irritability
- Seeming emotionally "flat" or detached
- Extreme anxiety or panic attacks

Changes in Communication

- Saying things like: "I'm done," "They'd be better off without me," or "I just want it to stop."
- Joking about dying, disappearing, or giving up
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or trusted adults
- Ghosting or dropping off suddenly, especially after conflict

Changes in Behavior

- Stopping activities or responsibilities they used to care about
- Missing school, work, or appointments without explanation
- Declining performance or motivation
- Giving away important possessions
- Using substances more heavily or recklessly
- Engaging in risky behavior or taking extreme chances

Changes in Appearance or Health

- Major changes in energy, weight, appetite, or sleep
- Signs of self-harm (e.g. unexplained cuts or bruises)
- Talking about physical pain with no clear cause
- Looking unkempt or disconnected from usual appearance

Immediate Red Flags

- Talking or writing about **suicide, death, or wanting to die**
- Searching online for methods or making plans
- Sudden calmness after a long period of distress (can signal resolution to follow through)
- **Access to lethal means** (firearms, medications, etc.) in combination with signs of crisis

☑ What to Do if You Notice These Signs

1. **Pause & check in**: "You've seemed a little off lately. Want to talk?"
2. **Listen non-judgmentally**: Don't interrupt or jump to fixing
3. **Take concerns seriously**: Even vague or joking comments can be signals
4. **Ask directly about safety**: "Have you had thoughts of hurting yourself?"
5. **Connect them to help**: You don't have to handle the situation alone. Call or walk with them to support.

Personalized Safety Plan Template

A guide I can turn to when things feel too heavy to handle

This tool helps you create a plan for getting through the hard moments. It's helpful to create in advance so you don't have to figure everything out when you're in crisis.

---

1. Warning Signs That I Might Be in Crisis

These are thoughts, feelings, or behaviors I notice when I'm heading into a hard place. (Examples: pulling away from people, hopeless thoughts, not sleeping, self-harming, using more substances, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What Helps Me Stay Grounded in the Moment

These are things I can do to get through the next few minutes or hours.

☐ Listen to calming music or a playlist I like
☐ Watch a comfort show/video
☐ Go for a walk or move my body
☐ Use grounding tools (ice, textures, breathing)
☐ Journal, draw, or scribble
☐ Text/call someone I trust
☐ Other:

_____

3. People or Places I Can Turn To

(Include trusted friends, peer supporters, safe hangout spots, counselors, hotlines, etc.)

Name / Place	How they help	Steps to Get in Touch

4. My Safety Options

These are steps I can take to reduce risk and protect myself when I feel unsafe.

☐ Ask someone to stay with me
☐ Avoid being alone if I can
☐ Lock away or give someone access to medications or sharp items
☐ Avoid drugs/alcohol until I feel steady
☐ Get to a public place or safe person
☐ Call or text a crisis line
☐ Other: _____

5. Reasons to Keep Going

Even when things feel hopeless, I can try to remember…

People I care about:

_____

Things I want to experience or achieve:

_____

One thing that brings me even a little joy or peace:

_____

Something that helped me once before:

_____

If you're in crisis, you can call or text the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline at any time

Supporting Peers in Crisis: Do's & Don'ts Cheat Sheet

What to do when a friend is struggling without losing yourself in the process

When someone you care about is going through a mental health crisis or talking about suicide, it can feel scary, overwhelming, or like you don't know what to say. You're not a therapist, but you *are* a lifeline. This guide gives you clear, useful strategies to be there for someone you care about when they're in crisis.

DO

✅ **Ask directly if they're thinking about suicide.**

It's okay to ask. You won't "plant the idea." You might save a life.

- "Are you thinking about hurting yourself?"
- "Have you had thoughts about not wanting to be alive?"

✅ **Take them seriously, even if they seem calm.**

Calm doesn't always mean safe. Don't ignore signs because they're not crying or panicking.

✅ **Stay with them (or connected) until help is on the way.**

This could mean in person or over text/phone. Just being there can keep them tethered.

If you need help yourself, loop in a third person (another friend, RA, peer mentor, adult you trust).

✅ **Use grounding questions.**

- "Can you tell me 5 things you can see right now?"
- "Want to sit on the floor with me and just breathe for a second?"
- "Let's put your feet flat on the ground and take 3 breaths together."

✅ **Help them make a plan or get to someone who can.**

If they say they feel unsafe, don't leave them alone. You can say:

- "Let's text the crisis line together."
- "I'll walk with you to [school counselor/peer support/etc.]."

✅ **Protect their dignity.**

You can get help without making a scene. Quietly step out, send a message, or ask someone to talk privately with them if they're open to it.

DON'T

❌ **Don't try to be their therapist.**

You can support them without solving everything. Stay present and listen.

❌ **Don't make promises you can't keep.**

"Don't tell anyone" is never a promise you should make. Instead try:

- "I care about you too much to keep this to myself, but I'll be with you when we reach out."

❌ **Don't guilt-trip, argue, or minimize.**

Avoid:

- "Other people have it worse."
- "But you have so much going for you."
- "Don't do this to me."

Instead try:

- "This sounds really hard. I'm glad you told me."
- "You don't have to carry this alone."

❌ **Don't leave them alone if they're in immediate danger.**

If they're talking about specific plans or seem disconnected from reality, stay close and call or text for help immediately.

Who to Contact

- **Call or text:** 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- **Trusted adult**: Teacher, coach, RA, school mental health staff
- **Emergency**: Call 911 if someone is in immediate danger (and say "mental health crisis" so they send appropriate responders)

Final Reminders

- You didn't cause this and it's not your job to fix it.
- You deserve support too. If you're carrying this alone, talk to someone.

Coping Strategies Toolbox Worksheet

A space to build a personal guide for getting through hard moments

This isn't just a list of coping ideas. It's a plan made by you, for you, because what works for one person might not work for someone else, and even what helps you one day might not help the next. Let's figure out what helps you feel safe, steady, and supported.

What Do I Need When I'm Struggling?

Check as many as apply. This helps match the kind of support to the strategy.

☐ To feel comforted
☐ To burn off energy
☐ To move my body
☐ To distract myself for a little while
☐ To express my emotions
☐ To calm down and feel in control
☐ To remind myself I'm safe
☐ Other: _____

What's in My Toolbox Already?

Think of things you've done (even once) that helped. They can be simple, weird, creative, or small. No wrong answers.

Strategy I've Tried Before	When It Helped	What Need it Met

What Doesn't Help Me

It's just as important to name the stuff that makes it worse, even if it seems "normal" or worked in the past.

Strategy That Doesn't Work for Me	Why It Backfires/Makes Things Worse

Coping Strategies by Need

Think through what might help you meet different needs when you're struggling.

What I Need	Things That Might Help
Comfort	*Examples: a warm drink, weighted blanket, holding a pet, watching a favorite movie*
Distraction	*Examples: scrolling social media, playing a game, listening to music, working on a creative project*
Release	*Examples: journaling, scream-singing in the car, punching a pillow, crying in the shower*
Grounding	*Examples: body scan, guided meditation, splashing cold water, 5-4-3-2-1 method*
Movement	*Examples: stretching, pacing, dancing, walking, working out*
Connection	*Examples: texting a friend, chatting in a livestream, calling a family member, leaving the house, making plans*
Hope	*Examples: make a vision board, set a goal, read uplifting stories, make plans with a friend*

What Steps Will I Take When I'm Having a Hard Time?

Try writing these on a sticky note or saving them in your phone for quick reference

First Thing I'll Try:

_____

What I'll Try If That Doesn't Work:

_____

What I'll Do If I Need More Help:

_____

Where Do I Start? Accessing Mental Health Support Visual

A simple guide to getting help in Missouri, even if you're not sure where to begin

Mental health care doesn't have to be confusing. This step-by-step guide walks you through where to turn and how to start, whether you're looking for therapy, meds, crisis support, or just someone to talk to.

STEP 1: What Do You Need Right Now?

If you're in immediate crisis or feel unsafe:

- **Call or text 988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — free, 24/7)
- **Text NAMI to 741741**
- **Emergency?** Call 911 and say: "Mental health crisis."

If you're not in crisis, but want support: Go to Step 2

STEP 2: Who Can Help You Find Care?

You don't have to figure this out alone. Ask someone to help you connect with services.

- A trusted adult (parent, teacher, coach, case manager, school staff)
- A peer support worker
- Your school counselor or social worker
- A community mental health center (see Step 4)

Already have Medicaid or insurance? Check your provider's website for mental/behavioral health services.

STEP 3: Ask About These Missouri Programs

- **ACT-TAY Teams (Assertive Community Treatment for Transitional Age Youth)**

Wraparound support for youth with complex needs such as mental health, housing, life skills, and more.

- **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)**

Offer therapy, case management, medication, crisis help, often regardless of ability to pay.

- **CSC Teams (Coordinated Specialty Care)**

For youth and young adults experiencing early psychosis or serious mental health concerns.

- Ask: "Do you have services for youth or young adults my age?"
- Or: "Can I get a referral to a CSC or ACT-TAY team near me?"

STEP 4: Where to Find Services Near You

- **Missouri Department of Mental Health Directory (Find Care):** dmh.mo.gov/behavioral-health
- **NAMI Missouri (Education & Support):** namimissouri.org

STEP 5: What to Say When You Call

Use these scripts if you're nervous about calling a provider or center:

- "Hi, I'm [your name] and I'm looking for mental health support. I'm [your age] and I live in [your city/county]. I don't know where to start — can you help me figure out next steps?"
- "I've been struggling with [anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, hearing things, etc.] and I'd like to talk to someone."

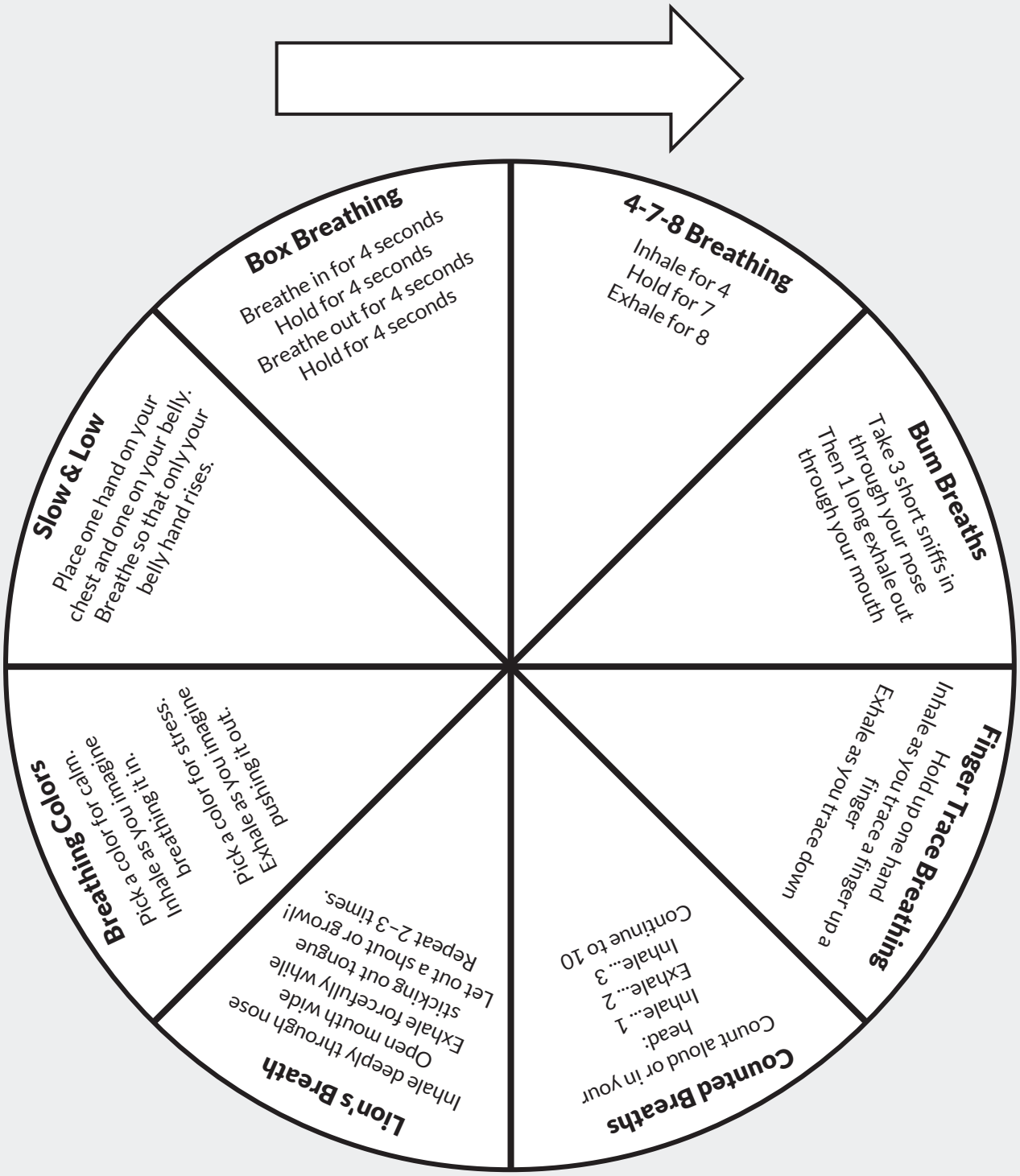
Mindfulness Wheel Activity

A tool to help youth regulate when they feel overwhelmed

Purpose: This spinner helps youth try out different calming breathing techniques. Breathing slowly and intentionally can help calm thoughts, slow heart rate, reduce anxiety, and bring them back to the present.

How to Use

1. **Print and cut out** the spinner and arrow. You can glue it to cardboard or laminate it for durability.
2. **Use a paper fastener** or push pin with a paperclip for the spinner arrow — or simply close your eyes and point.
3. **Whatever it lands on, try that breathing method for 1–2 minutes.** Repeat if helpful.



8. Employment

Work can be a powerful source of identity, independence, and stability, but navigating the job world as a young adult can also be stressful, confusing, and full of barriers. The Employment chapter includes tools to help youth explore career goals, develop job skills, and understand what to expect (and what's expected of them) in the workplace.

Whether a youth is job-seeking for the first time or re-entering the workforce after a break, these tools meet them where they are. The Workplace Readiness Self-Assessment and Career Exploration Worksheet help youth identify strengths, needs, and interests. Role-plays, checklists, and rights-based resources prepare them for interviews, workplace challenges, and navigating professionalism in a way that allows them to stay true to themselves.

Professionals should use these materials to demystify the working world and help youth develop confidence in their ability to succeed. This chapter is especially attuned to generational differences in workplace culture and offers strategies to help young people adapt without losing their sense of self. Whether the goal is a first job or a lifelong career path, these tools help youth take practical, supported steps toward success.

Workplace Readiness Self-Assessment Worksheet

A self-check to figure out where I'm at, what I need, and what kind of work fits me

Whether you're looking for your first job or thinking about a new one, it helps to check in with yourself first. This worksheet helps you reflect on what kind of work might be a good fit, how ready you feel, and what supports you might need to feel confident and successful.

Why Do I Want to Work?

Check any that apply

☐ I want to make money
☐ I want more independence
☐ I want structure or routine
☐ I want to build skills or experience
☐ I want to build a career
☐ I want to meet people or be part of something
☐ I feel pressure from family
☐ Other:

_____

What Type of Work Might Fit Me Right Now?

Choose the ones that feel most true right now

☐ I like helping people
☐ I like working alone
☐ I need something part-time or flexible
☐ I want to be active and on my feet
☐ I'd prefer a remote or quiet job
☐ I want to learn something hands-on
☐ I need a job that doesn't require experience
☐ Other:

_____

Workplace Readiness Check-In

On a scale of 1–5, how ready do you feel in these areas? (1 = not at all / 5 = very confident)

Topic	1	2	3	4	5
I can show up on time consistently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable talking to supervisors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can manage stress or ask for help	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have clothes/shoes for work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can follow directions and stay focused	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel okay working with new people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know how to budget or manage a paycheck	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What Might Get in the Way?

☐ School or classes
☐ Transportation
☐ Mental or physical health
☐ Family responsibilities
☐ Stress or anxiety
☐ I don't know where to start
☐ I'm afraid of failing
☐ Other: _____

Supports I Might Need to Succeed

☐ Help finding job options
☐ Practice for interviews
☐ Help with clothes or transportation
☐ Someone to talk to about stress
☐ Coaching or job mentoring
☐ Flexible hours or accommodations
☐ Other: _____

First Job Expectations Checklist

What to expect when starting work

Starting a new job, especially your first one, can be exciting, confusing, and a little weird. Every workplace is different, but this checklist covers common expectations most employers have. Knowing these ahead of time can help you feel more prepared, confident, and respected on the job.

TIME & SCHEDULING

☐ Show up **on time** or early — being late (even once) may be seen as unprofessional.
☐ If you're sick or need to miss a shift, let someone know as early as possible.
☐ You might not get the exact schedule or hours you want at first.
☐ Clock in/out correctly if required, that's how you get paid!
☐ Don't assume holidays or weekends are off. Ask what's expected.

COMMUNICATION

☐ Respond to texts, calls, or emails from your boss, even if it's just "Got it!"
☐ Ask questions if something doesn't make sense. It's better than guessing.
☐ Be polite and respectful even if someone else isn't.
☐ Try to stay off your phone unless it's allowed or urgent.
☐ Let your boss know if something is making work hard for you. It's okay to ask for support.

APPEARANCE & DRESS

☐ Wear clothes that match the job, even if there's no formal dress code
☐ Make sure clothes are clean and comfortable.
☐ Ask if uniforms are provided.
☐ Keep hygiene in mind, especially if you're working closely with others or food.
☐ Tattoos, piercings, or hairstyles may be fine, but check if there are workplace rules.

BEHAVIOR & ATTITUDE

☐ Being friendly and reliable matters as much as your skills.
☐ You don't have to be "perfect," but you do need to try.
☐ Gossip, complaining, or arguing on the job can cause problems. Vent later with someone you trust.
☐ Employers often notice small things: showing up early, offering to help, cleaning up.
☐ You don't need to agree with everything, but being adaptable goes a long way.

OTHER THINGS TO KNOW

- You might feel awkward or unsure at first. That's normal!
- It's okay to mess up. Just own it, ask how to fix it, and keep going.
- You might not love your first job, but every experience teaches you something.
- Talk to your support team if you feel overwhelmed, mistreated, or unsure if the job is a good fit.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Role-Play Scripts

Supportive practice for helping youth navigate disagreements and miscommunication at work

Purpose: These short scripts help emerging adults practice how to speak up for themselves, clarify misunderstandings, and keep things professional when problems come up at work. Whether it's a manager, coworker, or team issue, these role-plays offer a safe space to try different approaches and stay grounded under pressure. Use with a calm, supportive tone. Encourage youth to adapt language to sound natural for them and reflect their real work setting.

Script #1: Disagreement with a Supervisor About Schedule

Scenario: The youth requested specific days off for a class or personal obligation, but their manager scheduled them anyway.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your supervisor. You told me you had class on Tuesdays, but I scheduled you anyway. I'll start: 'You're on the schedule this Tuesday. We're short-staffed and I need you to cover it.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I understand the schedule's tight, but I really can't miss class."
- "I let you know in advance because I'm trying to balance both work and school."
- "Is there another day I can help cover instead?"

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "Everyone's got something going on. You're not the only one."
- "If you can't be flexible, maybe this isn't the right job for you."
- "I already posted the schedule. It's too late."

Script #2: Conflict with a Coworker Over Shared Tasks

Scenario: A coworker has been leaving all the hard or unpleasant tasks to the youth during shared shifts.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your coworker. I've been clocking out early and leaving the rest of the shift's cleanup for you. I'll start: 'Hey, can you just take care of it tonight? I'm exhausted.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I've stayed late to cover a few times already. I need us to split it more fairly."
- "I want to be a team player, but I don't want to feel taken advantage of."
- "I'd appreciate it if we could plan ahead and both do our share."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "Why are you making this a big deal?"
- "I thought we were cool. You're not a team player."
- "I've been here longer, you should help out."

Script #3: Frustration with a Supervisor's Tone or Feedback Style

Scenario: The youth wants to talk to their supervisor about how harsh or dismissive feedback is affecting their confidence and motivation.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your supervisor. I tend to be blunt or short with people. I'll start: 'I don't have time to sugarcoat things. Just fix it and move on.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I want to do a good job, and I hear your feedback. It's just harder to take in when it's delivered like that."
- "I'm not trying to make excuses, I'm trying to understand and do better."
- "Can we find a way to communicate where I can ask questions without being shut down?"

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "I don't have time to babysit you."
- "That's how work is. Toughen up."
- "You're taking this too personally."

Script #4: Setting a Boundary with a Peer Who's Oversharing or Gossiping

Scenario: A coworker keeps pulling the youth into workplace drama or talking negatively about others, which is uncomfortable or distracting.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your coworker. I've been venting a lot during our shift and dragging you into it. I'll start: 'Did you hear what the manager said about you in the back room?'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I'm trying to keep things professional. I'd rather not get involved."
- "I don't want to get caught in the middle of things that don't involve me."
- "I'm trying to focus on the job when I'm here, not the drama."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "So now you think you're better than everyone else?"
- "I'm just trying to give you a heads-up, forget it."
- "Whatever. Don't come crying when something happens to you."

Script #5: Miscommunication About Job Duties

Scenario: The youth was given a task but didn't receive clear instructions. They're being blamed for doing it incorrectly and want to clarify without sounding like they're making excuses.

Provider says to begin:

"Let's say I'm your team lead. You missed a step in a task, and I'm frustrated. I'll start: 'This isn't how we do it here. You need to pay more attention.'"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I didn't realize there was a specific way it needed to be done. I want to do it right next time."
- "It would help to have clearer instructions, so I don't mess it up again."
- "I'm still learning, and I'm open to feedback."

Provider (in character) can respond with:

- "You should've asked if you weren't sure."
- "We don't have time to walk people through everything."
- "You've been here long enough to know this."

Guided Reflection

- Have you ever been in a situation like this at school or work?
- What part of this conversation felt hard to say out loud?
- What part of your response felt the most confident or true to you?
- Did this script help you stay calm and focused? Why or why not?
- What tone helped you stay calm in this role-play?
- What could make conversations like this easier in the future?
- How can you set boundaries while still keeping things respectful?
- What's one phrase you want to remember from this practice?
- What would make you feel heard without sounding like you're complaining?
- Is there someone at work you could practice this kind of boundary with safely?
- How comfortable are you saying "no" or changing the subject in real life?
- What's the difference between being rude and protecting your space?
- How did it feel to speak up to someone with more power than you?
- What's one way you could prevent this kind of conflict from repeating?

What Job is Right for Me? Career Exploration Worksheet

A career exploration worksheet for figuring out what fits you

There's no one-size-fits-all job, and that's a good thing! This worksheet will help you figure out the kinds of work you might enjoy, feel confident doing, and be able to manage in your life right now.

What am I naturally good at?

Check all that apply or write your own!

☐ Talking with people
☐ Solving problems
☐ Organizing or planning
☐ Working with my hands
☐ Paying attention to details
☐ Being creative (art, writing, design, etc.)
☐ Fixing or building things
☐ Learning new info fast
☐ Staying calm under pressure
☐ Working independently
☐ Other: _____

_____

What kind of environment fits me?

Check all that apply:

☐ I like working with people
☐ I prefer working alone
☐ I want variety in my day
☐ I like routine and structure
☐ I prefer quiet spaces
☐ I'm okay in loud or fast-paced places
☐ I want a job where I can move around
☐ I want a job where I can sit and focus
☐ I like clear instructions
☐ I like figuring things out on my own
☐ I want something flexible with my schedule
☐ I want something with long-term growth

What kinds of jobs sound interesting to me?

These don't have to be your final career, just ideas that sound fun, meaningful, or worth exploring.

- _____
- _____
- _____

What do these jobs have in common? (Ex: work with people, active jobs, flexible hours, etc.)

- _____
- _____
- _____

What might get in the way?

Check any that apply right now:

☐ I don't have reliable transportation
☐ My mental/physical health
☐ I need something part-time or flexible
☐ I get overwhelmed in loud, busy places
☐ I have a hard time with strict rules or authority
☐ I don't have work clothes or a uniform
☐ I don't have a resume or experience yet
☐ I'm nervous about talking to customers/people
☐ Other:

_____

What does this mean for the kinds of jobs I might **avoid** (for now)?

- _____
- _____

What supports would help me do well?

☐ Help finding jobs that match me
☐ Practice with interviews
☐ Someone to help me submit applications
☐ Transportation or help getting to work
☐ Job coaching or on-the-job support
☐ Help getting work clothes or materials
☐ A job that allows mental health accommodations
☐ Other: _____

Top 1–3 jobs I want to explore:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Interview Readiness Role-Play Scripts

Supportive practice for preparing youth to answer common interview questions with confidence and authenticity

Purpose: These role-play scripts help emerging adults build confidence and clarity when answering typical job interview questions. These aren't about having the "perfect answer," but communicating clearly, showing strengths, and staying grounded under pressure. Encourage youth to adapt the words to match their voice.

Script #1: "Tell Me About Yourself"

Provider says to begin:

"Tell me a little about yourself."

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I'm someone who's dependable and curious. I like learning new things and being part of a team."
- "I've helped take care of my siblings, so I'm good at multitasking and staying calm under pressure."
- "I'm looking for a chance to build experience and contribute. This would be my first official job."

Provider can respond with:

- "Interesting, what kind of work are you most excited to try?"
- "What makes you a good fit for this role?"

Script #2: "What Are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?"

Provider says to begin:

"What would you say are your biggest strengths and one area you're still working on?"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "One of my strengths is showing up. I take my commitments seriously."
- "I'm good at staying organized and asking questions when I'm not sure."
- "One thing I'm still working on is speaking up, but I've been getting better at it by practicing and writing things down first."

Provider can respond with:

- "Can you give me an example of how you've used one of those strengths in a real situation?"
- "How would you handle feedback about that weakness on the job?"

Script #3: "Tell Me About a Time You Faced a Challenge"

Provider says to begin:

"Can you tell me about a time you faced a challenge and how you handled it?"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "In school, I was struggling with time management. I started using reminders on my phone and planning out my week, and it helped a lot."
- "One challenge was being part of a group project where not everyone contributed. I ended up setting up a group chat and helping divide tasks more clearly."
- "I used to get overwhelmed when things were fast-paced, but I've learned to take short breaks and refocus when I need to."

Provider can respond with:

- "What would you do if you ran into a similar challenge in this job?"
- "Do you usually ask for help when something gets tough?"

Script #4: "Why Do You Want to Work Here?"

Provider says to begin:

"Why are you interested in working here?"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "I'm interested in this place because I've heard good things about the team, and I want to be part of a positive environment."
- "This seems like a place where I could learn new things and grow my skills."
- "I like that this job is active and involves working with people, that fits how I work best."

Provider can respond with:

- "What do you hope to learn from this experience?"
- "Where do you see yourself six months or a year from now?"

Script #5: "Do You Have Any Questions for Us?"

Provider says to begin:

"Do you have any questions for me about the job or the company?"

Youth practices saying things like:

- "What does a typical day look like in this role?"
- "What kind of support or training is offered for new employees?"
- "What does success look like for someone starting in this position?"
- "What do you enjoy most about working here?"

Provider can respond with:

- "Great questions! Anything else you'd want to know before starting?"
- "What would help you feel prepared if we offered you this job?"

Guided Reflection Questions

- What part of that answer felt most natural or true to you?
- Was there anything you struggled to say clearly or confidently?
- How did it feel to talk about yourself in a positive way?
- What's one thing you'd like to remember or keep working on for your next interview?
- Is there a type of question you hope doesn't come up? How could we practice that together?

Understanding My Rights at Work Cheat Sheet

A quick guide to the protections every young worker should know

Whether it's your first job or your fifth, you deserve to work in a place that's fair, safe, and respectful. Here are some of your basic rights and what to do if something feels off.

Basic Workplace Rights

You have the right to:

- Be paid **at least minimum wage** (Missouri's minimum wage in 2025 is **$13.75/hour**)
- **Get paid for all your time worked**, including prep, cleanup, or training
- **A safe work environment**, free from harassment, discrimination, and dangerous conditions
- **Take unpaid breaks for medical reasons** (including mental health), if eligible under the law
- **Request reasonable accommodations** for a disability or mental health condition
- **See your schedule ahead of time** and know your expected hours
- **Speak up about your rights** without being punished

Red Flags to Watch For

It's not okay if:

- You're being **bullied, harassed, or touched inappropriately**
- You're not allowed to take legally required breaks (e.g., lunch breaks for longer shifts)
- Your boss threatens to **fire you for asking questions** or saying no to unsafe tasks
- You're **working off the clock** (before or after your shift without pay)
- Your employer withholds your tips, shortens your hours unfairly, or retaliates if you speak up

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Accommodations for Disabilities Or Mental Health

You can ask for changes to help you do your job safely and effectively. These might include:

- A modified schedule
- Extra time to learn tasks
- Working in a quieter area
- Taking breaks to regulate or de-stress
- Using written instructions instead of verbal ones

You don't have to share your full medical history, just what you need to succeed.

If Something Feels Wrong

If you're not sure if what's happening is legal or fair, you can:

- Talk to a **trusted adult, provider, or job coach**
- Call the **Missouri Division of Labor Standards** at 573-751-3403
- File a complaint online with the **U.S. Department of Labor** at dol.gov

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Extra Resources

- youthrules.gov: A simple site about youth labor laws
- dol.gov/agencies/whd: Info about wages, breaks, and fair pay
- eeoc.gov: Report workplace discrimination or harassment

Being Me at Work Activity

A values-based activity to explore how young people choose what parts of themselves to bring into the workplace

Navigating professionalism can feel like walking a tightrope for many young adults. This activity helps youth identify parts of their identity and personal style they want to express in the workplace, reflect on why they might choose to hold some parts back, practice self-awareness and self-advocacy around balancing professionalism with authenticity, and understand that it's okay to adapt without losing themselves.

How to Use This Activity

1. **Print and cut out the cards** below (or write them on slips of paper or sticky notes). Fill in the blank cards if there's anything missing.
2. Ask the youth to sort the cards into three categories:
   "This stays private at work"
   "Depends on the situation"
   "I want to bring this to work"
3. After sorting, reflect together:
   - What influenced each decision?
   - Are there things they *wish* they could share more freely?
   - What kind of work environment would make that possible?
   - Have they been told to hide any of these before? How did that feel?
   - Were there any cards that were hard to sort? Why?
   - Have they ever been told to "tone something down" at work?
   - How do they decide what's "safe" to share?
   - Is there something about them that they used to hide, but now feel more confident expressing?
   - What would a truly respectful work environment look like for them?

My tattoos or piercings	**My hairstyle or texture**	**My name (or nickname)**	**My cultural background**
My fashion style	**My accent or slang**	**My religion or beliefs**	**My race or ethnicity**

My personality (funny, quiet, bold, etc.)	**My mental health struggles**	**My physical or learning disability**	**My recovery story**
My criminal record	**My status as a caregiver or parent**	**My foster care experience**	**My activism or advocacy**
My political or social beliefs	**My goals and dreams**	**My boundaries around time or energy**	**My values (loyalty, honesty, creativity, etc.)**
My need for clear instructions	**My need for flexible schedules**	**My preference for quiet**	**My style of problem-solving**

My way of communicating	**My sense of humor**	**My independence**	**My teamwork skills**
My leadership potential	**My way of handling stress**		