Conversations: a middle school advisory program

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Conversations:

A Middle School Advisory Program

By

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Conversations: A Middle School Advisory Program

Mindy Swedarsky

Abstract

In this Integrative Masters Project is the Middle School Advisory Program called “Conversations”. This original work includes a rationale that develops the reasoning for establishing an advisory program at the middle school level. It explores advisory program models currently being used in the field including: (1) relevant content and activities for an advisory program as well as (2) explores the range of options a school has for implementing an advisory program in regards to time allotment and student grouping. This Integrative Master’s Project provides a snapshot of early adolescent physical, social, emotional, moral reasoning, and cognitive development and discusses the benefits to implementing an advisory program with 12 to 14 year olds.

The “Conversations” program was developed for middle school teachers to use and implement within their advisory curriculum. The goals of this program will directly connect to the developmental needs of adolescents. The program coaches students to better understand themselves and recognize their impact on others through guided conversations and classroom discussions, as well as through self-reflective worksheets.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................. 3
Rationale .................................................. 4
   Literature Review ...................................... 13
   Justification ......................................... 28
Original Material: Conversations: A Middle School Advisory Program 42
   Part 1: Access ......................................... 45
   Part 2: Access Unstoppable .......................... 77
Applications ............................................. 103
Appendix .................................................. 105
References .............................................. 138
The Rationale

Introduction

In this Rationale of the Conversations Middle School Advisory program, is a detailed description of adolescent development in regards to physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. It also includes a critique of existing materials and resources currently being used in the advisory field. The Rationale elaborates on structural models of advisory in regards to scheduled advisory time, student grouping, and benefits of advisory to students. Finally, this Rationale, includes a justification for the concepts and methodologies of the Conversations program.

Emergence of Interest in Topic

The impetus for writing an advisory curriculum comes from the author’s personal experiences in a middle school advisory program. The author switched in the seventh grade from a private school to a new district public school. The private school had only four students in the sixth grade class, and the public school seventh grade class enrolled over 200 students. Every morning at Rosa, advisories met to start the school day. There was one teacher to about 12 students. The advisor told students stories from her life, and the students felt comfortable going to her with any problems at home or in school. Rosa’s advisory program built a context to make the sixth to eighth grade program of 650 students feel much smaller and more connected.
According to the current principal of the school, before the school opened its doors in 1999, the district told the leadership of the school to create a program founded in the latest research of middle school education. Advisory, called “Transformation and Discovery” (T&D) at the school, was implemented only a year after Galassi (1998) noted that advisory programs "are a part of the accepted canon of middle school education" (p.1). The district was experimenting with advisory programs at the middle school level (grades 6-8), but the high schools did not have an advisory built into their schedule. By ninth grade, the advisory support system was replaced by a 15 minute homeroom at the beginning of each day and an overloaded guidance counselor who primarily communicated with students to make academic decisions. High school had more students, more hallways, more academics to juggle, and less social-emotional support. In the contrast between middle school and high school experiences, this author concluded that scheduled advisory programs make a difference in the daily lives of students.

Developmental Characteristics of Adolescents

For the purpose of the Conversations program, this essay on adolescent development puts focus on children between the ages of twelve to fourteen, approximately the ages of seventh and eighth graders. During adolescence, young people undergo many changes in physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and transition from the world of a child to an approximation of adulthood. No two children
experience these changes in the same way or at the same pace. The following essay will explore the range of developmental levels of adolescents.

**Physical Characteristics**

Adolescents are, on average, in a stage of rapid physical maturation. Both sexes encounter higher levels of hormones in their body chemistry with an increase of testosterone in boys and an increase in estrogen and progesterone in girls. The increased presence of these chemicals signifies the beginning of puberty and sexual maturation (Bell, 1998). Unlike babies and toddlers who undergo rapid growth in a short period of time without awareness of their growth, teens are very much aware and watching the changes in their bodies (Berger, 2008). Both young men and women notice that their growth is affecting how they interact in the world. Both sexes might feel uncomfortable when speaking about the particulars of their own physical development and feel uncomfortable discussing the changes of the other sex.

Some common changes unique to boys are: growth of testes and penis; voice deepens; first ejaculation; muscle and strength increase; body hair becomes thicker and hair grows all over body, but notably on the face and pubic region (Bell, 1998, p.13). Some common changes in girls are: menstruation, girls begin menstruating in the United States, on average, between the ages of ten and fifteen (Kidshealth.org, 2012); breast
growth; vagina and uterine growth; ovaries release eggs; hair grows in pubic region and hair thickens on legs; and hips widen (Bell 1998, p. 24).

Other examples of changes in adolescent physical development include an increase and imbalance of chemical and hormonal growth, resulting in acne and increased sweat gland production (Saylar & Mckee, 2009). Adolescents are beginning to reach their adult height (Bell, 1998, p.13); girls are about two years ahead of boys in height, but hormonally, girls are only ahead of boys by a few months (Berger, 2008, p. 366). In this period of growth, teens have uneven bone and muscle growth (Saylar & Mckee, 2009) and because of this, this age group is at a higher risk for sport related injuries than fully grown adults. This growth also contributes to periods of restlessness and fatigue as adolescents increase their nutritional needs (Saylar & Mckee, 2009).

Social Development

In addition to rapid physical growth, an adolescent also adapts new social relationships and emotional response to stimulants. Where pre-adolescent children are highly dependent on their family structures, adolescents begin to loosen their bond with their families in exchange for stronger peer relationships. Bell (1998) writes directly to growing teens, saying: “as a teenager you are old and young simultaneously- old enough to take care of yourself in more situations, but young enough to still be living at home. Many teens feel eager to free themselves from home and parental rules” (p. 55). During
this time, it is common for many “parents to find themselves feeling neglected or rejected” when their teens no longer participate as much in the family life as they had before (p. 57). In addition, adolescents often hide experiences from their parents that include sex, drugs, and alcohol.

Social groups are important during this stage as they allow teens to provide a “temporary reference point for developing a sense of identity. Through identification with peers, adolescents begin to develop moral judgment and values and define how they differ from their parents” (Gentry & Campbell, 2002, p. 21). Adolescents also share common experiences with each other (e.g. physical developmental) that no other age group can directly relate too (Bell, 1998, p. 70). During this state, adolescents wonder about how others perceive them and take great efforts to be accepted into peer groups. Many teens consider appearance and style important for becoming accepted (Berger, 2008, p. 423). Social status and acceptance is often so important that cliques and crowds form and provide both social control (i.e. what person(s) is allowed in or who is banned from participating in social groups) and social support (i.e. support around common goals, interests, or experiences) (Berger, 2008, p. 423).

**Emotional Development**

Emotionally, adolescents display a varied and unpredictable demeanor.

Adolescents “may seem more introverted and moody... and withdraw as they sort out
their feelings (Wood, 2007, p. 144). Some adolescents may appear to have low-self esteem characterized by “feeling depressed, lacking energy, feeling insecure or inadequate most of the time, having unrealistic expectations of oneself... or being excessively shy and rarely expressing one’s own point of view” (Gentry & Campbell, 2002, p. 16). These emotional layers of adolescence are usually associated with an increase and imbalance of puberty related hormones within an adolescent's body, but are also related to an adolescent's increasing awareness of self in relation to others.

Elkind (1981) theorizes that as adolescents expand into formal operational thought, developing the ability to think using abstract concepts and ideas, adolescents take on a new form of egocentrism. An adolescent is now able to “conceptualize his thoughts, this also permits him to conceptualize the thoughts of other people” (Elkind, p. 91). Since an adolescent is now capable of bridging between their own thought process and what they think others are thinking, and simultaneously are thinking about their own physical developments, “he is primarily concerned with himself... and assumes that other people are as obsessed with his behavior and appearance as he is himself (p. 91). An adolescent anticipates what another person is thinking and how that person may act; and since he assumes people are watching his behavior, he lives as though he is performing for an imaginary audience. It is common for adolescents to restrict their own self expression assuming they will be “under the constant scrutiny of other people” (p. 92).
In hand with their imaginary audience, adolescents construct a “personal fable” in which they believe that their feelings are a unique experience to themselves; they also conclude that they are invincible and that death, or otherwise, can only happen to others (Elkind, 1981, p. 93). In Schwartz, Maynard, and Uzelac’s (2008) research on egocentrism and personal fable, they suggest that “egocentrism may be a powerful influence on behavior each time an individual enters into a new environmental context and dramatically new life situation” (p. 447). Schwartz et al, also concludes that late egocentrism many be an effective coping mechanism during the transition to new educational and social settings.

Teens grapple with self reflecting questions such as “Who am I?” how does my cultural background, interests, education make me who I am. They also ask “Am I normal?” teens question if they are developing at a similar rate as their peers or if they are an outlier. Elkind theorizes that “most young people over concretize concepts such as self. The self is often thought of in terms of a single trait, such as 'selfish', rather than complex interactions of behavior” (Elkind, 1981). This idea contrasts Piaget's concept of formal operational thought in which an adolescent's thinking is “no longer limited by experiences... they can consider abstractions” (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

**Cognitive Development**
As adolescent bodies grow, their brains and cognitive abilities also begin to expand. A significant physical development unseen to the eye, is the growth and maturation of the adolescent brain. In the neurological development of adolescents, the prefrontal cortex of the brain begins to grow just before puberty. This area of the brain is responsible for “controlling planning, working memory, organization, and modulating mood” (Spinks, 2013, p.1). The impact of brain growth on adolescent behavior leads to the very gradual maturation of abstract thinking, as well as an inconsistency in regulating mood.

The process of cognitive development is very gradual; adolescents might reach into an abstract thought process slowly, but then reach back to concrete thinking during other parts of his or her life experience. Some emerging thought processes and interests emerge as adolescents begin to identify themselves in peer groups and they begin to locate themselves in larger societal networks. They became curious and empathetic for the world and show concern about oppressed groups (Saylar & McKee, 2009). For example, adolescents have an increased interest in current events and relate these events to their own lives. Adolescents are optimistic that they have the power to make a difference in the world.

Adolescents are approaching the formal operational thinking (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). In this stage of cognitive development, teens are able to think abstractly and go
beyond their personal experiences to find meaning in their learning and interactions. They are able to experiment with hypothetical thought in which reasoning includes questions like, “what if...?” and possibilities that may not reflect reality (Berger, 2008, p. 396). Adolescents also improve their analytic thought processes. According to the Keating Dual Processing model, teens are able to rank the pros and cons of possibilities and facts, and they rely heavily on logic and rationality (Keating, 2004). They use reductive reasoning as a tool to interpret a general statement through logical steps to draw a conclusion; they also use inductive reasoning as a tool to reason one or more specific experiences or facts to a general conclusion (Berger, 2008, p. 397). Teens use intuitive thought to make conclusions based on what “feels right”; this also connects to the “fable of invincibility” in which teens feel they will be able to live forever and therefore take many risks (Elkind, 1967). However, even with this gradual relationship with higher level thinking, they are quick to stereotype a person or group and cope with personal or group stress by scapegoating an individual or group. Kohlberg (1968) in his discussion of moral development, defines a thirteen year old male’s stage of moral development as a stage in which “the value of human life is seen as instrumental to the satisfaction of the needs of its possessor or of the other person”. In other words, young male adolescents morally connect to human life and to a particular value, and they think that value is dependent upon the needs of its owner. Male
adolescents put a moral value on who they are as individuals, but it is dependent on their own needs; once the needs of others are in the picture, many adolescents do not envision the perspective of another person.

The moral development of adolescent girls is seen by Gilligan (1982) as significantly contrasted to that of male moral development. Girls and women confront issues of moral relevance with a preconceived notion that a bond between people and creating relationship between people is of higher value than the aggressive nature of boys and men. Gillian discusses, “If aggression is tied, as women perceive, to the fracture of human connection, then the activities of care... are the activities that make the social world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression rather than seeking rules to limit its extent” (p. 43). Adolescent girls are highly concerned with the relationships they are creating in this stage of development, and moral dilemmas attempt to be solved with a “wish not to hurt others and the hope that morality lies in the way of solving conflicts so that no one will be hurt” (p. 63).

Literature Review

The programs selected in the course of this research were chosen to display a wide variety of content, participants, and activities. Poliner and Leiber’s (2004) guide shows administrators how to successfully implement school structural elements of advisory while also providing teachers with daily themes and activities to do in an advisory period. This resource is paramount to this research as it identifies the purpose for advisory program while comparing many different schools that use advisory programs
in varied ways. Poliner and Leiber (2004) admit that advisory programs are widely different in structure and practice, but offer schools a wide range of information and details to implement an advisory program that fits their needs. The Schrumpf, Freiburg, and Skadden (1993) program is focused in helping students cope with social and emotional changes in their lives including activities on self-esteem, listening skills, and relationship skills. This resource is significant because it shows advisory programs through the scope of adolescent social and emotional development.

Crawford (2008) shows how an in-classroom advisory program can be implemented with clear structure and routine. Once a teacher establishes the consistent structure for a program, the content that a teacher wishes to use can fall into the framework structure. Crawford offers consistency of programming so that both teachers and students will feel comfortable each day participating. Both the Blumen, Evans, and Rucchetto, (2009) and the Mortola, Hiton, and Grant (2008) programs offer an advisory designed for the individualized needs of adolescent girls and boys. These programs give girls and boys respectively a chance to discuss development and social expectations of their sex in all-girl or all-boy groups. Allowing adolescents to explore their own development in single-sex groups allows girls and boys to be fully self-expressed in areas they might otherwise feel embarrassed to speak openly about.

The final resource examined, Ciarrochi, Hayes, and Bailey’s (2012) workbook is not an advisory program at all. This workbook is written directly for adolescents as a personal guide to self-help and discovery. This text is significant to an advisory study because it coaches adolescent social and emotional development through the lens of how adolescents view the world and uses language that is accessible to this age group. The
workbook is structured so that each lesson builds directly off previously practiced skills. Though not formally an advisory program, the guided skills presented support the advisory value of social and emotional awareness.


This guide to advisory planning offers both administrators and teachers or advisors a comprehensive blueprint for initiating a successful advisory program in a middle or high school. For administrators, this guide offers suggestions about how to pitch an advisory program to the community, faculty, and students. It offers suggestions as to how students can be grouped and discusses relevant formats and themes that can relate to the mission and goals of a school. The program also suggests the potential allocation of time an advisory program can meet throughout the school year. Finally, they give suggestions for the expectations of advisors and how to train teachers or staff into advisor roles.

The guide offers full lesson plans for teachers to use in their classrooms. Each lesson plan suggests appropriate student grouping for an activity. The lessons also indicate at which point in the school year an activity would be most relevant. For example, at the beginning of the school year a get-to-know-you icebreaker is most relevant while at the end of year, an advisory might schedule a concluding celebration. While the authors acknowledge that their book is not a yearlong curriculum guide, they suggest many topics and specific lesson plans that can be used at varying points throughout a school year.
The authors believe that community-building, group cohesion and group maintenance are foundational in a successful advisory. The program details lesson plans with icebreakers to get to know fellow students names and their interests. They suggest activities for team building, and sharing cultural affiliations, family and personal stories. The program also supports facilitating respect in group dynamics and having an open dialogue about an individual’s impact on the whole group.

Other important aspects to this program are personal goal setting, reflection, and assessment. Under this umbrella, students might explore their own personal goals for the school year in terms of both academic achievement and outside of school performance. The authors also suggest methods for having students reflect on their work and how they might achieve the goals they make for themselves. Other skills included are the potentials of using homework planners and time management skills.


Schrumpf, F., Freiburg, S., & Skadden, D. (1993) suggests that when students walk into a school building they bring their struggles with them. Student might be thinking about poverty, divorce, substance abuse, violence and many other challenges that show up in a student’s academic performance and social comfort (p.1). Teachers are tasked with expanding on academic content while providing social and emotional support, and life skill coaching. Schrumpf et al, believes that students need to feel secure at school and to do that students need to have close relationships with both teachers and
peers. Teachers have the responsibility to educate the whole child by promoting citizenship skills where “individuals... have the skills to handle their own problems, conflicts and challenges” (p.1). The program includes many of the community building and academic skills that Poliner (2004) examines, but places significant emphasis on the social-emotional activity suggestions.

One of the central activities the authors discuss is “Self Talk:” the idea that the voice in a person’s own head guides the actions he does or does not take. The full understanding of self-talk is that (1) self-talk is happening all the time, and people (2) spend more time talking to themselves than to anyone else. (3) Self-talk is usually more negative than positive, and is (4) habit forming and predicts much of our behavior. (5) We have control over our self-talk, but (6) we believe our self-talk, and it affects how we feel about others (p. 91).

This program also stresses that students should think about what they want to be known for in the future and how to map this vision. The program unpacks how people make decisions in their lives, how to deal with put downs and be assertive. These skills are partnered with good listening skills and establishing strong relationships. The authors believe that “the most significant developmental issues for young adolescents are peer relationships” (p. 149). They suggest teaching students to be more aware of their fellow students by doing activities that discuss the qualities of friendships, or romantic relationships, and explore other cultures within the school.

Crawford (2008) makes an argument for advisory by suggesting that “through an advisory period of 15-30 minutes a day, teachers can offer students a consistent, dependable opportunity to get to know themselves and each other” (p. 10). Crawford offers two models to create consistency within an advisory routine: the (1) Circle of Power and Respect and (2) Activity Plus. “Once the teacher has mastered [either program], they can serve as containers for any content a teacher wishes to use... and when within that format [there is] a comfortable routine and a large variety of activities for growth, depth and engagement” (p.10).

The Circle of Power and Respect (CPR) has four key elements for running a daily advisory. The (1) “Daily News” is a message written on the board at the beginning of the period that students need to respond to before advisory starts (p. 33). Second is the (2) greeting where every student is greeted by someone and their name is said (p. 49). Though this might sound very simple, Crawford has gathered many ideas of ways to make this greeting session playful and varied including greetings like the Crystal Ball Greeting (p. 217) where students make one positive prediction for the future for the person they are greeting; or the Knock Knock Greeting where each student comes up with a knock-knock joke and tells it to their neighbor (p. 220). Third is (3) sharing, every student gets a chance to enter the larger conversation of the group: sometimes every student responds out loud to a prompt, or individuals are given time to share on a given
day. All members are expected to participate on a consistent basis (p. 61). Next is the (4) activity where the group does an activity that entertains the “human being need to play” (p. 77). Some suggestions for activities are team building games or academic challenges.

In the last part of the advisory time, the class returns back to “daily news” to have a conversation about its message. This conversation is also “a last word of encouragement” before students start the academic day (p. 86).

Crawford’s supplemental advisory plan is called Activity Plus. This model was intended to extend of the Circle of Power (CPR) framework to allow for more time to do an activity. The structure thereby allows you to kick off the activity with the daily news and greeting but provides more time for activity and reflection. It is structured as follows:

First is the (1) Daily News: The news segment of this routine is for making daily announcements but unlike the CPR routine, there is no interactive piece. Second is the (2) greeting and gives students a very short time to greet each other, but quickly segways into the activity. Third is the (3) activity. “The activity usually takes place away from the circle and uses most of the advisory time (15-20 minutes). It can be play... art projects, writing, planning meetings, [or] role plays” (p. 102). Crawford provides several activities to do including read alouds, board games, peer teaching, homework buddies, and role plays. Last is the (4) reflection, once the activity is complete, “students share about the
process of the results of the activity” (p. 103). This can be done in a full circle, in partners, or as a written prompt.

Crawford compiled 170 themes that can potentially be used throughout the entire year. The themes are broken down into 6 units of concentration including: getting acquainted, health and well-being, multicultural understanding, societal issues, adolescent needs and learning skills.


Blumen, Evans, and Rucchetto’s model for advisory and mentoring is specifically designed for adolescent girls. Unlike other advisory models, in which advisory programs are built into school culture and are planned by teachers, Girl’s Respect Groups are led by high school aged girls for middle school female students (p. 12). Teen leaders are given direct support and training from an adult group leader. The groups are run for six weeks in 90 minute blocks, after school. Groups have about 15 girls, two teen leaders, and one to two adult advisors.

Blumen et al, asserts that teen led groups “put middle school girls directly in contact with the people they most want to talk to” high school young women and gives a plan for choosing teen leaders and effectively training them (p. 12).
Girl’s Respect Groups weekly lessons drive through several topics including:

**What respect means to me:** Including conversations about having self respect, listening to your gut, setting boundaries, speaking up, building strong relationships, fighting for equality, and getting help. 

**Your mind and your body:** Including conversations about self talk, girl stereotypes, the and the value of keeping a journal; this lesson also includes thinking about body image and the choices about how girls think about their body, choose how they dress, and choose what they eat. 

**Your media IQ:** Groups think about the impact the media has on girls and their view of their bodies and emotional selves.

**Family:** Groups think about the girls’ role in their family, their rights in their family, and understanding their parents’ point of view.

Other topics the Girls’ Respect Group programs examine are friends, fighting for your rights at school, and romantic relationships.


The Mortola, Hiton, and Grant (2008) curriculum is a ten session program within a school that allows advisors to see at least two different groups of boys over the course of a school year. BAM! is not a mainstreamed advisory program within a school, rather boys are referred to the program from teachers or school guidance counselors. Mortola, Hiton, and Grant work with boys ages 9-12 in a public school setting, but their program can be modified to any age group (p. 71).
The authors noticed a clash between the characters of young boys compared with the characters of older boys. “Most boys, when they are very young... are in full contact with their own inner lives and experience their feelings [and] thoughts” (p.1). As boys grow older, “they lose touch with certain emotions [and] they struggle to participate authentically in relationships” (p.1). BAM! instructors think about the socialization process of boys, in which they are influenced to be “a man” and begin to censor themselves to appear “tougher and cooler” (p. 5-6). BAM! programs first uncover what the messages society sends to boys about who they are and who they should be. These limiting social messages often prevent boys from full self expression and they reject being vulnerable to emotions (e.g. fear) because those emotions go against societal expectations. The groups have respect for indirect communication skills (i.e. playing before talking); encourage and teach direct communication skills; and allow for physical movement (p. 17-18).

A key component to the success of a BAM! group, is the engagement of the adult group leader with personal stories that guide the message of a meeting and models access to feelings and thoughts (p. 24). Each session has specific objectives including: improving impulse control; building group cohesiveness; practice active listening (p. 89). The program intends to normalize the expression of fear (p. 93) and learn the impact of teasing (p. 98). BAM! groups explore elements of male socialization and expand the definition of manhood (p. 102). Boys learn about supportive friendships (p. 104) and encourage boys to express themselves without shame.

Most of the advisory program models discussed until this point agreed that students in an advisory program should be learning and practicing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Ciarrochi et al’s workbook is not a formal advisory program, rather this workbook offers direct coaching for adolescents to “learn about your struggle to understand yourself, to know your thoughts and feelings, and to manage fear and doubt” (p. 2).

The authors of this workbook are teachers, researchers, and clinicians of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). ACT is a behavior modification approach to changing a person’s response to past, present, and future events. This book teaches teens to “admit fear, take time to feel with a sense of genuine curiosity... without letting [fear] dominate over values based actions” (p. viii). These research base psychotherapy techniques, are a natural adaptation for a middle school advisory program as these skills directly address the cognitive awareness of adolescents.

The overarching concept in this workbook is to train adolescent in becoming a “Mindful Warrior.” A Mindful Warrior is “a person who has learned about his or her mind, who knows how to act with courage, and who tries to act with courage, and who tries to live according to what he or she values” (p. 9). In order to achieve these goals, a Mindful Warrior is “BOLD” and practices deep breathing, observes his or her own thoughts, listens to his or her values, and decides on actions and does them (p. 10).
Some major ideas this program discusses include: recognizing a person’s attempts to control “bad” feelings and the strategies people uses to control these feelings like procrastinating, sleeping drinking alcohol, or playing video games or even acting like they do not care, or saying mean things to others (p. 30-33). Ciarrochi et al calls a person’s mind a “Problem Solving Machine” and suggests that the mind is always looking for problems and then looks to solve them, often suggesting that a person himself is a problem that needs fixing. The workbook then challenges adolescents to notice what the mind is saying about internal emotions and life experiences. Once a person notices what the mind saying, the next step is to learn not to “mind your mind”, i.e. not believe everything the mind says, and choose your own path (p. 60).

The final section of this workbook helps adolescents uncover what they really care about and value. Adolescents might say, among many, that they value having courage, having fun, or being self disciplined (p. 94). Once adolescents have thought about what is really important to them, they can take specific actions to live by those values (p. 95).

**Literature Analysis**

After close examination of the above mentioned advisory programs, it is clear that most advisory models attempt to reach adolescents through activities, discussion topics, and skill building that are immediately relevant to adolescents in their present life
experiences. Most of the above programs recommend a curriculum that students can establish a relationship with the advisor and other group members, set personal goals, and teach self-esteem and communication skills. The formulation of the Conversations program is also designed to connect adolescents with their current life experiences, however, unlike other advisory programs the Conversations program is explicitly directed at the social and emotional realms of adolescent development. The program exposes adolescents to how they currently think about themselves and others and how they came to those conclusions. The lessons, skills, and activities teach students that who they are in the present moment is not right, wrong, good, or bad, they are simply part of their emerging sense of self in relation to others and the world around them.

Though each advisory program model that was examined has its strengths and balance, this author noticed a gap in directly nurturing an adolescent in regards to the social and emotional development of an individual. Most programs begin to expand on individual emotional awareness, but there is little discussion of adolescent development concepts such as egocentrism, over concretization of self, and other core concepts that are underlying experiences of adolescents and directly affect adolescents on a day to day basis. The Conversations program intends to provide adolescents with basic concepts of adolescent development so that they are aware of their own internal thought processes. Conversations acknowledges that the way adolescents think is part of who they are and is
in no way trying to change or “fix” who adolescents are or how or what they think. However, this program is intended to provide tools to adolescents that support adolescent thinking about themselves and the world and gain perspective on where their own thought process holds them back from performing to their fullest capacity.

The emotional life of an adolescent is fragile and it teeters between emotional and logical reasoning. Elkind (1981), theorized that adolescents tend to over concretize themselves. They have the potential to think big and abstractly but the moment something goes wrong adolescents can sum up who they are in one word: “stupid”, “ugly”, “useless”. Ciarrochi el at, applies the concept of over-concretizing the self in a tool labeled “storytelling” (p. 59). In storytelling, the mind condenses a whole life experience into a word or a phrase and puts it in a single category. Within the framework of over concretization, young adolescents will feel stuck in who they think they are or who other people have told them they are. By unpacking the stories that adolescents tell themselves about who they are, adolescent have the freedom to choose who they are now and who they are going to be. This author adheres that this behavioral approach is directly related to adolescent development because it addresses the ways adolescents think about themselves in order to free themselves from having limiting conclusions.

The biggest questions that adolescents ask themselves are “who am I?” and “am I normal?” Many of the answers to these questions come to adolescents in an over
concretized view of themselves. Their answers are based on past experiences that they think define who they are permanently. For example, an adolescent might trip on a ball in gym class and conclude that they are not athletic. In this curriculum students will not just look at how to strengthen their social or academic skills, they will be looking backwards into their own lives to see where thoughts about who they are originated (Ciarrochi, 2012, p.66), and once they have looked at that foundation they will have control to decide how they can move forward.

**Justification**

The evolution of the Conversations program came from this author’s personal acknowledgement of the value advisory programs bring to both an individual student and a school environment. Advisory made a difference for this author in transition to a larger school. In retrospect, Rosa’s impact came from the school culture of advisory that promoted small group social interaction, rather than a specific curriculum within advisory. The initial research for Conversations began around what effective advisory programs in school looked like and established the need for *implementing* advisory. However, there were a wide range of possibilities for the content of an advisory program. The core concepts within the Conversations program came from a combination of advisory materials, self-help programs and books that this author personally experienced and valued over a lifetime. After researching both adolescent development and self-help
resources, it became clear that understanding how one thinks about themselves during a particular stage of development leaves and impact all the way through adulthood. The final Conversation’s program uncovers how an adolescent thinks so that their current thoughts do not impede their future.

On this journey of personal experience through an advisory program and combing through advisory program models, the final version of the Conversations program looks much different than other advisory programs currently being used in the field. Most advisory programs models challenge students to think about who they are in order to get where they want to go in terms of academic or personal goals. Conversations also coaches students to think about who they are, but Conversations looks at how adolescents think about themselves and the world. The program gets to the root of how one’s internal voice drives decisions throughout life. It teaches students to acknowledge that thoughts come and go, and one does not need to trap the future in past experiences.

**Program Implementation**

The “Conversations Middle School Advisory Program” is designed for middle school students between the ages of 12-14. The program offers adolescents a chance to examine who they are in relationship to themselves, their families, peers, and community. Students will consider answering the introspective question of adolescence “Who Am I?” by identifying the values that are important to them (Stevenson, 1998, p. 81). In
grappling with this reflective question, they will have an opportunity in the latter part of the school year to practice putting their values into action.

An advisory period in middle school is a consistently scheduled time to have conversations with adolescents that relate to their own growth and development beyond physical changes. Most program models for advisory suggest that students use advisory time to build both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Crawford, 2008; Poliner et al, 2004; Schrumpf et al, 1993). Young adolescents also need time to have conversations about themselves so that they can bring up issues that matter to them. They need time to explore new pathways of relationships with themselves, family, and friends. The advisory period in a middle school gives students a structured opportunity to learn about themselves.

The “Conversations” program is designed for seventh or eighth grade middle school students. The program assumes that an advisory period is scheduled for every day of a school year and meets for at least 30 minutes. Students within an advisory are from the same grade level but are placed into an advisory randomly (i.e. groupings are not dependent on academic abilities or interests). Ideally, an advisory using “Conversations” would host no more than 15 students as many schools find that groups of 12-15 students are effective, while other schools established smaller groups of 8-12 (Poliner et al, 2004, p. 45). Larger groups might detract from the advisory value of ensuring that a “student is
known well by at least one adult” (Galassi et al, 1998; Jackson et al, 2000; Poliner, et al 2004).

Advisors are also academic teachers or hold other professional responsibilities within a school. Advisees will often see their advisors in academic settings or otherwise during the school day. In the transition from elementary school, many middle school students travel from classroom to classroom for varying subjects throughout the school day. Where in elementary school students are nurtured and evaluated by one teacher, in middle school, students may have four or more teachers. The advisor in middle school becomes a home base contact person for the student and for the student’s parents. With this infrastructure, “parents... [feel] they know who their child’s advisor [is]... [understand] report cards better... [and found that] it was easier to stay in touch with teachers” (Galassi et al, 1998, p.15). Parents also might use this contact with a teacher to ask general questions about the school.

This program will be implemented in two units. The first unit, “Access” will explore how students think about themselves. They will examine how their mind conjures thoughts and feelings to evaluate who they are. They will notice that who they think they are directly connects to the actions they do or do not take. For example, the mind might tell an adolescent she is stupid, and then in academic subjects she operates as if she cannot possibly learn, choosing to space out during lessons. Students will then
uncover what is important to them and experiment with aligning their actions to what they value. Some skills that will be taught and practiced in this section of the program are learning to recognize the difference between reality and the stories the mind tells, defining core values, and operating according to core values.

The understandings and concepts that students have wrestled with and practiced throughout the learning in unit one will be foundational in progressing to unit two. In unit two, “Access Unstoppable,” students will have an opportunity to directly apply the skills they have acquired by creating an action plan and engaging in a project that impacts their own communities. This section of the program is intended for the latter part of a school year. Some skills that will be taught and practiced during this part of the program include setting goals, following a self-set schedule, and project management skills. It is anticipated that students will see the difference between staying attached to or letting go of their own fears to produce a values inspired project.

A key element in this program is for adolescents to answer the “who am I?” question by identifying the values that are most important to them. The answer, fortunately, is not set in stone. How a student might answer that question at the beginning of the school year might be profoundly different than at the end, or over the course of his life. The mode that this advisory program will explore in order to answer this question is through values based learning. Using tools like Ciarrochi’s et al (2012), values guidelines
and other sources, it is anticipated that students will define themselves by a conscious understanding of what they value and will learn to operate according to those values. The “Conversations” program models specific tools and activities to aid adolescents into managing their own realities of life and push them to taking action outside of their personal comfort zone. Adolescents will learn to notice when they are afraid and how to not let it impede their present or future actions.

This behavioral approach is directly related to adolescent development because it addresses the ways adolescents think about themselves. Elkind (1981), theorizes that adolescents tend to overconcretize themselves. They have the potential to think big and abstractly but the moment something goes wrong adolescents can sum up who they are in one word: “stupid”, “ugly”, “useless”. Ciarrochi et al, applies the concept of over concretizing the self in a tool labeled “storytelling” (p. 59). In storytelling, the mind condenses a whole life experience into a word or a phrase and puts it in a single category. Within the framework of over concretization, adolescents will feel stuck in who they think they are or who other people have told them they are. By unpacking the stories that adolescents tell themselves about who they are, they have the freedom to choose who they are now and who they are going to be.

As referred to above, the biggest question that adolescents ask themselves is “Who am I?” (Stevenson, 1998, p. 81). Many of the answers to these questions come to
adolescents in an over concretized view of themselves. Their answers are based on past experiences that they think define who they are permanently. For example, an adolescent might trip on a ball in gym class and conclude that he is not athletic. In this program, students will be looking backwards into their own lives to see where thoughts about who they are originated (Ciarrochi et al, 2012, p. 66). Once they have acknowledged the foundation of their thoughts, they will have control to decide who they can be moving forward.

The “Conversations Middle School Advisory Program” is broken into several major themes including: language, the voice in your head, standing in the past, valued living, out of the zone, and inspiring life. Each theme, discussed in detail below, has several sub-topics or “Conversations” for a discussion with adolescents in an advisory period, and includes relevant exercises that give students an opportunity to personally connect to the discussion topic. The topics discussed within the program attempt to reach at the core of who students are and the activities are therefore very personal. The program assumes that all students within an advisory will participate in discussions and connected exercises, but acknowledges that a proportion of students might show reluctance to participating in the beginning stages of the program.

Advisories in Middle Schools
Many of the programs that were examined in the course of this research establish the need for implementing an advisory program within a school day or in an after school program. Advisory program models often suggest structural advisory elements that a school’s leadership is responsible for: for example, thinking about how students will be grouped, when and how long advisory time will be scheduled, and determine how advisory will impact the school culture and community. The following section will discuss the benefits of advisory programs within schools and give suggestions for implementing a successful school-wide advisory program structure.

Understanding adolescent development in regards to physical growth, social and emotional needs, cognition, and moral reasoning are crucial for middle level educators as they entertain curricular concepts. Equally relevant, adolescents should be exposed to looking at their own development beyond the physical changes that meet the eye. An advisory period in middle school is a foundational place to have conversations that relate to adolescent development. Young adolescents need a time to have conversations about themselves so that they can bring up issues that matter to them. They need time to explore new pathways of relationships with themselves, family, and friends. The advisory period in a middle school gives students a place to learn with an added benefit that it could help their overall success in school (Jackson, Andrews, Davis, & Bordonaro, 2000).
Establishing an advisory model in a middle school is appropriate because of the social and emotional transformations of adolescents. Advisories give this age group a time to play with new relational experiences between peers, adults, families, and communities. These relationships are often the crux of a middle schooler's total experience of school. Teachers even agree that “adolescents value school friendship and social relationships far more than school subjects and teachers” (Atwell, 1998, p. 66). Successful educators always attempt to create content driven by students' interests. Since relationships are in the forefront of adolescent thought, establishing a strong advisory program gives adolescents a chance to both create relationships in a small group environment and learn how to successfully navigate those relationships.

**Student Success in School**

The impact of advisory programs on middle school students is deeply rooted in researched based practices and is considered a cornerstone of strong middle schools (Galassi, Gulledge, and Cox, 1998; Jackson et al, 2000). Not only are middle schoolers thinking about relationships and how they are will interact with people, “the degree to which students are engaged and motivated at school depends to a great extent on the quality of the relationships they experience there” (Jackson, et al, 2000. p. 123). An advisory program allows middle schools to bridge adolescent interests with a school's educational goals to nurture long term academic success. Students tend to feel more
comfortable in school when they have established connections with teachers and their peers and as they form “a sense of connectedness to others and key institutions in their lives” this community foundation “is protective against an array of health risk behaviors and is associated with better mental health outcomes” (Bernat & Resnick, 2009). While academics are a quantifiable measurement of success in school, an adolescent’s social interactions in the school environment is a significant factor to all students and particularly to those students “who are vulnerable to educational failure, [or show] signs of withdrawal from learning or [have] motivational difficulties” (Furlong & Christenson, 2008).

Making meaningful connections between an adolescent and his environment can be understood through Catalano and Hawkins (1996) social development model in which they conclude that children connect to their environment based on their (1) perceived opportunities to participate in activities with others, (2) their degree of involvement in activities (3) development of skills for involvement, and (4) potential rewards for involvement (p. 156). Advisory programs in middle schools offer a direct way to address the social needs of students by encouraging active social interactions. In Crawford’s (2008) model for advisory, she makes a direct effort to make sure students feel connected in each of her advisory meetings by instituting a daily “greeting” in which every student is greeted by another, she calls it the “secret machine” for building connections (p. 49).
Connection to Parents

Throughout elementary school parents know who their child’s teacher is. It is easy to contact the head teacher of an elementary school student because there is only one email address to track down. Ultimately, only one person is responsible for knowing how a student in doing in all of the content areas, because only one teacher is teaching all of the content areas. The transition to middle school often offers a new structure of the school day. Students move from teacher to teacher, subject to subject. These new transitions not only challenge students themselves, but change a parent’s accessibility to their child’s education from one teacher to four or more.

Placing an advisory program at the middle level gives parents a starting point to access their child’s growth. Since advisory programs expect that “every student should be known by at least one adult”, then the first person a parent should have access to is the student’s advisor (Jackson, et al., 2002). The advisor can be a filter between the student, other teachers, and the family to bridge academics and home life. Galassi (1998) points out, parents may contact advisors when there are questions about school or report cards (p. 16). An advisor can also share with parents a student’s overall academic growth in a school, as well as social and emotional concerns (Poliner, 2004).

Time for Advisory
Students are driven by social and emotional experiences throughout their days and these experiences are the driving factors of all academic content. It is therefore imperative for middle school students, who are transforming social and emotional relationships with themselves, families, peers, and other communities, to be given time to nurture these transformations. Poliner (2004) gives several suggestions as to when and how often an advisory program might meet. Some schools have advisory nine out of ten days for 30 minutes each day (p. 23); others programs have advisory for 42 minutes every day (p. 25); schools might also choose a 10 minute block every day (p. 26). While each school has its own schedule to maintain, the most effective advisory schedule to develop student relationships would be offered daily between 30-45 minutes each day. Several schools directly observed scheduled advisory as the first period of the day (Rosa International Middle School. New Jersey; M.S. 234, New York), a suggestion for helping students transition from home life to learning.

**Student Grouping**

Poliner (2004) brings several examples of how to group students for advisory programs. In several high schools nationwide, advisory groups are built with members from each grade to strengthen the school community. Other models suggest grouping by gender or interest groups. Due to the significant developmental differences between grade levels of middle school students, this program recommends that all students be
grouped with their own grade level for the course of the school year. This system also
allows for all students to interact with the goals, objectives, and reach benchmarks of the
program.

Depending on the school, advisors might follow their students up through the
grades, or might only work with that group for one academic year (Poliner, 2004). This
author recommends that advisors change from year to year: (1) Students and teachers will
get a broader view of their school community; (2) any potential conflict between teacher
and student could potentially be eliminated with a new advisor; and (3) students work
with teachers they see in classes.

**Size of an advisory**

If an advisory program attaches itself to the Jackson et al (2000) idea that every
student should be known well by at least one adult in the school, it is best to make student
groupings in an advisory as intimate as possible. Poliner (2004) suggest that many
schools find groups of 12 to 15 in an advisory to be effective, though smaller groups
between 8 and 12 students provided greater personalized support. Any student grouping
is tailored to the availability of the school staff in proportion to the student body and
whether there are physical spaces groups can assemble.

**Small base groups within advisory**
Small group ratios are not always possible for schools to coordinate, but nurturing small groups is still possible even when advisories have 30 students participating. One suggestion is that smaller base groups are formed within an advisory to create smaller clusters of students in a classroom. Base groups “provide students with a social network upon which to draw and help to support student learning” (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Relationships will not form instantaneously among the students within a group, therefore Sharan (1992) suggests that “group composition should remain constant as long as it takes the group to acquire basic communication skills and develop a sense of group cohesion” (p. 45).

While it might not be possible at all moments of interaction with the groups, it is recommended that there is a teacher present during group discussions (Jackson, et al., 2000; Sharan, 1992). Especially when or if the content of a conversation will turn to deeper emotional topics, then Poliner (2004) suggest that teachers rely on social workers to be present to work with the small group of students.

**Assessment**

Unlike every content area in a school, advisory is one point in a student’s day when non-academic interests can be explored. Since many advisory programs focus significantly on social and emotional skill sets, there is always a question as to if or how an advisory program will be assessed. Schools have various theories on how advisories
can be assessed, if at all. Assessing an advisory program to some degree adds a level of seriousness to the role advisory will play in a school. Sometimes students will disregard a program if there is no accountability system in place. Poliner (2004) says schools can choose to have advisory ungraded, pass/fail, or assign regular grades; schools might also experiment with alternative assessments like rubrics (p. 68) or portfolios.
Conversations: A Middle School Advisory Program

Original Materials

In this “Original Materials” section is the Conversations Middle School Advisory program lessons plans. The program is divided into two major sections (1) Access and (2) Access Unstoppable. There is an outline of the themes and goals for each stage of the program. Each theme is divided into subtopics and each subtopic has associated lesson plans for an advisory group that span one or more advisory periods. The program includes worksheets for students and specific instructions to advisors for successful implementation.

“Conversations Middle School Advisory Program”

Themes

Part 1: “Access”

Language
Voice in your head
Standing in the past
Expectations

Part 2: “Access Unstoppable”

Valued living
Out of zone
Inspiring life
Goals
“Conversations Middle School Advisory Program”

Part 1: “Access”

Language

Goals:

- Students will understand that spoken language is how we speak to ourselves and others to communicate our thoughts and opinions.
- Students will understand that with spoken language comes other communication that is not said directly, but is communicated (ideals, assumptions, expectations, resentments...)

Voice in Your Head

Goal:

- Students will understand that their internal voice impacts how they view themselves and others.

Standing in the Past

Goal:

- Students will understand that their reactions to things that happen to them are functions of experiences from the past.

Conversations: Expectations

Goal:

- Students will understand that the expectations they have for themselves and others cloud their view of reality.
Part 2: “Access Unstoppable”

Valued Living

Goal:

● Students will understand that by declaring their values and living by their values they will create a life worth living.

Out of Zone

Goal:

● Students will understand that living an inspired life is dependent on moving outside of their comfort zone.

Inspiring Life

Goal:

● Students will understand that living a life that inspires them comes by taking specific actions to fulfill on their dreams.
**Part 1: “Access”**

#1: Conversations: Language

**Goals:**

- Students will understand that spoken language is how we speak to ourselves and others to communicate our thoughts and opinions
- Students will understand that with spoken language comes other communication that is not said directly, but is communicated (ideals, assumptions, expectations, resentments...)

**Concepts:**

- What is Language? Public and Private Language
- The Mind: The Internal Voice
- Descriptive Language
- Storytelling
- Predicting the Future

**What is Language? Public and Private Language**

*Note to advisor: For this conversation, students will brainstorm on their own components of language (see exercise). The class will convene as a group to discuss their thoughts and record them on the blackboard. Teacher will be versed in the “for advisor”*
paragraphs below to guide student ideas into categories of “Public” and “Private Language.”

For advisor:

Language is a complex system that includes words, images, sounds, facial expressions, and physical gestures. Language exists in two domains. The first, public language, includes speaking, talking, miming, gesturing, writing, artistic expressions, singing, dancing, acting etc (Harris, 2009, p.7). Public language also includes tone of voice, how people dress, and other acts that have symbolic intent (Zaffron & Logan, 2009, p. 39). There is also a realm of language that is constantly in use but is not usually heard. This sphere of language, called private language, includes thinking, imagining, day dreaming, planning, visualizing, analyzing, worrying, fantasizing, and so on (Harris, 2009, p. 7). Both realms of language are in constant use throughout our lives, they spin through our conversations with other people and our actions all day long.

Student exercise: (At the beginning of advisory) Write on the board, “What is language”? Allow students to make their own list and then open up the discussion based on student input. Write their ideas on the board. Discuss the difference between private and public language.

The Mind: The Internal Voice
Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. The worksheet “The Mind: The Internal Voice” should be given to students at the beginning of the discussion.

For advisor:

Our private language, e.g. thinking, imagining, visualizing etc., is our internal guide for how we operate and how we function. Our mind has an internal voice that filters our experiences before directly relating to the outside world. Everything we do, is based on a thought that was generated before we took an action. For example, when we get dressed in the morning, some thoughts in our head might be: what is the weather outside like? Do I have gym class today? What will my classmates think about the stain on my shirt? The voice in your head likes to tell you things. It tells you if things are true or false, right or wrong, good or bad. Your mind creates problems, offers solutions, gives answers. It agrees and disagrees. It asks “what is in it for me?” or “what is in it for them?” (Zaffron & Logan, 2009, p. 44).

Your mind is a complex vehicle that uses language to navigate the world. The mind is constantly:

• Processing a lot of information from many sources at one time.

• Making sense or meaning of that information.

• Labeling and fixing problems it finds.
• Evaluating how well it’s doing (The mind).

• Evaluating how well you’re doing (your mind and you are two different things).

• Comparing how you are doing to how everyone else seems to be doing.

• Essentially, the mind is a “problem-finding and problem solving machine... its job is to locate and fix problems both outside and inside your mind and body.

(Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 47). In problem-finding the mind asks, “is there a problem? and if there is, the mind’s problem solving muscle asks “how do I solve it?”


**Student exercise:** Hand out worksheet “The Mind: The Internal Voice”. When you have reached the student exercise, read the instructions out loud and give students 3 minutes to notice their thoughts. You may then open a discussion about students’ thoughts. Use discretion if choosing to allow students share what they have written.

Maybe ask a guided question like “what was the overall theme of your of thoughts?”

**Descriptive Language**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. As the advisor, model how you personally use descriptive language to navigate your day. The worksheet “Inventory of Descriptive Language” should be given to students at the beginning of the discussion.

**For advisor:**
In English class the teachers always say the best way to create a rich and juicy story is to add descriptive language to our writing. Its helps spin our story; entice a reader to keep moving through. One of the ways we use language is to describe what we see and what we know to be true. “The test of descriptive language is whether it accurately articulates the world as it is, where people see the world rightly. Descriptive language is often to used to look back, spot trends, and predict what will happen” (Zaffron & Logan, 2009, p. 68). Descriptive language is useful getting through the day because it helps us navigate the world: the football player plans the way to run and who to throw to, your friend tells you where to go to buy nice shoes, or your science teacher tells you the steps in a lab report.

**Student exercise:** Hand out “Inventory of Descriptive Language” worksheet. Read the instructions aloud and model how students should fill out this chart using examples from your own life. Once students are done, come together for a group discussion.

**Storytelling**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. The worksheet “Observing your own Storytelling Machine” should be given to students at the start of the exercise.

**For advisor:**
Your mind pushes the information it gathers into stories about you and your life. The stories that your mind generates are about yourself, others, or things that are happening. Your mind “weaves information into stories usually about you and your life... often these stories carry a lot of messages about the kind of person you are” (Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 57). Your life experience in comprised of hours and hours of events, conversations and thoughts. There is so much information that you sift through all day long. In order to handle all that information you chunk your life into concretized understandings of yourself and the world. You use descriptive language to truncate your life experiences: “the beach was fun”, “my life sucks”, “the party was boring”.

Where descriptive language runs amok, is when you use descriptive language to describe yourself, the people around you, and the things that happen to you. Things happen to you in your life and you condense those experiences into words. You failed a test and the over concertized version of yourself becomes “stupid”. You hit a home run and the over concertized version of yourself becomes “athletic”. You look in the mirror and the over concertized version of yourself becomes “fat”. A classmate raises his hand to answer a question and gets the answer wrong, and the over concertized version of him becomes “idiot”.
“The mind likes to look at you just to see whether there’s a problem to fix in comparison with how other people are doing. It asks, “Am I good enough? What’s wrong with me? Can other people see my flaws?” (Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 59).

**Student exercise:** Hand out worksheet *Observing your own Storytelling Machine* (Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 59). Read the instructions aloud and allow students to check off the statements that are relevant to them. Come together for a group discussion that links the students’ observations to the conversation from earlier.

**Predicting the Future**

**Note to advisor:** The Predicting the Future theme is designed to be discussed with students over 2-3 days. For these conversations, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. The Predicting the Future worksheets “Context of Language”, “Life Goes” and “The Future is Empty“ should be given to students at the start of each day’s exercise.

**Day 1: Your future is based on language.**

**For advisor:**

Your future actions are determined by both the public language you use in conversation, as well as your internal dialogue. Ultimately, the language you use in either of these realms determines how you see the world. When you say you are not organized enough to get all your homework done, then the way you see your world is that you
cannot possibly complete the tasks at hand. When you say your sister is a spoiled brat, the only way you see the world with your sister in it is “spoiled brat”. When you use very specific language about who you are, who others are, and how events happen to you, you see the world through the lens of the language you are using. You do not see the world for what it really is, you only see what the glasses you are wearing sees.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the Predicting the Future Context of Language Worksheets. Read through the first question and model how to do this exercise using an example from your own life. Let students fill out their chart on their own and come back for a group discussion. Then guide students through the second page, allow them to independently fill this out, and come back for a group discussion.

**Day 2: Your stories determine your future actions.**

**For advisor:**

Your stories about who you think you are determine all your future actions. You think that you are stupid, so you do not do your homework. You think that your ideas are not worth hearing, so you never raise your hand in class. Your thoughts restrict you taking action in the present moment of life. Your thoughts that come and go about who you are prevent you from participating in your own life. Your relationship with the future is not based in action, it is based on your fear of action. In your dreams you say that one day in the future you will be “successful”, “happy”, “free”, or that you will have
the perfect job and go on the perfect vacation; but your current ways of operating do not get you to your dreamed future. “Our default future consists of our expectations, fears, hopes, and predictions” for what we really want to happen, but our future is “ultimately based on our experiences in the past” (Zaffron & Logan, 2009, p. 44). While you bank on these future dreams as the outcome of your life, at this moment, you do not operate in a manner that gets you to the future. You bring all of your past experiences with you into the present moment, and since your future is so far ahead of you, you procrastinate your life in the present. You are left in the current moment overwhelmed with your life and no prospects for the future.

**Student exercise:** Worksheet: Predicting the Future: Life Goes.

*Write on the board “My life goes the way I say it goes”. Give students time to respond to quote and connect to an area of their life (relationship, challenging event etc.) that matters to them. Once students have completed their independent writing, come together for a group discussion about their reaction to the topic.*

**Day 3: Your stories are tied to your past.**

**For advisor:**
Your current stories and expectation of the world are tied to your past experiences. Once you recognize what your past says about who you are, the people around you are, and how situations that happen in your life, you are able to leave the past in the past. Your stories remain stories, but they do not inhibit future actions. If the past
stays in the past, you are left in the present moment and nothing in in the way of your future. “If we take out of our future everything from the past that we inadvertently placed there, and put it back in the past, then what’s in the future is nothing” (Zapolski, 2013). Your future is therefore empty for you to create the future as you want it to look.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the “Predicting the future: The Future is Empty worksheet.” Instead of a full group discussion, allow student to walk around to their classmates and share with at least 4 people their “empty” future.
#2: Conversations: Voice in your head

Goals:

• Students will understand that their own use of language impacts how they view themselves and others.

Concepts:

• Your thoughts and your feelings about the world are not true.

**Your thoughts and your feelings about the world are not true.**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

Your mind is constantly having a conversation about who you are, who other people are, and how situations are happening for you. Your mind thinks it knows everything. You evaluate, you judge. The worst part is that you think that the conversations you are having in your head, the evaluations of yourself and the world, your judgments of yourself and the world are TRUE! “Just because you have a thought or an emotion doesn’t mean it is true. You might think “I’ll never have a best friend,” but that’s just a thought, not the truth. You might feel unloved, but that doesn’t mean you are unloved- it’s just how you feel” (Van Dijk, 2011, p. 35). Your mind works really had to tell you that the split second jumps from thought to thought, emotion to emotion are true
and unquestionable. You make other people and their thought, wrong and think that you alone know what good and bad looks like.

Your evaluations of yourself and the world are fleeting. Something can happen or someone can tell you something and you suddenly have a totally different point of view on the same exact same experience.

**Story:** You have a very close friend named Alex. Alex is a hard worker in school, he always has a lot of interesting things to talk about, and you in general are glad to be friends with him. *How friendly does Alex seem right now? How would you act toward him? (Carracaocli, p. 56)*

Another of your friends, Kim, calls you to hang out. You invite Alex along.

You think that everything is going well, but at some point Kim pulls you aside and says “can we PLEASE ditch Alex, he sooo weird and boring. BAM! Suddenly your view of Alex is impacted. You start to second guess your friendship with Alex. Have I been wrong about Alex this whole time? Is Alex so boring? OMG I see it now, really, Power Rangers again? This is just pathetic.

“Your mind is always evaluating other people... sometimes helpful... sometimes not so helpful. For example, it might make you enemies where there are none” (Ciarrochi, p. 57). Your whole world view of Alex was shattered because someone said something about who he was.
Student exercise: Hand out the worksheet “Someone said something, and now...” Give students time to write their situation. Then come together for a pair share and then a full group share.

#3: Conversations: Standing in the Past

Goals:

- Students will understand that their reactions to things that happen to them are functions of experiences from the past.

Concepts:

- The Moments You Decided Who You Were
- Unsaid by Communicated
- Meaning Making

The Moments You Decided Who You Were

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

There have been moments of your life where you made a decision about your life. Something happened and since then you have operated as if that version of yourself is who you are going to be moving forward. Until you can recognize the stories that have
driven your life until this point, you will be stuck in the ways you have always operated and there will be no room for you to be who you are at the core.

At several points in your life you made a decision about who you are. Something happened on the playground and you decided you could no longer approach recess in the same way. You got the results of a test back and you decided that you were capable or incapable of the results you wanted. At this point, you will look directly at these moments that you made decisions about who you were and that image of yourself is maintained until today. Get the story out so you can recognize that the decisions of a younger you is not who you are now or in the future.

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the work sheet “3 Moments”. Model for students your own moments from your life that you decided who you were. Give students time to think and write. Next, allow student to pair share and then full group share.*

**Unsaid but Communicated**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

“Unsaid but Communicated” means that whenever you say something, the words are not the only things that are being communicated. Your language is carried with assumptions, expectations, disappointments, resentments, interpretations, significance,
and situations that occur as dangerous (Zaffron & Logan, 2009, p. 39). Essentially, whenever you speak, your language is carried with assumptions of how the world is supposed to look or be. An assumption is something “that is assumed to be true” (Ravick, 2010). You have an assumption that whenever you go to the supermarket, the shelves will be stocked; you have an assumption that whenever you share a bad report card with your parents that they will react in negative way; you have an expectation that when you ask someone to hangout that they will follow up. Expectations and assumptions are reasonable for the human mind to have because these tools aid daily navigation. However, “when we make assumptions about other’s intentions, reasons for action, or their understanding of the situation we may be laying a flawed foundation for our understanding of the relationship” (Ravick, 2010). When we are communicating with others and we carry assumptions and expectations about who they are or what they are capable of, we disregard who the person who is standing in front of us really is and what they stand for.

Making decisions about the way things are or the ways things are not, is not limited to your own personal and internal struggle. You do this all the time with things you do not even think about. You have an image or an idea about how a princess should look, what she would wear, and how she might act. Or you have an idea of how America should be. Your idea of how these things “should” be might not really represent how they
are or are not in the real world. When something happens that challenges our idea of the
perfect picture we are befuddled. We assume that our expectations, assumptions,
disappointments or interpretations are the way it is and the way it should be.

(Ask advisory and write their responses on board): What should a princess look like and
act like?

Your definition of princess came from somewhere: it might be the media,
books you have read, pictures you have seen. You’ve given time and thought to
classifying a princess and you assume that the picture perfect is the way other models of
princess should look. A “princess” might not hit as near home to you, we generally in
today’s world,- minus England- we think of a princess as a fictional, or maybe a Disney
character.

But try this on: What expectations to do have of your mother or father? Where
did you get this idea? Once you acknowledge what your expectations of who people are
and where you got that idea, you are suddenly free to choose to hold onto the story you
hold or face the reality of who this person is. You can literally start from scratch. You do
not need to bring you past ideas into your current or future experiences with this person.
By doing this, you strip away all of the story around a person and you are left with is just
that person.
**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Noticing your expectations”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.

**Meaning Making**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

A human’s experience is to make meaning of the world around them. We categorize things and information and we look for purpose in the actions we take. The meaning you make of the world pops up directly from your own thoughts: a thought pops in your head after something happens and you hold that meaning close to you. Example: Alex is talking about Power Rangers, and you make it mean that he is boring. The meaning you make about Alex is hot glued to Alex in your mind. You can’t separate who Alex is from your thoughts about him.

You begin to weave a story about who Alex is based on your evaluation of him: Alex is boring because he talks too much about Power Rangers, Alex is weird because the topics he talks about are weird. Every time you make a judgment of Alex you essentially attach an imaginary bubble to Alex and when you see Alex coming down the
hall, all you see are the bubble you have glued to him. What you don’t get is that these bubbles are only attached to Alex using your own glue. Alex’s sister glues other bubbles to him, Alex’s other friend glued other bubbles to him. You however, operate, as if the bubbles you attached to Alex are the real Alex.

You need to take responsibility that the bubbles you placed around Alex, and other people in your life, were placed there by you. You need to take responsibility for the meaning you made about Alex. Everything that you think defines Alex was put there by you. The problem is that your thoughts about who Alex are, are not true. They are only your thoughts and evaluations. And these ideas about Alex only rest in past experiences of Alex or what other people have said about Alex.

Take this situation:

Your mother asks you to clear the dinner table and your reaction is “why can’t my brother do it? Why is she so mean? Doesn’t she know I have homework?” and on and on.

If you watch from a view of a bystander, all your mother asked you to do was set the table, but all you heard was this voice in your head saying all types of stuff about how rude she is for even considering that thought. She was wrong and you were right. You, no matter what, were going to come out of the argument with the upper hand. All she said was “clear the table” and you made it mean she was an awful human being. Even though, all she said was “clear the table” your reaction to what she said was far greater
than what actually happened. Your reaction became even more important to the event, and more time consuming, than just cleaning the table. You, in the moment, were living as if the thoughts in your head were so real that you could not interact with your mother at face value. You were only interacting with the bubbles you had glued to her that you think defines who she is.

You put so much time and energy into defending your positions that your ears have no room to hear anything anyone else is saying. All your mother is really saying, is to please help clear the table, the meaning you were attaching to who she is and what she said became a bigger story than what was actually said.

Student exercise: Hand out the worksheet “Meaning Making”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.
#4 Conversations: Expectations

Goals:

- Students will understand that the expectations they have for themselves and others cloud their view of reality.

Concepts:

- The “S” Word: Should
- Anxiety
- Being Aware of What You Are Not Aware
- Hiding and Shame

The “S” Word: Should

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

The words you choose on a daily basis reflect your past experiences. Before you jump into doing anything, you usually reason with yourself about how a conversation or task will go. In these situations you often use the word “should”.

“My strategy for going through this should be...”

“I should be using this time to study”

“I should tell my mom how much I hate it when she...”
“I should be doing my homework”

“I shouldn’t worry about what other people think when I...”

“Should” statements “can get out of control and raise your anxiety level when they are unreliable and unimportant” (Schab, 2008, p. 36). Your thoughts when you use the word ‘should’ imply that you are not doing or going to do something the “right way” because you think only a professional can do it ‘right.’ By using a ‘should’ statement, you second guess your own judgment on how to complete a task at hand, and you rely on your past experiences to guide you.

You already know that the weight of the past is not worth weighing you down. It gets in the way of the life you want now and in the future. ‘Should’ means your past ideas of any situation is occurring for you in the present moment: “It should go X way, because the past says it should go this way...”

“Should” also occurs when a situation has already passed and you relive that experience in your head the next day, the next week, or the next year.

“I should have done it differently.”

“I should have studied harder.”

“I should have said it this way...”
Your ‘should’ statements rarely reflect your own ways of looking at the world in the present moment. They imply that the way you are going about your life is not “good enough”.

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the worksheet “Oh, SHOULD you?” Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.*

**Anxiety**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

Sometimes we are so nervous in our life that we miss out on things we want. We are afraid of talking to new people, or having your picture taken (Shannon, 2012, p.3). Many times our fears about a particular situation come from the voice in our head telling us that we are not worth it, other times our fears arise because of a failed past situation. You are afraid of talking on the phone because in the past you thought you had nothing to say. You were afraid to ask the teacher a question because the one time you did, someone in the class laughed at you. Those thoughts and stories about who you are still carried with you into your current life experience.
You often have very real, physical reactions to the things that make you nervous, such as: Nausea or butterflies, a shaky voice, blushing or sweating, muscle tension or shaking, or maybe your heart pounds in your chest (Shannon, 2012, p. 13).

You anxiety is often cause by your thought that other people are constantly judging you (Shannon, p.14). You are scared to be who you are because you think everyone in judging your every move. To protect yourself, you do not put yourself in situations that might cause you any sort of exposure. You put yourself in a situation that you do not get what you really want. Your fears in life come from a place of “social perfectionism.” You want every interaction with people to be perfect, maybe find the right amount of wit, humor, or coolness. If you do not think you can fulfill on those high standards, you believe you should not even bother trying. “By not allowing any possibility of failure... you are expecting yourself to always be interesting, relaxed, funny, smart, or whatever you think you should be. You are setting a higher standard for yourself than others...” (Shannon, 2012, p. 39).

The voice in your head is setting these high standards and expectations of you. You are the one saying you need to be a certain way in order to have friends or achieve your dreams. Right now you operate as if the things that are important to you in life, like humor or coolness, are so important that only the best and bravest can and should have them. You are so stuck in the way it “should” be there is no room for other possibilities of who you are or how events in your lives should play out.
**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Behind your back.” Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.

**Being Aware of What You Are Not Aware**

*Note to advisor:* For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

Your fears and anxiety are gathered from your own thoughts and tell you to act in a particular way. Something happens and your thoughts trigger you to be ashamed, angry, anxious, scared, or even happy and excited or any number of emotions. You could have had thousands of reactions to something that happened, but based on your thoughts or emotions, and your past stories, your mind happens to settle on one area that allows you to avoid responsibility, avoid domination, be right or wrong, make others right or wrong, or be in control (Zaffron and Logan, 2009, p. 47). The voice in your head tells you that in order to survive a situation you must shrink away from it, thus giving you permission to be stuck in the situation you are in. You are not able to see any other possibility, movement, or resolution of the current situation.

What you are not aware of at the current moment is that when you are in the middle of a situation, you have the power to direct the outcome. When your first thought is “She hates me,” and your emotional reaction is shame, fear, or otherwise, you on a pinhead can change your course of action. You can choose how you want to act or who
you want to be. If your initial thought is “I will have nothing good to contribute”-
seriously question yourself. What other outcomes can you predict? How about “This
excites me, maybe it will excite them” or “I don’t know what they’d think, but I can find
out” (Shannon, p. 85).

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the worksheet “Getting out of the Mud”. Model for
students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students
time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.*

**Hiding and Shame**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation
using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for two to three days of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

**Day 1: Emotions that cloud our experience**

There are many emotions that we have throughout our lives. The most common
human emotions include: joy, fear, anger, shock, love, anxiety, disgust, sadness, guilt,
and curiosity (Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 28). Those emotions pop into your existence when you
see a situation coming at you. Sometimes we become wrapped up in these emotions and
the present moment and future is clouded by our reactions. You very often not only have
these emotions, but you judge yourself for having them. For example something happens
and you become angry. You justify your anger within your own thoughts, but you also
judge your emotions. People often think that fear, anger, and sadness are “bad” emotions
to harbor, while joy, love, and curiosity are considered positive emotions. Of the most
common emotions human kind experiences over half are judged to be “bad,” yet
consistently through our lives they come up in varying situations. When you have these emotions, you judge yourself for having these emotions.

When you consider an emotion bad, you run, hide, and feel ashamed for feeling this way. We try so hard to avoid bad feelings, so we end up suppressing, avoiding or ignoring those emotions. We fight our basic emotions as if we had any control of having them or not having them. You pretend that having those feelings are an inherent problem and you attempt to get rid of them. “You can’t force yourself to not have feelings or thoughts. The more you try to, the less likely you are to succeed” (Ciarrochi, 2012, p.35).

**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Inside/Outside Reactions”. Read the top paragraph of the first page (“when you experience any kind of emotion...”) aloud. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write. When the students have all finished, have a pair share so students can talk about common inside/outside techniques. Then, ask students to move on to page two. Read the questions aloud and give student time to write and reflect. Come together for a full group discussion.

**Day 2: Separating you from your thoughts**

Your thoughts and emotions come at you all day long, in empowering forms and degrading ones. You, however, are not your thoughts. You can separate yourself from the thoughts in your head. The first step to doing this is to notice the way your mind reacts to your thoughts. In today’s exercise you will watch your thoughts come and go without judgment of having them. Since human beings cannot get rid of feelings and thoughts, our goal is to practice accepting them as they come to you.
Guided meditation

Close your eyes. We will start with deep belly breathing. Fill your chest and tummy with air and slowly exhale. You notice your head telling you this exercise won’t work and is hippie. You notice your internal voice thinking about your next class.

Breathe. You listen to your heart beating; your mind wanders through your day. Your ride or walk to school, where you sat or what you were thinking about, who you were talking to. You got to school and walked through the hallways, who did you see? What were you thinking about them? Let your thoughts come. Your thoughts are not right or wrong, they are just your thoughts. You walked to your locker, you opened it up to get what you needed for the day. Did you have everything? You have classes all day. Your first one was math, then English. You look around the room notice your friends, you see your teacher, she asks about your homework. Notice your reactions, your body movements; your thoughts are not right, not wrong, they are just happening.

The bell rings for lunch, you grab your things, and look for a friendly face to go to the cafeteria with, hopefully you’ll get together. Notice your thoughts – they are okay to have, they are not who you are just your thoughts. Gym class, the ball gets thrown your way. The coach asks you to change into gym clothes. They are just thoughts, not who you are. More classes, science, social studies, Spanish. The bell rings for the end of the day.

Full group discussion: What were your thoughts? What did you do with them?

Day 3: Giving up the Mud

Hiding and Shame (Continued)
All the thoughts that were elicited from yesterday’s exercise you had them, you noticed, and they came and went. Many of those thoughts you have had many times, and your actions reflected your thoughts. Being concerned, scared, or worried, about the future is directly part of who we are. We are worried about having good friends, we are scared our parents might find out about our bad grades, or we are worried we might fail a test. The future is uncertain every minute, but you act as if you can’t move from the mud because your fears and worries hold you there. You operate as if you and your thoughts are one and the same. “Being concerned, worried is part of who we are, but we act as if we are stuck with it” (Zapolsky and DiMaggio, 2012). You being stuck is your story, it’s the meaning you are making of your experience of fear. Freedom, real, juicy, freedom comes from giving up your story of being stuck in the mud.

For now, the mud is comfortable it is safe, no one bothers you or expects anything else from you. You know that the mud is not where you want to be forever, though. At this time, we are going to explore what is really important to you and what excites and motivates you. When you know what you want, all the future looks like is you fulfilling on what you want.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Your thoughts and your future”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. For example, a person might be going through a breakup. They might think, “no one can love me,” “he is a jerk,” “I don’t need her”; but what they really want in this area of their lives is love, friendship, and peace. By believing the thoughts in our head, it costs us the real things we want out of life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.
Behind an Upset

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

There are so many moments of life where we get upset about something. Your friend cancels an outing, your father finishes the ice cream. Your sister stole your hairbrush, your brother won’t let you hang out with him. Something happens and you react. You do not just react, your reactions are robust. We try to manipulate the other person, persuade, get angry, and freak out. Then you start thinking and saying things like “he always...”, “she never...”, “he is such a...”. You start to bring in stories that happened before this particular event to persuade your listener that your side of the story is the right way the story goes. And all this drama that happens in the moment you are upset is suddenly bigger than what you were really upset about in the first place. The story you are generating insists that you are right and on top of the situation. You reaction is what Zaffron and Logan (2009) called a “racket”.

A racket is:

1. A consistent complaint
2. Your behavior that goes with the complaint
3. Payoff: Being right or wrong, avoid domination, control situation, and escape responsibility
4. Cost: Losing something to get what you want: losing love, losing closeness

(p. 50)
For example, you consistently say that your classmate is really stupid. Your behavior that goes along with this thought is that you roll your eyes, tell jokes behind her back and laugh at her. Your payoff for this racket is that you get to be right that she is X way and you get to control her social status, and seemingly your own, in and outside of school. The cost for your behavior is that you lose any possibility for relationship, love, or making a difference with others. A racket stays with you in every situation where this person is present or comes up in conversation. Most pieces of a racket you are not even aware of having consistently, yet they burden your life experience. Just like how you are working on separating your thoughts from who you are, your rackets are connected to your own ideas about who you are and about who others are.

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the worksheet “Rackets”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write, then come together for a full group discussion.*

**Comfort Zone**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

You live within your comfort zone. It is super safe there. You have your breakfast every morning safely, you do your homework the same way every night because it is safe. If you are a school driven person you do your homework because otherwise you might get in trouble. If you are not a school driven person then you might not do homework because you think you are dumb or you don’t want to be controlled. Whatever it is, you are safe where you are. You are safe talking about the baseball game, no one
will know what is deep within you. You live in a comfortable place because it is predictable and you have complete control over it. There is nothing right, wrong or anything about your lifestyle, it works for you.

Your dreams live outside of that comfort zone. You wish that you could go to the Super Bowl. You hope that you can go rock climbing this summer. You want to write a book or go skiing. Your life as it currently goes has hopes, wishes, and dreams of something for your future. You say you want those things but you do not play the game of getting them. That voice in your head starts telling you it is not possible, you are not skilled enough, you are not good enough, no one will support you, or you do not have the money. So why even bother? Why take the steps to get there? Some of you do the things you want but you are not invested to push beyond where you already are. In your comfort zone, you say “hey, the way it is fine, no one expects bigger of me. I’m good”.

But when you get to the end of the road and nothing but death is staring at you in the face, and you look back over your shoulder and see your life, do you have everything you wanted? Did you have the relationships with family you wanted? Did you have good friendships? Were you happy? Did you have a career you loved? The vacations you dreamed of? Did you have it all?

Living out of your comfort zone will get you everything you want while, living in your comfort zone, gets the same old.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Life without Barriers”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write. When they are done, allow students to walk around to as many students as possible and tell each other what they would do a life without barriers. Then,
come together for a full group discussion.
Part 2: “Access Unstoppable”

#5: Conversations: Out of Zone

Goals:

- Students will understand that living an inspired life is dependent on moving outside of their comfort zone.

Concepts:

- Comfort Zone
- Taking risks
- Reasonable/unreasonable
- Fear of rejection or being told no
- Making requests of others

Taking Risks

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

Sometimes you stop yourself from doing something because you see a risk in it. Your head tells you not to go visit your friend because you risk being insulted; your head tells you that you can’t go skiing because you might break a bone. Your head tells you not to wear an outfit because people might laugh at you. Your head tells you not to talk to your mom about girls stuff because she definitely will not understand.
You project that there is imminent risk in the actions you might take, so you weigh the costs of risk to you. You make pro and con lists that weigh the outcomes. “If I walk into the store to get a job application, they might not hire me, so why be rejected?”; “If I ask my teacher for an extra day to work on my assignment, she will probably say no, so why make the request?”

All your fears of risk come from your past, and you weigh the risks in the present as if the exact experience of the past is relevant in the current moment. In questioning if you should go skiing at the risk of breaking a bone: do you know for absolute certain that you will break a bone? When you say no to the trip, you are operating as if the past- other people’s experiences, your experiences, what someone said- is going to happen to you, therefore you don’t take the risk.

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the worksheet “Taking Risks”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write. When they are done, allow students to walk around to 3 other students tell each other what they would do in life if the risk barriers were gone. Then, come together for a full group discussion.*

**Reasonable/Unreasonable**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

Pushing yourself to get what you want is the difference between being reasonable with yourself and being unreasonable with yourself. Your reasonable self will wake up in the morning get dressed, eat breakfast, go to school, go through the day, and then go to
bed. Your routine will sit in your comfort zone. It will stay in your zone until the end of time.

Living an unreasonable life means pushing yourself beyond who you think you are and what you think you are capable of. You think you are lazy? Try accomplishing everything you need to do in the morning, and see how much time in your day you will have.

For example, you want to make 100 cookies for a bake sale, study for a social studies test, and call your friend. You need to do it all because you committed to do them all, but the day before you have all of these things looming, you panic. “It’s too much, I can’t handle it, I have to cancel something”. STOP. See how unreasonable you can be with yourself. Being unreasonable starts with you holding to what you say you will do. If you promised your teacher you would study, you honor that; if you promised student council you'd bake, they are depending on you to do so, so you honor that. Being unreasonable means you understand that when someone is relying on you, you follow through 100%.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Unreasonable”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write. When they are done, allow students to walk around to 3 other students tell each other what three things they will do over the next day to practice being unreasonable. Then, come together for a full group discussion.

**Fear of rejection or being told no**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.
For advisor:

The risks that we impose on situations that have not happened yet, inhibit all life moments. Sometimes, not getting what you really want comes from a fear of being rejected or being told no.

“Well, my mom will just get angry if...”

“Sarah will flip out if I ask.”

“Dad wouldn’t let me go the party even if I was crawling on my knees”

“They probably do not want me to work for them, so I will not even ask”

Your fear of being told no prevents you from even asking for what you want. Just like everything else in life, there was a moment in your past that you asked for something and you were told no. Now you operate as if that is how all people will respond to you. Or you do not think that another person will think that your idea is any good, so why share it with them?

Your prediction about how another person is going to respond leaves that person no to room to respond honestly. Either you never give them the chance to even hear your ideas, or you are going to take it personally if they say no. Their no sometimes is a factor of them having their own life to think about. Let them decide how they want to respond, all you have to do is ask.

**Student exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “The ‘No’ Barrier”. Model for students how to fill out this worksheet using examples from your own life. Give students time to think and write. When they are done, allow students to walk around to 3 other students tell each other what three things they will do over the next day to practice being unreasonable. Then, come together for a full group discussion.
Making Requests

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one to two days of exploration. Have students take out their “Life without barriers” worksheet completed in a previous advisory session.

For advisor:

With almost anything you want to accomplish in life, you need to interact with other people. You want to write a book? You need to talk to an editor and a publisher. You want to go skydiving? You need to talk to an instructor. For almost any dream you have, you will come in contact with other people who will help you fulfill on that dream. Those people are direct partners in getting the life what you want in live.

For advisor:

The interactions you have with each person that is involved in your project needs to connect to that person at a personal level. Usually when we make request of people it is one sided. We think that our needs are so important that the person either feels guilty, burdened, or obligated to accept the request. They might say yes and be annoyed about it; or they might say no and you nag, pester, and bother them until they give a disgruntled yes. In the process of your old requests, the people in your life were left with other than positive reactions to your requests.

When you left a scene, suddenly, they thought of you as burdensome, selfish or demanding. They grumbled, they did not do the work, they did not do it right, or you thought it was not good enough. You would tell them, or think, that they were useless, or incapable of success. Your requests never appeared to the people you were working with
as an opportunity for them to learn a new skill, get involve in a worthwhile project, or excite them in anyway.

The old you, who had a story for everything, who made you right and others wrong, who tried to avoid being dominated, and were an overall jerk, did not have room for other people to exist and be inspired by your goals and projects. But the new you understands that the people in your life are the ones that can partner with you to live the fullest life.

A new request to a person will look completely different than how you have communicated with people in the past. A new request will look like this (*Write this on the board*):

1. Acknowledge who the person is for you.
2. Acknowledge who you were in the past the new way you will act in the future.
3. Make a request that gives specifics (dates, time, action) that occurs as an opportunity for the other person, and allow them to decide what they want to do.

A conversation might look like this:

“Hey Harry! I know you are incredibly creative and have done really detailed work in class assignments and art class. You really inspire me and I know those around you to do amazing work. We are working as a team to put on a school carnival for February 8th. I know that in the past you felt like you were pushed or yelled out, or really insulted. All that made you want to back off. A lot of that was my fault. I wanted to make
everyone do it my way and did not let you do things that inspired you. For this project, the only guaranteed outcome I want is fun, inspiration and creativity. I was wondering if you would be willing to take on the creative manager of the project because that is your strength?”

Suddenly, your request is not about you and your project, you instead have created an opportunity for them to be who they are in your project instead of your minion or puppet.

**Student exercise:** Model for students how to practice this method of engaging others in a dream:  (With a partner) Choose a person you would like to get involved in your project. Tell your partner who that person is and how you think they will react to your request. Your partner will get in character as that person and then follow these steps: (Write these on the board or have them available on a projector):

1. **Acknowledge who the person is for you.**

2. **Acknowledge who you were in the past the new way you will act in the future.**

3. **Make a request that gives specifics (dates, time, action) that occurs as an opportunity for the other person, and allow them to decide what they want to do.**
#6: Conversations: Inspiring Life

Goals:

- Students will understand the living a life that inspires them comes by taking specific actions to fulfill on their dreams

Concepts:

- Life that Inspires
- Scheduling what you want in life
- Trying vs. Doing
- Working Backwards to Reach Goals
- Whole and Complete
- Actions that make a difference with others
- Impact on others
- Cleaning up your impact on others
- Letting Go

Life that Inspires

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one to two days of exploration.

**For advisor:**

Everyone from the poorest women in Africa to the richest man in America wants to wake up every morning to a life that inspires them and a life that excites them. We know that the construct of our lives comes from the language we label it with. When our language inspires us about who we are and what the world around us is, we are able to
touch the hearts of others. Aside from the language you use there are many measurable ways to live the life you want to live.

First: you need to operate as though the words you say are who you are. If you say “I’ll do that,” you’ll fulfill on your promises. If you say you will reach a goal of X, you will do everything in your power to reach that goal. Right now, you consider the words you say as fleeting: words you say pop out of your mouth like thoughts pop into your head, but you treat them as if they don’t matter. You tell your friend you will meet her at the front door in 10 minutes, but it takes you 20 minutes to actually get there. You tell your sister you’ll play with her after dinner, but then you flake behind your homework. “They’ll understand,” you tell yourself; “it is no big deal,” you convince yourself.

In your current reality, you think that the words you say only impact yourself. You think that what you say and what you do don’t impact other people. When you don’t follow through on what you say, you give yourself all kinds of excuses that ultimately communicate that you were right and have the upper hand. The reality is, however, that the words you say are the way the world is for you.

“I want to write a book”

“I want to go skydiving”

“I want to get good grades”

You say things but do not take yourself seriously; you don’t take your own dreams seriously. You don’t think that what you want to happen will happen. So why bother trying for it? If you can’t honor your word for things that are important to you, you show up as if the things you say are not important.
Our goal is to align what you say with who you are. You say you are unstoppable, then that is who you are. If you’re unstoppable, you operate as a person who is unstoppable. Your actions as an unstoppable person will show up in school, at home, after school activities. People will relate to you as an unstoppable person.

**Student exercise:** Pair share: Describe a situation in which you treated your word or commitments as if they did not matter. Come together for a full group discussion.

**Scheduling what you want out of life**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

The practice of honoring your word comes in doing the things you say you are going to do. Simple. You say it, it happens. This is not magic. We don’t live in a fairy tale. The things you say you are going to do, or dream to do, will get done when you put those things in your future.

When you schedule the things you need to do in life and the things you want to do, you honor both your commitments to others and your own dreams. For the following exercise, take out your calendar and start scheduling the things you need and want to do. When you schedule your life, there is less worry around fulfilling on the things you say you will do. If there is a list for Tuesday, you do not have to think about Wednesday’s tasks. Putting it into a calendar takes some of the worry out of life.

**Student exercise:** Tell students to take out their calendars, phone, iPad, whatever it is that helps you track your dreams and responsibilities (if students do not have these things, please refer to worksheet entitled “Scheduling my dreams”). If students need help
kick starting this process, let them refer to the “Life without barriers” worksheet or, you can tell them to think about what they want to accomplish today, this week, this month, and this year on first page of the “Scheduling my dreams” worksheet. Give students time to write and reflect. Have each student share some of their commitments in small groups.

Trying vs. Doing

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

Yoda, the little green man in Star Wars, had an epic conversation with Luke Skywalker. Yoda said, “Do or do not, there is no try”. Many times you have said “I will try to get it done”, “I will try to do my math homework”, “I will try to practice piano this week”.

Take for example, this (object at hand). [Call for a volunteer] Now, I want you with all your strength to TRY to take this object from me. Go! (Person takes object). I didn’t say take the object, I said TRY to take it. Let’s do this again. TRY to take this object. (Person doesn’t take it). Again, I said TRY to take it, no don’t take it. One more time, TRY again. (Person is confused). Confused? Because there is no in between do and do not. “Try” is only a construct of unreliable language.

“Try” is your excuse to wiggle out of responsibility. If you were authentic when communicating with your teacher, and really meant what you said, “try” would not pop into your vocabulary. You will either practice piano or you won’t practice.

**Working Backwards to Reach Goals**
**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

Sometimes dreams have multiple stages to success. You want to climb Mount Everest, but before you do that you need to train physically, buy plane tickets, and prepare your supplies. Climbing to the top of a mountain is not as simple as taking a walk. What gets most in our way of reaching our goals is that we become overwhelmed by all the steps we need to take, or other parts of our lives get in the way of what we want. But when we live by our word, our lives suddenly have more space to fulfill on what we really want in our lives.

As a teacher, I was trained to create lesson plans in a method called “Backwards design”. We create a final goal for our class to reach and from there, work backwards to figure out what skills are needed to reach those goals. Though this example fits in the “adult world”, reaching a dream that inspires you can fit in this “backwards” model.

Say you wanted to run a 5K that is four weeks away:

**Set your goal:** Race day, run a full 5K

What steps do you need to take along the way in order to complete your goal? *(Ask students to think generate a list of steps to read this goal and write them on the board, use the below list to guide you if needed):*

- One week before, I should be able to run 2 full miles.
- Two weeks before, I should be able to run 1 full mile.
- Walk two miles.
- Stretch muscles.
• Buy new shoes.

• Register for event.

Or maybe you wanted you plan a surprise party for your friend. To get to there, you need to: Invite friends, bake a cake, and fill balloons. There are details that help fulfill on our dreams that are actually part of the dream we are fulfilling but exist in time and space apart from “action day”. Each piece of the puzzle is crucial to fulfilling our dream. So now our goal is to choose our dream and think about all the pieces that go into fulfilling that dream. When do those pieces need to happen in order for “action day” to be successful? In the case of inviting friends to a party, you would need to invite guests at least two weeks in advance, while blowing up balloons might happen an hour before.

**Student exercise:** What things do you hope to accomplish in a specific life goal?

*When all the pieces of planning your dreams are put into existence on your calendar, you will notice there is more time in your life for everything you want to do.*

1. What is on your current to-do list for a specific project?

2. When will you complete each task for this project?

Give students time to think and write on the “This dream will happen, and here is how” worksheet. Then come back as a full group and continue the discussion using the “for advisor” notes below.

**For advisor:**

All of the things on your list are important and need to get done. Some things are really exciting for you, the other things you have to do because it falls under a role you fill like “student” (homework), “family member” (chores) etc. When all the things you
have to do are coming at you at the same time, the situation often occurs as
overwhelming and stressful, but by you declaring how your future is going to look by
putting the things you need to do into existence, you only need to chew small pieces of
your life at a time. You can focus on the present rather than fear for all the things you
have to do in the future. The future is exciting, so put in it what you want. Give students a
few more minutes to review their lists and add details. In pairs, let partners review the
other partners work and give suggestions for any actions that might have been missed.

Whole and Complete

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation
using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

Your dreams will be accomplished when you say and do everything that is
needed to fulfill on your dream. You know that throwing a party has 10 steps to act on,
and in order for it to be the “ultimate party” it will take doing everything on your list in
the fullest way. Your balloons cannot be half filled, you cake cannot be only a little
baked. Each piece needs to be fulfilled whole (all of it) and complete (checked off the
list).

You can think of whole and complete like this (Write these bullets on the
board):

• What are my exceptions of how it’s done?
• Who do I think others expect?
• What can I do that no one expects?
When you fulfill on all aspects of a dream, it is not a dream anymore, it is reality. Your life is driven by reality now. Your normal is exciting and inspirational.

**Student exercises:** Hand out worksheet “Whole and Complete”. Give students time to think and reflect on the questions posed on the worksheet. Pair share the writing they have done, then come together for a full group discussion.

**Actions that make a difference with others**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

You have worked through who you are and have a clearer picture of what really matters to you. You have real power to making a difference with people. At this stage in our exploration of ourselves, you will take on a project that makes a difference with other people. Who you say you are and the actions you take will all align to create something that inspires your core and other’s hearts. In your interactions with this project you will know who you are *being* through how others respond to you. You will notice when you try to control an outcome and when you give up control to allow the outcome to happen. People are going to be excited about what you are doing, not only because of the project you are doing but because who you are is worth attaching to.

How you operate in this classroom as you go through planning your projects is a microcosm of how you operate in every other area of your life. You get angry when things don't go your way in this project, you likely have the same reaction elsewhere. When you get a test grade you don't like, when your dad tells you to clear the table. All of your good, bad, and ugly will show up in this process. Through it all, however, your
classmates and teachers are standing for you to fulfill on your dreams.

**Impact on others**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

Who you are and what you do have a direct impact on the people around you. Your reactions to your own life not only affect yourself, but also those around you. Your actions, reactions, and states of being, leave traces with the people in your life. You, however, operate as if you live in a universe all to yourself. You think who you are is unimportant to those around you. When you leave your backpack in the middle of a hallway, you operate as if your actions will not effect other people. You operate as if showing up late to your friend’s party is not important and you think your actions will have no impact. You are so involved in looking good or succeeding that you don't even notice what is going on for others.

You don't take responsibility for your thoughts and actions that impact other people. You even make excuses for yourself:

“It is not my fault I was late, I......”

“It is not my fault she got upset, I....”

You are so wrapped up in who you are at the moment that you take no responsibility for the things that happen to and around you. The reality of life is, however, that you are responsible for the things that happen to and around you. You are responsible for the things that happen to you and the things that do not happen to you. You are responsible for the way people react to you or do not react you.
You are responsible when your sister is lonely.

You are responsible when your grades fall short.

You will give every excuse in the book for why you are not responsible to for what happens: “but she was bothering me, it was her fault”; “but he threw the ball at me first so I…”

When you own that you are responsible for the way your life is and the way your life is not, you have power over your circumstances. You will drive the car of your life rather than sit in the back seat.

**Student exercise:** *Handout the worksheet “I’m Responsible”. Read the instructions aloud and allow students to think and write. Come together for a full group discussion.*

**Cleaning up your impact on others**

**Note to advisor:** *For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.*

**For advisor:**

When you take responsibility for something that happens, you can regain love, friendship, and whatever else it is that matters to you. Owning responsibility in many situations means that you have a conversation with another person that admits your responsibility. A conversations of this nature would include (*write these bullets on the board)*

1. Admitting responsibility for your actions and the impact it had on you.
2. Notice how you impacted another person.
3. Creating a new way to be in the future.
4. Share this with another person.

This conversation might look like:

“Hi Jane! I need to clean something up with you. Remember that time I kept putting garbage in your hair and everyone was laughing? Well I really want to own that. You were angry, sad, and really upset. The impact on me was that I lost your trust and lost you as a friend. Moving forward I want to have our relationship back, and I want you to know I will always have your back.”

**Student exercise:** (With a partner) Choose a person you would like to clean up your relationship with and take responsibility for the way things went. Tell your partner who that person is and how you think they will react to your request. Your partner will get in character as that person and then follow these steps: (Write these on the board or have them available on a projector).

1. Admitting responsibility and the impact it had on yourself.
2. Notice how you impacted another person.
3. Creating a new way to be in the future.
4. Share this with another person.

For homework: Have three conversations with people in your life in which you take responsibility for your past relationship to make a difference in your future.

**Letting Go**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**
Living by your values and doing things you say, will give you power in directing your future. These tools do not predict the on the ground results, they reflect you fulfilling on what is important to you. The “game day” results will all be linked in your effort up until that point. However, even with all your plans set in place you never know what wrench will be thrown in along the way.

You’re planning a party: you blew up every balloon to the fullest, you invited all the guests, iced the cake- but on the day of the event, it rains. Or you studied for a test, you spent hours and hours, you have note cards and review sheets, studied with a friend, only to find out that the core of the material you studied was only half of what was on the test. Or your family planned a family vacation and at the last minute your brother gets sick and you cannot go.

The final result of anything you are planning is not always the way the final way it happens. What, however, does not change in the whole process and final result is who you are and what you value.

Because things didn't go the way you expected you react: you might get angry or feel defeated. You might tell yourself that it is “ruined,” “it is all their fault” or “everything I do fails.” Your mind gets chatty and all those evil things you tell yourself come up one after another after another. Not only does your mind start spinning, but now, here front and center, is proof of your failure. And worse, other people see it too.

In your upset over the situation you let your mind be right and your values disappear. Something happens and suddenly you are not who you are but the person your mind tells you who you are. However, even in these moments of potential disappointment, you have the ability to choose who you want to be and what values you
want to live by. Do you want to be the person your mind is telling you are or do you want to be the person you say you are? Values can be carried through any situation you are in at any time.

In the moment the rain starts to fall on your party, and you are getting upset, turn to your values. If you have declared your values in the situation, those values follow you through smooth and rough patches. If you value success, fun, and creativity, in the moment the rain starts to fall you can choose your next steps of action. If you were living by those values even in a situation of upset, you can get your way.

In a situation that looks like it might not end up the way you envisioned, your old self would have thoughts and take specific actions that would spin the downfall into drama. But your new values driven self has other options:

It rains but you value **success** so what can you do to get the result you want but in a different way?

It rains but you value **fun**, so how does your party transform?

It rains, but you value **creativity**, so what else can you do that aligns what you want to your value?

Changing the course the results of a project will take, does not mean you sacrifice the results you want. Changing course means looking at the situation and what you value and asking yourself, “how can my values fit the circumstances?”

You can find your values in any situation, at any time. When you are looking for your values that is all you will see. You won’t see upset or story because you aren’t looking for upset or story. You will only see your values. You will reap from the situation exactly what you want to get out of the situation based on the values driving you.
The transformed you will see rain falling from the sky and might say, “so, we’ll do it inside”, or you’ll call your friends and tell them rain check, party will move to tomorrow. The new situation will not come from upset but from a place of power.

**Student exercise:** Hand out worksheet “Transforming the outcome”. Allow students to think and write, then come together for full group discussion.
#7: Conversations: Valued Living

Goal:

◦ Students will understand that by declaring their values and living by their values they will create a life worth living.

Concepts:

• Values Driven Life

• Values Led Life

• Declaring your values to others

• Acting your values

Values Driven Life

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

Your life and everything you do comes out of what is really important to you. From making your bed, to being with people, to being successful, taking actions in any area of your life arises from what is really important to you. Your values are at the core and subtext to how you operate in everything you do. Your values can be defined in one or two words. You might have values for love, inspiration, success, power, or fun. Your values show up in all areas of your life.

Your values show up in “good” situations, for example: you go to your friend’s tennis match because you value friendship, fun, and play; and in “bad” situations, for example: you are angry with your friend because she cancelled on you again. What is really coming up is that you value friendship and commitment.
When you take a step back and ask yourself what is really important to you in any situation you are in, you will give yourself a pathway to act in a manner that fits your values. In the good moments you might value love and connection, and in the harder moments you want support and inspiration.

When you are clear about what is important to you, you will find those elements in any situation you are in. When you approach situations knowing what you value, all that is clear about what is happening is that value. That is all you are looking for and that is what you will get. You will notice that when you declare your values your actions align to those values. For example, in the situation that your friend canceled on you, knowing your values would allow the situation to show up in a different way. You would communicate to your friend, “hey, I really value your friendship, what happened yesterday?” Using our own words to communicate your values to your friend and what they hear is that “you're important to me.”

**Student Exercise:** Hand out the worksheet “Values I Value.” Give students time to think and write about the values that are important to them and how these values show up in different areas of their life. Allow students to share in pairs, then come together for a full group discussion.

**Values Led Life**

**Note to advisor:** For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

**For advisor:**

Every action you take in this world is driven by what is really important to you. When you do your homework, you are showing that you value education. When you clear
the dishes from the dinner table you are shown that you value cleanliness or family support. We usually go about our day not really thinking about what is important to us, we just do things the way that we think they need to get done. Sometimes we do things that go against what we value because we are afraid or do not want to look bad.

For example, you do not want to raise your hand in math class because in the past you almost always got the answer wrong; or you think you burden the teacher by asking the same question again, or worse bother other students in the class with your question; so why raise your hand? The cost of your behavior is that you will not expand your learning, the teacher doesn’t know how you are really doing, and you hold on to your fear. By not raising your hand you get to affirm that you are not good at math, are stupid, or just can’t do it. You get to be right about who you are.

The way you currently operate, your story about what might happen or about who your mind tells you you are, gets in the way of what is really important to you and what you value. “Living by your values means listening to what is important to you choosing to act accordingly. It means, “I stand for this [or] I care about this” (Ciarrochi, p. 84). Declaring what you value is essential to being yourself, not who your evil mind is telling you who you are. When you declare your values you also declare your personal code to live by.

If you value learning, then raising your hand in class is an action that you take that supports your value. If you value friendship, then an action that you take is picking up the phone. If you value health, you might exercise or eat a lot of vegetables.

Living by your values is as simple as declaring your values. You might have different values for different parts of your life, but who you are is as simple as declaring
how you want to operate in your daily life with yourself, the people you interact with, or things that you do. It is you saying that you want to be a certain way in every situation.

*Student exercise:* Hand out the worksheet “This is the real me”. Before letting them get started, using the following text as a guide to help guide student thinking:

“What do you want other people to see you as? Declaring who you are is sometimes challenging because when we look at our lives we begin to judge ourselves. For some reason though, we put more importance of who we are based on how we think that others see us. For this exercise, think about how you want to occur to other people. Do you want to look scared or hidden? Or do you want to look powerful, successful or creative? Who do you want to be in every moment of your life? **What three qualities do you want to be seen as?**

As you are thinking about your qualities, you might be thinking, “well, that quality is really what I want but I do not think I can actually be that way”. Your mind now is telling you limiting ideas to try to protect you from being hurt or disappointed with yourself. Watch where your mind takes you, because if might be far from where you really want to go.”

*Give students time to think and write. By the end of this advisory period they should have three values written on their page. Though students might share this period, the official conversation for declaring what they chose will come in the following advisory periods.*

**Declaring your values to others**
Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

Once you have declared your values for yourself, you need to share that new way of being with others. Otherwise, the vision of yourself remains a construct of your mind and does not live in the actions you take in the world. Today you will get a chance to openly declare the values that you find define who you are. The words you use today are you, for right now, in the moment. Over the course of your life your values might shift, the words that you think define you may change. The intention of this activity is for you to see yourself through a lens of action. You are your values and your values reflect your actions. By you publicly making it known who you are and what you value, other people will also see you as what you say you are.

Student activity: In a full group forum, each student will declare to the rest of his classmates the values that they are choosing to define themselves by. Each student will answer these questions: “Who are you declaring you are now (what values)? How will it impact your life and other people’s lives?” This activity is a kind of celebration and should be treated as such!

Acting your values

Note to advisor: For this conversation, the advisor will open the conversation using the “for advisor” notes. This topic is intended for one day of exploration.

For advisor:

Since you have declared your values to those around you, you now will get an opportunity to practice using all of the skills you have accumulated in this program to
live according to your declared values. Living by your values means taking what you say seriously, if you are that value than you act as that value. Today you will begin to think of every action you take as a way to highlight what is important to you.

**Student exercise:** *Hand out the worksheet “Acting your Values”. Read the instructions aloud and give an example from your own life, or a volunteer student, to model how this worksheet can be filled out. Give students time to think and write, then give students an opportunity to share in small groups their process of relating their values to action.*
**Applications**

In this “Applications” section is some guiding tools for successful implementation of the Conversations Middle School Advisory programs. It includes advisor preparedness, appropriate scheduling during a school year, and student demographic awareness.

The Conversations Middle School Advisory program is designed for advisor-led classroom discussion. It assumes that the advisor is well versed in the concept being introduced to advisees and has prepared personal, relevant stories to enhance student understanding. Structure for student-led conversations is not built within this program. While conversations are advisor-led, the program's fundamental success is dependent on student interaction with the concepts through talking, writing, or other forms of communication. The Conversations Middle School Advisory program believes that students need time to reflect on themselves introspectively through guided discussions.

It is suggested that the program is introduced in the beginning weeks of a school year and spans at least one semester. In a five day week, the Conversations Middle School Advisory program does not need to be implemented every day, however to create fluidity of content, the Conversations program should be either daily or reasonably spaced throughout the weeks advisors are using the program.

The program is designed with early adolescent development in mind. The seventh and eighth grade groups are all in different stages of physical development, but most have experienced the concept of over concretization of the self - a concept that is a fundamental to understanding of the Conversations program. The program recognizes that all students might not feel comfortable sharing or interacting with their classmates in
a personal way in the initial stages of the program. However, as the teacher and students establish an environment of openness and confidentiality, it is the intention that all students will benefit from discussion and eventually see value in open participation with the group.

The Conversations Middle School Advisory program is not specific for any socioeconomic or cultural group. The topics discussed relate to universal human experiences of emotion, thought, and behavior and can be applied to any classroom setting.

While the “Conversations” program is designed for adolescents, it is very important that the advisor is well versed in the discussion topic and can contribute to the discussion with the advisor's own connections to the topic and personal related stories. For each theme, it is recommended that the advisor generates, in advance of the discussion, his or her own stories that connect to topic and are relevant to the students’ experience. In the BAM! Boys Advocacy and Mentoring program, Mortola et al (2008) suggests that the use of strategic storytelling within an advisory program “makes developmental sense because storytelling enhances contact, allows the leader to model qualities we are asking the [students] to learn, and helps the [students] understand better the important themes of the group” (p. 24).
Appendix

Conversations: A Middle School Advisory Program

Worksheets
The Mind: The Internal Voice

Your mind is a complex vehicle that uses language to navigate the world. The mind is constantly:

- Processing a lot of information from many sources at one time.
- Making sense or meaning of that information.
- Labeling and fixing problems it finds.
- Evaluating how well it is doing (The mind).
- Evaluating how well you’re doing (your mind and you are two different things)
- Comparing how you are doing to how everyone else seems to be doing (Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 47).

**Exercise:** Noticing your mind: For the next few minutes: write down everything that pops into your head as it comes. Your chain of events might seem very random as they come, but this exercise is for you to notice how your mind speaks to you.
**Exercise:** Do an inventory of the last week. List 5 things that happened and think about what descriptive language you attached to it. For example “I went to the beach, it was AWESOME, HOT, FUN etc.” or “I took a science test, it was HARD, UNFAIR, STUPID etc.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Something that Happened</th>
<th>Descriptive Language Attached</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Name: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________

**Observing your own Storytelling Machine**

Take a look at the following list. Check off the things that your mind has told you in the past. Notice which statements your mind is saying is true or untrue, right or wrong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m a worthless person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t stand myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have nothing to be proud of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m no good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one likes me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one loves me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m an imposter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is nothing special about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not worth it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m ugly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a disappointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m disgusting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m broken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is something wrong with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m useless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m boring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m invisible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t belong.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 59
(1) What language do you attach to people or things that are important to you or things that bother you? How does this language affect your relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/thing</th>
<th>Language you attach</th>
<th>How does your language effect your relationship?</th>
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</thead>
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</table>
(2) If you were to change language you used about yourself, other people, or things what would you be able to access in those relationships?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/thing</th>
<th>What kind of relationship do you want with this person/thing?</th>
<th>What language would you use if you had the relationship you wanted?</th>
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</table>
Predicting the Future
Life Goes

“My life goes the way I say it goes”
Evaluate the above statement and use specific examples from your life to support or argue the statement.
Predicting the Future
The Future is Empty

If there was nothing getting in the way of the life you wanted, what would you put in your future to have the best life?
Think of a situation where your view changed based on something that happened or because someone said something. What was the cost of this happening? What did you lose?
3 Moments

About age 5:
What happened? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
What decision did you make about yourself?
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

About age 8:
What happened? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
What decision did you make about yourself?
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

About age 11:
What happened? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
What decision did you make about yourself?
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Adapted from Ciarrochi, 2012, p. 66
Noticing Your Expectations

Think about a few people person who are important to you. What are your expectations of them? Where do these expectations come from?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Expectations of them</th>
<th>Where these expectations came from</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>
Meaning Making

Think of a situation that has happened to you: What happened, what meaning did you attach to it?

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Make a list of your “should” statements. Where in that past did your “should” statements originate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should statement</th>
<th>Where did this statement originate?</th>
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</table>
Behind Your Back

Picture a few people who know and care a lot about you. What words or phrases would you like to hear used to describe you?

What would you want them to say at your 15th birthday?

________________________________________________________________________

Your 20th birthday?

________________________________________________________________________

Your 30th birthday?

________________________________________________________________________

Read the quote below and think about how it relates to your life:

“The words and phrase that you imagine other people said about you reflect personal qualities that are important to you. They show how you want to be in the world. These are your true values. Your values can act as a compass in life. They can help you move in the direction that you know in your heart you want to move in” (Shannon, p. 46).

How can your values guide your future?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Adapted from Shannon, 2012, p. 45
Getting out of the Mud

Think of a situation you are stuck in right now, what outcomes could you predict to resolve this situation? Who would you have to BE to resolve this issue?

A situation where I am stuck:

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

What outcomes do you want from this situation?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Who would you have to BE to resolve this issue?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
**Inside/Outside Reactions (p. 1 of 2)**

When you experience any kind of emotion, what is your immediate reaction? You have **inside** strategies - your reactions that you have in your head or things you do alone; and **outside** strategies - how you interact with the people or things around you.

Here are some examples of insides and outside strategies, read the list and check off if you have done any of these tricks to escape your emotions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside Strategies</th>
<th>I’ve done this</th>
<th>Outside Strategies</th>
<th>I’ve done this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pushing negative feelings out of your mind</td>
<td>Getting mad at people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Obsessing about other things</td>
<td>pretending to be strong</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eating too much</td>
<td>Acting like you don’t care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>Trying to be invisible</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercising</td>
<td>Making a big deal about how hurt you are</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procrastinating</td>
<td>Being “super nice and trying to please everyone</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Daydreaming</td>
<td>Excluding people from your social network</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding being with people</td>
<td>Saying mean things to others, teasing people</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticizing yourself</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink alcohol, using drugs</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing video games, watching TV or using the computer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ciarrochi, 2012, p.33
Look back at your list. Choose one or two strategies that you have memories doing. What happened before you turned to your strategy?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Did your strategies work?
Do your strategies it fix the emotion or get rid of it?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
Being concerned, scared, or worried, about the future is directly part of who we are. We are worried about having good friends, we are scared our parents might find out about our bad grades, or we are worried we might fail a test. All our worrying about the future actually impedes our future.

Think about a situation that is really important to you. When you discuss this area with others or in your head, what thoughts come up?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Getting unstuck

Your current thoughts are a part of how this situation occurs to you. However, in your present state, you believe that the thoughts you have are true about this situation and it causes you to feel stuck and not take action in this area. Your thoughts hold you back from what you really want. Explore your thoughts in relationship to what you want in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You have these thoughts but</th>
<th>what you really want in this area is...</th>
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</table>
A racket is:
1. A consistent complaint
2. Your behavior that goes with the complaint
3. Payoff: Being right or wrong, avoid domination, control a situation, or escape responsibility
4. Cost: Losing something to get what you want- losing love, losing closeness (Zaffron and Logan, 2009, p. 50)

Think of some consistent complaints that recur in your life. What is your associated behavior, your payoffs and the costs to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racket</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Payoff</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>
If you could do anything without barriers, what would you do?

You might think about friendships and other relationships, family, things you would do, places you would go, things you would learn, career choices, or anything that inspires you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without barriers I would...</th>
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</table>
Taking Risks

What do you want to do? What are the risks? What would you get if you took the risk out?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions you want to take</th>
<th>Perceived Risks</th>
<th>Without these risks I could....</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
Unreasonable

List ways you can be **unreasonable** with yourself in different areas of your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At Home</th>
<th>Friendships/Relationships</th>
<th>Family</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At School</th>
<th>Extracurricular Activities</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

What 3 actions will you take between now and tomorrow to practice being unreasonable?

1. ___________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________
The ‘No’ Barrier

Think about an area of your life you are very passionate about and want to act on. Who are the people around you and outside of your circle that you would need to engage in order to fulfill on your dream?

Dream I want to fulfill is __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What has stopped you from engaging with this person in the past?</th>
<th>Why is it important that this person know about or participate in your project?</th>
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</thead>
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</table>
The People Who Can Help

Look over your “Life without barriers” worksheet from a few sessions ago. Choose a life goal that you will work on starting today. For the dream you are going to make happen, who are the **people** you will need to interact with in order to make all parts of the dream happen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Potential Role</th>
<th>Why they are important</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
When you schedule the things you need to do in life and the things you want to do, you honor both your commitments to others and your own dreams! In this exercise, think about all the things that you need and want to do you. Remember to be UNREASONABLE with your self!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Today</th>
<th>This Week</th>
<th>This Month</th>
<th>This year/Future</th>
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</table>
Now, take out your calendars, phones, or ipads- whatever method you use to record your dreams and responsibilities. If you do not have one, you may use the sample calendar below. You are responsible and accountable for the things you need to accomplish.

Of the list you made on page one, when will you complete the tasks you need to do? Schedule the actions you need to take. For example on October 18th, “finish social studies assignment and play with sister”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of ____________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
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</table>

Share some of your commitment with someone in the classroom and someone in your life.

Over the next week, hold yourself accountable for the things you say you need to do.
This dream will happen, and here is how...

Today you will choose a project that you have listed as a dream or goal in your life. In order to get this project off the ground, you need to think about all of the elements that will need to go into it and then commit a specific dates for achieving each individual task/goal.

**Project Name**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task to accomplish this project</th>
<th>This task will be complete by (date)</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Task to accomplish this project</td>
<td>This task will be complete by (date)</td>
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</table>
Whole and Complete

From our last exploration “This dream will happen...” we created a framework for the actions we need to take to fulfill on our project. Now you will think about the project as a whole. Each piece needs to be fulfilled whole (all of it) and complete (checked off the list) for you to have a fully successful project.

To insure the richest experience for yourself, ask yourself these questions:

What are my exceptions of how this project done?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Who do I think others expect?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What can I do that no one expects?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
I’m Responsible

Imagine an area of your life where you believe that you had no direct impact on the events that occurred even though you were a player in the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Happened?</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What did you make the situation mean?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What did you say of the players involved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What role did you actually play in the event?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Transforming the outcome**

How can you transform a situation that looks like it is about go differently than you expected?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you think this situation would go?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is currently challenging the outcome?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can you do to change course to align with your values?</th>
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</table>
Values I Value

Your values are at the core and subtext to how you operate in everything you do. Your values can be defined in one or two words. You might have values for love, inspiration, success, power, or fun. Your values show up in all areas of your life. Below, think about the values that are important to you in these areas of your life:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At Home</th>
<th>Friendships/Relationships</th>
<th>Family</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At School</th>
<th>Extracurricular</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</table>
One of the biggest questions people ask themselves is “Who am I”? Your answer does not lie in your actions, but rather in your values.

Name 3 values that you say define who you are for yourself and for others.

This is who I am:

_________________________
_________________________
_________________________

Remember, your values will change over time, nothing is carved in stone!
Acting your Values

Choose a situation or a relationship you usually have a difficult time with, are scared of, or an area that is not working.

1. Who are you according to your values?

________________________________________________________________________

2. What is the situation, what outcomes are you expecting?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What actions do you usually take to avoid the situation or protect your from failing?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. If you had power in this area, what would be possible?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Knowing what you value, what actions can you take that will align those values?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Adapted and modified from Shannon, 2012, p. 78.
References


