

For use with parents, teachers, and students



I. The Power of Story Telling

Talking about the social and emotional issues that both define and divide us is the first step in creating positive social change. We encourage you to use the stories and personal narratives on this platform to get the conversation started.

Each personal narrative takes less than five minutes to watch, but can spark hours of internal discovery and conversation by using the corresponding open-ended written prompts about race, equity, inclusion, and justice in America.

The video producers for Connect with Kids use production techniques that encourage youth and adults to connect through both listening and speaking. All stories are produced to provide a better understanding of how we see each other, treat one another, and can create connections through listening and speaking.

Research shows that individuals are more likely to make behavioral changes by building emotional connections and positive relationships rather than exchanging intellectual, data-driven information. When we watch a compelling story, the experience creates an emotional impact that is far more likely to create a positive change than through more traditional educational approaches. Much like reading poetry or listening to music, watching a personal story will often spark different emotions and connections among individual viewers.

II. Conversation and Writing Prompts

The conversation starters and writing prompts following each video are designed to help youth understand their own mirrors and windows.

The personal stories of others can serve as windows and mirrors of our own hearts and minds. When watching a story, we often see through our mirrors first or the part of the narrative that reminds us most of ourselves. How we see and feel about people, places, and issues are often influenced by our “mirrors.” We also connect to the parts of the story that reveal our differences and give us another view of the world - our windows.

These first steps in self-awareness can start as early as pre-school and over time develop into more complex intellectual and emotional development that lead to social awareness, healthy relationships, leadership qualities, and positive social change.

- A. How We See:** These prompts are designed to help students identify and discuss how they see key topics and issues revealed through characters in the story. By allowing students to discuss the themes that resonate most with them, they begin to understand the filters and lenses we develop in life that influence how we see and feel about people, places, and issues; and how those perspectives influence our feelings.
- B. How We Feel:** Our feelings often impact our behavior. And, sometimes, it's very difficult to understand or even name why we act in a certain way. By answering objective questions about what feelings we experience during the story, we begin to learn more about ourselves and name the feelings we have that influence our behaviors.
- C. How We Change:** When we put language around the experiences we are seeing that are new to us and how they are teaching us new ways to think and feel, we can also begin to explore how we can change our behaviors to create more positive outcomes.
- D. Deeper Learning: Define and Discuss:** As students answer objective questions that help them identify how they see and feel about the stories they have watched, facilitators can begin to assess readiness for deeper explanation and exploration for more topics and language that will lead to a deeper understanding of complex social issues.

It's important that we don't shy away from talking about topics that might, at first, make us feel uncomfortable because exploring different attitudes, new ideas, and opportunities for change are the beginnings of learning and growth. However, as we move through this process, it's important to meet youth and adults “where they are” and not to push an individual or group conversation that may not be age appropriate, culturally responsive, or provide a pathway for positive conversation and change.

We have provided a range of words and topics in this section that allow the facilitator or individual working alone to select topics and words they want to explore in more depth based on their individual desires or the desires of the group.

III. Best Practices



Stories and prompts are intended for use in one-on-one, small group and whole class settings in which students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems. Discussing different emotional responses using open-ended prompts in a classroom, family, or community setting can create new spaces for growth through a mutual aid process that

recognizes the power of peers as a vehicle for problem solving and reaching consensus.

Friends and families that care about one another learn to try out their opinions in a safe space, give and receive feedback, and provide positive support. These prompts can also be used for journaling that leads to self-examination and discovery of individual thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Through this process, we learn that we are not alone in our thoughts, feelings, and emotions and that, at our core, we are all connected by similar heart-felt needs and desires.

IV. Personal Growth and Change



We encourage all to move through this process with acceptance, compassion and patience for every individual. Each of us will have different feelings, opinions and reactions as we move through a collaborative process inspired by our common desire to build better individual lives and communities.

Facilitators

A facilitator is a person responsible for leading or coordinating the work of a group, as one who leads a group discussion.

Our stories and prompts are designed to support classroom teachers, counselors, community leaders, youth mentors, parents/guardians, and others in facilitating courageous conversations about the social and emotional issues that define our times.

Facilitators help groups explore, analyze, connect, build, and construct their own learning. Research shows that children and adults who emotionally connect with an experience are more likely to make life-long behavioral change than those who just receive information about that experience. Business experts call it “see-feel-change,” fueling action by sparking emotion. We call it opening minds and educating hearts by using the power of storytelling and peer-to-peer connections to create heart-felt associations.

Effective methods for teaching and facilitating group work in social and emotional learning skills are active, participatory, and engaging. Our videos feature real teens sharing their stories and adults who have experience in navigating tough to teach topics.

We provide open-ended conversation starters and writing prompts on a variety of topics and themes so that youth and adult viewers have the freedom and creativity to watch, listen, and discuss their emotional reactions and opinions without direction or limitation.

The facilitator's role is to serve as a trusted mentor and guide creating a caring environment that encourages inclusion of diverse ideas, respect for difference of opinion, healthy discussion and lively debate with an end goal of creating deeper understanding for all.

V. Facilitator and Participant Preparation

A. Preparation for Facilitators

Watch, Read, Make it Your Own Prior to each group session. We are aware that depending upon the make-up of your group and/or community, some topics may be too challenging or deemed inappropriate. Our best practices encourage to select open-ended prompts that resonate with your group.

Additionally, each individual in the group has his or her own unique life experiences. The prompts that accompany each story are designed to encourage individuals to reach into their hearts and stretch their comfort level by listening to the experiences of others and sharing their own.

By encouraging their participation in the learning process, you can help participants listen to each other and receive support and validation from you and each other as they participate in activities and discussion, which ask them to explore their feelings and reactions. As appropriate, guide participants toward supporting each other by asking them to react and give feedback.

B. Preparation for Individual Participants and Self-Paced Learning

Facilitators should be mindful of the emotional nature of using documentary film. The content is powerful and evocative because a person speaks directly to the audience. Speaking directly may lead to greater emotional responses among viewers, compared to similar written word content. This is intentional and valuable in creating self-reflection leading to positive change. Facilitators should be prepared for youth to connect deeply to characters or situations in videos.

Facilitators should preview videos several times and use their relationships with youth to prepare for how youth may react to films. Different people will see things and feel different emotions from watching the same video. Each set of conversation and writing prompts provides several different approaches to reflect, discuss, and learn. There is no one "correct" approach to discussion and reflection. Some youth may also need greater time to process and consider a particular situation or theme that is presented.

The key to successful facilitation and learning is providing an emotionally supportive environment, this may include providing time and space to process content that may challenge how a youth sees the community or world. Quality, caring relationships between facilitators and youth are reinforced in a variety of ways in a group setting; consider all the strategies in this guide when planning for activities.

C. Preparatory Empathy

At the core of effective facilitation is the notion that the leader must understand the population that he/she is facilitating, referred to as “preparatory empathy.” It is important for you to prepare for your audience by considering:

1. What young people are thinking and feeling about the many issues addressed in the video.
2. What it is like to be a young person in today’s world and in particular how youth of different races, genders, religions and socio-economic backgrounds may feel when listening to other students express their thoughts and opinions.
3. How adults tend to respond when students express their thoughts and opinions— and how you will respond.

Source: Principles of the Mutual Aid Model, Lawrence Shulman, MSW, Ed.D; Alex Gitterman, Ed.D; William Schwartz, Ed.D.

VI. Additional Strategies and Considerations

A. Setting the Tone and Climate for Learning

One of the most important variables in leading a session can be how the adult facilitator relates to the students in the class. Your challenge is to create an emotionally safe environment for honest dialogue and sharing without relinquishing your role (and control) as a leader. Key guidelines follow:



1. As an effective facilitator, young people need to know that you are both in charge of the group/classroom and that you are a truly caring person who is interested in the challenges they face. To effectively involve students, work with the group to develop a set of class participation guidelines or “norms.”



2. Each session, encourage participation by asking for feedback and responses from the students, and an atmosphere of acceptance by encouraging students to listen to differing viewpoints. It is your role to remain neutral and to be supportive and encouraging of all points of view.

3. Create a platform for open communication at the start of each session. Rearranging seating to allow students to sit in a circle facing each other can help to encourage open and direct communication. If participants get off-topic, find a moment in the conversation to gently remind participants of the goal and topic.

B. Navigating Difficult Conversations and Creating a Climate of Sharing

Students will learn and adopt new behaviors from adults and their peers when a climate of honest and thought-provoking discussion and sharing is fostered. This climate of sharing often leads to questions that can be difficult to address. The following guidelines and responses are offered:



1. What should I say if students ask challenging questions? When encouraging an open and trusting dialogue, students may ask challenging questions, such as “How have you dealt with prejudice?” “Have you ever broken the rules?” While they may simply be curious, more often the questions are asked because they want to see if you, as the adult program facilitator, really understand what it is like to

be a teenager faced with handling these situations. Generally speaking, self-disclosure is best kept to a minimum, or not shared at all. All things considered, it is best to follow your school or agency’s guidelines.

2. What should I say if a student discloses highly personal information about family members, friends, or him or herself? The resources are designed to have participants watch videos about “real people” and react to their stories. Therefore, it is likely that they will share personal information. Prior to discussions, it is important to tell students that they should not use names or identifying information. It is equally important to monitor if the disclosures are relevant to the discussion.

3. What should I do if the students do not seem to connect with the stories or people in the video?

Although a diverse group of children and teens are represented in the video segments, not everyone can relate to all of the people featured in the stories. Some students may get distracted if the kids in the video “don’t seem like them” and will need help to refocus. It is important to redirect the discussion to the issue and how they would handle the situation at hand. Ask students if there is anyone in the video that they were able to relate to, or transition the discussion to relating to the overall situation depicted rather than the specific individuals featured in the video.

C. The “All-in-the-Same-Boat” Phenomenon

A potent force is the discovery that one is not alone in his or her thoughts, feelings, and emotions. There is something special in hearing others articulate similar feelings and experiences. Such mutuality produces support that energizes learning. As students respond to key questions in the lesson, the facilitator can establish connections by acknowledging the students’ experiences, including academic stress, social anxiety and peer pressure.

Source: Principles of the Mutual Aid Model, Lawrence Shulman, MSW, Ed.D; Alex Gitterman, Ed.D; William Schwartz, Ed.D.

D. The “Strength-in-Numbers” Phenomenon

Research tells us that young people often feel overwhelmed by everyday stress and pressures. Media, peers and communities often contribute to this. The pressure is less overwhelming and frightening when students are able to deal with these pressures as a large group. When students collectively address this in a group setting, they can learn from each other and garner the support needed to manage these pressures.

Source: Principles of the Mutual Aid Model, Lawrence Shulman, MSW, Ed.D; Alex Gitterman, Ed.D; William Schwartz, Ed.D.

