YOUNG WOMEN CHOOSING ACTION

FINAL CURRICULUM
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About YWCA &amp; Centene</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Description</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Elements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module One:</strong> Orientation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Two:</strong> I Choose To Be Present</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Three:</strong> I Choose To Set My Intention</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Four:</strong> I Choose To Appreciate And Grow My Strengths</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Five:</strong> I Choose To Communicate And Collaborate</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Six:</strong> I Choose To Notice My Thoughts And Actions</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Seven:</strong> I Choose To Be Healthy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Eight:</strong> I Choose To Be Kind To Myself</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Nine:</strong> I Choose To Accept And Appreciate Myself</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Ten:</strong> I Choose To Take Responsibility For My Actions</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Eleven:</strong> I Choose To Be Assertive</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Twelve:</strong> I Choose To Rise To The Challenge</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Thirteen:</strong> I Choose To Share My Skills And Talents</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Guides</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga and Mindfulness Practices</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Referenced</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT YWCA & CENTENE

YWCA USA is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, stand up for social justice, help families, and strengthen communities. We are one of the oldest and largest women’s organizations in the nation, serving over two million women, girls, and their families every year.

Centene believes that successful corporate citizenship includes investments in community-based institutions and organizations that address the needs of communities while advancing initiatives that focus on inclusion, whole person health, and community development. Centene’s investment in the creation of this curriculum is reflective of its values and core beliefs and demonstrates how it actively fulfills its purpose of transforming the health of the community, one person at a time.

A General Note

YWCA USA and Centene both share a deep concern about and a passion for increasing the health and safety of women and girls. Furthermore, each organization has been impacted by the growing body of data that show women’s and girls’ negative health outcomes are often correlated to their racial/ethnic identity and economic status. This curriculum is not only a reflection of our shared core values but also our desire to leverage our resources to create a data-driven, trauma-informed, community-based program that can build the capacity of teen girls/young women to be empowered, resilient agents of change. Further, it is our shared belief that an innovative program like this can improve women’s long-term wellness.

This curriculum is the culmination of more than three years of dedication and commitment of a group of people determined to make change in communities of color. YWCA USA and Centene implemented a 24-month pilot project with 4 affiliates: YWCA Brooklyn, YWCA of Northwest Ohio, YWCA Northwest Louisiana, and YWCA Watsonville. Each site ran six cohorts where all the facilitators and participants were actively engaged in providing feedback and clarity on the curriculum. The resulting curriculum and facilitators’ guide have been finalized by incorporating the feedback from the facilitators and young women who participated.
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

*Young Women Choosing Action* is an intersectional, culturally responsive, trauma-informed leadership program designed with the unique challenges and opportunities of low-income young women and young women of color, ages 13–19, in mind. *Young Women Choosing Action* will enable young women to practice skills and dispositions, which can lead to new habits of decision making rooted in an active choice rather than a reactive behavior. Through their participation in this program, young women who have had varying experiences with trauma, stress, and structural oppressions will develop leadership skills, expand their understanding of their physical and emotional responses to trauma, cultivate a practice of personal well-being, and build their capacity as leaders. Young women will learn how healthy decision making, self-advocacy, and self-regulation support effective leadership.

This curriculum is informed by valid and developmentally appropriate educational and therapeutic theories. All program sessions are aligned with the best practices of Positive Youth Development and guided by YWCA USA’s Theory of Change.

Participants in *Young Women Choosing Action* will learn and practice real-world leadership skills by working together to identify and address an authentic community need. Mindfulness-based somatic exercises, such as yoga and breathing activities, will support their leadership efforts and personal empowerment. Ultimately, young women who complete the program will be empowered to effectively employ choice, mindfulness, and leadership strategies in a wide variety of life situations.

Young women who successfully complete the program by demonstrating increased competence in the skill areas targeted in the curriculum may be eligible to facilitate subsequent sessions of *Young Women Choosing Action* or participate in other advanced leadership opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence marks a time of major and sometimes frenetic changes in brain chemistry and, subsequently, behavior. Developmentally, adolescence moves young people toward more functional independence and a more self-defined identity than what they experienced in childhood. While there is no such thing as a “typical teenager,” there are plenty of societal and personal factors that may complicate an already intense developmental process. Along with the social, physical, and emotional changes common for adolescent young women, *Young Women Choosing Action* takes many of these extenuating factors into consideration to promote greater growth and self-awareness for participants.

Adverse childhood experiences, sexual violence, institutional and structural racism, classism, sexism, and other trauma can lead to stifled development and a limited concept of choice for young women. In response to adversity and disenfranchisement, young women may learn behaviors or develop relational patterns that further disempower and disengage them from developing helpful and healthy skills and dispositions. *Young Women Choosing Action* aims to mitigate the effects of trauma, adversity, and inequality on young women’s lives by providing them with a safe, supportive environment in which to learn and practice a range of practical leadership and wellness skills. In this context, they will begin to identify as healthy and capable individuals and begin to practice effective communication and leadership skills.

Young women who complete the program will understand that they are not responsible for the trauma and circumstances that they have experienced nor are they entirely responsible for the behaviors they have developed in response to those circumstances. However, by learning to choose behaviors conducive to healthy relationships and personal well-being, participants will also gain awareness of how they can be agents of positive change in their personal lives as well as in their communities.
Young Women Choosing Action employs elements of several evidence-based educational, youth development, and therapeutic frameworks. These elements, rather than being mutually exclusive, build upon each other to provide a unique and comprehensive approach for empowering young women to engage on personal and social levels.

**YWCA THEORY OF CHANGE**

YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Young Women Choosing Action aims to support this mission by employing the YWCA USA Theory of Change continuum of response—direct service, issue education, and advocacy—to address the YWCA focus areas of racial justice and civil rights, empowerment and economic advancement of women and girls, and the health and safety of women and girls.

Young Women Choosing Action is designed on the premise that every participant can initiate positive change in herself and her world. Young Women Choosing Action provides a safe and supportive environment in which young women practice using empowering tools and strategies. Young women who employ these tools and strategies in their personal lives and within their community may expand their capacity to be change agents. Specifically, Young Women Choosing Action provides participants with opportunities to:

- Access vocabulary and information that supports an understanding of how teenage brain development and adverse experiences impact emotional and biological responses.
- Develop mindfulness and yoga strategies to support them in mitigating stress and reaching goals.
- Engage with their own leadership and executive functioning skills to support real-world change.
- Employ individual choice and intention-setting on a regular basis to support self-efficacy and empowerment.

All these activities cultivate a practice of personal well-being and build leadership capacity by supporting healthy decision making, self-advocacy, and self-regulation.

**CHOICE**

Young women who have implicitly or explicitly been denied choice and power in various aspects of their lives may struggle with making beneficial decisions for themselves. In general, healthy decision making can be tricky for adolescents because the brain’s frontal lobes (reasoning center) are not fully developed, and the amygdala (emotional and reactive area of the brain) tends to be in overdrive. Often, an adolescent’s desire to be decisive conflicts with her developmentally appropriate desire for freedom. Add gender, cultural, peer, and circumstantial expectations around choice to the equation, and it is no wonder that young women may struggle with making the best behavioral choices for themselves.

To address the adolescent’s complicated relationship with decision making, Young Women Choosing Action incorporates the concept of choice into nearly every aspect of the program. Each session is designed to incorporate elements of Choice Theory, which states that we are all driven by genetics to satisfy five basic needs—survival, love & belonging, power, freedom, and fun—and that we choose our behavior to meet these needs. This curriculum provides young women with strategies for making informed choices about their behaviors.

While the curriculum provides a clear path to meeting prescribed program goals and outcomes, it does so within the context of choice for both program staff and participants. Facilitators will have the option of choosing module designs they deem best suited for the young women who will be participating, and the young women will have regular opportunities to engage with choices around their five basic needs. Supported by trained facilitators, participants will also practice collaborative decision making and consensus in the context of the leadership project. An “I choose” affirmation underscores the prevailing concept of each session, and participants may put these affirmations into practice during and between sessions. Each participant will receive a personal leadership journal in which she can privately reflect on her choices, goals, and feelings.
CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND AUTHENTICITY

Educational programming that is welcoming and inclusive fosters opportunities for healthy relationship-building by centering the content and delivery methods in ways that the desired audience finds meaningful and valuable. Such programming often results in higher attendance and greater skill retention among youth. *Young Women Choosing Action* allows program facilitators to make programmatic choices that ensure greater authenticity and cultural relevance for participants. Because every group of participants is unique, facilitators will determine cultural, experiential, and developmental factors pertinent for each group and adapt activities accordingly.

TRAUMA-INFORMED

Childhood adversity can extensively impact executive functioning and mental and physical health into adulthood. When individuals understand these impacts and engage in mindfulness, they can mitigate these impacts. Because healing childhood trauma is paramount to adult well-being, *Young Women Choosing Action* applies a trauma-informed approach. While this program is not to be mistaken for therapy, it incorporates elements of Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) through activities rooted in mindfulness and brain science. *Young Women Choosing Action* provides participants with an understanding of how trauma and adversity may impact wellness and offers skills and vocabulary to help alleviate that impact. Watching this video titled “The Paradox of Trauma-Informed Care” by Vicky Kelly, may prove helpful to facilitators as well.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>A safe physical environment is provided and a sense of safety in interpersonal interactions is promoted. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness and Transparency</td>
<td>Decisions and information are delivered with transparency, with the goal of building and maintaining trust among participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Support</td>
<td>Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and Mutuality</td>
<td>Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences between facilitators and participants, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment, Voice, and Choice</td>
<td>Clients are supported in shared decision making, choice, and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward. They are supported in cultivating self-advocacy skills. Staff members are facilitators of recovery rather than controllers of recovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues</td>
<td>aThe program actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender identity, geography, etc.); offers access to gender responsive services; leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections; incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of individuals served; and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.</td>
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POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs provide empowering, positive, and supportive environments in which young people can learn and grow. Among other qualities, the PYD framework fosters healthy relationships and bonding and promotes a range of prosocial norms and competencies. Participants in PYD programs have demonstrated increased resiliency and connectedness, among other skills and dispositions.

This program incorporates the PYD framework by employing the “5 C’s” of PYD. Young Women Choosing Action offers participants relevant opportunities to develop competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion so that they may meaningfully learn how to contribute to themselves and their community. PYD elements are inherent in each session’s structure and content, and trained program facilitators further develop these through careful guidance. Young Women Choosing Action affirms every participant’s identity and culture, along with her burgeoning independence.

When young women are encouraged to take the lead, they are offered the opportunity to acquire new skills or enhance their current skill set, confidence, and competence. By implementing community-based social action leadership projects, participants in Young Women Choosing Action will develop executive functioning, communication, and cooperative leadership skills. Reflection activities enable participants to apply what they have learned to future leadership and interpersonal endeavors. Additionally, young women who participate in this program will become more skillful in taking the lead in their own lives by practicing healthy decision making, self-advocacy, and self-regulation to meet their needs in a safe and effective manner.

Young women who successfully complete the program will be eligible for internship positions with their YWCA program, thereby extending their leadership and learning opportunities.

TARGETED SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences may negatively impact a young woman’s engagement with a range of useful skills and prevent them from identifying with positive attributes. However, cultivating these useful skills and attributes may play a role in young women overcoming adversity, identifying as a leader, and cultivating positive change. Each session of Young Women Choosing Action offers participants opportunities to build, reflect upon, and apply the following skills and dispositions:

- Executive functioning
- Emotional awareness and self-regulation
- Communication and social connections
- Leadership and personal responsibility
- Self-efficacy and self-advocacy
- Growth mindset and optimism
- Flexible thinking
- Empathy

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The objective of Young Women Choosing Action is to establish a program that offers young women opportunities to take the lead in establishing positive change in their own lives and in their community.

Following regular and sustained participation in Young Women Choosing Action, young women will:

- Have the opportunity to exercise personal choice in a safe, validating environment.
- Acquire a range of language, tools, and skills necessary for self-reflection, emotional awareness, and self-efficacy.
- Better understand and learn how to mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, and other stressors.
- Be attuned to the mind-body connection and establish a mindfulness practice.
Practice leadership and develop executive functioning skills.

Establish connections with a range of community resources that support and sustain their personal wellbeing.

Identify strategies for navigating institutional and structural racism, sexism, and classism.

Design and carry out a relevant, community-based social action leadership project.

Have the opportunity to teach others the skills they acquire in the program.

**THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

As alluded to earlier, Choice Theory is incorporated into each module of Young Women Choosing Action through activities and guiding intentions that support young women in identifying and meeting their basic needs. CBT and social learning theory (SLT) provide further bases for the design and recommended implementation of the program.

CBT encourages the development of alternative ways of thinking and behaving to reduce psychological stress. This involves participants identifying thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions that make life more difficult and practicing strategies that help them identify personal strengths that they can build on for greater resiliency and reduced stress. Specifically, the dialectical behavioral approach to CBT supports these efforts through activities that encourage mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation.

Moreover, SLT posits that extrinsic environmental factors (e.g., family and community), intrinsic personal factors (e.g., biology and affect), and behavior are all interconnected when it comes to learning. SLT informs the curriculum by promoting self-efficacy, emotional coping, and self-regulation in a supportive learning environment where prosocial behavior is modeled and where unhealthy behaviors are redirected.

And lastly, Somatic Experiencing Therapy (SET) will inform the curriculum using the idea that when individuals are exposed to traumatic events or chronic adversities and when adrenaline gets released during the fight, flight, or freeze response, adrenaline and unexpressed emotion may remain trapped in the body. Movement through yoga and dance are effective ways for individuals to burn off this excess adrenaline and reconnect with emotion in a context of safety. Many of the modules have incorporated yoga poses as a way to teach young women to become aware of their bodies, to pay attention to their breathing, and to note how different poses and movements facilitate emotion.

**PROGRAM PRACTICES**

Instructors should implement the following practices into the planning and delivery of Young Women Choosing Action to support program success for all involved.

**Group Size:** Recommended group size is 10–16 participants, led by 2 facilitators. A small to medium group size is more conducive to meaningful interpersonal engagement and allows facilitators to get to know each participant better, which assists with responsive planning on the facilitators’ part.

**Program Duration:** Recommended program duration is a minimum of 13 sessions, at a minimum time of 2–2.5 hours per session. A brief agenda with estimated session times is provided at the beginning of each module’s curriculum. Facilitators may find it helpful to incorporate breaks and/or stretch longer modules across two weeks.

**Orientation:** The facilitators could use the orientation session to introduce the program, create a group and safety agreement via consensus, and get a sense of the group’s needs and strengths.

**Farewell:** Facilitators could set aside a culminating session for carrying out the leadership project, having participants process and reflect on the program, and/or hosting a completion ceremony or graduation.

**Length of Sessions:** A minimum of two hours per session allows participants time to adequately settle into each session and provide time for more comprehensive
discussion and program activities. Since this is a mindfulness-based leadership program, it is important not to rush the process. Some modules are timed to run up to three hours and some run for two hours. Facilitators are encouraged to adjust the times to meet the needs of the participants.

**Recommended Program Space:** Ideally the program location would be easily accessible, and the room or space within this location would be large enough for all participants to move around with ease. Table space and comfortable seating for all participants is necessary. Clean, uncluttered spaces painted in cool colors have been shown to enhance engagement and learning among young people.

**Incentives, Recruitment, and Retention:** It can be a challenge to fully enroll a program for young women because teenagers have countless responsibilities, commitments, and diversions vying for their time and attention. *Young Women Choosing Action* includes authentic incentives and employs a community-based recruitment strategy designed to promote participants’ genuine interest and engagement with the program. *Young Women Choosing Action* satisfies the young women’s interest in leadership and employment by offering paid internship opportunities upon completion. Added incentives over the duration of the program; the cultivation of a safe and supportive community; and relevant, culturally competent content contribute to sustaining attendance for the program’s duration.

**Facilitator Training Guide:** The importance of well-prepared, highly trained, approachable facilitators cannot be overstated when it comes to the success of a youth program. The *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum is accompanied by an accessible and in-depth training guide that provides relevant information for facilitating an intersectional, trauma-informed leadership program. The Facilitator Training Guide also includes links and references to additional information for further exploration of the curriculum’s foundations and for use in program planning.

**Practice and Reflection:** Each young woman should receive a Personal Leadership Journal for her private use. These journals are designed to remind young women about the content discussed in each module while providing them with writing prompts to inspire self-reflection and goal setting. The journals offer a place for young women to reflect on how their choices and experiences have impacted them.

In addition to journaling between modules, young women may access a private group social media page. This could be a place where facilitators and participants contribute relevant information about social action leadership and mindfulness for group discussion. Facilitators may also post reminders to practice skills and use the Personal Leadership Journal between modules.

Opportunities to practice new skills and reflect on experiences pave the way to greater skill retention and sustained learning. *Young Women Choosing Action* provides participants with the tools to support these efforts.

**Upon Completion Of Each Session**

- Debrief the program.
- Follow through on leadership incentives with eligible participants.
- Retain or select, train, and engage youth interns.
- Plan upcoming sessions.
MODULE ONE:
ORIENTATION
MODULE ONE: ORIENTATION

PROGRAM PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>30 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebreaker Game</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Overview</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Agreement &amp; Safety</td>
<td>45 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Mindfulness</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Yoga Practice</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150 Min/2.5 Hours</strong></td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Reflect understanding about the program and its components, including the terms “mindfulness,” “trauma,” and “social action.”
- Practice a mindfulness breathing technique.
- Receive a general introduction to yoga.
- Be introduced to the practices of teamwork, communication, and consensus building.

1. Review activities and determine how co-facilitators will share responsibilities and deliver content and instructions.
2. Arrange a meeting room in a comfortable and inviting manner, assuring enough seating for all participants and co-facilitators. Preferably, arrange seating in a circle or around a large table so that everyone is visible to each other.
3. Post six large sheets of poster or flip chart paper around the room that have these headers and can easily be written on by the participants. Fold them up so the young women cannot see them when they first come into the room.
   - I chose to participate in Young Women Choosing Action to . . .
   - I show respect and care toward others by . . .
   - I feel respected and supported when . . .
   - For me to feel safe participating in the program I need . . .
   - Behaviors that help a group get along and be successful include . . .
   - Behaviors that keep a group from being successful include . . .
4. Prepare the cards for the Yoga: Two Facts and Fiction game.
5. Print a few copies of the Correcting Yoga Fictions sheet.
6. Review the Social Action Leadership Project Outline to familiarize yourself with the purpose of the project and the facilitator’s role.
7. Post the Brief Agenda in an easily visible location.
8. If providing food and beverages, arrange to have these ready and accompanied by necessary plates and utensils.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Young Women Choosing Action overview handouts.
- Markers.
- Poster paper or large newsprint.
- Tape.
- Nametags (optional).
- Video projector and computer for videos.
- Yoga: Two Facts and a Fiction card deck.
- Correcting Yoga Fictions sheet.
- Personal Leadership Journals for each participant.
MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (30 min)

1. With all participants sitting in a circle, co-facilitators introduce themselves by name and pronoun and welcome participants to Young Women Choosing Action, thanking them for taking the time to participate in this one-of-a-kind leadership program.

2. Request that anyone who has a cell phone set the phone to silent mode and put it safely away—out of sight, if possible.
   a. Let participants know that they should silence and put away phones during the program so that they give each person and the work their full attention.
   b. Also, say that you understand that phones are an important part of how we interact with each other and the world and that there will be designated uses for phones within the program.

3. Acknowledge that everyone arrives at the program having already had a busy day and with lots of information and other concerns on her mind.
   a. Explain that people hold tension and stress in their lungs and muscles and invite them to release any tension, nervousness, or stress they may be holding by sitting up straight, breathing in through their nose, and sighing out through their mouths.
   b. Model this action.

4. Point out that the day’s schedule has been posted and that it will be posted each week so that participants will have a sense of what will happen during each module.

5. Let participants know that each week there will be a daily intention.
   a. Explain that the success of the Young Women Choosing Action program depends a lot on the participants choosing to be at the meeting each week and choosing to be actively present for themselves and the group.
   b. Explain that setting an intention to achieve a goal will help them stay focused on the steps they must take to get there.
   c. Note that all intentions are choices; therefore, each module of Young Women Choosing Action will invite participants to engage with an “I choose” intention.

6. Assure participants that everyone will get to know each other better over these 13 weeks (or however long your program is designed to run). Tell them that you will start by simply learning one another’s names, saying why you joined this program, and sharing a couple of quick facts about yourselves.

7. With one co-facilitator going first and the other planning to go last, go around the circle until every person has shared her name and why she decided to join Young Women Choosing Action.
   a. One of the facilitators should write the reasons on the piece of flip chart paper with that header so you can refer to them later during the Program Agreements and Safety discussion.

Icebreaker (10 min)

1. Have everyone stand in a large circle.
   - Explain that this is an opportunity to start remembering everyone’s names, as the game connects a person’s name to an adjective and a physical pose.

2. Tell the girls to be creative with their movements—they can stomp, twirl, dance, put up their fists—anything that feels right to them.

3. With one of the facilitators starting, have everyone state their first name, then choose an adjective that has the same first letter as their first name to accompany it and strike a physical pose.
   - For example, “I am ‘Rowdy Robin,’” and she puts her hands on her hips.

4. Everyone in the circle then says, “Hi, Rowdy Robin,” and mirrors the same movement, putting their hands on their hips.

5. The next person in the circle takes her turn. Let’s say, for example, her name is Elaine.
   - She says, “I am ‘Elated Elaine,’” and then she blows a kiss.
6. The group would then say, “Hi, Elated Elaine,” blow a kiss, then say, “Hi, Rowdy Robin,” and put their hands on their hips.

7. Continue around the circle until every person has shared their adjective, name, and movement. The activity concludes after the group has repeated them all, starting with the most recent one and moving back around the circle.

**Program Overview (15 min)**

1. Explain that you will be taking a few minutes to go over the major parts of the program, so everyone has a clear understanding of the goals and choices involved in the program.

2. Distribute *Young Women Choosing Action* Overview and/or project it on a screen so participants may follow along.
   a. To encourage participation from the start, ask if someone is willing to read the first paragraph of the program overview.
   b. See if someone will read the next paragraph and so on until the entire document has been reviewed aloud.

3. This is an opportunity to generate participants’ buy-in and enthusiasm for the program, so it is appropriate for co-facilitators to share their excitement and discuss that they are looking forward to various parts of the program.
   a. Reviewing the program overview is also when facilitators will introduce the concept of trauma-informed leadership.
   b. Explain that this leadership program seeks to transform adversity into action, so participants should acknowledge and honor their experiences but use their power of choice and intention to take positive action in their community and personal lives.

4. If between-session social media contact is part of your plan, briefly discuss how this will be used and work with participants to write guidelines for social media safety.
   a. Ask them to describe safe social media usage.
      i. What kinds of information would be appropriate to share?
      ii. What kinds of posts and behaviors should be avoided?
   b. Write all appropriate responses down for the whole group to see.

5. Explain that personal safety is also important in a group, and we should always consider what we need to maintain a safe place for everyone.
   a. Ask them to describe personal safety.
      i. What makes you feel unsafe in a group?
      ii. What kinds of actions and behaviors should be avoided?
   b. Write down all appropriate responses for the whole group to see.

6. Tell the participants that you will add these documents to the group agreements you will be working on soon.
   - You can revisit this discussion during the Agreement and Safety activity.

   a. Explain that it is highly recommended that young women use this tool to reflect on their experiences.
   b. Explain that using it regularly—with intention—will help them to grow their leadership and mindfulness skills to a higher level.
   c. Let them know that this is a private journal for home use designed to help them get the most out of the program.

8. Answer any questions that participants may have.
What is Young Women Choosing Action?

Young Women Choosing Action is a new YWCA program for young women ages 13–19. It is an intersectional, culturally responsive, trauma-informed leadership program that offers young women opportunities to take the lead in choosing positive action in their communities and their own lives.

Why should I participate in Young Women Choosing Action?

Young Women Choosing Action offers real-world opportunities to work as a collaborative leader for community change. You will also learn useful skills and strategies to support your well-being, an important aspect of effective leadership.

Your experience in Young Women Choosing Action could lead to further leadership and professional opportunities. If you complete the full 13-week session of Young Women Choosing Action, you may be eligible to apply for internships with YWCA. You will also be able to cite this experience on college and job applications.

What does “trauma-informed” mean?

Far too many young women have experienced hardship and trauma in their lives. Young Women Choosing Action is designed on the premise that young women who have faced adversity are fully capable of creating positive change for themselves and others. Young Women Choosing Action is a trauma-informed leadership program because it offers you strategies to use for personal empowerment and well-being while you simultaneously design a social action leadership project aimed at addressing injustice in your community.

What kinds of activities can I expect from Young Women Choosing Action?

Social Action Leadership Project: As a group, we will design and carry out a social action leadership project aimed at making a difference in our community. Each week we will have time to plan and collaborate on this change-making project.

Choice and Intention: We will use group projects and discussions to explore how to best use our power of choice to make a change in our community and ourselves. Each week we will focus on a specific intention, such as “I choose to honor my experience,” and apply that intention to the work we do.

Yoga and Mindfulness: If we want to know how to create change in our world and ourselves, it is helpful to know how the human mind works and how our minds and bodies are connected. Each week we will learn mindfulness and yoga techniques that will support our leadership work.

Program Agreements and Safety (45 min)

This activity is intended to give young women an opportunity to share their ideas about social and behavioral expectations and safety. Their responses will be used to create the social and safety agreement for the program.

1. Tell participants that being able to use good judgment and monitor their behavior are important leadership skills. For that reason, Young Women Choosing Action invites participants to work together with the co-facilitators to create their social and safety agreement rather than be issued a set of predetermined rules.

2. Explain to participants that they will be working in small groups to answer a series of questions and then come back together to share the results.

3. The rules of the activity are as follows:

   a. Groups will be determined randomly, through a counting exercise.
   b. Each group should designate a writer.
   c. Each group will start by standing in front of a different poster.
d. Group members will answer the question out loud.

e. There are no right or wrong answers—participants should answer honestly and respectfully.

f. The designated writer will write down on the poster exactly what each group member says.

g. No one should judge what a member says—just write it down.

h. Spelling does not count and should not be criticized.

i. After two to three minutes, all groups will be instructed to move clockwise to the next poster and repeat the process until each group has answered all six questions.

j. If a previous group has written something the group agrees with, the designated writer will put a check mark next to what is written and try to add more answers to the question.

4. Have participants count off by fives or use one of the group-selection processes in the grouping section of the Cultivating Community Practices manual (so that each group has at least two members).

5. Distribute markers, remind groups to choose a writer, and direct groups to stand in front of a poster—one group per poster.

6. Instruct groups to carefully release the folded portion of the poster, read the question out loud, and write their responses.

7. Keep time. After three minutes, instruct groups to move clockwise to the next poster.

8. Once every group has an opportunity to answer each question, ask them to return to their seats.

9. Tape the posters up where everyone can see them.

10. First, read aloud the answers to the question you posed during the original introductions, “Why have you chosen to participate in this program?”

   a. Note that everyone has her reasons for being here but point out recurring themes.

   b. Note that this is an example of how we can arrive at the same place despite our different paths and situations.

11. Next, read the answers to “I expect Young Women Choosing Action to…”

   a. Confirm the expectations that can be and will be met (e.g., if someone writes “to do a leadership project” or “to learn yoga,” you can say that these are things that will certainly happen).

   b. Point out answers that rely on the participants’ behavior, such as “I’ll be a more responsible person.”

   i. Explain that there is the potential for such growth in Young Women Choosing Action, so long as participants regularly and intentionally practice responsible behaviors, such as following through on commitments and making healthy, informed choices.

   ii. Also, address any expectations that cannot be met in the context of the program. For example, if someone writes, “I’ll get into college,” explain that while participation in the program could certainly enhance a college application and help young women practice skills and behaviors that are conducive to college acceptance, admission to college is not a promised result of participation.

12. Get consensus. Ask if anyone can define the word “consensus.”

   a. Once the group arrives at a definition that describes a general agreement that meets most people’s needs, explain that coming to consensus does not always mean that everyone gets what she wants.

   b. Sometimes they need to give up an idea they like but do not feel is essential so that someone else can get something that she does feel is essential.

   c. Provide a relevant example to illustrate how consensus works.

      i. For instance, say you plan on going out for a treat with your friend. You are really in the mood for ice cream.

      ii. You would love to have ice cream, but your friend is lactose intolerant, and the ice cream place does not have anything to offer her.

      iii. She suggests going to the bakery, but you have a gluten allergy, and the bakery only uses gluten-based flours.
iv. Together, you reach an agreement to go to the café that serves gluten-free, lactose-free, yet still delicious smoothies. Neither friend got exactly what she wanted, but the smoothies satisfied everyone’s dietary needs.

13. Explain that the group will work together to reach a consensus on an agreement about how they will behave and work with each other in the coming weeks.

14. Read the answers to, “I show respect and care toward others by....”
   a. Ask the group members if they think these are reasonable expectations.
   b. If the answer is “no” to any of the answers, clarify why it is not and/or ask if there is a way to reword it to make it more reasonable.
   c. Note any changes and cross out answers the group decides are not reasonable (for instance, “pretending they don’t exist”).

15. Read the answers to, “I feel respected and supported when...” and follow the same process as above.

16. Read the answers to, “For me to feel safe in this program I need ...” and ask everyone if there is anything on the list that they want to discuss.

17. Read the answers to, “Behaviors that help a group get along and be successful include...” and follow the same process as above.

18. Read the answers to, “Behaviors that keep a group from being successful include...” and ask if everyone is OK with avoiding these behaviors.

19. Ask the group to review the expectations listed on the previous five posters.
   a. Ask if anything is missing or problematic.
   b. Respectfully address the answers that arise.
   c. Ask the group members to give thumbs up or thumbs down to signify whether they agree with including the listed expectations in the group agreement.
   d. If there are any thumbs down, ask why.
   e. Discuss whether the expectation(s) in question feels important to the group or whether it would be OK to let go.

20. Address social media guidelines, as needed.

21. Let the group know that you will create a poster that neatly outlines the agreement and post it in the room as a reminder of the group agreements.

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**Introduction to Mindfulness (10 min)**

1. Ask young women if they are familiar with the term “mindfulness” and allow a few to share their definitions.
   a. Acknowledge that we all have different ideas of what mindfulness means and that you will be exploring those ideas as you move through the program.

2. State that, for starters, they will begin trying to notice when and how they are breathing as this often can tell them about the way they are feeling.

3. Ask participants to think about what happens with their breath when they feel relaxed. When they feel nervous? Angry? When the person they have a crush on walks by them?
   a. What kinds of situations cause them to hold their breath?
   b. What makes them sigh or take a deep breath?
   c. Say that these are all examples of how our minds and bodies are connected.
4. Say, “When you notice yourself getting carried away by your feelings, you can also use your breathing to help you calm down and stay centered.”

5. Let participants know you are going to introduce a simple breathing activity they may choose to use in these kinds of situations.
   a. Invite participants to sit up straight, with their feet on the floor.
   b. Encourage them to close their eyes (letting them know it is OK to open them if they need to check for safety if fear arises).
   c. If they wish, they can drop their hands into their laps, palms up or palms down.
   d. Let them know they may adapt these instructions by finding whatever variation is comfortable for them.

6. Instruct participants to follow these steps for the breathing exercise:
   a. Breathe in as deeply as they comfortably can through their nose to the count of three, filling their lungs with air.
   b. Then hold their breath for the count of two, and release through their mouth to the count of three.
   c. Say that you will lead them through 10 rounds of this breathing exercise.

7. After leading 10 rounds of the exercise, explain that taking deep breaths works to calm people down because humans have about 175 brain cells whose only job is to monitor our breath and send signals to other parts of the brain about how we are feeling.
   a. When these brain cells signal that we are breathing calmly and deeply, the other parts of the brain get the message that we are doing OK, that oxygen is going to all the right places in our body, and there is no need to freak out.
   b. The breath sends a message to the brain that we are calm, and the brain responds with calmness.

8. Ask if anyone has any experience with using her breath to control her emotions or if anyone has any comments about how this exercise went for her.

9. Encourage participants to try to check in with their breath and use the breathing exercise as they see fit over the week.

**Introduction to Yoga Practice (15 min)**

1. Ask participants to share what they think of when they hear the word “yoga.” They may have a variety of responses.

2. Ask if anyone has ever tried yoga before and how that went.

3. Inform participants that there are several varieties of yoga and that, for many people, yoga is a spiritual practice.

4. Explain that for many others, it is simply a part of their mindfulness and exercise regime.

5. Say that people who practice yoga, even just once a week, have experienced a range of benefits—the kinds of benefits that would be helpful in leadership situations and in dealing with the kinds of stress teens often face.

**Yoga: Two Facts and Fiction Game**

1. This activity introduces participants to some of the benefits and prevalent misconceptions about yoga, generating buy-in and a greater understanding of the practice.

2. Inform the group that they are going to play a short game to learn more about yoga. It involves reading information off a card.
   a. Encourage anyone who would like to take a turn reading a card to do so, but it is not required.
   b. Explain that there are two facts about yoga and one fiction on the card.
   c. Tell participants they must try to guess which are the facts and which is the fiction.
   d. Make the group aware that the people reading the card will know what the fiction is because it is printed in lighter ink.
3. Follow these instructions for the game.
   a. Take the top card and read it as an example of how it is done.
   b. Ask participants to guess which is the fiction.
   c. When someone guesses it correctly, affirm her answer and restate the two facts.
   d. Read from the corresponding information on the Correcting Yoga Fictions sheet to clarify why the fiction on this card is not a true depiction of yoga.
   e. Invite volunteers to read a card.
   f. Read the relevant information from the Correcting Yoga Fictions sheet for each round.
   g. Play until the group has read all 10 cards.
4. Ask participants to share one new understanding they have about yoga after playing the game.

Introduction to Social Action Leadership Project (10 min)

1. Ask participants if anyone can define what social action means.
   a. Have a few people share what they think when they hear the term.
   b. If they have trouble coming up with a definition of social action, you can share this: “Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities.”

2. To further assist them in understanding what a social action leadership project could look like, show one of these videos: UNESCO Teen Projects or NCS Summer Action Projects.
   a. After watching these videos, ask them to share what stood out to them.

b. Then ask if they can think of any examples of social action happening in their community or the nation. If they are hesitant to share examples, share some of your own.
3. Explain that, as part of the Young Women Choosing Action program, they will be able to design and implement a project that makes a difference in their community.
   a. Tell them that over the next several sessions, they will go through some activities to help them decide what they want to do.
   b. Explain that they will also have the opportunity to implement their project over several weeks.

Review and Reflection (15 min)

1. You should end the session by asking the participants to share something that they learned or will use in the coming week or choose one of the reflection suggestions from the closing rituals section of Cultivating Community Practices.
2. Close the session by having the group do a round of mindfulness breathing together.
   a. Ask them to get in a comfortable sitting position and close their eyes if they feel safe to do so.
   b. Have them take in a deep breath through their nose to the count of three, filling their lungs with air.
   c. Tell them to hold their breath for the count of two, and release through their mouth to the count of three.
   d. Lead them through three rounds of this before letting them go for the evening.
# YOGA CARDS: TWO FACTS AND A FICTION

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>✓ Yoga improves coordination.</th>
<th>✓ Yoga helps reduce anxiety.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga encourages creativity.</td>
<td>✓ Yoga is a form of mindfulness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✗ You must be very flexible to be able to do</td>
<td>✗ You must be in good shape to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga improves balance.</td>
<td>Practicing yoga improves self-regulation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✗ You need special clothes to practice yoga.</td>
<td>Practicing yoga reduces stress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga builds compassion for yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>✗ Yoga is a religion.</td>
<td>✓ Practicing yoga improves self-regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga improves strength.</td>
<td>✓ Practicing yoga reduces stress.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>✗ Yoga is relaxing but does not do much for overall health.</td>
<td>✗ People who practice yoga are “New Age” and out of touch with reality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga may reduce asthma symptoms.</td>
<td>✓ Yoga improves focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga helps alleviate symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder</td>
<td>✓ Yoga improves flexibility, both in the body</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Practicing yoga helps teens improve their performance at school.</td>
<td>✗ If you are not in a yoga class, you shouldn’t practice yoga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Yoga improves the mind-body connection.</td>
<td>✓ You need to practice yoga regularly to get its full benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Yoga involves contorting your body into pretzel-like positions.</td>
<td>✓ Just a few minutes of yoga each week can lead to better health and greater</td>
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</table>
CORRECTING YOGA FICTIONS

You must be very flexible to be able to do yoga. You do not have to be flexible to start a yoga practice. Do not expect (or attempt) to mimic the exact shape of yoga poses you see pictured on the internet or in magazines. Chances are it took the person in the photo a very long time to master those poses. Regular yoga practice can increase muscle flexibility, but many people find it takes months or years of regular practice. It is OK if your heels do not reach the floor or if you can only stretch so far. It is important to move at your own pace, respect what your body can do, and find a way to stretch that feels good for you. Use books, blocks, or pillows to support the parts of your body that are not ready to stretch on their own. Never force a stretch! Being flexible about the way you think about yoga helps you to get to a point of greater physical flexibility when your body and mind are ready for it.

You need special clothes to practice yoga. While marketing campaigns might try to convince you that you need specific clothing or gear to do yoga, you do not. If you are not wearing clothing that is too constricting, you can do yoga. If you do not have a yoga mat, use a towel or blanket for floor exercises. Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years without special clothes or equipment.

You must be in good shape to practice yoga. If you know you have high-blood pressure or other circulatory medical concerns, it is best to consult a doctor before beginning a regular yoga practice. However, yoga can be adapted for all levels of fitness and all body types. You do not have to be physically fit to start a yoga practice, but yoga can lengthen and strengthen muscles and reduce weight for people who practice regularly.

Yoga is a religion. There are some religious traditions that incorporate yoga as part of the spiritual practice, and some people who use yoga as a means of spiritual healing, but yoga itself is not a religion. There are no gods or commandments in yoga. In the United States, yoga has become recognized as a secular or nonreligious practice and is recommended by health care practitioners to people of all faiths as a means of supporting a healthy lifestyle.

Yoga involves contorting your body into pretzel-like positions. Some more advanced poses do require the flexibility to move your arms or legs into positions you do not normally find yourself in, but these are not the kinds of poses you’ll be practicing in Young Women Choosing Action. This program focuses on basic stretching and breathing exercises that support mindfulness and flexibility.
Yoga is relaxing but does not do much for overall health. Yoga is proven to reduce anxiety and stress, but other studies have shown a range of physical health benefits, including a reduction of asthma symptoms, lower blood pressure, and weight loss. It can build bone and muscle strength and reduce symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Many people who practice yoga find that their cravings for unhealthy food, beverages, and addictive substances decrease. Yoga can lead to better overall health.

Yoga numbs your emotions. Yoga can help with regulating emotions and increasing optimism, but it does not numb you to feelings. In fact, some people find yoga is a deeply emotional experience. Our bodies store emotional tension and pain. Some people may find that certain yoga poses release this tension and/or cause emotional responses. It is OK to find yourself feeling sad or suddenly happy when you practice a certain pose. It is OK to cry. If these feelings arise, respect them, and use your personal strengths to help you move through them.

People who practice yoga are “New Age” and out of touch with reality. All kinds of people practice yoga for all kinds of reasons. You may encounter people who fit certain stereotypes you associate with people who practice yoga, but you may also run into other people who practice yoga who do not fit any of the stereotypes. Yoga, like other mindfulness practices, has been shown to improve focus and decrease impulsivity. People who practice yoga are often well-equipped to deal with real world situations. They may handle stress and adversity quite well because they can think flexibly in stressful situations, decide on a helpful course of action, and act with intention. There is a saying that what you practice on the mat prepares you for what you must deal with when you are off the mat. (This holds true no matter what surface you use to do yoga.)

Practicing yoga is selfish and self-centered. Doing yoga is a time to focus on yourself—your breath, body, and mind. It is important to set time aside for yourself to practice. However, taking care of yourself is not selfish. When you are anxious, unwell, or stressed out, it is hard to be of service to anyone. The better you care for your own physical and emotional health, the more available you will be to support others through your leadership and your relationships.

If you are not in a yoga class, you shouldn’t practice yoga. There is a lot to be said for learning from a well-trained yoga teacher, but it is not necessary to spend lots of money on a public class to learn the basics of yoga. In Young Women Choosing Action, you will learn some basic poses and breathing exercises that anyone can do or adapt by themselves. You can read articles or find information online about how to personalize a yoga routine for yourself. If you want more than that, there are plenty of excellent yoga classes you can find free online. Online yoga teachers all have their own styles. Look for a beginning yoga class with a teacher you like.
MODULE TWO: I CHOOSE TO BE PRESENT
MODULE TWO: I CHOOSE TO BE PRESENT

BRIEF AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebreaker</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Pranayama Breathing Technique</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills Activity</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Team Presentations</td>
<td>25 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reflection Exercise</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness Activity</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:
- Receive more information about the mind-body connection using both yoga and mindful breathing techniques.
- Identify personal leadership strengths and areas for growth.
- Learn about key leadership and teamwork components.
- Practice teamwork, communication, and consensus building.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and determine how co-facilitators will share responsibilities and deliver content and instructions.
2. Arrange a meeting room in a comfortable and inviting manner, assuring enough seating for all participants and co-facilitators. Preferably, arrange seating in a circle or around a large table so that everyone is visible to each other.

3. Make copies of the Program Agreement (developed using the Program Agreement Activity in Module One).
4. Make one copy of each leadership quality chart.
5. Post the daily intention and overview of the day’s schedule in an easily visible location.
6. If providing food and beverages, arrange to have these ready and accompanied by necessary serving items.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Markers.
- Poster paper or large newsprint.
- Tape.
- Nametags (optional).
- Pens or pencils.
- Construction paper of different colors.
- Scissors.
- Leadership quality charts.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (15 min)

1. Start in a circle, as you did during introductions in the first module. Have everyone go around and introduce themselves again and ask them to share their favorite food. This is just another way the group can get to know one another.
2. Remember to review what you covered last week, especially the group agreements, and give participants an overview of what to expect today.
3. Consider putting the brief agenda on a slide or on large flip chart paper for participants to see.
Icebreaker (15 min)

1. Ask participants to stand in a circle for a quick ice breaker game.
2. Explain that you are going to practice a little teamwork by counting to 20 together, but not in unison.
3. The rules are:
   a. Only one person can say a number at a time.
   b. Numbers must be said in consecutive order.
   c. Everyone must say at least one number.
   d. The group is not allowed to just “go around the circle.” People on either side of the person who last spoke a number must wait at least one number to chime in.
   e. No talking is allowed other than saying numbers.
   f. If any of these rules are broken, the group must start again with number one.
4. Instruct the group to start. Whenever anyone breaks one of the above-stated rules, instruct her to start again. The group may begin to use hand signals or other nonverbal strategies to signify who should go next. This is allowed, but they should come to this through their own trial and error.
5. End the game after about 3 minutes (or earlier if they reach 20 through their own luck or strategy).
6. Reflect with the group. Ask how they worked together to reach their goal, or if they did not reach 20, ask what strategies may have helped them more easily reach their goal. Ask if they could take any of the strategies the group used in this activity forward as they begin their leadership work.

Introduction to Pranayama Yoga Breathing Technique (20 Min)

1. Tell participants that now that they have a basic understanding of the benefits of yoga, you are going to introduce them to a basic yoga technique called “pranayama.”
   - Explain that “pranayama” means a focus on deep breathing and gentle stretching. It is a mindful yoga practice that they can use to support a good mood and reduce stress.
2. Instruct participants to stand up and find a space in which they can move their arms without bumping into or disturbing anyone else.
3. Ask participants to silently take a quick inventory of how they are feeling.
   a. How would they describe their mood and energy level?
   b. How is their posture and breathing?
4. Instruct participants to stand comfortably and evenly on their feet, not on their heels or toes.
   a. Their weight should feel evenly distributed between their feet, and they should consider this a time to physically center themselves.
   b. Their arms should be relaxed and down at their sides.
5. Ask participants to notice their breath and to breathe deeply if it is comfortable for them.
   a. They should try to avoid shallow chest breathing.
   b. Allow them to take a couple minutes just to focus on their breath, paying attention to how it comes in and goes out.
6. Explain that now you are going to link breath to movement.
7. Instruct participants to breathe in as they raise their arms. Explain their options:
   a. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front or lift from the sides (T-shape).
   b. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.
8. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.
9. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.
10. Once everyone has played for a bit, let them know you will be guiding them in 10 repetitions of pranayama.
11. Let them know they may do this with their eyes open or closed, but they should try to pay attention to how their body and breath are moving together.
12. Ask them to play with their movements for a few seconds to find what feels good and try to get in sync with their breath. Guide participants to breathe in and raise their arms, then to breathe out and slowly lower their arms. Pause for a second between each movement.

13. Ask participants to check in with themselves about what they experienced.

   a. Ask them to silently answer:
      
      i. “How did you feel before this yoga practice?”
      
      ii. “What was your mood?”
      
      iii. “How was your energy?”
      
      iv. “Do you feel different after this practice?”
      
      v. “Is there a difference in your posture or your breathing?”
      
      vi. “How about your mood?”

   b. Invite anyone to share how the experience went for them.

Leadership Skills Team Activity (30 min)

1. Tell the group that you will be talking about the best way to work together or collaborate on a leadership project.

   a. Let the group know that you will start planning the social action leadership project in the next session, but it is important that everyone is on the same page about the kinds of skills, behaviors, and attitudes they must bring to the table as leaders to help their project be successful.

   b. Explain that the project is a collaborative leadership project, meaning everyone will take a meaningful role in deciding and working on the project and no one person will oversee the whole project.

2. Tell participants that they will be working with a partner to brainstorm what certain skills look, sound, and feel like when being used effectively in a collaborative leadership situation.

3. Explain that each group will receive a chart with the name of a different important leadership skill or quality that they will focus on and later present to the other groups.

   a. The partners must make sure that they agree on the definition of the skill.

   b. If they are not sure or do not agree, they should ask at least three other participants for feedback before asking a facilitator.

   c. Explain that this rule is in place because it is important for the young women to see each other as resources and to begin to work together to solve problems.

4. Divide the group into partners using the method of your choice from the Cultivating Community Practices section in this curriculum.

5. Distribute one leadership quality chart and writing utensil per pair. You may have to double up as there are eight leadership qualities in this exercise.

6. Tell them they have 10 minutes to define their skill and complete their chart.

7. Circulate among the groups and help them to rely on their own resources to troubleshoot whenever possible. Let the group know when five minutes have passed.

8. After 10 minutes, signal that you will be transitioning to the next step and encourage groups to wrap up their work.

9. Ask groups to take about three minutes to decide how they will share the presentation duties. Explain that each group will need to name and define their skill and say what it looks, sounds, and feels like to effectively use that skill in collaborative leadership. Tell them the presentation should only be a minute or so long.

10. After three minutes, ask groups to wrap up their work.

Leadership Quality Charts

On the following pages you will find the eight leadership quality charts that will be used in this module as part of the leadership activity. You will need to print out one copy of each page, and during the lesson you will break the group up into small groups so that they can work on these charts together. You may have to ask one or two groups to do two of them.
<table>
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<th>COMMUNICATION</th>
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## SELF-REGULATION

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Leadership Skills Team Presentations (25 min)

1. Before you begin, ask participants if they could describe what an effective presentation looks like (they may say “eye contact,” “look at the audience,” “don't slouch,” etc.), sounds like (“clear,” “loud enough to hear,” etc.), and feels like (“audience feels interested,” “presenter feels confident,” etc.).

2. Explain that this is the first time participants will be presenting to each other and that they should strive for these qualities but understand that there may be time to continue working on presentation skills when working on the social action leadership project.

3. Invite groups up, one at a time, to present their ideas.

4. After each group presents, tape its chart in a visible location. Ask if anyone wants to add an idea to the chart. Add ideas, as necessary. Thank each group after its presentation.

Once every group has had a turn, say that along with the group agreement, you will use these charts as a guide for the collaborative leadership work you will be doing in the program.

Self-Reflection (20 min)

1. Say that self-reflection is another helpful skill that leaders should have.

2. Explain that thinking about how we have approached situations, reflecting on what went well and what could be improved upon in the future, is helpful in planning how to meet our goals and be an effective team member.

3. Say that the next activity will give young women a chance to reflect on the skills and qualities they bring to the team.

4. Ask participants to choose any color marker, a piece of construction paper, and a pair of scissors.

5. Once everyone has their materials, ask participants to trace their hand onto a piece of the paper and cut it out.

6. Once they have done this, ask them to think about a time they had success working in a group or working as a leader.

a. Ask them to remember why they or their group was successful.

b. Did they put certain leadership or personal skills to effective use? Which ones?

c. Guide them to think about a skill that they feel ready and able to share with the group as they embark on their leadership work.

7. Ask them to write this skill on the “palm” of their paper hand, since it represents something they would like to offer to the group.

8. Now ask them to flip over the hand. Tell them to think about a time they struggled with group work or leadership work.

a. Ask them to think about what made it difficult for them in that situation.

b. Was there a skill that may have helped them if they had a better understanding of how to use it?

c. Ask them to think about a skill that they are still learning to put to good use and with which they may require some more practice or help.

9. Instruct them to write this skill on the empty side of the hand.

- Say that communicating the things they need help or practice with allows the group to understand their perspective and support their personal goals.

10. Encourage participants to take a short amount of time to decorate their hands as they wish and ask them to write their name somewhere on the hands.

11. Ask the group to form a circle. Go around the circle and ask each participant to share the skill she has to offer the group and the skill with which she may require help. Encourage each participant to notice who has a skill that may support her in strengthening her own skills.

12. Thank the group for their openness. Collect the hands for future reflection.

13. You may choose to end this activity with a round of high-fives.
Handy Mindfulness Activity: (15 min)

1. Inform the group that as you guide them through this mindfulness activity, you will ask questions that encourage them to listen to their bodies. These questions are meant to be answered silently.

2. Say to the girls, “I will ask you to clap your hands three times and then drop them into your lap and close your eyes, if you are comfortable doing so. We will count each clap as we go.”

3. “Okay, ready, clap your hands three times. One. Two. Three. Now rest your hands in your lap and close your eyes.”

4. “Breathe normally, in through your nose and out through your nose. Bring your attention to your hands. Can you feel the effects of having clapped them? Do you feel a buzzing or vibrating sensation? Do you feel warmth?”

5. “Focus your attention on the palms of your hands. What do you notice?”

6. “OK, move your attention to your pinkies. What do you notice?”

7. “Now pay attention to your ring finger, your middle finger, your pointer—or index—finger.”

8. “Finally, notice what you feel in your thumb.”

9. “One finger at a time make a fist, paying attention to how each finger feels as it moves inward toward your palm.”

10. “Now shake your hands a little. What part of your hand draws your attention when you do that?”

11. “Take a minute to quietly focus on your hands.”

12. After one minute, signal the group to open their eyes and discuss what participants noticed during this activity.

Review and Reflection (10 min)

1. You should end the session by asking the participants to share something that they learned or will use in the coming week or choose one of the reflection suggestions from the closing rituals section of Cultivating Community Practices.

2. Have them go around and share. Then lead them in a round of mindfulness breathing together to end the session.

   a. Have them get in a comfortable sitting position, close their eyes if they are comfortable, take in a deep breath through their nose to the count of three, filling their lungs with air.

   b. Then hold their breath for the count of two, and release through their mouth to the count of three.

   c. Lead them through three rounds.

13. You may choose to end this activity with a round of high-fives.
MODULE TWO: I CHOOSE TO SET MY INTENTION

BRIEF AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Projects</td>
<td>50 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brain Training Neuroplasticity</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>STOP Mindfulness Practice</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yoga Poses</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
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<td>Review and Reflect</td>
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<td>Review and Reflect</td>
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<td>135 Minutes/2.25 Hours</td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Be able to define “neuroplasticity.”
- Understand that it is possible to train one’s brain to adapt to new habits.
- Practice developing tools for establishing a mindfulness practice.
- Practice goal setting and communication skills.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
4. Prepare the following T-chart on a large piece of paper, that will be hung:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INJUSTICE</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
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5. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
6. Prepare to show a YouTube video.
7. Post the schedule of activities in a visible location.
8. Prepare the meeting space, as necessary.
9. Gather materials, including door prize, if applicable.
10. Make any necessary arrangements for food.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Screen for showing YouTube video.
- Intention Jewelry Making Kit with enough supplies to allow each participant one bracelet. (Purchasing additional kits would allow more than one participant to make a bracelet at a time and ensure that everyone will have time to complete the activity in the time allowed.)
- Kits are available for purchase at www.myintent.org/collections/frontpage.
- Markers and/or colored pencils for sharing or individual packages for each participant.
- One pre-cut framing mat per participant (size 5” x 7” or 3” x 5”).
Plain paper.
Optional camera for taking photos that will later be printed to the appropriate size to fit in the framing mat.
Chart paper or chalk/white board for making a list.
The T-chart with the words “Injustice” and “Action”.
Yoga mats, blankets, or towels (one per participant).

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome, Check-In, and Review (15 min)

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from Cultivating Community Practices.
3. Remind participants where the schedule and group agreement are posted.
4. Read the daily intention: “I choose to set my intention.” Ask participants what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)
5. Invite participants to sit up straight, feet on the ground, and take a deep breath to center themselves and prepare for the activities ahead.

Frame of Reference Activity and Intention Jewelry Making (50 min)

1. Tell participants you will be working on two art projects focused on intention that will inform their process as they begin work on their leadership project starting next week. Mention that these activities relate to how they approach the world and set their goals.
2. Explain that the first thing participants need to do is decide what they would like to have as a personal intention to guide the work they do as part of Young Women Choosing Action. Acknowledge that they shared their ideas earlier and that, for the purpose of this activity, an “intention” refers to an aim, goal, skill, or trait they would like to strive to attain over the next 10 weeks. Ask participants to think of one word that describes what they would like to achieve over the course of Young Women Choosing Action. They may finish the statement “I am (a)...” or “I choose to be (a)…”. Sample words: “leader,” “strong,” “smart,” “change-maker,” “calm,” “bold,” “mindful,” etc.
3. Explain the process of intention jewelry making and that participants will take turns making their bracelet while everyone works on the Frame of Reference project. This means that they will have to move back and forth between the two projects.

Intention Jewelry Making (20 min)

This activity is intended to guide participants in setting an intention or goal for the duration of the program. Wearing the bracelet between sessions can be a helpful reminder of the lessons they are learning as part of the program, as well as a link to their intention.

1. Co-facilitators should familiarize themselves with how to make the intention jewelry using the kit.
2. Each facilitator should make a sample bracelet for herself.
3. Decide how to combine this activity with another for minimum disruption.
4. Show an example of the intention jewelry and how participants may use the bracelet for reflection in their daily life.
5. Instruct each group on how to use the jewelry making kit and explain that participants will need to take turns with the jewelry maker(s).
6. Once a young woman has chosen a word, she may begin making the bracelet. Call participants to the jewelry-making session one or two at a time, depending on how many jewelry-making kits are available. The rest of the group should be working on the Frame of Reference activity.
Frame of Reference (30 min)

This activity is intended to teach how identity and culture shape how individuals see and act in the world. Recognizing that their “truth” or reality is not the only “truth” can help individuals to better navigate the choices they make. This activity asks young women to explore their frame of reference and set an intention for the program.

1. Decide whether you would like to fill the frame by having young women draw self-portraits or by taking and printing photos of each young woman.

2. Make the necessary arrangements for supplies and/or photo printing.

3. Arrange for suitable table space for each participant to engage in an art project that involves drawing.

4. Explain that you will be engaging in a guided art project that is intended to illustrate how individuals form the way they see themselves and the world around them. Say that although everyone will follow the same instructions, it is likely that all the results will differ, since they will be based on each person’s individual experiences and creativity.

5. Distribute the framing mats to participants. Ask them to hold the frames up to their faces and look through them. Explain that everyone sees the world through her own frame of reference and how she sees and interacts with the world has a lot to do with her individual experiences. For instance, someone who grew up in a large family may see and experience some situations differently from someone who is an only child.

6. Ask participants if they can think of any aspects of their identity or experiences that may contribute to how they see or experience the world. Write their responses on chart paper or a chalk/white board. Answers should include:
   - Gender and gender identity
   - Sexual orientation
   - Ethnicity/race
   - Religion
   - Economic situation
   - Family situation, traditions, and values
   - Community/neighborhood
   - Age
   - Education
   - Language
   - Personal experiences

7. Ask participants to think about how these aspects of themselves inform how they act, interact, and think in various situations. Remind them that this is the frame through which they look at the world, and that everyone is looking back at them through her own frame. Ask them to think about how they view people who have different frames of reference from themselves. Do they have negative feelings about them? Do they try to find common ground with them? Do they try to understand why someone may behave a certain way? Do they accept differences unconditionally?

8. Say that often we think of the way we see things as “the truth” of a situation, but if we all see things from our own frames, how can we really know what “the truth” is in any given situation?

9. Explain that although our experiences and sense of identity shape how we see and move through the world, having a frame of reference is not an excuse for acting in hurtful or hateful ways toward ourselves or others. By choosing to understand why we think and act the way we do (and why others may think and act in certain ways), we can better choose behaviors that help us achieve what we want in life.

10. Instruct participants to creatively write their intention on the bottom of the frame.

11. Ask each participant to decorate the rest of her frame so that it reflects her frame of reference. Tell them they may draw pictures, write words, or use symbols that represent the aspects of their identity they feel impact the way they look at the world and respond to situations.

12. Explain that you will be taping a picture into the frame. If participants are to draw a self-portrait, distribute paper for this and instruct them to center their paper so their...
picture appears inside the frame. If you will be taking photos, explain the process for that.

13. Distribute markers and pencils.

14. Encourage the young women to have fun with this and to do their best work within the time constraints.

Notes

■ This activity may run concurrently with the intention jewelry making activity.

■ If you are taking photos, you could take them while participants are working on their frames.

■ Consider setting up a “photo studio” by selecting a space in the room that is well-lit with a plain backdrop.

■ The amount of time it takes participants to complete an art project can vary greatly. Making them aware of time constraints can help contain the project.

■ If you intend to display the framed portraits, explain this to participants before they start working, letting them know that ultimately it is their choice whether to display their work.

Brain Training Neuroplasticity (10 min)

1. State that as a follow-up to the art activity they just finished, we are going to look at the role the brain plays in how we view ourselves and interact with others.

2. Explain that from the time we are born, our brains are constantly taking in information, and as we grow, our brain goes through its own stages of development. Often our actions are directly related to what it is going on with the chemicals and signals in our brain as it develops and changes. It works the other way too—brains can develop patterns or “habits” based on the kinds of things we think or do repeatedly. This makes it more likely that we will continue to think or do these things, even if we do not intend to. Say that we will be watching a short video about how this works.

3. Show the video titled “Neuroplasticity.”

4. Ask if anyone can explain neuroplasticity in her own words.

5. Ask if anyone can draw a connection between intentions and neuroplasticity.

   a. Can participants think of thought patterns that they have established without realizing it?

   b. Can they think of thought habits they would like to change?

   c. Let them know that noticing their thoughts and feelings is the first step in deciding which kinds of thoughts are helpful and which ones are not.

   d. Setting an intention to make change is the next step.

Stop Mindfulness Practice (15 min)

1. When leading a mindfulness meditation practice, the intention is to create a peaceful and inviting atmosphere for inner reflection. Facilitators should read the scripts with a calm, clear voice. There is no need to speak in an affected or breathy voice, as some imagine when they think of guided meditations. Read the scripts slowly and clearly, pausing for several seconds after each sentence and allowing participants time to process the instructions.

   • Mention that no matter what skill they want to strengthen, mindfulness practices like the one you are about to use support the process of neuroplasticity and skill building.

2. Share this saying about mindfulness: “You must weave your parachute every day, so it is ready when you have to jump.” In other words, if you practice mindfulness when you do not need it, it will be a tool that is available to you in stressful times when you do.

3. Share that you are going to teach them the STOP mindfulness practice now.

4. Tell them that “STOP” stands for:

   a. Stop.

   b. Take a breath.

   c. Observe the situation.

   d. Proceed.
5. **Stop.** Encourage participants to find a time to “STOP” every day.

6. **Take a few breaths.** Follow your breath in and out of your nose for a minute. Pay attention to how your breath moves in your body. Allow your breath to communicate a sense of calmness to your brain.

7. **Observe** your experience just as it is. Notice any thoughts or emotions you are having. Name your emotions because this can help to settle down your brain’s fear response.
   
   a. Do not judge your thoughts or feelings, just try to recognize them as the temporary things that they are and let them pass.
   
   b. Notice any feelings you are having in your body. Notice your posture and how you are sitting or standing.

8. **Proceed** with something that will support you in the moment. This could be talking to a friend, giving yourself a hug, or getting a glass of water. Think about what would be helpful and proceed to do it.

9. Lead participants in a short STOP meditation using the guided meditation script in the Yoga and Mindfulness Practices Manual or this video, guided by Elisha Goldstein.

10. Encourage participants to set aside a time or set a timer to practice this exercise at least once per day.

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**Social Action Leadership Project (20 min)**

Remind the participants that over the course of the next few sessions they will be working together to create at least one social action leadership project that will be implemented during the second half of the program. The group will practice their leadership skills while participating in this project and they will work to bring about a positive change in their community. Explain that the group will use their mindfulness and communication skills to find consensus or agreement while they work toward their shared goal.

1. Ask participants if anyone remembers what “social action” means and share a few examples again to get them rooted in the definition. If no one speaks up, remind them that social action is taking steps to change things that are wrong in society; that social action is a means of addressing an injustice or bias in society.

2. Ask the young women if and where they encounter injustice in their own lives. Do they experience different or unfair treatment because of their age? Gender? Race? Religion? Clarify with them whether this treatment is a social justice problem rather than an interpersonal problem. For instance, girls being suspended for racist or sexist dress code violations is a social justice issue but one girl’s mother not allowing her to wear sleeveless shirts is an interpersonal issue.

3. Ask the young women to speak about social justice issues that affect them. Write (or ask for a volunteer to write) their responses in the “injustice” column of the prepared T-chart.

4. Once you have a good list, ask the young women if they can think of a social action that might be taken to address each of these issues. Write these (or ask a volunteer to) in the “action” column of the T-chart. If necessary, provide some examples of possible actions. More than one action may be listed for each injustice.

5. Ask participants if they feel drawn to address any injustice on the list. Ask each person who shares a response to explain why they think it is important.

6. Thank everyone who shares. Explain that the next step will be to come to consensus about what the project will be. Encourage participants to consider the thoughts their peers just shared and to think about what kind of project they might like to undertake as part of *Young Women Choosing Action*. Let them know they will do more work on this at the next session.

7. Make sure to keep the T-chart with the list of injustices and actions for the next session.
Yoga Practice (15 min)

Start today’s Yoga practice with some pranayama in the Easy Pose.

**STEP 1**

Ask the participants to sit on the floor and cross their shins so that their feet slide beneath the opposite knees.

1. Participants might know this position as sitting crisscross applesauce.
2. Knees should be bent at a comfortable angle.
3. There should be a triangle-formed by the two thighs and the crossed shins.
4. Feet should be relaxed.

**STEP 2**

Next tell them you are going to do some pranayama in this position. Have them raise their arms.

1. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T-shape).
2. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.
3. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.
4. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.
5. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.

**STEP 3**

Transition the focus from breathing to posture.

1. Tell the participants, “Lengthen your spine, imagining it reaching for the floor while simultaneously lifting your belly button up.”
2. “Bring your shoulder blades together and in toward the torso to support this movement.”

**STEP 4**

Hands may be placed in the lap, palms up, or placed on the knees, palms down. Take several conscious breaths in this position.

Now let them know you are going to teach them Child’s Pose. It may be helpful for one facilitator to instruct while the other demonstrates.

**Child’s Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Ask the participants to “kneel on the floor, touching your big toes together and sitting on your heels.”
2. “Separate your knees about as wide as your hips (or as wide as is comfortable).”

**STEP 2**

1. “Bring your torso down between your thighs as you exhale.”
2. “Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of the pelvis while you lift the base of your skull away from the back of your neck.”

**STEP 3**

1. “Lay your hands on the floor alongside your torso, palms up, and release the fronts of your shoulders toward the floor.”
2. “Feel how the weight of the front shoulders pulls the shoulder blades wide across your back.”
3. Alternatively, arms may be stretched out in front of the head, with palms facing down.

**STEP 4**

1. Instruct the participants to stay in this position for 30–60 seconds, breathing for relaxation.

Let them know that this pose is usually done at the end of yoga practice to help re-center yourself before going about the rest of your day.

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**Review And Reflection (10 min)**

1. You should end the session by asking the participants to share something that they learned or will use in the coming week or by choosing one of the reflection suggestions from the Closing Rituals section of Cultivating Community Practices.

2. Have them go around and share.

3. Then end the session with a round of mindfulness breathing together.

   a. Have them get in a comfortable sitting position, close their eyes if they are comfortable, take in a deep breath through their nose to the count of three, filling their lungs with air.

   b. Then hold their breath for the count of two, and release through their mouth to the count of three.

4. Lead them through three rounds of mindfulness breathing before dismissing them.
MODULE FOUR:  
I CHOOSE TO APPRECIATE AND GROW MY STRENGTHS
MODULE FOUR: I CHOOSE TO APPRECIATE AND GROW MY STRENGTHS

BRIEF AGENDA

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness Practice</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths Self-Check and Process</td>
<td>30 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yoga Practice</td>
<td>15 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act and React Game</td>
<td>30 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>35 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150 Min/2.5 Hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Practice mindfulness skills to mitigate the impact of adversity and toxic stress.
- Identify personal strengths and set behavioral goals.
- Practice resiliency skills.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and determine how co-facilitators will share responsibilities and deliver content and instructions.
2. Make copies of the Strengths Self-Check, one per participant.
3. Write situations for the Act and React Game on slips of paper, fold them individually, and put them in a container.
4. Post the daily intention and an overview of the daily schedule in an easily visible location.

5. If providing food and beverages, arrange to have these ready and accompanied by necessary service items.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Chart paper and marker or dry-erase board and markers.
- Copies of the Strengths Self-Check, one per participant.
- Prepare the following two charts on large pieces of flip chart paper for use during the social action leadership project discussion:

  **Project / Topic Nomination Charts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST CHOICE</th>
<th>SECOND CHOICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

  **SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE AFFECTED</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SUPPORTERS OF THE ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECISION-MAKERS</th>
<th>SOURCES FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE</th>
</tr>
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</table>

- Container for the Act and React game.
- Written situations for the Act and React game.
- Yoga mats, blankets, or towels—one per participant.
**MODULE ACTIVITIES**

**Welcome, Check-In, and Review (15 min)**

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants where the schedule and group agreement are posted.
4. Read the daily intention “I choose to appreciate and grow my strengths.” Ask participants what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)
5. Invite participants to get comfortable as you are going to take them through a new mindfulness practice.

**Mindfulness Practice (15 min)**

Tell them to begin by taking a few slow breaths in and out through their nose—centering themselves and listening to their breath and feeling themselves begin to relax as they focus only on their breathing. Have them repeat this five times. Now tell them you are going to take them slowly through a three-minute meditation practice.

**Three-Minute Meditation (Guided Meditation)**

1. “Place your hands on your lap and your feet flat on the ground. If it feels safe for you, close your eyes.”
3. “Pay attention to the sounds around you. Maybe you hear someone shuffling their feet, or voices coming from the hall. Perhaps there is traffic outside. Simply notice and hear it all without judgement or attaching any thoughts to it. It is not good or bad, it just is.”
4. “Just pay attention to your breath. Notice your breath coming in and going out. Feel where it enters your nose and the cool sensation in your nostrils.”
5. “Now come back to your body and the sounds around you. Notice the sensation of sitting in your chair.”
6. “When you are ready, gently open your eyes.”

**Strengths Self-Check And Process (30 min)**

1. Hand out the Strengths Self-Check and read the introduction aloud with the group (or ask for a volunteer to read it).
2. If appropriate for your group, encourage members to read through and check off the strengths they have.
   a. If members struggle with reading, you may choose to read through each skill and descriptor aloud. If this is the case, encourage participants to reflect on the skills and place their checkmarks quietly.
   b. There will be time to reflect on their answers later.
3. Once participants are finished filling out the self-check, remind them to follow the final instructions, which are to circle the skill they would most like to practice in the upcoming weeks and put a star next to the skill they view as their greatest strength right now.
4. Explain that they will be discussing the self-check in pairs in concentric circles.
5. Instruct half the group to stand in a circle, with their backs to the middle of the circle. The other half of the group should form a circle around them, facing toward the middle so that everyone has a partner whom they are facing. (If there is an uneven number, a facilitator should participate.)
6. Tell the participants that they will have two minutes to converse with the person they are facing. Let them know how you will signal when it is time to change. Encourage everyone to listen without judgment but to ask follow-up questions if time allows.
7. Instruct participants to share with each other what they consider their current greatest strength and why they think that.
8. After about two minutes, signal the group to wrap up its conversations and instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left.
9. Instruct participants to take turns sharing which skill they would most like to work on and why they think this skill would be useful to them.

10. After about two minutes, signal the group to wrap up its conversations and instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left.

11. Instruct participants to discuss the question “Why is focusing on strengths a useful strategy for overcoming stress and adversity?”

12. After two minutes, signal the group to wrap up its conversations and instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left.

13. Explain that many experts agree that it is beneficial to have a growth mindset—or a belief that we can build our strengths and that, with practice, we can change and improve our situation. Ask them, “What if we approached our challenges from the opposite point of view, called a ‘fixed mindset,’ and we believed that there’s not much we can to change our attitude, skills, or knowledge in any given situation? How might that affect how we deal with difficulty in our lives?” Instruct participants to discuss the question with their partners.

14. After a few minutes, signal the group to wrap up its conversations and instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left.

15. Tell participants this is the last pairing. Ask them to work with their partners to come up with actions they can take this week to practice the skill they each want to strengthen.

16. After a few minutes, signal participants to wrap up their conversations and return to their seats.

17. Ask participants if they would like to share any good ideas that they came up with for practicing the skills they would like to strengthen. Encourage them to honor where they are and appreciate the degree to which they are already employing strengths.

18. Thank them for their participation in the activity. Assure them that they will have opportunities to practice the skills in Young Women Choosing Action in the upcoming weeks.

---

**Strengths Self-Check**

Research shows that people who practice the following skills are better able to overcome the effects of toxic stress, trauma, and adversity. These skills support resiliency, or the ability to bounce back and move forward in the face of difficulty. These are also useful leadership skills. You may have heard some of these skills described as personal strengths. This makes sense because the more you practice them, the more you strengthen your ability to use them effectively.

Below the name of each skill is a list of statements that describe what it looks like to practice the skill. Put a check mark next to each statement you think is true about yourself.

**Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation**

- I am good at identifying my emotions and controlling my responses.
- I am comfortable with my emotions and can appropriately express a wide range of emotions, including joy, fear, anger, and sadness.
- I do not get stuck in any emotion for long. I can work through difficult emotions and move on.

**Impulse Control**

- I stop and think before I act.
- I have control over how I respond to most situations and I choose to respond in safe and appropriate ways.
- I make a choice to engage in healthy habits even though there are times I may feel drawn to unhealthy behaviors.

**Optimism**

- I think positively about the future, even when things go wrong.
- I choose to focus on the good in my life. I do not spend too much time complaining.
- I am realistic about the steps I need to take to reach my goals, but I never stop believing I can take those steps.
Flexible and Accurate Thinking
- I can look at a situation from many different perspectives and use those perspectives to inform how I act in the situation.
- I am comfortable thinking about new ideas and change.
- If at first I don’t succeed, I try again in a new way.

Empathy
- I understand how my words and actions may affect others.
- I can usually recognize how another person is feeling and respond respectfully.
- I am comfortable talking about feelings and emotions with others to find common ground.

Self-Efficacy
- I believe that I am capable of reaching my goals.
- I can recognize when I am successful and use the lessons of that success to help reach future goals.
- I learn from my mistakes and do not let them hold me back.

Connecting and Reaching Out
- I build relationships with healthy and safe/loving people.
- I look for friends who will challenge me and encourage me to grow.
- I know whom I can ask for trustworthy advice and feel comfortable asking them.

Growth Mindset
- I believe that I can change my behaviors and attitudes with intention and practice.
- I love to learn new things.
- I am persistent. When I want something, I stick with it, even if the going gets tough.

Instruct the participants to:
1. **Circle** the skill you would like to focus on improving in the upcoming weeks.
2. **Put a star** next to the skill you think is your greatest strength right now.

Yoga Practice (15 min)
Start today’s yoga in a sitting position—the participants can either be in easy pose or they can be on their knees with their thighs touching their calves. Tell them you are going to teach them some release poses. First, take them through 10 rounds of pranayama.

**Pranayama:**
1. Have them raise their arms.
2. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T shape).
3. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.
4. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.
5. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.
6. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.

Next, have them change positions so they are sitting up straight with their legs in front of them to learn the Bound Angle Pose.

**Bound Angle Pose:**

**STEP 1**
1. Sit with your legs straight out in front of you.
2. Exhale, bend your knees.
3. Pull your heels toward your pelvis, then drop your knees out to the sides and press the soles of your feet together.
**STEP 2**

1. Bring your heels as close to your pelvis as you comfortably can.

2. Always keep the outer edges of the feet firmly on the floor.

**STEP 3**

1. If it is comfortable, hold the big toes with your thumb and index finger.

2. If you cannot reach your toes, hold your ankles or shins with your hands or place your hands on your knees.

3. Tell participants not to force their knees down. If necessary, use blankets, to comfortably support the knees.

**STEP 4**

1. While focusing on your breath, sit in this pose for up to a couple of minutes.

2. When you are ready to release, inhale, lift your knees away from the floor and stretch your legs out in front of you.

3. Shake your leg muscles out if it feels good.

Then have them move into Child’s Pose.

**Child’s Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Kneel on the floor.

2. Touch your big toes together and sit on your heels.

3. Separate your knees about as wide as your hips (or as wide as is comfortable).

**STEP 2**

1. Bring your torso down between your thighs as you exhale.

2. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of the pelvis while you lift the base of your skull away from the back of your neck.

**STEP 3**

1. Lay your hands on the floor alongside your torso, palms up, and release the fronts of your shoulders toward the floor.

2. Feel how the weight of the front shoulders pulls the shoulder blades wide across your back.

3. Alternatively, arms may be stretched out in front of the head, with palms facing down.

**STEP 4**

1. Stay in this position for 30–60 seconds, breathing for relaxation.

Have everyone sit up and either stay seated on the floor or move them to the table to explain the rules of the next activity.

**Act And React Game (30 min)**

1. Tell participants you will be playing a game that will require them to think about their physical and emotional responses to different situations and act them out.

2. Explain that each person will take turns pulling a situation out of a hat (or whatever kind of container you are using) and will act out that situation without telling the rest of the group what the situation is.

3. The group will try to guess what each person is “reacting” to, based on the reaction.

4. Participants may move, speak, and use items in the room (such as chairs) as props, if necessary.

5. Ask for a volunteer to go first.

6. Make sure everyone gets a chance to go at least once.
Social Action Leadership Project
(35 min)

Coming to Consensus

Participants will use this activity to come to agreement on the issue they will address in the social action leadership project.

1. Break participants into groups of three or four using the method of your choice.
2. Ask them to review the T-chart you prepared in the previous module.
3. Explain that they will be working in small groups to determine their top two choices for a social action issue. The group must come to an agreement about the order of preference and be able to speak about why they chose these issues in this order.
4. Say that each group should assign a “secretary” to write their choices down in order of preference. Each group should be mindful to allow for everyone’s input.
5. Read the criteria for the social action issue:
   a. It should be relevant to the group.
   b. It should be an issue that can be addressed through social action.
6. Allow groups about five minutes to discuss.
   a. If after five minutes groups are not finding agreement, guide the process, as necessary.
   b. Tell them they have five minutes more to come to consensus.
7. Ask them to review their work and decide on one group member who will present their ideas.
8. Say that you will fill in the chart, as each group presents its ideas.
9. Ask group representatives to present one at a time.
   a. Fill in the corresponding categories on the chart as they go.

Act And React Situations

- You see your favorite celebrity on the street!
- You just won a million dollars!
- A huge rat just ran across your feet.
- You missed your bus by one minute.
- Your friend just told you a terrible joke.
- Someone cut in front of you in line.
- Someone sent you flowers.
- You got into the college of your dreams.
- Your friend just broke up with her boyfriend/girlfriend and is crying.
- You see someone on the bus get sick.
- You just tasted something unexpectedly sour.
- You just meditated for five minutes.
- You notice that you accidently put on two different shoes this morning.
- You get blamed for something you did not do.
- A kid in your class just said something sexist.
- You walk into a room full of puppies.
- You are holding a baby that will not stop crying.
- The haircut/style you just got is totally not what you wanted.
- The haircut/style you just got is gorgeous.
- You smell something foul during math class.
- You just received a compliment.
- You just stepped in a puddle (in your brand-new shoes).

Facilitator Note: Adapt and add to situations to make them more relevant for your group.
10. Once all groups have presented, ask participants to look at the list.
   a. Are there any issues that are #1 for more than one group?
   b. Are there any issues that most groups had on their list?

11. If every group has the same #1 issue, then consensus has been reached.
   a. If not, invite discussion about how consensus might be reached.
   b. Use participant suggestions to drive the decision-making process whenever possible.

12. If groups present different ideas, ask participants to speak in favor of their preferred project, highlighting how it would benefit the community.

13. If consensus cannot be achieved in the time allotted either:
   a. Suggest a vote, or
   b. Ask participants to consider the ideas (even do some research, if they wish) between sessions and be prepared to decide next time.

14. If a decision has been made, say that they will work on designing a project at the next session.

15. In either case, congratulate participants on challenging work, well done.

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**Review and Reflect (10 min)**

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.
2. Standing in a circle, ask for a quick one-to-five or thumbs evaluation of the day.
3. Thank the young women for their participation. Acknowledge that you discussed a lot of information in today’s module. Encourage them to practice the STOP exercise at least once a day this week, to use their Personal Leadership Journal, and to check in with the group on social media.
MODULE FIVE:
I CHOOSE TO COMMUNICATE AND COLLABORATE
MODULE FIVE: I CHOOSE TO COMMUNICATE AND COLLABORATE

BRIEF AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness Activity</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Adversity</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga Practice (Heart Opening Yoga Poses)</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>155 Minutes/ 2.55 hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand how adversity and toxic stress may impact health and behavior.
- Practice communication and teamwork skills.
- Practice leadership skills.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Write “Adversity challenges and difficulties that create stress and/or roadblocks in our lives” on a large piece of flipchart paper.
2. Put together a flip chart that has the following graph on it:

GROUP RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Can keep track of materials and assure they are available when needed.):</td>
<td>(Is comfortable finding the appropriate words to describe thoughts and actions.):</td>
<td>(Is comfortable writing and editing ideas.):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTISTRY/DESIGN</td>
<td>ASKING QUESTIONS</td>
<td>PLANNING SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Has creative vision and/or the ability to create/build art.):</td>
<td>(Pays attention to the process and asks questions to help clarify the project.):</td>
<td>(Can see the steps it takes to get from point A to point B.):</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Review activities and determine how co-facilitators will share responsibilities and deliver content and instructions.

4. Post the daily intention and an overview of the day’s schedule in an easily visible location.

5. Hang the Adversity Challenges flip chart where everyone can see it and it will be easy to write on during the session.

6. Cut out word bubble templates—one per participant.

7. Prepare another flip chart as follows on the table below.

8. Hang the charts for the social action leadership project when you get to that part of the agenda.

9. If providing food and beverages, arrange to have these ready and accompanied by necessary service items.

### PROJECT GOAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE ACTIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>REASONS WHY IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR OUR ISSUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenting a case to others about the issue (written or spoken).</td>
<td>■ Write a press release.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Start a blog to raise awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Meet a decision-maker to put forward an argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Flip chart paper and markers.
- “Resource” flip chart plus ones from prior week.
- Word bubble templates (one per participant).
- “Project Goal” flip chart.
- Pens.
- Tape.

### MODULE ACTIVITIES

**Welcome, Check-In, and Review (10 min)**

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.

2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.

3. Remind participants where the schedule and group agreement are posted.
4. Read the daily intention “I choose to communicate and collaborate.” Ask participants what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)

Mindfulness Activity (10 Min)

1. Have everyone get in a comfortable seated position and tell them you are going to take them through a new mindfulness activity (guided meditation) in preparation for today’s activities to get them more centered and able to fully participate.

2. Lovingkindness and Self-Compassion Guided Meditation (from the Centre for Mindfulness Studies, 2015)
   a. Sit in a comfortable position, upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few breaths to settle into your body and into the current moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.
   b. Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture, as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.
   c. Now bring yourself inside your body and notice how you feel.
   d. Locate your breathing at the place where you can most easily feel it. Feel how your breath moves in your body. When your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.
   e. Start to notice where you might be holding stress in your body, perhaps in your stomach, your jaw, your forehead.
   f. Also notice if you are holding difficult emotions, such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.
   g. Now offer yourself goodwill because of what you are holding in your body right now. Silently repeat the following phrases to yourself:
      ■ May I be safe.
      ■ May I be peaceful.
      ■ May I be kind to myself.
      ■ May I accept myself as I am.
   h. If your mind has wandered or if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breath.
   i. You can also name the emotion and find where it is settling into your body and breathe into that area.
   j. When you are ready, return to repeating the phrases.
      ■ May I be safe.
      ■ May I be peaceful.
      ■ May I be kind to myself.
      ■ May I accept myself as I am.
   k. Finally, take a few breaths and just rest comfortably in your body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
   l. Gently open your eyes.

3. Take a few minutes and ask the group if anyone wants to share what that meditation felt like for them.

Addressing Adversity (30 min)

1. Write “Adversity challenges and difficulties that create stress and/or roadblocks in our lives” on chart paper or a dry erase board where everyone can see it.
   a. Explain that most people encounter some adversity in their lives and part of growing is learning how to effectively respond to adversity as it arises.
   b. Give examples such as, “Adversity may involve something like not passing a test, or it may be something more serious and life-changing like being bullied at school or becoming homeless.”

2. Ask participants to brainstorm a list of potential adversities.
   a. Write (or ask for a volunteer to write) their answers on the chart paper or dry erase board.
   b. Encourage participants to think of both every day and life-changing adversities.
c. You might want to add some of the following examples if they do not make it onto the list. At the very least, mention these adversities and ask the young women if they should be added. This includes experiencing or witnessing:

i. Abuse (verbal, physical or emotional).
ii. Parents getting divorced.
iii. Food insecurity (not having enough to eat most of the time).
iv. Homelessness.
v. Someone you love going to prison.
vi. Racism.

3. Once the list is complete, explain that as we grow and our brains develop into adulthood, we learn to understand and navigate adversity based on our frame of reference, how our past experiences have played out, and the kinds of support systems we have had in our life.

4. Say that experiencing ongoing stress or adversity can be traumatic for many people, and the stress of storing those situations in their bodies and brains may lead to something called “toxic stress.”

a. If we have experienced more adversity than our minds and bodies can tolerate, we may experience health issues, anxiety, stress, or depression at that time or later.

b. People who experience toxic stress may be overreactive to anything they perceive as a threat. So, if someone lashes out at you because she thinks you gave her a dirty look (and you know you did not), it is not necessarily because that person is a jerk. It may be because the parts of her brain that are trained to notice and respond to threats are hyperdeveloped as a result of adverse childhood experiences. She may see a threat where most people do not.

5. Ask “Does experiencing toxic stress make it OK for someone to act aggressively when she feels threatened?”

a. Participants should arrive at the answer “no” or “it may explain why it is happening, but it doesn’t make it OK.”

b. Explain that how we react to adversity and deal with stress could affect our relationships and ability to reach our goals.

c. However, being able to identify how we react to adversity and stress helps us identify what works and does not work for us.

d. Research shows that choosing to focus on our strengths, choosing to use resiliency strategies to “bounce back” from adversity, and choosing to believe in our ability to change and grow helps us to overcome the long-term effects of adversity and minimize stress.

Heart Opening Yoga Poses (20 min)

1. Explain to participants that often we hunch our shoulders over our heart space. This constricts our breathing and can affect our posture. These poses could help with opening our heart space.

2. Have everyone stand up and get into a comfortable space.

3. Take them through 10 rounds of pranayama to get them centered and in the right frame of mind to learn two new poses.

Pranayama:

1. Have them raise their arms.

2. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T-shape).

3. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.

4. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.

5. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.

6. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.
Next have them lie down on the floor so you can teach them Cobra Pose.

_Cobra Pose:_

**STEP 1**

1. Lie on your stomach.
2. Stretch your legs back with the tops of your feet on the floor.
3. Spread your hands on the floor under your shoulders.
4. Hug your elbows back into your body.

**STEP 2**

1. Press the tops of your feet and thighs firmly into the floor.

**STEP 3**

1. As you inhale, straighten your arms to lift your chest off the floor, going only so high that your thighs and legs maintain a connection to the floor.
2. Press the tailbone toward the floor and keep your muscles firm through the legs from the hips to the feet.

**STEP 4**

1. Firm your shoulder blades against the back.
2. Lift through the top of the sternum but stay relaxed through the ribs.
3. You should feel a slight back bend.
4. Do not overextend.

**STEP 5**

1. Hold the pose anywhere from 15–30 seconds, breathing easily.
2. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

Repeat this three times. Now you will teach them Sphinx Pose.

_Sphinx Pose:_

**STEP 1**

1. Lie on your belly, legs side by side.
2. Firm your tailbone and lengthen it toward your heels.
3. Then, rotate your thighs inwardly by rolling your outer thighs toward the floor.
4. This helps broaden and lengthen your lower back and sacrum (the downward-facing triangular bone at the back of your pelvis) to protect it in a back bend.

**STEP 2**

1. Reach actively through your toes.
2. As you move into the pose, be sure to continue lengthening your tailbone toward your heels to protect your lower back.
3. Your buttocks should be firm but not clenched.
4. Although your legs are active, your tongue, eyes, and brain should be quiet.

**STEP 3**

1. Now set your elbows under your shoulders and your forearms on the floor parallel to each other.
2. Inhale and lift your upper torso and head away from the floor into a mild backbend.

**STEP 4**

1. Stay for 5–10 breaths, then exhale and slowly release your belly and lower your torso and head to the floor.
2. Turn your head to one side.
3. Lie quietly for a while, broadening your back with each inhale, and releasing any tension with each exhale.
4. Repeat once or twice more if you like.

Then have them move into Child’s Pose.

_Child’s Pose:_

**STEP 1**

1. Kneel on the floor.
2. Touch your big toes together and sit on your heels.
3. Then separate your knees about as wide as your hips (or as wide as is comfortable).
**STEP 2**

1. Bring your torso down between your thighs as you exhale.

2. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of the pelvis while you lift the base of your skull away from the back of your neck.

**STEP 3**

1. Lay your hands on the floor alongside your torso, palms up, and release the fronts of your shoulders toward the floor.

2. Feel how the weight of the front shoulders pulls the shoulder blades wide across your back.

3. Alternatively, arms may be stretched out in front of the head, with palms facing down.

**STEP 4**

1. Stay in this position for 30–60 seconds, breathing for relaxation.

2. Ask and note the answers to the following questions:
   
   a. Is there any additional information we need to get to complete our project?
   
   b. Is anyone doing similar work that could support our work?
   
   c. Do we need to research anything before moving on?

4. Next, point out the second chart. Explain that it is important to know the resources we have within the group, as each person will be asked to bring their skills to the table.

5. Read the description of each “resource” on the chart. Ask if anyone thinks we are missing any important skills. Use the additional blocks on the chart to add reasonable suggestions.

6. Tell participants to think about which skills they see in themselves. Let them know that markers are available, and each participant will need to put her name in at least one resource block. Invite them to come do so.

7. Say that you are going to hang on to these charts and they will refer to them as they better define their project and design their work plan.

---

**Social Action Leadership Project (45 min)**

**Identifying Resources**

Participants will identify the resources available to support their work in addressing a social justice issue.

1. Explain that now that we have identified a general idea for a social action leadership project, we need to determine some essential information to plan and move forward with our work.

   a. We will be looking at the resources we have in the community, the resources available to us online, and the resources that we have right here within the group.

   b. This will help us to determine how to access the skills and support we need to make this a high-quality, meaningful leadership project.

2. Using the first chart, ask for ideas in each category. The facilitator or a participant should fill in the chart as ideas are generated.

---

**Designing The Social Action Leadership Project (30 min)**

This next step is the most critical part of the process as the participants will begin collaborating to design their social action leadership project.

1. Explain that they will be finalizing the design of their project. Say that to design a project, it is better to start at the end rather than the beginning. Explain that this means that the group should be clear about what they hope to achieve with the project and about what success might look like.

2. Distribute the word bubbles. Ask each participant to fill in the word bubble with words they would like to hear spoken once the project is complete. For example, they might write, “Our project got a lot of publicity and things are changing in the community.”
3. As participants finish filling in their word bubbles, collect them and post them in the front of the room.

4. Read all the word bubbles aloud and ask, “What can we learn about the goal of our project given our desired results?”

5. Write the project goal on top of the prepared chart. Say that they are going to work together to fill in the chart, so that they can further narrow down their project.

6. Read the “Possible Actions” and “Examples” for the first square. Ask participants to share why this type of action might be useful for their issue.

7. Ask them to share other possible actions, keeping in mind the limited timeframe in which they must complete the project.

8. Fill in each corresponding square according to participant input.

9. You will need the group to come to consensus on which action they will focus on, given its resources and desired outcome.

---

**Review and Reflect (10 min)**

1. Encourage the young women to spend some time between modules writing in their Personal Leadership Journal and to choose a consistent time each day to practice both mindfulness and yoga.

2. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.

3. Ask participants to take a moment to think of one word to share about how they are feeling after today’s meeting.
   a. Starting with a co-facilitator, go around the circle until everyone has shared her word.
   b. If someone is really struggling, offer alternative ways to respond, such as using a thumbs-up signal or writing down the word.

4. Thank the young women and let them know that starting next week they will begin designing the social action leadership project so they can implement it during the program.

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**Word Bubble Templates**
MODULE SIX:
I CHOOSE TO NOTICE
MY THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS
## Module Six: I Choose to Notice My Thoughts and Actions

### Brief Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Light, Green Light</td>
<td>25 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind-Body Connection: Flipping the Lid</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>155 Minutes/2.55 hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Learning Objectives

**Participants will:**
- Understand the amygdala’s role in triggering fight, flight, or freeze responses.
- Define social action and injustice.
- Practice yoga and mindfulness.
- Determine potential action projects.
- Practice self-regulation/emotional control, impulse control, and self-efficacy.

### Planning and Preparation

1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
2. Prepare a resources chart as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps to Take</th>
<th>Completion Deadline</th>
<th>Who Will Do It</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
4. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.
5. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.
6. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
7. Make any necessary arrangements for food, utensils, etc.

### Materials Needed

- Three squares of construction paper: One green, one red, one yellow.
- Tape for hanging the paper.
- Markers, pens or pencils, and notepaper.
- Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).
- All the Social Action Flip charts from the prior weeks plus the new Resources one.
- List of scenarios.
MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome, Check-In, and Review (10 min)
1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Point out that the day’s schedule is posted.
4. Read the daily intention “I choose to notice my thoughts and actions.” Ask participants for a couple quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)

Yoga Poses (15 Min)
1. Have everyone stand up and find a space on the floor where they can spread out a bit as you will be both lying on the floor and doing some standing poses.
2. Take everyone through pranayama together.

Pranayama:
1. Have them raise their arms.
2. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T-shape).
3. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.
4. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.
5. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.
6. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.

Have them lay down on the floor to get ready for Sphinx Pose.

Sphinx Pose:
STEP 1
1. Lie on your belly, legs side by side.
2. Firm your tailbone and lengthen it toward your heels.
3. Then, rotate your thighs inwardly by rolling your outer thighs toward the floor.
4. This helps broaden and lengthen your lower back and sacrum (the downward-facing triangular bone at the back of your pelvis) to protect it in a back bend.

STEP 2
1. Reach actively through your toes.
2. As you move into the pose, be sure to continue lengthening your tail toward your heels to protect your lower back.
3. Your buttocks should be firm but not clenched.
4. Although your legs are active, your tongue, eyes, and brain should be quiet.

STEP 3
1. Now set your elbows under your shoulders and your forearms on the floor parallel to each other.
2. Inhale and lift your upper torso and head away from the floor into a mild backbend.

STEP 4
1. Stay for five to 10 breaths, then exhale and slowly release your belly and lower your torso and head to the floor.
2. Turn your head to one side.
3. Lie quietly for a while, broadening your back with each inhale, and releasing any tension with each exhale.
4. Repeat once or twice more if you like.

Then take them through this new pose: Upward-Facing Dog.
**Upward-Facing Dog Pose:**

**STEP 1**
1. Lie on your belly on the floor.
2. Stretch your legs back, with the tops of your feet on the floor.
3. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your waist so that your forearms are relatively perpendicular to the floor.

**STEP 2**
1. Inhale and press your inner hands firmly into the floor and slightly back, as if you were trying to push yourself forward along the floor.
2. Then straighten your arms and simultaneously lift your torso up and your legs a few inches off the floor on an inhalation.
3. Keep the thighs firm and slightly turned inward, the arms firm and turned out so the elbow creases face forward.

**STEP 3**
1. Press the tailbone forward.
2. Pull your belly button in.
3. Firm the shoulder blades against the back.

**STEP 4**
1. Look straight ahead or tip the head back slightly but take care not to compress the back of the neck and harden the throat.

**STEP 5**
1. Hold the pose for 15–30 seconds, breathing easily.
2. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

**NOTE:** Often, it is difficult to keep the legs strongly suspended above the floor. Before you move into the pose, position a thick blanket roll below your top thighs. When you are in the pose, lightly rest your thighs on this roll as you press the tailbone closer to the roll.

Have them then move into Child’s Pose to stretch their backs and relax. Ask them to take some deep breaths to re-center themselves.

**Reacting to Everyday Scenarios: The Red Light, Green Light Game (25 min)**

This activity is used to explore triggers and limbic responses in a nonthreatening, introductory manner.

1. Hang each piece of colored paper at eye level along the same wall, with the yellow piece in the middle, preferably with about three feet of space between each piece.

2. If you think it would be helpful for your participants, write “Fight, flight, or freeze” on the red paper, “Please hold” on the yellow paper, and “It’s cool” on the green paper.

3. Read through the scenarios ahead of time. If you find that it would be helpful to alter or add to the list to increase relevancy, do so. Just be sure to keep the content of the scenario suitably neutral.

4. Show participants the three squares hanging on the wall. Explain that these squares represent emotional traffic lights. Cover the following talking points:

   a. Over time and through our experiences, we tend to develop “automatic responses” to certain situations. Not everyone responds in the same way to the same situations.

   b. In this activity, participants should think about how they may normally respond to some common scenarios.

   c. There are three general ways people respond to situations. When participants have a general sense of their go-to response for a scenario, they should stand by the color square that best represents their reaction.

   d. Red = Fight, flight, or freeze: This is the kind of situation that makes a person blow up in anger, melt down in tears, or otherwise freak out.

   e. Yellow = Please hold: This is the kind of situation that an individual does not automatically react to. For the time being, the person may back slowly away or proceed with caution or try to find more information. Later, the individual may have a green or a red reaction, but in the moment, the person just keeps herself safe.
Green = It’s cool: This is the kind of situation you can let roll off your shoulders and you can move on from quickly.

every person reacts to things in her own way, given personal history, personality, and biology. There is no right or wrong answer in this activity, and there should be no judgement attached to how people respond. Just remember, some people run screaming if they see a snake, and some people keep snakes as pets. There is a multitude of ways we respond to human experiences.

5. Ask participants to stand up and get ready to listen to the scenarios.

6. One by one, read the scenarios. Allow participants to consider the scenario and move to the square that corresponds to their reaction.

7. Once you have read through all the scenarios, have participants return to their seats for a discussion.

8. Discussion questions/points:
   a. Were you surprised by any of your responses to the scenarios? Which one(s) and why?
   b. Why do you think we respond in certain ways to certain situations?
   c. We tend to think of red as being a less helpful way to respond and green as being the better way to respond. Do you think this is always the case? When could it be harmful to let things roll off your shoulders? When could it be helpful to follow your fight, flight, or freeze instinct?
   d. Are there ways you respond to certain kinds of situations that you would like to change?

**Scenarios**

1. You are sitting outside in the sunshine. You feel something on your arm. When you look, you see a large spider. How do you react?

2. You are telling your friend about a problem that you think is serious. She rolls her eyes and says you are just being dramatic. How do you react?

3. All your friends want to go to the movies this weekend. You tell them you do not have the money to go. They go without you. How do you react?

4. You have just spent an hour cleaning and organizing your closet. Suddenly, a shelf collapses, creating a huge mess of your work. How do you react?

5. Your class is taking a field trip, and there are a lot of students going on the trip. This means that you must sit three to a seat. You find yourself crammed between two classmates for the long trip to the museum. How do you react?

6. It is evident that someone in your family has been going through your purse/backpack without your permission. How do you react?

7. You just saw the person you are in a relationship with flirting with someone else. How do you react?

8. You are crossing the street at a crosswalk when a car runs a red light. The driver slams on the brakes and does not run into you, but she honks her horn as if it is your fault. How do you react?

**Mind-Body Connection: Flipping the Lid (15 min)**

This lesson is adapted from a model developed by Dr. Dan Siegal. It provides a practical illustration of brain anatomy that may be used to deepen understanding of brain function.

1. Familiarize yourself with the exercise and information that goes with it.

2. If possible, view this video, titled “Hand Model on the Brain.”

3. Ask participants to bend their right elbow and hold their hand up, palm facing in.

4. Explain that they can use their hands to create a model of the brain.

5. Say that the top of the wrist represents the spinal column. This is the major route of communication between the brain and the body.
6. Ask participants to bend their thumb into the center of their palm. Say, “This represents your limbic system. It is where a part of your brain called the ‘amygdala’ resides. The amygdala is sometimes called the ‘lizard brain,’ because—evolutionarily—it is an incredibly old part of our brain. It is the part of the brain that sends the ‘fight, flight, or freeze’ signal. A lot of our fear and what seem like our automatic responses (or triggers) to scenarios in our life stem from this area.”

7. Ask participants to curl the rest of their fingers over and cover up their thumb. Say that this represents their rational or thinking brain. It can be used to “keep the lid” on the intense reactions that arise in the limbic area, so we don’t “flip our lids.” Tell them you’ll talk more about this part of the brain in future sessions, but for now they should just notice how the thinking brain covers the amygdala and remember that they can use mindfulness and neuroplasticity to help control or reset those unhelpful reactions.

8. Instruct participants to open their hand back up to expose the “amygdala” again. Explain that the amygdala can get a bad rap, but it has served us humans well for a long time. If early humans did not have strong fight, flight, or freeze impulses, they may not have survived all the natural dangers in their world long enough to create future generations. Even today, there are situations when our fight, flight, or freeze instinct can serve us well, so we want to honor the work it does. However, we also want to begin to recognize when the amygdala is taking over in unhelpful ways so that we can train our brains to situation better instead of worse.

Social Action Leadership Project (60 min)

1. Explain that you will be making a work plan to complete your project.
   a. Remind everyone of the project goal and the action(s) you chose to take.

2. First, the young women must determine the steps that need to be taken and the time by which the steps must be completed.
   a. Ask participants what needs to be done to successfully complete the project.
   b. Ask if there are any steps that must be taken in a particular order.
   c. List the steps on the chart once they have been determined.
   d. Do not forget to include planning and preparation for the public presentation to YWCA leadership and/or community members in the action plan.

3. Ask participants to set a timeline for each step’s completion. Write it on the chart.

4. Using the “Resource” flip chart as necessary, ask for volunteers for each step.
   a. Steps may be completed by individuals or in small teams.
   b. Every participant should count on contributing in various ways each week.

5. Ask participants to think about the materials they need to complete their job.
   ○ You can use this time to add their suggestions to the chart or you can ask them to add it after some consideration.

6. Hang the work plan where it will be accessible each week and have markers available so that participants can add to the materials list, as necessary.

Review and Reflect (10 min)

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.

2. Encourage participants to reflect on their experiences using the Personal Leadership Journal and to set aside time each day to practice mindfulness and yoga.


4. Let participants know that social action work will continue in the next session and thank them for their participation.
MODULE SEVEN:
I CHOOSE TO BE HEALTHY
MODULE SEVEN: I CHOOSE TO BE HEALTHY

BRIEF AGENDA

Welcome, Check-in, and Review 10 Minutes
Yoga 15 Minutes
Prefrontal Cortex/Decision Making 10 Minutes
Coping Strategies 25 Minutes
Self-Care Plan 30 Minutes
Social Action Leadership Project 25 Minutes
Review and Reflect 10 Minutes
Total 135 Minutes/2.25 Hours

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand how the prefrontal cortex supports decision making.
- Understand the difference between positive and negative coping strategies.
- Develop a self-care plan.
- Practice yoga to release tension.
- Practice building consensus.
- Practice self-regulation, self-efficacy, and collaboration.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
2. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.
4. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.
5. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
6. Make any necessary arrangements for food.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Copies of the Self-Care Plan templates—one per participant, plus extras in case of mistakes.
- All the social action leadership project flip charts from prior weeks.
- Colored pencils (optional).
- Stressful Scenarios printouts.
- Yoga mats, blankets, or towels (one per participant).
- Optional props, such as hats, glasses, aprons, etc., to suit scenarios.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (10 min)

- Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
- Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
- Remind participants that at the last meeting they explored how they react to some kinds of situations and the role the amygdala plays in their emotional responses. Say that today they are going to take a deeper look at how the prefrontal cortex can help to manage the amygdala.
- Read the daily intention “I choose to be healthy.” Ask participants for a couple of quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)
Yoga Poses (15 Min)

1. Have everyone stand up and find a space on the floor where they can spread out a bit as you will be both lying on the floor and doing some standing poses.
2. Take everyone through pranayama together.

**Pranayama:**

1. Have them raise their arms.
2. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T-shape).
3. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart.
4. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.
5. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides. Have participants inhale through their noses and exhale through their mouths.
6. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.

Now you are going to teach them some strength building poses.

**Mountain Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Stand with the bases of your big toes touching, heels slightly apart (so that your second toes are parallel).
2. Lift and spread your toes and the balls of your feet, then lay them softly down on the floor.
3. Rock back and forth and side to side.
4. Gradually reduce this swaying to a standstill, with your weight balanced evenly on the feet.

**STEP 2**

1. Firm your thigh muscles and lift the kneecaps, without hardening your lower belly.
2. Lift the inner ankles to strengthen the inner arches. Imagine a line of energy all the way up along your inner thighs to your groin muscles, and from there through the core of your torso, neck, and head, and out through the crown of your head.
3. Turn the upper thighs slightly inward.
4. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor and lift the pubis toward the navel.

**STEP 3**

1. Press your shoulder blades into your back, then widen them across and release them down your back.
2. Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight toward the ceiling.
3. Widen your collarbones.
4. Hang your arms beside the torso.

**STEP 4**

1. Balance the crown of your head directly over the center of your pelvis, with the underside of your chin parallel to the floor, throat soft, and the tongue wide and flat on the floor of your mouth.
2. Soften your eyes.

**STEP 5**

1. Stay in the pose for 30–60 seconds, breathing easily.

**Note:** You can check your alignment in this pose with your back against a wall. Stand with the backs of your heels, sacrum, and shoulder blades (but not the back of your head) touching the wall.

**Chair Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Stand in Mountain Pose.
2. Inhale and raise your arms perpendicular to the floor.
3. Either keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward, or join the palms.
STEP 2
1. Exhale and bend your knees, trying to take the thighs as nearly parallel to the floor as possible.
   a. The knees will project out over the feet, and the torso will lean slightly forward over the thighs until the front torso forms approximately a right angle with the tops of the thighs.
   b. Tuck tailbone down and have a straight spine.
2. Keep the inner thighs parallel to each other and press the heads of the thigh bones down toward the heels.

STEP 3
1. Firm your shoulder blades against the back.
2. Take your tailbone down toward the floor and in toward your pubis to keep the lower back long.

STEP 4
1. Stay for 30 seconds to a minute.
2. To come out of this pose straighten your knees with an inhalation, lifting strongly through the arms.
3. Exhale and release your arms to your sides into Mountain Pose.

Have them move from Mountain Pose to Chair Pose a few times to get the hang of it and to feel what it feels like to move from one to the other.

Then take them through a few rounds of pranayama to close out the practice.

Prefrontal Cortex/Decision Making (10 min)
1. Read through lesson plan. Alter language for authenticity, as needed.
2. Ask participants to remember the hand model of the brain they made last week. Ask them to raise their hand in front of them and bend their thumbs to form the “amygdala.”
3. Ask if anyone remembers what the amygdala does. (If no one answers, remind them that it is the part of the brain that sends the “fight, flight, or freeze” signal.)
4. Instruct participants to fold the rest of their fingers over their “amygdala.” Ask if anyone remembers what part of the brain this represents. (If no one responds, remind them that this represents the rational or thinking brain.)
5. Hold your hand, wrist facing out, next to your forehead. Point to the front of the fingers. Explain that this represents the prefrontal cortex. Place your hand on the front part of your head to demonstrate where on the brain the prefrontal cortex is.
6. Say that the prefrontal cortex is like the brain’s remote control.
   a. It is the part of the brain that helps with managing emotion and executive functioning.
   b. Executive functioning is all about reasoning and making decisions.
   c. This section of the brain also helps people understand one another.
7. Mention that the prefrontal cortex communicates with the other sections of the brain through connections called synapses. Healthy choices and practicing mindfulness help build healthy synapses.
8. Open your hand, revealing the thumb, and ask how managing emotion and making well thought-out decisions could be helpful in keeping us from flipping our lids.
9. Ask, “Thinking about the skills and strategies we’ve learned so far, what steps can we take to create an atmosphere for greater neuroplasticity in building the connections between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex?”
10. If necessary, give an example, such as, “When we set an intention to stop and breathe when we feel our stress levels rising, it helps us to pay more attention to our feelings and make that connection.”
Coping Strategies (25 min)

1. Remind participants that stress is a part of life and that we deal with various levels of stress throughout our lives and according to our circumstances.

2. Say that while stress is a normal human response to situations, chronic stress—which means experiencing high stress levels over an extended period—can cause serious health problems like high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, and depression.

3. Explain to participants that this is why it is important to learn how to manage stress and difficult feelings while you are young.

4. Also, say that the most effective leaders are those who have the tools to manage stress without internalizing it. A daily workout, yoga, meditation, sufficient sleep, etc. can be critical to a leader’s success.

5. Say that the human brain does not like to hang out in a state of stress and is hardwired to seek relief and pleasure in the wake of stressful situations.
   a. The impulse is to feel better, but the choices we make to meet that impulse sometimes make things worse.
   b. It all comes down to whether we choose healthy or unhealthy coping strategies.

6. Ask participants how to define a healthy coping strategy vs. an unhealthy coping strategy. Settle on a close variation of the following definitions:
   a. Healthy Coping Strategy—contributes to relieving stress and usually does not cause any short- or long-term harm.
   b. Unhealthy Coping Strategy—may relieve stress in the short term but has potential negative effects on health and relationships.

7. Inform participants they will be working in small groups to create short, one-minute skits about coping strategies.

8. Tell them each group will receive a description of a potentially stressful scenario and three possible ways to cope with the stress of the situation.

9. The participants should choose the strategy that would be most helpful in this situation and be prepared to act out a situation.

10. Afterwards, they will discuss why the group decided on its chosen coping strategy.

11. Now, divide participants into groups of three.
   a. Tell them they have 10 minutes to decide their course of action and plan their skit.
   b. Signal the five-minute mark and let groups know their remaining time.
   c. Circulate among groups to support the process while allowing participants room to work together to solve problems.

12. At the 10-minute mark, signal a transition into performing the skits.

13. Invite participants to be respectful audience members and have each group perform their skit, one at a time, asking the following questions and allowing discussion between each skit:
   a. Why did you choose to use this coping strategy in this situation?
   b. What were your other choices for coping strategies, and why didn’t you choose them?
   c. Are there other coping strategies that could have helped in this situation?

14. Let participants know that if they do find themselves struggling with triggers or stress, they can use healthy coping strategies to work through them. Remind them of strategies you have already discussed and explored in Young Women Choosing Action.

Stressful Situation Scenarios

The Big Test
Your math teacher just announced a big test. It is on a concept you have been struggling with, and it is a big part of your final grade in the class. You have a few days to study, but you really do not understand how to do this math. You
go to ask your teacher for help after class, but she says she has to get ready for her next class and suggests that you should have paid better attention in class. Now you are mad and stressed. How do you cope?
- Swear and punch the wall on your way out the door.
- Seek advice from someone you trust about what to do next.
- Go home and take a hot bath.

**Birthday Breakup**

You have made plans to celebrate your birthday with your bae. You are thinking about how much you are looking forward to your date, when you get a text that says, “It’s too hard to say this in person. I care about you, but I don’t think we’re right for each other. Can’t see you anymore. Sorry.” You are stunned and hurt and angry. How do you cope?
- Cry on a friend’s shoulder.
- Describe this person’s flaws and secrets on social media.
- Go home and take a nap.

**Work-Related Worries**

You just started a new after-school job at a fast-food restaurant to save up for college and other expenses. You never realized how much you would have to do and learn to keep the orders moving along. You are trying hard, but you make a few mistakes. Your boss is not a patient person and is constantly telling you to “get it together” and “hurry up.” Your co-worker says to ignore her and says you are doing great for a new employee. You are feeling angry and overwhelmed, along with being worried about the homework you have to do after work. How do you cope?
- Take a deep breath and just pay attention to completing one step at time.
- Quit your job.
- Tress eat a large order of fries and a milkshake during your shift break.

**Friend Troubles**

A friend of yours has been having a tough time dealing with her emotions, and you think she might be a bit depressed. Last night while you were doing your homework, she texted you some things that made you worry about her well-being.

You stayed up late into the night texting with her to make sure she was OK. You decided to talk to your guidance counselor this morning to get some support. When she found out, your friend accused you of betraying her. You feel tired and worried and upset with your friend. How do you cope?
- “Break up” with your friend and hope she does all right without you.
- Write about your worries in your journal.
- Go for a run to destress.

**Lonely Times**

Things have been hectic at your home lately, and nobody has been paying much attention to you. Your friends are also caught up in their own activities and worries. You would love to be able to hang out and talk to somebody about your worries and ideas, but nobody seems to listen lately. To make it worse, everyone on social media seems to be having great times together. You feel like you are there for others, but you are feeling lonely and left out a lot of the time. How do you cope?
- Fill the lonely hours surfing the internet and social media.
- Think positive thoughts.
- Volunteer for a worthy cause.

---

**Self-Care Plan (30 min)**

1. Explain that stress is a normal part of life.
   - **a.** We cannot always control how stress and adversity enter our lives, but we can control our responses to stress.
   - **b.** Say that if we can set some intentions around how we plan to deal with stress and triggers before they develop, we increase our ability to apply healthy coping strategies as situations do arise.

2. Tell participants they will be taking a couple minutes to make their own self-care plan. This plan will help them determine their intentions when it comes to dealing with stress.

3. Explain that stress might manifest differently in different situations.
areas of our lives, so they will see categories on the self-care plan.

a. Ask them to think about how stress comes up for them in these areas and how they tend to deal with that stress.

b. Encourage them to choose healthy coping strategies and avoid unhealthy coping strategies while setting their intentions.

4. Distribute the Self-Care Plan handouts and pencils. Be available to help with reading, clarification, and direction.

5. Participants may take their self-care plan home.

Social Action Leadership Project (25 min)

1. This stage of the social action plan is highly variable depending on the scope and timeline of the project as the participants are beginning to put the implementation plan into action.

2. Have participants work in small groups based on the Resource Plan developed the prior week that indicates who will do what piece of the project work.

3. Program facilitators should navigate the landscape of the project work as they see necessary.

4. It is important that all participants have meaningful work to do in the allotted time each week.

5. Facilitators should be available to guide the work process and assist in problem solving.

Review and Reflect (10 min)

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.

2. Encourage participants to find time to write in their journals, reflect, and practice mindfulness and yoga.

3. Remind everyone to take their self-care plan home and to work on following it.

4. Ask each participant to share a “hashtag” description of the session.

5. Thank participants for their continued good efforts.

Healthy Coping Strategies to Try

- Eat a healthy meal.
- Have a cup of tea.
- Stretch.
- Do yoga.
- Take a walk.
- Take a hot bath.
- Listen to music.
- Take time to be by yourself.
- Meditate.
- Exercise.
- Think affirming thoughts.
- Nap.
- Volunteer for a worthy cause.
- Dance.
- Talk to a counselor.
- Write in your journal.
- Hang out with friends.
- Make art.
- Seek advice from someone you trust.
- Cry.
- Engage in a relaxing hobby.
- Laugh/watch something funny.

Unhealthy Coping Strategies To Avoid

- Strike out or punch something.
- Rant on social media.
- Binge eat junk food.
- Isolate yourself.
- Have unprotected or impulsive sex.
- Use illegal drugs.
- Use alcohol.
- Use tobacco.
- Vape.
- Use marijuana.
- Mistreat the people around you.
- Self-harm.
- Gamble.
- Avoid responsibility.
- Use healthy coping strategies excessively (too much of a good thing can be unhealthy).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Area</th>
<th>Self-Care And Coping Strategies I Use Now</th>
<th>Self-Care And Coping Strategies I Intend To Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL/ WORK</td>
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<td>HOME</td>
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<td>PEERS</td>
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<td>MIND</td>
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<td>MIND</td>
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<tr>
<th>Barriers to My Self-Care Strategies</th>
<th>How I Will Address These Barriers and Practice Self-Care</th>
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<tr>
<th>Unhealthy Coping Strategies I Would Like To Use Less Of Or Not At All</th>
<th>What I Will Do Instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
MODULE EIGHT:
I CHOOSE TO BE KIND TO MYSELF
MODULE EIGHT:
I CHOOSE TO BE KIND TO MYSELF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIEF AGENDA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength Building Yoga Poses</td>
<td>20 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind-Body Connection: Attend and Befriend</td>
<td>30 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion Scenario</td>
<td>30 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>40 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Meditation</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>150 Min/2.5 Hours</td>
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</table>

4. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.
5. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
6. Make any necessary arrangements for food.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIALS NEEDED</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes from the Compassion Scenario lesson plan, either copied and cut out or rewritten on separate slips of paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph from Step 3 Designing the Action.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants will:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Understand how the automatic responses of “attend” and “befriend” alleviate stress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Practice loving-kindness meditation and develop capacity for self-compassion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Employ collaboration skills and executive functioning in designing social action leadership project.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLANNING AND PREPARATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.</td>
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<tr>
<th>MODULE ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and Introductions (10 min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Remind participants that at the last meeting they prepared a self-care plan and talked about healthy decision making and the prefrontal cortex. Point out the schedule for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Read the daily intention “I choose to be kind to myself.” Ask participants for a couple quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strength Building Yoga Poses (20 min)

1. Have everyone stand up and find a space on the floor where they can spread out a bit as you will be both lying on the floor and doing some standing poses.

2. Take everyone through pranayama together.

**Pranayama:**

1. Have them raise their arms.

2. They may choose to raise their arms straight in front, or they may choose to lift from the sides (T-shape).

3. Once their arms and hands are raised over their shoulders, they may choose to bring their hands together or leave them apart. Indicate participants to relax their shoulder blades.

4. Encourage them to try to get a good and comfortable stretch. They should find what feels comfortable for them but strive to keep their hands relaxed and their shoulders drawn down.

5. Next, instruct participants to breathe out while they slowly and gently lower their arms down to theirs sides.

6. Repeat this breathing technique 10 times.

**Mountain Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Stand with the bases of your big toes touching, heels slightly apart (so that your second toes are parallel).

2. Lift and spread your toes and the balls of your feet, then lay them softly down on the floor.

3. Rock back and forth and side to side.

4. Gradually reduce this swaying to a standstill, with your weight balanced evenly on the feet.

**STEP 2**

1. Firm your thigh muscles and lift the kneecaps, without hardening your lower belly.

2. Lift the inner ankles to strengthen the inner arches.

3. Then imagine a line of energy all the way up along your inner thighs to your groin muscles, and from there through the core of your torso, neck, and head, and out through the crown of your head.

4. Turn the upper thighs slightly inward.

5. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor and lift the pubis toward the navel.

**STEP 3**

1. Press your shoulder blades into your back, then widen them across and release them down your back.

2. Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight toward the ceiling.

3. Widen your collarbones.

4. Hang your arms beside the torso.

**STEP 4**

1. Balance the crown of your head directly over the center of your pelvis, with the underside of your chin parallel to the floor, throat soft, and the tongue wide and flat on the floor of your mouth.

2. Soften your eyes.

**STEP 5.**

1. Stay in the pose for 30–60 seconds, breathing easily.

**Chair Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Stand in Mountain Pose.

2. Inhale and raise your arms perpendicular to the floor.

3. Either keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward, or join the palms.

**STEP 2**

1. Exhale and bend your knees, trying to take the thighs as nearly parallel to the floor as possible.

   a. The knees will project out over the feet, and the torso will lean slightly forward over the thighs until the front torso forms approximately a right angle with the tops of the thighs.

   b. Knees should be in line with one another and not surpass the big toes. Core should be engaged to maintain a straight spine.

2. Keep the inner thighs parallel to each other and press the heads of the thigh bones down toward the heels.
STEP 3
1. Firm your shoulder blades against the back.
2. Take your tailbone down toward the floor and in toward your pubis to keep the lower back long.

STEP 4
1. Stay for 30–60 seconds.
2. To come out of this pose straighten your knees with an inhalation, lifting strongly through the arms.
3. Exhale and release your arms to your sides into Mountain Pose.

Tree Pose:

STEP 1
1. Stand in Mountain Pose.
2. Shift your weight slightly onto the left foot, keeping the inner foot firm to the floor, and bend your right knee.
3. Reach down with your right hand and clasp your right ankle.

STEP 2
1. Draw your right foot up and place the sole against the inner left thigh; if possible, press the right heel into the inner left groin, toes pointing toward the floor. Just avoid placing the sole of your foot in your knee joint.
2. The center of your pelvis should be directly over the left foot.

STEP 3
1. Rest your hands on the top rim of your pelvis.
2. Make sure the pelvis is in a neutral position, with the top rim parallel to the floor.

STEP 4
1. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor.
2. Firmly press the right foot sole against the inner thigh and resist with the outer left leg.
3. Press your hands together in Prayer Pose.
4. Gaze softly at a fixed point in front of you on the floor about four or five feet away.

STEP 5
1. Stay for 30–60 seconds. Stare at a non-moving point of focus to increase concentration and balance.
2. Step back to Mountain Pose with an exhalation and repeat for the same length of time with the legs reversed.

Have them move from Mountain Pose to Chair Pose to Tree Pose for a few minutes until they get comfortable with them all and the flow.

End with a few pranayama breaths.

Mind-Body Connection Attend and Befriend (30 min)

STEP 1
1. Explain to participants that, at its most basic level, stress is simply a response to a fear—real or perceived.
2. Say that humans are hardwired to respond to fear in a few ways. Let them know the group will be taking a closer look at how emotional responses can be linked to physical responses when it comes to stress. Let them know they will be taking a closer look at some responses they have already talked about and looking at some other responses.
3. Invite participants to close their eyes, as they are comfortable. Let them know you will be asking them questions to help them direct attention to their bodies and minds. They should answer these questions silently for themselves.
4. Ask participants to hold their hands in front of them, making tight fists. Ask the following, pausing for at least 15 seconds between each question:
   a. What do you notice in your body? In your mind?
   b. What kinds of emotions are you feeling?
   c. What kinds of thoughts are you having?
   d. How does your breath feel right now?
   e. How open or closed do you feel?
   f. How energetic do you feel?
   g. How would it be to feel like this all the time?
5. Direct participants to release their fists and drop their hands. Invite them to take a deep breath if they would like.

6. Follow up by asking if anyone wants to share how it felt holding that position in their body and mind. Did it feel open or closed? How would it be to feel like that all the time?

7. Explain that the physical act of making fists turns on the fight-or-flight response to stress, which helps us either to fight off what is stressing us out or to run away from it.

8. Point out that when we are in fight-or-flight mode, our breath, body, mind, and heart are all constricted. We are on guard, closed off to everything except signals of danger. In our brain, our amygdala is overactive and the prefrontal cortex, where we do our best thinking, is less active. We are thinking only about ourselves and the next few seconds; we are not thinking about the perspective of others or the consequences of our actions. Often when we are in this mode, our filters only let in signs of danger, and they interpret even neutral or safe stimuli, such as a helpful friend or teacher, as threats or dangers.

9. Explain that when we are in fight-or-flight mode, cortisol—which is a stress hormone—is coursing through us, blocking the brain receptors for oxytocin, the hormone that allows us to feel love, compassion, trust, and caring connection. The body and brain are sending the message that everything is a threat, and there is no room in our response for compassion or understanding.

10. Say that it is possible to spend so much time in fight-or-flight mode that one’s body reacts to danger even when there is not any. This state can be interpreted as aggression and can affect relationships. It also is not good for physical and emotional health to spend too much time in this state.

**STEP 2**

1. Now ask participants to close their eyes again (if they wish) and to slump or slouch forward, with their head falling toward their chests. Ask the following questions, pausing for 15 seconds between each question:
   
   a. What do you notice in your body? In your mind?
   b. What kinds of emotions are you feeling?
   c. What kinds of thoughts are you having?
   d. How does your breath feel right now?
   e. How open or closed do you feel?
   f. How energetic do you feel?
   g. How would it be to feel like this all the time?

2. Invite them to take a deep breath.

3. Follow up by asking if anyone wants to share how holding that position felt in their body and mind. Did it feel open or closed? How would it be to feel like that all the time?

4. Explain that this position demonstrates the freeze-or-submit response to stress or danger. Say that animals in the wild sometimes respond this way to threats; they freeze, hoping to blend in with their surroundings so predators will not see them, or they play dead, hoping to fool predators into leaving them alone.

5. Say that when humans respond this way to stress or trauma, we might say they are giving up or shutting out the world. We might say they are helpless or depressed. Explain that someone in the freeze state does not notice or pay attention to signals of safety; they only filter in reasons to give up. Ask how could this affect health? Relationships? Future and present success?

6. Tell participants that the fight, flight, and freeze responses to stress are hardwired into our brains because our ancestors needed them for survival. Say that there may be times in our lives when we find these responses helpful, but most of the time they cause more trouble for us than good.

7. Tell participants that scientists are beginning to spend more time paying attention to other built-in responses to stress. These are not the kind of responses that tend to get a lot of attention in our society, but science is seeing positive results in people who practice them. Inform the group that everyone is going to take a couple of minutes and give them a try.

**STEP 3**

1. Instruct participants to sit or stand up, holding their bodies not too tightly, not too loosely. Ask them to extend their hands out in front of them, palms up
and open. Ask the following questions, pausing for 15 seconds between each question:

a. What do you notice in your body? In your mind?

b. What kinds of emotions are you feeling?

c. What kinds of thoughts are you having?

d. How does your breath feel right now?

e. How open or closed do you feel?

f. How energetic do you feel?

g. How would it be to feel like this more of the time?

2. Direct them to place one or both hands over their heart while still upright, and to feel the warmth of their hand(s). Pausing for 15 seconds between questions, ask:

a. What do you notice in your body? In your mind?

b. What kinds of emotions are you feeling?

c. What kinds of thoughts are you having?

d. How does your breath feel right now?

e. How open or closed do you feel?

f. How energetic do you feel?

g. How would it be to feel like this more of the time?

3. Thank participants for their participation in this activity and ask everyone to take a seat. Ask follow-up questions, as above.

4. Explain that the position with hands up and out represents a stress response called “attending,” and the position with one or both hands over the heart is called “befriending.” Another way of putting it is to say that they are responses of compassion and self-compassion.

5. Explain that these differ from fighting, fleeing, or freezing, because instead of avoiding or attacking what we are faced with, we attend to our circumstances, whether we like what they are or not, with a calm body and a clear mind.

6. Using your hand model of the brain, demonstrate the prefrontal cortex covering the amygdala.

a. Explain that attending and befriending keep us from “flipping our lids” because they rely on communication between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala.

b. When the amygdala’s alarm bells go off, the prefrontal cortex asks, “What’s going on? Is this threat real?”

c. If the amygdala says, “Run!” the prefrontal cortex says, “Hold on, let us assess the situation.”

d. If the amygdala says, “I’m just going to sleep this one out,” the prefrontal cortex says, “Take a deep breath and try to focus on the big picture and what’s happening right in front of us.”

7. Note that all the automatic responses we have are there for a reason, and it is not that one is better than the others. However, some are better for certain circumstances. It is also true that not all stress is bad. It is all about matching our responses to the situations we find ourselves in. Attending and befriending are not the best responses all the time; if we are faced with real danger, we may need to respond by fighting, fleeing, or freezing.

8. Note that, at first, the attend and befriend responses may make us feel vulnerable, and that for some situations, it may not be physically or emotionally safe to respond this way. Say that you will continue to discuss and practice attend and befriend strategies in the coming weeks, and that by using mindfulness more regularly, the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala will be able to sort it all out.

**Compassion Scenario (30 min)**

1. Divide participants into groups of three or four. Ask them to sit together.

2. Explain that you are going to practice a little compassion today. Ask for a definition of compassion or say it is “deep concern and caring for others.”

3. Say that each group is going to be given one scenario and together will come up with some possible responses to the scenario.

4. Tell the groups that they all need the following information before receiving their scenario. Read the following:

- Imagine you are sitting with a dear friend you have known a long time. She’s had some struggles in her life, but she has overcome them. She is capable,
caring, and knows what she wants. You have seen her accomplish a lot, but this friend is not treating herself very kindly today. She is focusing on negativity and saying things about herself that you know are not true. You want to be a good friend to her, so you sit with her and listen to what she is saying and respond to her with the love and patience she deserves. But to be your best for her, you may first have to check in with how you are approaching the situation. That is OK. Ask yourself if you are clenching your fist in fight-or-flight mode, freezing up, or opening to attend or befriend?

5. Tell the participants that you are going to give each group a quote. This is something the friend is saying to the group.

6. Let them know that as their group reads the quote (one group member may read it aloud), participants should think about how they can respond to their friend with compassion.
   a. What should they say?
   b. What should they do?
   c. What advice should they give her?

7. Say that you will start with an example.
   a. Example quote: “I’m an idiot. I can’t do anything right.”
   b. Read the example quote aloud and ask for examples of how a person could respond with compassion.
   c. Encourage participants to get specific, instead of just saying, “No you’re not,” ask them to give examples.
   d. For instance, “No, you are not an idiot. You do lots of things right every day. Just look at that great outfit you put together today, and you always know just the right thing to say when other people are sad.”

8. Pass each group one of the quotes below.
   a. Quote one: Your friend says, “I am ugly on the inside and the outside.” How do you respond with compassion?
   b. Quote two: Your friend says, “I don’t deserve to be loved. I don’t know why anyone would want to be my friend.” How do you respond with compassion?
   c. Quote three: Your friend says, “I give up. I just can’t succeed. I’m not even going to try.” How do you respond with compassion?
   d. Quote four: Your friend says, “I have made so many mistakes, I don’t know how anyone can forgive me.” How do you respond with compassion?

9. Allow the groups to discuss and come up with responses for a couple of minutes. Circulate and guide any group that may be stuck.

10. Call the participants back together.

11. Ask if they came up with good, compassionate responses for their friend. Solicit some examples.

12. Next, say to the participants, “Let us change the scenario up a little bit. Imagine that it is you who is thinking or saying these things. Would you respond to yourself differently than you respond to your friend? How so? Why?”

13. Explain that although in our culture we are often taught that the best way to motivate ourselves is to be tough on ourselves, science is showing that this is not necessarily the case.
   a. Science is showing that practicing self-compassion decreases depression, anxiety, stress, and emotional avoidance.
   b. Explain that self-compassion and mindfulness go hand in hand.

Social Action Leadership Planning (40 min)

1. By this time in the program, most of their planning should be completed and the participants have hopefully begun implementing pieces of their social action leadership project.

2. Have them continue to work in small groups if needed to put the finishing touches on their implementation plans so they can begin implementing in full next week.
Walking Meditation (10 min)

1. Say that today you are going to end things a little differently and practice a short-guided meditation before you go.

2. Stand in one spot. Pay attention to how your weight is transferred through the soles of your feet to the floor (ground) beneath you.

3. Pay attention to all the subtle movements that go on to keep us balanced and upright. Very often we take this for granted—our ability to be able to stand upright—but this is a skill we had to learn how to do and, without even knowing it, we are constantly adjusting to stay upright.

4. Now, begin to walk at a slow but normal walking pace, and in a normal manner, taking care not to bump into each other. We are not going to be changing the way that we walk; we are simply going to be aware of it.

5. Pay attention to how your feet touch and leave the ground. Be aware of how your heel first makes contact, notice as your foot rolls forward onto the ball, and then lifts and travels through the air. Be aware of all the different sensations in your feet, not just a contact in the soles of your feet but the contact between the toes, the feeling of the inside of your shoes, the fabric of your socks, and let your feet be as relaxed as you can.

6. Become aware of your ankles. Notice how these joints move to keep you in motion. Allow your ankle joints to relax. Notice the role your legs and hips play in moving you along.

7. Pay attention to how your arms sway, and how your shoulders and head move with each step you take. Your brain is sending a signal down your spine, letting all your body parts know they have a role to play in this motion. And your spine itself is in motion as you move along.

8. Bring your head back to a point of balance, your chin slightly tucked in. Relax your jaw.

9. Relax your eyes. Just let your eyes be softly focused, gently looking ahead—not staring at anything, not allowing yourself to be caught up in anything that is going past you.

10. Notice your feelings. Do not become emotionally attached to your feelings, just pay attention to the general tone of what you are feeling. Are you bored? Are you content? Are you irritated? Are you happy to be walking along? Just notice what you are feeling and let it go.

11. Notice your mind. Is your mind clear or dull? Is your mind busy, or is it calm? Are you thinking about things unconnected with this practice, or do whatever thoughts that you have center on what you are doing just now? Notice these things with no judgment—just noticing.

12. In a few seconds, I am going to ask you to stop, and I would like you to come to a natural halt. You are not freezing on the spot; you are just allowing yourself to come to a stop.

13. So, do that now; come to a stop. And just experience yourself standing. Just notice what it is like to no longer be in motion.

14. Notice once more the complex balancing act that is going on to keep you upright. Feel the weight traveling down through the soles of your feet into the earth; simply standing, and experiencing yourself and, finally, bringing this meditation session to a close.

Review And Reflect (10 Min)

- Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.
- Have the young women stand in a circle. Encourage everyone to be especially kind and patient with themselves between modules, to write in their journals, and to practice mindfulness and yoga.
- Ask for a one-to-five evaluation of the day’s activities.
- Thank everyone and let them know you look forward to seeing them next time.

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1 Walking Meditation (adapted from Burrell Education 2012)
MODULE NINE:
I CHOOSE TO ACCEPT AND APPRECIATE MYSELF
MODULE NINE: I CHOOSE TO ACCEPT AND APPRECIATE MYSELF

BRIEF AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warrior Poses</td>
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<td>Mind-Body Connection: Teen Brain True/False</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Reflection Art Project</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>135 Minutes/2.25 Hours</strong></td>
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- Prepare the meeting space, as necessary, for movement and yoga practices.
- Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
- Make any necessary arrangements for food.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).
- Undecorated pocket mirrors with closing lid (one per participant).
- Permanent markers in a variety of colors.
- Paper and pencils.
- Optional acetone/nail polish remover and cotton swabs in case of mistakes.
- True or False questions and answers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand the unique aspects of the teenage brain.
- Discuss and practice affirming thoughts that can support goals and self-compassion.
- Use yoga and affirmations to develop a sense of personal power.
- Use executive functioning skills and personal strengths to support social action work.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
- Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
- Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (10 min)

1. Welcome back participants and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants that at your last meeting you talked about self-compassion and practiced the attend and befriend responses to stress.
4. Point out that today’s schedule is posted.
5. Read the daily intention “I choose to accept and appreciate myself.” Ask participants for a couple of quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)
6. Invite participants to sit up straight and take a deep breath to center themselves and prepare for the activities ahead.

Warrior Poses (20 min)

1. Explain to participants that today they will be practicing Warrior Poses, which are meant to help build focused attention and a sense of inner strength.

2. Let them know you are going to teach them three Warrior Poses, but first you are going to start with pranayama.

3. Have everyone find a spot in the room where they can spread out.

Pranayama:
Take them through 10 rounds of pranayama.

Warrior I Pose:

**STEP 1**
1. Stand in Mountain Pose.

2. With an exhalation, step apart so legs are in a wide stance, wider than hip width but not so wide that you lose your balance.

3. Raise your arms perpendicular to the floor (and parallel to each other) and reach actively through the little-finger sides of the hands toward the ceiling.

**STEP 2**
1. Turn in your left foot 45–60 degrees to the right and turn out your right foot 90 degrees to the right.

2. Align the right heel with the left heel. Exhale and rotate your torso to the right.

3. As the left hip point turns forward, press the head of the left femur back to ground the heel.

4. Lengthen your coccyx toward the floor and arch your upper torso back slightly.

**STEP 3**
1. With your left heel firmly anchored to the floor, exhale and bend your right knee over the right ankle so the shin is perpendicular to the floor.

**STEP 4**
1. Reach strongly through your arms, lifting the rib cage away from the pelvis.

2. As you ground down through the back foot, feel a lift that runs up the back leg, across the belly and chest, and up into the arms. If possible, bring the palms together. Spread the palms against each other and reach a little higher through the pinky sides of the hands.

3. Keep your head in a neutral position, gazing forward.

**STEP 5**
1. Stay for 30–60 seconds.

2. To come up, inhale, press the back heel firmly into the floor and reach up through the arms, straightening the right knee.

3. Turn the feet forward and release the arms with an exhalation or keep them extended upward for more challenge.

4. Take a few breaths, then turn the feet to the left and repeat for the same length of time.

5. When you are finished return to Mountain Pose.

Warrior II Pose:

**STEP 1**
1. Stand in Mountain Pose.

2. With an exhalation, step or lightly jump your feet 3.5–4 feet apart.

3. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides, shoulder blades wide, palms down.

**STEP 2**
1. Turn your right foot slightly to the right and your left foot out to the left 90 degrees.

2. Align the left heel with the right heel.

3. Firm your thighs and turn your left thigh outward so that the center of the left kneecap is in line with the center of the left ankle.
STEP 3
1. Exhale and bend your left knee over the left ankle, so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor.
2. If possible, bring the left thigh parallel to the floor.
3. Anchor this movement of the left knee by strengthening the right leg and pressing the outer right heel firmly to the floor.

STEP 4
1. Stretch the arms away from the space between the shoulder blades, parallel to the floor.
2. Do not lean the torso over the left thigh.
3. Keep the sides of the torso equally long and the shoulders directly over the pelvis.
4. Press the tailbone slightly toward the pubis.
5. Turn the head to the left and look out over the fingers.

STEP 5
1. Stay for 30–60 seconds. Inhale to come up.
2. Release the hip of the raised leg toward the floor until the two hip points are even and parallel to the floor.
3. Energize the back leg and extend it strongly toward the wall behind you; reach just as actively in the opposite direction with the arms.
4. Bring the head up slightly and look forward but be sure not to compress the back of your neck.

Warrior III Pose:

STEP 1
1. Stand in Mountain Pose, exhale, and fold forward to a standing folded bend.
2. From this position, exhale and step your left foot back into a high lunge position. Your right knee should be (more or less) at a right angle.
3. Lay the midline of your torso down on the midline of the right thigh (from the knee to the hip crease) and bring your hands to your right knee, right hand to the outer knee, left hand to the inner.
4. Squeeze the knee with your hands, lift your torso slightly, and with an exhalation, turn it slightly to the right.

STEP 2
1. Now from the lunge position, stretch your arms forward, parallel to the floor and parallel to each other, palms facing each other.
2. Exhale and press the head of the right thighbone back and press the heel actively into the floor.
3. Synchronize the straightening of the front leg and the lifting of the back leg.
4. As you lift the back leg, resist by pressing the tailbone into the pelvis.

STEP 3
1. Normally students come up into Warrior III by lunging the torso forward.
   a. This tends to shift the body weight onto the ball of the front foot and unbalance the position.
   b. Do not allow the torso to swing forward as you move into position; instead, as you straighten the front knee, think of pressing the head of the thighbone back.
   c. This centers the femur in the hip joint, grounds the heel into the floor, and stabilizes the position.

STEP 4
1. The arms, torso, and raised leg should be positioned relatively parallel to the floor. For many students, the pelvis tends to tilt.
2. Release the hip of the raised leg toward the floor until the two hip points are even and parallel to the floor.
3. Energize the back leg and extend it strongly toward the wall behind you; reach just as actively in the opposite direction with the arms.
4. Bring the head up slightly and look forward but be sure not to compress the back of your neck.

STEP 5
1. Stay in this position for 30–60 seconds.
2. Release back to the lunge on an exhalation.
3. Bring your hands to the floor on either side of the right foot, and on an exhalation, step your left foot forward to meet your right.
4. Stay in this forward bend for a few breaths, then repeat for the same length of time on the other side.
**STEP 6**

1. Have the participants move from Warrior I into Warrior II Pose. If a few participants want to try Warrior III, show them how to do so.

2. When done with the Warrior Poses, have them move back to Mountain Pose.

3. Ask the participants to take some deep breaths to slow their heart rate down.

4. End the practice with pranayama.

**Mind-Body Connection: Teen Brain True/False (20 min)**

1. Explain that because of modern technology and the ability to take pictures deep inside the brain, neuroscientists are learning things about the teenage brain that they never knew before.

2. This is beneficial because it helps put an end to a lot of negative stereotypes about teens, it could help teens better understand and appropriately adjust their emotions and behaviors, and it could lead to changes in society that support teenagers in their development (e.g., later school start times and more appropriate homework loads).

3. Explain that you are going to play a quick round of True or False to determine what is a fact and what is a myth when it comes to brain development in the teenage years.

4. Tell participants that if they think a statement is true, they should stand up, and if they think it is false, they should stay seated.

   a. Say that it’s OK if they don’t know; they should just give it their best guess.

   b. No one will be getting an award for most correct answers, and it doesn’t matter if they get answers wrong.

   c. It’s about learning the information, so they can put it to use in their lives.

5. Once participants are ready to begin, read the following True or False questions, one at a time. Read the answers as you go, after participants have decided to stand or sit.

**True or False?**

1. The brain you are born with is the brain you have for life.
   
   - **False.** While it is true you only get one brain for the duration of your life and you should want to take care of it, your brain changes significantly over the course of your lifetime. Neurobiologically, teenage brains are substantially different from children’s brains and adults’ brains in terms of which parts are active and how various parts are developing. Brains also change according to experience and learning.

2. The teenage brain acquires about one billion new neurons or brain cells during adolescence.
   
   - **True.** The brain cells you use grow stronger, and the ones you do not use wither away. Your brain does not need all these neurons and letting go of the ones you don’t need creates space and energy to strengthen the ones you do. If you want to strengthen your brain, spend time practicing the skills you want to hone. There is evidence that the learning that takes place during adolescence can be the most enduring—you will remember information and retain skills you learn now more than at any other point of life. So, if you want to keep your brain cells, engage with your learning and the world around you.

3. The brain is fully developed by the time you become a legal adult at age 18.
   
   - **False.** Neuroscience shows that the prefrontal cortex and other parts of the brain may continue to grow and develop until age 24 or 25. The brain develops from the back to the front, so the prefrontal cortex is actually the last part of the brain to finish developing.

4. Teenagers require less sleep than adults.
   
   - **False.** Teenagers require nine to 10 hours of sleep each night. This is tricky in our society, because the sleep hormone melatonin tends to be released later in the evening for teens, meaning you may not be sleepy until later at night. Melatonin also hangs around longer in a teenage body, which can explain morning exhaustion. However, training your body and brain to
get a good night’s sleep is important because sleep is the time your brain sheds the neurons you don’t need. Sleep helps strengthen your memories of what you learned during the day, process information, and regulate emotions. Also, not getting enough sleep can affect how you eat, how well you make decisions, and how you learn—it can even affect your skin.

5. Teenagers are more at risk for addiction than adults.

- **True.** The brain releases a feel-good chemical called “dopamine” when you get something that you want or even when you just think about getting something you want. The release of dopamine makes you want that thing again and again. Teenagers have lower everyday levels of dopamine than adults; but when you get something you want, your brain releases greater levels of dopamine than are released in an adult brain. So, you can get the sensation of going from feeling kind of flat to feeling high. This isn’t a problem if the thing you want is a big salad or to ace the math test. However, the desire to chase a good feeling can lead to unhealthy activities like drinking, drugs, unsafe sex, binge eating, or over-exercising. Eventually it could lead to an addiction. This could even happen with commonplace activities like exercise or social media. The key is to seek that feel-good sensation from healthy sources and then to practice moderation.

6. “Raging hormones” are responsible for poor choices and moodiness in the teenage years.

- **False.** It is not so much the hormones as how your brain responds to them that sometimes leads to this stereotype of teenagers. In adolescence, the sex hormones you have carried since childhood increase to adult levels. For girls, these hormones are called “progesterone” and “estrogen.” These hormones are linked to the brain chemicals that control mood. This can mean you experience feelings in a big way. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because you could feel joy and enthusiasm just as big as sadness or anger. If you can teach your brain to respond to your big feelings with positive action, you (and maybe even the world) could benefit from your elevated hormone levels.

7. Your brain is heavily influenced by whatever you expose it to.

- **True.** Like we have discussed, this a time of substantial changes and neuroplasticity. What you choose to spend your time doing, thinking, watching, and listening to will affect which neurons strengthen, how your prefrontal develops, and whether your amygdala gets tripped.

8. Excessive screen time can mess with your brain.

- **True.** Social media, television, gaming, and other screen uses are not inherently bad for you, but too much of anything is not good for you. Most screens emit blue light, which can mess with melatonin levels and thereby affect the quality of sleep you get. Not enough sleep messes with your brain. Turn off all screens a couple hours before bedtime to help with this. Many games and social media apps may trigger dopamine releases, which makes them potentially addictive. Spending a lot of time on a screen can keep us disengaged from our surroundings and out of touch with our own minds and bodies. If you are spending hours watching television or swiping mindlessly through your phone, then you are probably not engaging with the kinds of activities that strengthen neurons, build the skills that support a strong prefrontal cortex, or lend to a mindful approach to life. Though it is fine and healthy to check out from time to time, too much screen time can increase stress.

9. Teenagers are great at multitasking (doing two or more things at once).

- **False.** Your brain is only able to fully focus on one thing at a time. If you do more than that, your brain switches its focus back and forth between the things, so nothing gets completely done or gets the full attention it may need. Therefore, texting and driving—or even texting while walking—is a horrible idea.

10. Teenagers are driven to experiment and try new things.

- **True.** The teenage brain is working overtime because it is priming you to learn all the things you need to learn on your way to adulthood and to form your individual identity along the way. This is a time of
life when you may feel more courageous and crave new experiences. That is great, but it is important to keep in mind that your prefrontal cortex—with all its capacity to help you make good decisions, plan for the future, and monitor your emotions—is still forming. So even if you are feeling invincible, you will want to slow down your decision making and deliberately weigh the pros and cons before jumping into a situation that could keep you from reaching your goals or which may do harm to yourself or others.

11. Teenagers are highly skilled at “reading” people and interpreting others’ feelings.

- **False.** In general, adolescents interpret emotion through their amygdala, while adults rely on their more developed prefrontal cortex. Remember that the amygdala is designed to be super-sensitive to threats and trigger the fight, flight, or freeze response. Looking at interactions through the view of the amygdala may cause you to misinterpret interactions as being angry or aggressive. This can affect relationships. So, realizing that you are working to increase the communication between your prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, take a step back before concluding that someone is angry or disappointed with you. Communicate your concerns and clarify the situation; it may make it easier to read the next situation that comes up.

12. Teenagers can’t control their brains.

- **False.** While teenagers can and do make mistakes (just like people of every age), they are capable of understanding how their brains work and taking steps to help them make healthy decisions that pave the way for a successful adulthood.

Thank young women for their participation. Tell them that the information in the game represents our current understanding of teenage brain development, in general, and that every individual is different and experiences development at their own rate. The point of the game was to share information because knowledge is power.

**Self-Reflection Art Project (45 min)**

This activity offers participants time to recommit or add to their intentions, while reflecting on elements of the program so far.

1. Ask for a definition or explain what self-reflection is. (It is thinking about one’s actions or thoughts and assessing what one may improve upon or continue to do in the future).

2. Tell participants that you are going to do a short art project that brings together several of the ideas you have been talking about in *Young Women Choosing Action*.

3. Tell them that you will give them the instructions and then you will discuss how this project brings in the different elements.

4. First ask participants to think of a word that describes a personal quality they are striving to achieve. This could be the same word that is on their intention bracelet or it could be different. Facilitators could share a quality they are striving for themselves, such as calm, joyfulness, efficiency, connectedness, etc.

5. Ask participants to write down the word. Offer to help with spelling or ask a participant who is a proficient speller to help.

6. Explain that you are going to give each young woman a handheld mirror. Using the markers, the young women will decorate the mirrors any way they like, but there are some things they should take into consideration.

7. Everyone must write “I am” either on the cover or around the edge of the inside mirror (their choice).

8. Everyone must write their word somewhere on the mirror.

9. It is important to let the writing dry before touching it or adding another color, otherwise smudging will occur.

10. Distribute mirrors and set out markers.

11. Once participants are off to a start with their art, discuss the question, “How is this project related to what we’ve been talking about in *Young Women Choosing Action*?”
Possible Answers:

- **Intention setting**—it helps participants set a goal and plan for reaching it.
- **Neuroplasticity**—every time you look at the mirror and practice saying or thinking the affirmation, it strengthens the pathways that support your efforts in this area.
- **Self-Compassion**—if you are feeling bad about yourself, it can be a reminder to be kind and patient with yourself and that you have good qualities.
- **Mindfulness**—it can be a physical reminder to practice mindfulness and not get carried away by emotions.
- **Attend/Befriend**—it can be a reminder to respond (to others and to yourself) with openness.
- **Prefrontal Cortex**—it can be a reminder that you are building the reasoning part of your brain and are working to control your amygdala. In a moment of panic, you can check in with yourself and try to see the big picture.
- **Leadership**—leaders should be self-reflective and confident (not to mention, they may want to check their teeth for spinach before speaking in public or attending a meeting).

12. As participants finish decorating their mirror, encourage them to set the mirrors aside to dry fully.

Social Action Leadership Project
(30 min)

1. The participants should be at the implementation stage by now so that they will have a few weeks to implement their project.

2. Make sure participants consider necessary prep work prior to implementation. For instance, do they need to travel to implement the project and, if so, how long will that take? This might mean moving the agenda around so they can do some implementation while, at the same time, participating fully in the program.

3. This way they will have something meaningful to share with the YWCA leadership and/or community members invited to hear about their project and its impact.

4. If the participants are having trouble implementing the program, work with them to overcome the hurdles preventing them from moving it forward. Spend some time talking about what is getting in the way of them moving forward.

Review And Reflect (10 min)

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.

2. Encourage everyone to take some time for self-reflection in their Personal Leadership Journals and to practice mindfulness and yoga.

3. Ask for a thumbs up/thumbs down evaluation of the day’s activities.

4. Let participants know that social action work will continue in the next session and thank them for participating.
MODULE TEN:
I CHOOSE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY ACTIONS
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIEF AGENDA</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, Check-in, and Review</td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga Poses</td>
<td>15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind-Body Connection: Executive Functioning</td>
<td>20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Year Plan</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand how fundamental executive functioning skills support leadership and goal setting.
- Set long-term goals and plan how to meet them.
- Engage with leadership work.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
2. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
   - a. Copy the Executive Functions Cards.
   - b. Cut the Executive Functions Cards along the lines.
   - c. Keep skills and matching definitions together, create a deck that contains one card per participant. If there is an odd number of participants, a facilitator will participate.
   - d. Retain the leftover cards for use in the activity.
   - e. Shuffle the cards.
4. Make copies of the Five-Year Plan.
5. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.
6. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.
7. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
8. Make any necessary arrangements for food.
9. Prepare a poster with a list of all executive functioning skills for use as a visual aid during the discussion.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).
- Executive Functioning Match-Up cards.
- Poster listing executive functioning skills.
- Copies of the Five-Year Plan (one per participant).
- Pens or pencils.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (10 min)

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants that at your last meeting you discussed the unique development of the teen brain and self-appreciation. Point out the schedule for this module.

4. Read the daily intention “I choose to take responsibility for my actions.” Ask participants for a couple quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)

**Yoga Poses (15 min)**

1. Ask the participants to stand up and find a comfortable spot in the room where they have plenty of room to spread their arms out.

2. Start with 10 rounds of pranayama.

3. Then have them go into Mountain Pose to prepare for Upward Salute.

**Upward Salute:**

**STEP 1**

1. Stand in Mountain Pose.

2. Turn your arms outward (or laterally) so your palms face away from your torso and thumbs point backward.

3. With an inhale, sweep your arms out to the sides and up toward the ceiling.

**STEP 2**

1. If you are tighter in the shoulders, stop when your arms are approximately parallel to each other.

2. But if possible, without hunching your shoulders forward, press your palms firmly together by, touching the bases of your palms first, then the palms themselves, and finally the fingers.

**STEP 3**

1. Extend your elbows fully and reach up through your pinkies so your thumbs turn slightly down toward the crown of your head.

2. Making sure not to compress the back of your neck, tip your head back slightly and gaze at your thumbs.

**STEP 4**

1. Do not let your lower front ribs protrude forward.

2. Bring your front ribs down (toward your pelvis) and in (toward your spine) and lengthen your tail bone toward the floor.

3. Then lift your rib cage evenly away from your pelvis to stretch the circumference of your belly.

4. Hold for a few breaths.

**STEP 5**

1. Exhale and, as you sweep your arms out to the sides, tip your torso forward from the hip joints to fold into a forward bend.

**Kali Mudra:**

**STEP 1**

1. Bring your hands together with your fingers interlaced.

**STEP 2**

1. Extend your index fingers.

**Goddess Pose:**

**STEP 1**

1. Start in Mountain Pose at the front of your mat.

2. Step your right foot a stride length towards the back of your mat.

3. Turn your toes out and your heels in, so your feet land on a 45-degree angle.

**STEP 2**

1. Bend your knees deeply out to the sides and sink your hips down to the height of your knees.

**STEP 3**

1. Bring your arms out at shoulder height and bend your elbows so that your fingertips point skyward.

2. Spread your fingertips wide apart from one another and activate the muscles across your back to hold your arms here.
**STEP 4**

1. Engage your core muscles and draw your tailbone in the direction of the floor.

2. Do not hunch forward with your shoulders; keep your spine long and your muscles engaged.

**STEP 5**

1. Stay here for 30–60 seconds, breathing.

Have the participants come back to Mountain Pose and take some nice deep breaths. Then ask them to take a few breaths in through their nose and out through their nose before moving on to the next activity.

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**Mind-Body Connection:**

**Executive Functioning (20 min)**

1. Tell participants that you will be talking about executive functioning skills. These are prefrontal cortex skills that are vital to good leadership and that become stronger with attention, intention, and practice.

2. Explain that the group will be participating in an executive functioning “meet and greet.”

   - Some participants will receive a card with the name of a skill on it. Others will receive a card with a quotation from someone who has the skill.

   - They will have five minutes to find the person whose quotation accurately describes the skill. There is only one correct match for each skill.

3. Distribute shuffled Executive Functioning Cards and encourage participants to get up, move around, and engage in conversation to try to find their partner. Partners should stand together once they have found each other.

4. Participants may suggest various group processes for finding partners, such as going around the circle and reading their cards. If this happens, allow this process to play out, since it is an example of executive functioning and leadership.

5. If after three minutes pairs do not appear to be making progress, ask if anyone has a suggestion for how to expedite the process.

   - Guide them toward sharing quotations as a group if they do not come up with it themselves.

6. Once all pairs have been found, ask each pair to share the name of their skill and their quotation with the whole group.

   - If there were fewer participants than card pairs, introduce any executive functions that were not distributed as part of the activity.

7. Post the list of executive functions where everyone can see it.

**Discussion Questions/Points**

- The prefrontal cortex, where a lot of executive functioning skills are developing, is still forming in teens. So, teens have these skills, they just may not be fully developed. Are there any executive functioning skills you feel you do well?

- Knowing that you can grow these skills with practice, are you motivated to work on any particular skill? What are some steps you could take to practice this skill?

- How can executive functioning skills help us achieve our goals for our social action leadership project?

Encourage participants to pay attention to how they are practicing executive functioning skills as they move through the day’s activities and throughout their social action work. Every now and then, check in by asking questions like, “Are you managing your time effectively?” or “Is this a situation where some flexibility would pay off?”

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**Five Year Plan (45 min)**

1. Tell participants that they are going to engage with their prefrontal cortex and use executive functioning skills to do some goal setting and planning. Say that having clarity about one’s goals allows them to be assertive in reaching them.
2. Ask participants to relax, breathe regularly, and—with their eyes open or closed—picture themselves as they would like to see themselves five years from now.

3. Lead them in the following visualization:
   - How old are you in five years?
   - What are you doing?
   - Where are you living?
   - Are you in college?
   - What are you studying?
   - Have you graduated yet?
   - Do you have a career? What is it?
   - Are you making a good salary?
   - What are you doing to take care of yourself?
   - Are you practicing mindfulness?
   - Have you found a hobby that brings you joy?
   - Is there an area in your personal life where you have made a positive change? What is it?
   - In five years, how do you see yourself contributing as a leader?
   - Are you active in your community?
   - Have you joined or started an organization that creates positive change?
   - How are you sharing your leadership gifts with the world?
   - Five years from now, what are the accomplishments you feel proud of?

4. Direct participants to remember what they visualized as they open their eyes or bring their attention back to the present.

5. Distribute the Five-Year Plan sheet and a writing utensil to each participant.
   - Ask them to take a few minutes to think about the goals they just pictured.
   - Ask them to choose one career or education goal, one personal or wellness goal, and one community service or leadership goal they have for five years from now and to write these on their five-year plan.

6. Ask them to think about the steps they need to take to achieve these goals and to write them in the chart, pointing out that there are steps they may need to take immediately to start laying the groundwork and some steps they’ll need to plan to take in the long term.
   - For instance, if they want to become a doctor, they may start with studying for their biology exam this week, finding out within the next month what colleges require of pre-med students, taking a First Aid course next year, and performing an internship at a hospital in the future.

7. Ask them to think about possible steps and to fill in the chart. Circulate and help them flush out ideas for steps that they may take to reach their goals.

8. If time allows, invite participants to share some of their goals and plans.

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Social Action Leadership Project (30 min)

1. The participants should be implementing the project at this stage.

2. Check in and see if they are experiencing any difficulties.

3. If the project was a one-time event the group can begin planning for the presentation to the community members during this period.

---

Review And Reflect (10 min)

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.

2. Encourage active reflection and mindfulness practice between modules.

3. Close the session with a one-word circle check-in. Ask each person to share one aspect of her life that she intends to take responsibility for this week.

4. Thank everyone and let them know you look forward to seeing them next time.
FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Today I am__________ years old. In five years, I will be___________years old.

MY FIVE-YEAR GOALS

Career/Education

Personal/Wellness

Community Impact/Leadership

I must make choices that support my progress toward my goal. Here is how I intend to do that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>This Week</th>
<th>This Month</th>
<th>This Year</th>
<th>In The Future</th>
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95
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Regulation</th>
<th>Working Memory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Control</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>Sustained Attention</td>
<td>Task Initiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal-Directed Persistence</td>
<td>Self-Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think before I act. I resist the urge to do or say anything inappropriate for the situation.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can remember information that helps me complete the task I am working on.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I manage my emotions so that I can achieve goals and complete tasks.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I am able to adapt to changing conditions and revise my plans if obstacles or setbacks occur.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I am able to focus my attention despite distractions, fatigue, or boredom.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I am able to motivate and start projects without procrastination.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I have systems for keeping track of information and materials.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can meet deadlines and show up on time to things.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I keep my eye on the prize and work to meet my goals. I don’t let distractions get me off track.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I pay attention to how I am doing in different situations. I think about what I did well and what I could do better.&quot;</td>
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MODULE ELEVEN:
I CHOOSE TO BE ASSERTIVE
MODULE ELEVEN:
I CHOOSE TO BE ASSERTIVE

BRIEF AGENDA

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<tr>
<td>Yoga Flow</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind-Body Connection: Communication Styles</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project</td>
<td>40 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Meditation</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>120 Minutes/2 Hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:
- Understand different communication styles and the benefits of using assertive communication strategies.
- Practice assertive communication.
- Practice leadership and executive functioning skills.
- Engage in mindfulness activities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Review activities and decide how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
2. Make copies of necessary materials.
3. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
4. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.
5. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.
6. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
7. Make any necessary arrangements for food.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).
- Copies of the Communication Role Play scenarios.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (10 min)
1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants that at your last meeting they discussed taking responsibility for themselves and made a five-year plan. Point out the schedule for this module.
4. Read the daily intention “I choose to be assertive.”
5. Ask participants for a couple of quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)

Yoga Flow (20 min)
1. Have the participants find a spot on the floor where they will have room to spread out and take part in yoga comfortably.
2. Explain to participants that they are at the stage of Young Women Choosing Action in which everything they have been doing is starting to come together. They are applying the mindfulness strategies they have learned and making strides on their social action leadership project.
3. Let them know that they can do the same with yoga and build on one pose or lesson to move smoothly into the next.

4. Facilitators may lead participants in the following sequence (with or without instrumental music playing in the background):

   **STEP 1** Stand in Mountain Pose.

   **STEP 2** Inhale and raise arms over the head, as if you are holding a big ball.

   **STEP 3** Exhale and “dive” down into a forward bend, belly resting on the thighs, head hanging down.

   **STEP 4** Inhale and rise halfway with hands on the shins, calves, or thighs. Back should be straight and head reaching forward.

   **STEP 5** Exhale and return to forward bend.

   **STEP 6** Inhale and reach all the way up, hands over the head as before.

   **STEP 7** Exhale and bring hands together in front of the heart in Prayer Pose, elbows pointing out.

   **STEP 8** Inhale and reach hands above head.

   **STEP 9** Exhale and return to forward bend.

   **STEP 10** Inhale and move carefully to lay on belly. Place hands to support.

   **STEP 11** Exhale.

   **STEP 12** Inhale and move to Upward-Facing Dog or Cobra position.

   **STEP 13** Exhale and move to Child’s Pose. Stay in Child’s Pose, breathing naturally for up to 30 seconds.

   **STEP 14** Move back to Mountain Pose.

   **STEP 15** Repeat the entire sequence or take several deep breaths in Mountain Pose before ending the practice.

---

**Mind-Body Connections: Communication Styles (30 min)**

1. This activity explores different communication styles and addresses how assertive communication is helpful in meeting one’s needs.

2. Tell participants that you will be talking about communication styles today.

3. Communication is another area in life where they can practice intention and mindfulness.
   a. How they communicate is learned behavior, and their communication styles can impact their choices, stress levels, and effectiveness as leaders.
   b. There are four major ways people tend to communicate.

4. Explain that participants will be working in small groups of three or four.
   a. Each group will be given a description of a communication style and a situation.
   b. They will have five minutes to create a skit of one minute or less that depicts someone communicating in the described style in the given situation.

5. Divide participants into groups of three or four.

6. Circulate among the groups to guide the activity, as necessary.

7. After five minutes, ask each group to act out its skit for the larger group. After the skit, ask the group to read or describe the attributes of the communication style it was given.

8. Discuss, using the following questions:
   a. Which communication style is most effective in getting the individual’s needs met without causing distress to others? Why?
   b. How hard is it to be assertive?

9. Who are some examples of assertive women? What can we learn from their communication styles?

10. What are some steps someone could take to be more assertive in her daily life?
11. Remind young women that it is OK if they have not had a lot of experience with assertive communication.
   a. Mention that for many, becoming an assertive communicator takes mindful attention and practice.
   b. Encourage them to start by using “I” statements to clearly communicate needs and feelings.

Social Action Leadership Project
(40 min)
1. Hopefully, by now, the project has been implemented a few times (unless it was a onetime project) and the participants will now take this week to develop their presentation to the community.
2. Use a similar Resources Grid to determine what steps need to be taken to get the project implemented and who is going to do them to plan for the presentation to the community.
3. Share that a presentation needs to have a few key components:
   a. Welcome and introductions of the group to the guests.
   b. Outline of project goals, objectives, and outcomes.
   c. Lessons learned in undertaking the project.
   d. Questions from the audience.

Guided Meditation (10 min)
Tell the participants that, as a different way of connecting to their body, you are going to take them through another guided meditation. This one is a body scan meditation.

Body Scan Meditation
(adapted from meditations found at www.upaya.org)
1. You may do this practice laying down or sitting in a chair, whichever is most comfortable.
2. Let your body relax and soften. Bring your attention to your breath. Breathe deeply into your belly. Your body is beginning to settle. If you become uncomfortable, you can quietly adjust your posture.
3. Breathing deeply, bring your awareness to your body. Remind yourself of its inherent awareness, ease, and vitality. Invite yourself to relax into these elements. Let your body feel open and safe.
4. Bring your attention to the top part of your head, to your skull and scalp. Breathe into your scalp. As thoughts arise, just let them be. Be aware of any tension in your scalp. On your next inhalation, breathe out gratitude.
5. Move your attention to your forehead. Be aware of your forehead, accepting whatever tension might be there. Breathe into your temples. Let your temples feel cool and relaxed. Accept any tension or pain in your temples. As you breathe in, let your temples feel open and soft.
6. See if you can soften your eyes as you breathe in. As you breathe out, let go of all hardness in and around your eyes. Breathe openness and awareness into your eyes. Breathe out gratitude for your clear, bright, and relaxed eyes.
7. Bring awareness to your ears and the muscles around and in your ears. Breathing in fully, opening your ears. Exhaling, feeling grateful for being able to listen and bear witness.
8. Breathe in through your nose. Feel air passing in and out of your nostrils. Breathing in, imagine that the air you are inhaling is full of vital energy. Breathe out with gratitude. On your next inhalation, bring your awareness to the place in your nostrils where you can feel air entering. Feel the exhalation passing out of your nostrils. Let your concentration deepen, as you are aware of where the air enters and leaves your nose.
9. Bring your awareness to your mouth. Relax your whole mouth, letting your jaw soften. On your inhalation, bring a slight smile to your mouth. On your exhalation, feel yourself letting go of tension in your jaw, your cheeks, your lips, your tongue, and your throat.
10. Gently move your awareness to your throat and neck. Let your awareness rest lightly in this area. Feel your neck and throat. Breathe into your neck and throat and accept whatever tightness might be in this area. Breathe out gratitude.
11. With your awareness on your shoulders, breathe into your shoulders. Let all tension melt from your shoulders as you exhale. Let your shoulders drop as you relax them. Give away any sense of heaviness in your
shoulders, letting go of your burdens. On your inbreath, give your shoulders space. On your outbreath, drop your shoulders even farther.

12. Let your awareness be in your arms. Inhaling and exhaling, breathe into your arms. Be aware of any tightness in your arms. There is nothing that you need to hold. With your attention lightly on your arms, breathe spaciousness into your arms. Breathe out relief and release.

13. Touch your hands with your awareness. Let them open. Your palms are facing upward. Inhaling, feel simple generosity in your hands. Exhaling, imagine the tension in your arms and hands flowing out through the ends of your fingers. Let your hands feel light and alive.

14. Bring your awareness to your spine. Breathe into your spine, letting it stretch with your inbreath. Feel the strength of your spine on your outbreath. On your inhalation, be aware of your rib cage expanding. As you exhale, feel the aliveness of your spine. Appreciate the strength of your spine.

15. Bring your attention to your chest and lungs. Breathe deeply into your lungs and fill them so that your chest rises after your belly does. Give your chest space in which to breathe deeply. Breathing in, you feel your chest opening, your lungs expanding. Breathing out, appreciate your lungs.

16. Now breathe into your heart. Be aware of any tightness in and around your heart. Feel your heart open, as it trusts your attention and your breath. Bring your attention to the tissue around your heart. Feel your heart being supported by healthy tissue and cells. Bring your attention to the veins and arteries leading to and from your heart. Visualize your arteries as clear and open. See your veins carrying healthy blood into your heart. As you breathe in, appreciate your heart. Breathing out, feel gratitude for your good heart.

17. Bring your attention to your diaphragm. Let your diaphragm open as you breathe in deeply. Be aware of your whole torso as you exhale; feel your diaphragm contract. Breathing in, feel your diaphragm drop, giving your heart and lungs space in which to expand. On your exhalation, try to let go of tension.

18. Move your attention to your stomach. Breathing in, you are aware of your stomach. Breathing out, appreciate your stomach. Breathing in, be aware of the digestive function of the stomach. As you exhale, let yourself feel grateful for your stomach.

19. Breathe into your legs as you settle your attention into them. Breathing out, let your thighs soften. On your inhalation, feel gratitude for the support of your thighs. Breathing out, appreciate your thighs. Your awareness is on your knees. Breathe into your knees. On the outbreath, be aware of the small muscles around your knees. Feel grateful for your knees. Breathe in healing to your knees. Breathe out any tension and pain in your knees. Bring your attention to your calves and shins. Breathe into your calves and shins. Exhaling, be aware of any tension in your calves. Breathe in spaciousness to your calves. Breathe out gratitude that your legs have taken you so far in your life.

20. Breathe into your feet, bringing all your attention to your feet. On your outbreath, be aware of any tension in your feet. On your inbreath, imagine that you are breathing all the way through your body into your feet. Your mind touches your feet. On your outbreath, appreciate your feet.

21. To complete this practice, slowly, gently, and smoothly bring your awareness from your feet to your legs; to your stomach; to your chest, heart, and lungs; to your spine; to your shoulders, arms, and hands; to your neck; to your face; to the top of your head.

22. Breathe in and out smoothly as your awareness travels up and through your body. When you have reached the top of your head, return your awareness to your breath, then let it gently spread to your whole body. Stay this way for some minutes.

23. Take a few moments to relax with an open and quiet mind.

24. When you are ready, open your eyes.
Review and Reflect (10 min)

1. Conduct the door prize drawing/incentive delivery.
2. Encourage everyone to keep reflecting (using their journals), making healthy and effective choices, and practicing mindfulness.
3. Ask young women to assertively state one thing they would like to take away from today’s session.
4. Thank them for their efforts.

Communication Role-Play Scenarios

**COMMUNICATION STYLE: PASSIVE OR NONASSERTIVE**

**What it is:** A style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, or identifying and meeting their needs.

**What it may look like:** Slumping, avoiding eye contact, standing away from the people you are talking to.

**What it may sound like:** Quiet voice, mumbling; statements like “It’s OK,” “It doesn’t matter to me,” or “Whatever you think is fine.”

Passive communicators have trouble addressing the issue at hand and may feel anxiety and resentment because their needs are not being met.

**Scenario:** A young woman is hanging out with friends. The friends are Snapchatting with each other and laughing at each other’s posts. The young woman does not have a phone with her. She is feeling a bit left out. How does she address the situation if she communicates in a passive style? How are her friends likely to respond?

**COMMUNICATION STYLE: AGGRESSIVE**

**What it is:** A style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others.

**What it may look like:** Pushiness, clenching fists, getting into people’s space.

**What it may sound like:** Loud, bossy, or shouting voice; putting others down; “you” statements meant to put others down or intimidate them. “You make me . . .,” “You never . . .,” “You are . . .”

Aggressive communicators alienate themselves from others and are not able to resolve the real issues.

**Scenario:** A young woman is hanging out with friends. The friends are Snapchatting with each other and laughing at each other’s posts. The young woman does not have a phone with her. She is feeling a bit left out. How does she address the situation if she communicates in an aggressive style? How are her friends likely to respond?
MODULE TWELVE:
I CHOOSE TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE
MODULE TWELVE:
I CHOOSE TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

**BRIEF AGENDA**

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<tbody>
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<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga Flow</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness Mural</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project: Public Presentation</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Reflect</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Participants will:

- Reflect on what was learned in prior lessons.
- Reflect on mindfulness lessons and practices.
- Complete the work on the social action leadership project, solidifying executive functioning, collaborative leadership, and self-efficacy skills.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

1. Decide on the order of activities and how co-facilitators will share responsibilities.
2. Make copies of necessary materials.
3. Select a greeting activity and/or check-in process from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
4. Post the schedule of activities and daily intention in a visible location.
5. Prepare the meeting space for movement and yoga practices.

6. Gather materials, including a door prize or incentives (if applicable).
7. Make any necessary arrangements for food.

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Towels, blankets, or yoga mats for each participant and facilitator (optional).
- Art supplies.
- 5”x5” blank canvases (or other small size canvas)—one per participant.
- A variety of art supplies, such as paints and paintbrushes—enough for the group.
- Collage materials (magazine photos, tissue paper, etc.).
- Scissors
- Glue.
- Markers.
- Musical instruments for Yoga Flow—tambourine, bells, or other sound to help them move through poses.

**MODULE ACTIVITIES**

**Welcome and Introductions (10 min)**

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the greeting/check-in process you selected from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants that at your last meeting they prepared for their upcoming presentation. Assure them that they have prepared well for today, not just the previous week but over the course of the 12-week program. Also remind participants that at your last meeting they discussed taking responsibility for themselves and made a five-year plan. Point out the schedule for this module.
4. Read the daily intention “I rise to the challenge.” Ask participants for a couple of quick ideas about what the intention means to them. (This should be a brief conversation; assure them you will continue to explore this intention as you move through the activities.)

**Yoga Flow (20 Min)**

Have everyone find a comfortable spot to do yoga. Let them know that they are going to get to practice yoga the way they want to—doing the poses that feel good to them.

1. Start with pranayama.
2. Then tell the participants that for the next 12 minutes they can do their own yoga flow. It is intended to provide participants with an opportunity to “play” with their yoga practice while engaging with poses they have learned in *Young Women Choosing Action*.
3. Facilitators may choose to play instrumental music and encourage participants to find their own creative approach to the yoga poses.
4. End the practice with everyone taking a few deep breaths together to re-center themselves.

**Mindfulness Mural (45 Min)**

1. Make plans to display the mural ahead of time.
   a. You may choose to temporarily display it as part of the social action leadership project presentations, or you may arrange a more permanent home for it in your center or in the community.
   b. Be sure to get any necessary permissions before hanging the mural.
2. Self-directed art projects may take some participants longer than others, so plan to allow individuals who finish their projects to move on to their designated social action leadership project work or have another activity to work on.
3. When selecting the art supplies for this project, be sure to consider cleanup.
   a. If there are no sinks in close vicinity, plan on having plastic tubs to collect paint brushes, etc.
   b. Have paper towels or wet wipes available for wiping hands.
   c. Whenever possible, use washable materials.
   d. Protect work surfaces with newspaper.
4. Explain to participants that they will each receive a small canvas. Their canvases will be put together to form a larger mural to teach others who see it about the benefits of practicing mindfulness.
5. Instruct participants to think about what mindfulness means to them.
   a. Is it about paying attention to emotions?
   b. Is it yoga or meditation?
   c. Is it making healthy choices with intent?
   d. Is it being present in the moment?
6. Tell them that once they have defined mindfulness for themselves, they should consider what the greatest benefit of mindfulness is.
   a. Is it a peaceful mind? A relaxed body?
   b. More choices? Self-compassion?
   c. Ask them to have a vision in their minds of what it looks and feels like to practice mindfulness.
7. Show participants the art supplies they have available to them. Tell them they may use the supplies to depict their interpretation of what mindfulness looks and feels like in the style of their choice, using pictures, words, or symbols.
8. Remind participants that creativity comes in lots of variety. Encourage them to enjoy the process.
9. Tell participants how long they have to complete the project, allowing time for clean-up.
10. In the preselected area, hang or display the canvasses so they are abutting in mural form.
11. Include a description of the project.
Social Action Leadership Project
Public Presentation (60 min)

1. Have one of the participants welcome the community members and/or YWCA leadership to their social action leadership project presentation.

2. Conduct the presentation as the young women have planned it, leaving time for the guests to ask them any questions about the project or their next steps.

3. Make sure that there is ample time for the young women to introduce themselves to the guests and to explain why they chose the project, the goals and the objectives, and what they hoped it would accomplish given their limited time to implement it.

Review And Reflect (15 min)

1. Encourage everyone to see their reflection, journaling, and mindfulness practices through to the end.

2. Check in with participants using selected check-in from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.

3. Thank participants for their efforts and attention. Tell them you are looking forward to celebrating their successes in the next and final session.
MODULE THIRTEEN:
I CHOOSE TO SHARE MY SKILLS AND TALENTS
MODULE TWELVE: I CHOOSE TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

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<tr>
<td>Reflection Letter and Intention Jewelry Making</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action Leadership Project Reflections</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Debrief and Reflect</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate</td>
<td>30 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</table>

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Signed certificate of completion for each participant.
- Paper and pencils.
- Intention jewelry-making kit and supplies.
- Internship applications.

MODULE ACTIVITIES

Welcome and Introductions (10 min)

1. Welcome participants back and thank them for coming.
2. Use the one-to-five check-in from the Cultivating Community Practices section of the curriculum.
3. Remind participants that at your last meeting they applied the skills and lessons they learned over the prior 12 weeks to deliver their presentation with confidence. Reassure them that the lessons from *Young Women Choosing Action* that helped them succeed last week will also be the foundation of their healthy and bright futures.
4. Share the daily intention “I choose to share my skills and talents.” Overview the schedule.
5. Invite all participants to take a breath if they wish.

Reflection Letter and Intention Jewelry Making (45 min)

1. Explain that the following activities are an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experience in *Young Women Choosing Action*, as well as a chance to think about their next steps.
2. Say that they will have a chance to make another piece of intention jewelry, and while they are waiting for their turn with that activity, they are invited to share their thoughts in writing about the program.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Reflect on the steps it takes to complete a collaborative social action leadership project.
- Reflect on areas of success and possible improvement as individuals and as a group.
- Employ communication skills to deliver a public presentation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1. Decide on the order of activities.
2. Print and sign certificates of completion for each participant.
3. Gather necessary materials, including any incentives and applications for internships.
4. Prepare the meeting space for the presentation.
5. Make any necessary arrangements for food.
3. Ask young women to think about a new intention they would like to carry forward. Ask them, “What kinds of choices and behaviors would you most like to practice in your life?”
   a. Ask them to think of a word that describes this, such as “healthy,” “empowered,” or “wise.”
   b. They may opt for words that help them feel connected to the programs, such as “choose action” or “be mindful.”
   c. Another option may be to choose a strength that they would like to practice, such as “responsible,” “connected,” or “self-aware.”
   d. Once they have the word they would like, ask them to write it down.

4. Explain that while they are waiting for their turn to make jewelry, they should write a letter to the YWCA headquarters describing their time in the program. The letter should address the following questions (post this list where participants can see them while they write):
   a. Why did you choose to participate in Young Women Choosing Action?
   b. What was your social action leadership project?
   c. What did you learn about mindfulness, yoga, intentions, and leadership?
   d. What did you like about the program?
   e. What might you change about the program in the future?
   f. What skills do you hope to continue using? How do you plan to use them?

5. Depending on how many jewelry-making kits are available, invite the appropriate number of young women to make their bracelets.
   a. Check the spelling of their intention word and guide them, as necessary.
   b. As each participant finishes, invite others to pause their writing and complete the activity.
   c. Repeat until everyone is finished.

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Social Action Leadership Project Reflections (30 min)

1. Sitting in a circle, have a group discussion that addresses the following questions:
   a. Did the leadership project go as planned?
   b. What went well?
   c. What did not go as well?
   d. What would you do differently next time?
   e. What have you learned?
   f. Has the social action successfully brought about change/awareness? How do you know?
   g. Did the group reach its goals?
   h. Do you think any follow-up actions could be helpful? Why?

2. Ask participants to reflect on the following questions:
   a. What do you think was your own greatest contribution to the project?
   b. How would you like to continue to grow as a leader?

3. Ask participants to share how they answered those questions with the person they are sitting next to.

Program Debrief And Reflect (30 min)

1. Stand in a circle. Congratulate participants on completing their project and being open to new learning new skills.
2. Let them know they are going to take a few minutes to reflect on their successes and think about what they have all learned.
3. Ask them to each share one thing that they think they did well as a group in the presentation or overall social action leadership project. Check in to make sure everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so.
4. Ask the young women if they think there is anything they would have done differently if they could do it again. How would they approach it differently? Check in to make sure everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so.

5. Ask them which mindfulness practices they plan on taking forward with them. Which have been particularly helpful? Check in to make sure everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so.

6. Ask each participant to share one way she has grown as part of this program.

7. Ask each participant to reflect on her initial intention. How did she intend to feel at the end of this program? Is that how she feels now?

8. Explain that endings and transitions can be difficult. Ask participants to think about how they might continue to take care of themselves as they deal with the feelings of loss that may come with completing this program. Ask anyone who is willing to share her ideas.

9. Ask participants where they can find support as they continue to practice what they have learned as part of the program.

10. Offer culturally responsive and relevant suggestions, as appropriate.

11. Thank participants for their thoughtful reflection and invite them to transition to a closing celebration.

Celebrate (30 min)

1. One at a time, present each participant with a certificate of completion and thank her for a specific quality she brought to the program.

2. Explain how participants may apply for future internships.

3. Remind participants of the skills and tools they are taking with them.

4. Thank the young women for their participation and close in a way that seems fitting for the group.
A safe and welcoming environment in which young women know what to expect and feel comfortable expressing themselves is key to cultivating a successful leadership program. Brain research shows that a balance of ritual and novelty supports greater learning. Each module of Young Women Choosing Action incorporates opportunities to build community rituals and norms, while providing original approaches to content and skills. By consciously incorporating programmatic elements which support the unique characteristics of each group, facilitators cultivate a community rooted in the best practices of Choice Theory and Positive Youth Development. Facilitators should consider how they plan to incorporate the following community-building elements into each module.

### Cultivating a Safe Environment

Creating a physical space that is both calming and welcoming helps to set the tone for Young Women Choosing Action. Whenever possible, consider arranging the space to optimize comfort, intent, and efficiency.

- **Limit Distractions:** A clean and tidy space is best for limiting anxiety and distractions amongst participants. A clear table space is essential for project work.

- **Circles:** Arrange seating in a circle whenever possible. This will allow all participants to be in view of each other and is most conducive for conversation and engaged interaction.

- **Use the Language of Choice:** Present information and instructions using language and actions that support participants’ five basic needs. Help participants identify when they can make a choice and how they can support others’ choices.

- **Reinforcing Messages:** Hang posters, signs, or pictures (if possible) that reinforce ideas of choice, leadership, or mindfulness. While walls should be free of clutter to limit distraction, a few well-placed and inviting posters may provide inspiration.

- **Accessibility:** It is essential that the space is adequately accessible to all participants. While arranging the program space, incorporate appropriate accommodations for any mobility, visual, or auditory needs participants may have.

### Cultivating a Welcoming Environment

Facilitators can help reinforce participants’ sense that they are vital to the team and appreciated as individuals by incorporating welcoming rituals at the start of each module. Choose rituals which feel authentic to both the facilitators and the participants.

- **Personal Welcome:** Greet each participant by name as they arrive to each module. Ask them how they are and invite them to join the circle. Small gestures go a long way in building community.

- **Greeting Ritual:** High fives, fist bumps, or other actions may be incorporated into individual greetings. Participants will grow to anticipate the welcome and this could lead to a greater sense of belonging.

- **Circle of Hellos:** This is a way for participants to mindfully connect with and acknowledge each other. Sitting in a circle, participants will pass a “hello” around. Using the name of the person to her left, the person who starts the circle says, “Hello, (name).” The person who receives the hello says “hello” back to the person on her right, calling her by her name and then passes the “hello” to her left, again using the name of that person in the greeting. The hello moves around the circle with each person greeting the people on her left and her right by name, until the “hello” arrives back to the original person. This activity may be used at the beginning of each module. However, depending on the size of the group, it could take several minutes to complete. Therefore, if this activity becomes part of the welcoming ritual, timing may have to be adjusted for other module activities.
Introductions

Particularly in the first few modules, plan on incorporating time for participants and facilitators to share their names and some basic information about themselves. This is especially important for groups comprised of young women who have not met before. In groups who are already familiar with each other, the emphasis may be placed on sharing biographical information. Lay the groundwork for future conversations and acknowledge the individuality and worthiness of each participant by incorporating one or more of the following into the early modules of Young Women Choosing Action.

- **Nametags:** Supplying the group with nametags to wear will provide a visual reminder of each person’s name. Add an element of choice by inviting participants to draw on their nametags a small picture or symbol of a skill or positive quality they possess.

- **Quick Intros:** Ask each participant to share her name and one or two non-threatening biographical facts, such as age, favorite ice cream flavor, or birth order. Alternatively, consider asking participants to share two opposite facts, such as their favorite pizza topping and their least favorite pizza topping.

- **Physical Alphabet:** This activity works for both kinesthetic and visual learners and can be a good ice breaker. Ask each participant to use her arms and legs to physically spell her name, as she introduces herself.

- **Alliteration:** Ask participants to think of an adjective or describing word that begins with the same sound as their first name and describes an aspect of their personality, for instance “Listening Leandra” or “Ethical Etta.” For an added challenge, each participant can be invited to reintroduce those who went previously in the circle. For example, “I am Merry Marissa, this is Ethical Etta and Listening Leandra.”

Checking In

Facilitators need tools for taking quick reads of participants’ attention, satisfaction, and understanding. This feedback can be used to adjust programming, debrief modules, and inform future interactions.

- **Thumbs:** Using this classic check-in tool, facilitators ask participants to use their thumbs to respond to an inquiry. Thumbs-up represents an affirmative answer, thumbs-down is negative, and a sideways thumb means “so-so” or “sometimes.”

- **One-to-Five:** Ask participants to rate their experience by holding up a corresponding number of fingers. One finger signifies extremely low energy or highly dissatisfying experiences while five fingers means that a participant is feeling great or greatly enjoyed the experience.

- **One-Word Summary:** Ask each participant to think of one word to describe her experience. Moving around the circle, each participant shares her word. This check-in is best delivered when there is adequate time for participants to process the question, as all people take in and consider information at their own speed. If you know you will be using this method of check-in, give participants a heads-up earlier in the module by letting them know you intend to ask them to choose one word to describe their experience and asking them to keep that in mind as they engage in the activities. If a participant is struggling with coming up with a word during the activity, you may give her a “pass” in the moment and ask that she share the word with you later after giving it a bit more consideration.

- **Nod if You are with Me on This:** Check-in is useful after giving instructions or sharing information. Simply ask participants to nod their heads if they understand what you have said or shake their heads if they do not. If any participants shake their heads, provide clarity for what they do not understand.

Transitions

Each module of Young Women Choosing Action involves several activities, many of which are participant directed. Much time can be lost in the transitions from one to another. Transitions can also be stressful for participants if they come without warning or if there is a lack of fluidity between activities. Facilitators may incorporate the following strategies to help make transitions between activities smooth and mindful.
**Post Schedule:** Posting an outline of the daily schedule in plain sight allows participants to get a sense of how activities will flow. This aids with transitions, as well as providing a sense of security.

**Time Awareness:** At the beginning of each activity, tell participants how much time they will have to work on the activity. This prepares them for impending transitions and helps them to practice time management skills.

**Chimes:** Use a pleasant-sounding chime or bell to gain participants attention (rather than calling out). Chimes may be used to signify a “two-minute heads up” so that participants know they will need to wrap up their work and/or to signify the end of an activity.

**Transitional Explanations:** Facilitators can support transitions by explaining how one activity leads into the other or drawing attention to the connections between one activity and the next.

**Grouping**
Several activities call for small group work. Efficient methods of dividing the whole group into smaller subsets make for smoother transitions and fun variety within modules.

**Phrases:** Facilitators pre-select words according to required group size. One at a time, each participant says one word, in its designated order. Groups are made up of everyone who said the same word. Using words and phrases that represent programmatic themes help to reinforce program goals, as well as provide a quick method of grouping. For example, if the aim is to create two large groups, participants could alternately say “choose” and “action.” If an activity calls for groups of four, the words “Choice,” “Mindful,” “Leadership,” and “Justice” might be used. The selected words could also be selected from the module’s “I choose” intention.

**Self-Selected:** If the participants in a group have proven to be inclusive and cohesive, allow them to choose their own groups. Encourage participants to look out for each other and make sure everyone is included in a group. Also encourage participants to work with people they haven’t worked with before.

**People on Either Side:** If there is no time or need for a physical transition then participants may be asked to work with one or both people sitting on either side of them.

**Commonalities:** Ask participants to find a designated number of people with something in common with them. For example, you might say, “Find two other people who were born in the same season as you,” or, “Find one other person who has the same color socks as you.” This is a good method to use when you have some extra time. It also helps if facilitators are aware of some basic commonalities within the group ahead of time.

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## Teachable Moments

Facilitators cultivate an atmosphere of growth and community by modeling positive behaviors and thoughtfully addressing concerns and concepts as they arise. Intentionally using the following strategies can greatly benefit the community.

**Assertive Communication:** Facilitators should strive to maintain calm, positive interactions. Use “I” statements and be direct about your wishes whenever communicating with participants and other adults.

**Modeling Teamwork:** Co-facilitation offers opportunities to model shared leadership, clear communication, and mutual respect. It may be helpful at times for co-facilitators to speak about how they support each other in their work and discuss the strategies they use to come to agreement.

**Modeling Mindfulness:** When facilitators embody mindfulness practices, participants have an authentic example of what practicing mindfulness could look like. Seeing an adult facilitator model the behaviors and practices inherent to *Young Women Choosing Action* helps participants to see the practices as a group norm, which may also deter resistance to the practices.

**Guide on the Side:** Participants may look to facilitators to solve problems that come up for them, but it is important to avoid providing easy answers or directives. To support participants’ growing leadership skills, facilitators should serve as the “guide on the side.” Whenever possible, facilitators should seek to ask...
guiding questions rather than to provide direct answers. If participants are getting off task, facilitators may ask “Who is taking responsibility for keeping your group on task?” If a participant is confused about instructions, facilitators might ask if there is another participant who can provide more clarity. If a facilitator sees that the approach a group is taking could be problematic, she might follow a course of questions: “Could you remind me what the goal of your project is? How does this approach support that goal? Can you think of a more direct route you might take, given the time constraints we have?” The goal is to help participants see each other as resources, as well as develop their individual capacities to solve problems.

Sharing Information: Facilitators should consider sharing any relevant and well-sourced articles, news stories, videos, podcasts, or other apps which may support participants’ social action work and/or mindfulness practices.

Closing Rituals
Just as facilitators set the tone for the program by incorporating positive opening rituals and check-ins, sending participants off on a positive note at the end of each module is equally important.

Check-ins: The check-in procedures used above may be used to quickly gauge participants’ experience with the module.

Reflection: Reflection is an essential part of learning. Incorporating a few quick reflection questions, which participants may answer aloud or silently for themselves, helps build neural connections and allows for deeper processing of the content. Reflection questions may include:

- “If you could teach someone one thing you learned today, what would it be?”
- “How could you incorporate what we practiced into your daily life?”
- “What did you learn about yourself today?”
- “Of all the things we talked about and did today, what had the greatest impact on you? And Why?”

Mindful Minute: The end of each module is a transition back to life outside the program space. Participants may find that taking a mindful minute helps with this transition. A mindful minute could consist of taking an intentional breath, honoring a moment of silence, and/or reflecting on the daily intention.

Well Wishes: Similar to the concept of a greeting ritual, facilitators may choose to incorporate a selected method of ending the program each week. This could be a round of high fives, a chant they share with the group, or simply a catch phrase, such as “We’re all done for today, I wish you well until the next time.”

Interim Activities
Encourage young women to practice these mindfulness and leadership skills between modules, as regular practice helps build lasting neural pathways. Because young women have many activities and responsibilities vying for their attention, it may prove useful to provide a framework for interim practices.

Homework: Encourage participants to stay connected with the program during the interim between modules by journaling, practicing yoga and mindfulness exercises, and keeping in touch via a group social media page. Whether a participant ultimately completes the “homework” is her choice, but assignments are offered as a means to support the skills each module teaches and the dispositions they reinforce.

Social Media: Establishing a group page or thread on participants’ favorite social media site provides a platform for reflection, continued practice, and increased engagement with the program. Establishing group hashtags helps encourage a sense of community while supporting the young women’s personal wellness and leadership efforts.

Managing Time
Every activity in the Young Women Choosing Action curriculum includes an estimate of the time it might take to complete. However, it should be noted that the amount of time an activity actually takes is determined by a group’s size, how much time is spent discussing the content, how
much guidance and support a group needs to accomplish tasks, and whether any unexpected challenges arise. Ultimately, facilitators can expect that not every activity will run “to time,” some may run long, and some may run short. If activities run long, facilitators will need to make executive decisions about how to adapt subsequent activities. It may be necessary to condense or reschedule an activity. Unless it is completely unavoidable, activities should not be eliminated as all elements are designed to build upon each other. If an activity is completed earlier than expected, facilitators may use the extra time to incorporate fun, community-building activities. The following activities support positive group engagement while building on concepts, skills, and dispositions inherent in the *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum.

**Women Who Chose Action:** On notecards, write the names of women who have famously taken on leadership roles, worked to create change, or were forerunners in their field. Select women who are likely to be familiar to the young women you are working with, intentionally including women of color and LGBTQ women in the mix. The names may be a mix of locally known activists and nationally known celebrities and leaders, as well as famous women from history. Also include one or two facts about the women on the notecard. For instance, a card with the name “Laverne Cox” might include the fact “first openly transgender actor to be nominated for a primetime Emmy Award.” With permission, tape one notecard on each participant’s back without revealing what the card says to that participant. Participants must ask each other questions to determine the name that is taped on their own back. They may only ask questions which can be answered with “yes” or “no.”

**Lead the Way:** Participants work in pairs for this activity. Each pair face each other and decide which of the two partners will take the lead first. The leader makes movements which the partner must mirror. After about a minute the other partner becomes the leader. Once each partner has had an opportunity to lead, change up the activity. In the second round, the leader makes movements and the partner must do the opposite of what the leader does. If the leader leans right, the partner leans left. If the leader reaches up, the partner reaches down. After a couple minutes, they should switch roles. Follow up this activity with a discussion about the responsibilities of leadership and/or whether it is harder to mirror another’s behavior or work against it.

**Concentric Circles Conversation:** For this activity, have half the group form a circle with each person standing facing out, with their backs to the center of the circle. The other half of the group should form a circle around the first circle, so they are paired up and facing someone on the inside circle. Tell participants that you will ask a question and they should discuss their answer to the question with the person they are facing, making sure both people get a chance to share their thoughts on the matter. Explain that when you signal (or the bell chimes) the outside circle will rotate clockwise, but the inside circle will stay where they are. At that transition, the facilitator will ask another question. Questions could include:

- What are the qualities of a good leader?
- How do young people practice leadership differently than older generations?
- Who is your hero? And why?
- What is the best advice you have ever received?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What does “have a choice” mean to you?
- What do you think is the most important issue of our time? And Why?

**Two Facts and a Fiction:** Ask participants to think about two things that are true about themselves and to make up a third. Participants take turns sharing their two facts and one fiction. Everyone else must try to identify the fiction. This game can also be played in smaller groups to assure that everyone gets a chance to go.
YOGA AND MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

As a trauma-informed leadership program, Young Women Choosing Action teaches mindfulness, meditation, and yoga practices to participants as means of mitigating stress, directing focus, and/or cultivating positive coping strategies. When teaching these practices to participants, it is important to be aware that engaging with activities rooted in breathing and movement may trigger emotional reactions for some young women. The following strategies provide guidance for teaching yoga and mindfulness from a trauma-aware perspective (Hannay, 2017).

1. Use language rooted in choice whenever introducing a mindfulness or yoga practice. Speak to participants about the fact that these practices are personal and may be adapted to suit their emotional and physical needs. Offer alternatives to each exercise, including breathing practices.

2. Presume that most people have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. This approach encourages planning and program implementation that is effective for everyone including those who may be struggling.

3. Yoga and mindfulness practices may bring up strong emotions. Have a plan in place to connect individuals safely and discreetly to an appropriate level of care.

4. Create a safe place for participants to develop their mindfulness practices. Keep in mind that what one person finds comforting another may find triggering. Check in with participants regularly to ensure they feel comfortable with the practices and adjust, as necessary.

5. Be aware that we store loss and grief in our lungs. Breathing activities can lead to dizziness, lightheadedness, or emotional reactivity. Always start teaching breathing activities with participants seated in a chair or on the floor.

6. Always provide options and modifications for each exercise, to provide “a way out” for poses or exercises which may cause stress for a participant.

7. Assume each participant is the expert on her own adversity or trauma. Create opportunities to listen and adapt practices whenever necessary.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF MINDFULNESS

Melissa Greenberg, Ph.D. describes the following nine elements as essential qualities of mindfulness. Keep them in mind as you teach participants about mindfulness practices, as the language is helpful for communicating.

Focus on the Present Moment: Encourage participants not to get lost in their thoughts, either thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Encourage them to bring their attention back to what they are experiencing “right now.” Guide them to remain open to how things are unfolding in the current moment rather than worrying how things might (or might not!) turn out in the future.

Being Fully Present: Encourage participants to pay attention to how it feels to move through their days. Every now and then they should stop and ask themselves “What do I feel in my body? What do I see, hear, smell—right now?”

Openness to Experience: Let participants know that part of practicing mindfulness is learning how to deal with feelings and experiences that may be difficult. Let them know that if they find themselves dreading and shutting out their own feelings and experiences because they think they can’t handle them, they might try to welcome with curiosity any thoughts and feelings that naturally arise, knowing they are merely sensations in the moment and the next moment can be different. Encourage them to create mental spaciousness to contain these thoughts and feelings. Tell them that if they look at their experience as simply a flow of sensations or thoughts—they may begin to see themselves evolve naturally over time.
Non-Judgment: Encourage participants to avoid categorizing their thoughts and feelings as good or bad. They should also avoid trying to change them or feeling compelled to act on them. Tell them that all feelings have a purpose, whether to protect you from danger or open you to love. By practicing watching and accepting whatever arises in consciousness with an open mind they may learn to be more accepting of themselves and other people.

Acceptance of Things as They Are: Encourage participants to avoid trying to force or change reality to fit their vision of what it should be. Encourage them to see reality clearly and let it be as it is, having faith that they can tolerate whatever comes up.

Connection: Explain that practicing mindfulness often helps people to feel connected to all living things and the environment. Mindfulness helps us to see our part in the larger whole.

Non-Attachment: This is about adapting to change by trying not to hold onto or control things, people, or experiences. Non-attachment is a type of flexible thinking that helps us to prepare to enact a plan B and move away from our fear of change.

Peace and Equanimity: Explain that practicing mindfulness helps us find a more peaceful place inside us. With practice participants might find that they are less likely to get too swept up in life’s highs and lows. Equanimity helps us to stay firmly rooted in our own clear vision and values, even if things do not go our way.

Compassion: Mindfulness practice may lead us to act more gently, kindly, and patiently with ourselves and others. Rather than judging or condemning, we open our hearts to really listen and try to understand our own and other people's experiences. Practicing mindfulness helps many people to develop deeper empathy and self-compassion.

MINDFULNESS STRATEGIES

Mindfulness is not a one-size fits all process. Offering alternatives may prove helpful for some young women. Over the course of their participation in Young Women Choosing Action, participants will be presented with a variety of tools and information to inform their approach to mindfulness. Along with the lessons included in the curriculum, facilitators may wish to share the following strategies to support participants' practice and exploration of mindfulness. These strategies may be initiated in times of stress or participants might choose a specific time each day, such as while they are getting dressed or before sending a text message, to engage with the activity as a regular practice.

STOP
This is a good everyday practice.
S: Stop whatever you are doing. Pause for a moment.
T: Take three mindful breaths.
O: Observe what is happening around you in the present moment. Check in with yourself as well. What is going on inside of you in this moment?
P: Proceed mindfully with whatever you were doing or about to do.

RAIN
This practice may be used as an everyday practice or to navigate times of stress.
R: Recognize what is happening. What do you see and hear?
A: Allow life to be just as it is. Breathe and notice without judgment.
I: Investigate inner experience. How are you feeling? What is happening with your breath?
N: Non-Identification. Realize that you are not your thoughts or your emotions. You do not have to tie your identity to what you are thinking or feeling. You can choose to act with intention.

RID
This practice is best for addressing emotional distress and emotional triggers.
R: Relax.
I: Identify the trigger.
D: Decide on your response.
This three-minute video, titled Mindfulness: Youth Voices, is also worth sharing with participants, especially if they are questioning the benefits or worthiness of mindfulness.

**BREATHING**

Young women may choose to pay attention to their breath in times of stress or as part of a regular mindfulness practice. To do this they can simply close their eyes and bring their awareness to their breath moving in and out. They may focus on the sensation of the breath, its warmth or coolness. They may choose to say silently, “Breathing in I am here. Breathing out I am here.” or “As I breathe in, I breathe in peace. As I breathe out, I breathe out calm (or love or presence).”

**MINDFUL MOVEMENT**

Young women may choose to pay attention to how they move through the world. It may be helpful for some to pick a movement on which to focus their full attention, such as walking to the kitchen or washing their face. As they engage in these movements, they may notice what is happening with their breath, what they are feeling or thinking, and how their muscles and joints move to complete the action. This is one way of connecting with the moment and bringing awareness to certain automatic actions.

**MINDFUL STRETCHING**

Some participants may find it helpful to mindfully take time to stretch each day. Stretching their arms and back upon sitting at a desk could be used as a cue for the brain, that it is time to be attentive and focus on schoolwork. Taking a big standing stretch first thing in the morning might be accompanied with mindfully reciting an intention for the day. Young women should be invited to explore how stretching might support their own mindfulness practice in a way that feels fitting.

**MINDFULNESS APPS**

There are several free and low-cost mindfulness apps available to download onto smartphones and other devices. Some apps are designed with adolescents in mind. Since many young women have constant access to their phone, these apps may be an accessible means of supporting a developing mindfulness practice. Widely recommended apps for teen girls include Akasha; Insight Timer; Relax Melodies; and Stop, Breathe, and Think, but there are dozens available. If young women are interested in using a mindfulness app, encourage them to do some research and find an app that is a good fit for their needs.

**MINDFULNESS MEDITATION SCRIPTS**

When leading a mindfulness meditation practice, the intention is to create a peaceful and inviting atmosphere for inner reflection. Facilitators should read the scripts with a calm, clear voice. There is no need to speak in an affected or breathy voice, as some imagine when they think of guided meditations. Read the scripts slowly and clearly, pausing for several seconds after each sentence and allowing participants time to process the instructions.

There are a variety of recorded meditations available online for free. If reading a meditation is not an option, facilitators may want to search the internet to seek recordings that deliver similar content. Be sure to specify the kind of meditation you are looking for, such as “self-compassion” or “walking meditation.” Listen to the meditation before sharing it with participants to make sure it aligns with the intended program content.

**One-Minute Mindfulness Activity**

- Straighten your spine. Quiet your mind. If you wish, close your eyes. Otherwise, look down at the floor.
- Take an intentional breath, following the air in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Relax your shoulders and take another intentional breath, following it in and out.
- When you are ready, open your eyes or look up.

**Handy Mindfulness Activity**

- In a few seconds, I will ask you to clap your hands three times and then drop them into your lap and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so. We will count each clap as we go.
Okay, ready, clap your hands three times. One. Two. Three. Now rest your hands in your lap and close your eyes.

Breathe normally, in through your nose and out through your nose. Bring your attention to your hands. Can you feel the effects of having clapped them? Do you feel a buzzing or vibrating sensation? Do you feel warmth?

Focus your attention on the palms of your hands. What do you notice?

Now move your attention to your pinkies. What do you notice?

Now pay attention to your ring finger, your middle finger, your pointer or index finger.

Finally, notice what you feel in your thumb.

One finger at a time, make a fist, paying attention to how each finger feels as it moves inward toward your palm.

Now shake your hands a little. What part of your hand draws your attention when you do that?

Take a minute to quietly focus on your hands.

After one minute, signal the group to open their eyes and discuss what participants noticed during this activity.

STOP Mindfulness Meditation
(Stahl & Goldstein, 2010)

Stop what you are doing and center yourself on your chair, relaxing your body and your mind, but keeping your spine straight. Center your head over your heart, your heart over your hips; feel your feet on the floor. Close your eyes, as you are comfortable.

Take a deep inbreath and let your thoughts go with the outbreath. Continue to breathe in and out at a pace that feels natural and comfortable for you.

Observe how your breath feels as it moves in and out. Notice any thoughts or feelings that arise inside you. Just observe without judging or acting on those feelings. Be aware of sounds or sensations of what is happening around you. Again, you do not need to act on or judge what is happening, just notice. Observe how, just like your breath, thoughts and feelings may come and go. Observe how every moment is temporary, leading to another moment. Each breath makes way for the next breath.

In a minute you will proceed with your day. You may choose to proceed with a sense a calm. You may choose to reflect on how your breath is available to center and support you in any moment.

When you are ready open your eyes and proceed with your day.

Three-Minute Meditation

Sit still. Place your hands on your lap and your feet flat on the ground. If it feels safe for you, close your eyes. Sit with your feet flat on the ground and your hands in your lap.


Pay attention to the sounds around you. Maybe you hear someone shuffling their feet, or voices coming from down the hall. Perhaps there is traffic outside. Simply notice and hear it all without judgement or attaching any thoughts to it. It is not good or bad, it just is.

Pay attention to your breath. Notice your breath coming in and going out. Feel where it enters your nose and the cool sensation in your nostrils.

Now come back to your body and the sounds around you. Notice the sensation of sitting in your chair.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

Lovingkindness and Self-Compassion
(from the Centre for Mindfulness Studies, 2015)

Sit in a comfortable position, upright and relaxed. Fully or partially close your eyes. Take a few breaths to settle into your body and into the current moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture as if you were seeing yourself from the outside.

Now bring yourself inside your body and notice how you feel.

Locate your breathing at the point where you can most easily feel it. Feel how your breath moves in your body.
When your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.

- Start to notice where you might be holding stress in your body. Perhaps in your stomach, your jaw, your forehead.
- Also notice if you are holding difficult emotions such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day.
- Now offer yourself goodwill because of what you are holding in your body right now. Silently repeat the following phrases to yourself:
  
  * May I be safe.
  * May I be peaceful.
  * May I be kind to myself.
  * May I accept myself as I am.

- If your mind has wandered or if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breath. You can also name the emotion and find where it is settling into your body and breathe into that area.
- When you are ready, return to repeating the phrases.
  
  * May I be safe.
  * May I be peaceful.
  * May I be kind to myself.
  * May I accept myself as I am.

- Finally, take a few breaths and just rest comfortably in your body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish.
- Gently open your eyes.

**Walking Meditation**
(adapted from Burrell Education 2012)

- Stand in one spot. Pay attention to how your weight is transferred through the soles of your feet to the floor (ground) beneath you.
- Pay attention to all the subtle movements that go on to keep us balanced and upright. Very often we take this for granted—our ability to be able to stand upright—but this is a skill we had to learn how to do and, without even knowing it, we are constantly adjusting to stay upright.
- Now, begin to walk at a slow but normal walking pace, and in a normal manner, taking care not to bump into each other. We are not going to be changing the way that we walk; we are simply going to be aware of it.
- Pay attention to how your feet touch and leave the ground. Be aware of how your heel first makes contact, notice as your foot rolls forward onto the ball, and then lifts and travels through the air. Be aware of all the different sensations in your feet, not just a contact in the soles of your feet but the contact between the toes, the feeling of the inside of your shoes, the fabric of your socks, and let your feet be as relaxed as you can.
- Become aware of your ankles. Notice how these joints move to keep you in motion. Allow your ankle joints to relax.
- Notice the role your legs and hips play in moving you along.
- Pay attention to how your arms sway, and how your shoulders and head move with each step you take. Your brain is sending a signal down your spine, letting all your body parts know they have a role to play in this motion. And your spine itself is in motion as you move along.
- Bring your head back to a point of balance, your chin slightly tucked in. Relax your jaw.
- Relax your eyes — and just let your eyes be softly focused, gently looking ahead – not staring at anything, not allowing yourself to be caught up in anything that is going past you.
- Notice your feelings. Do not become emotionally attached to your feelings, just pay attention to the general tone of what you are feeling. Are you bored? Are you content? Are you irritated? Are you feeling happy to be walking along? Just notice what you are feeling and let it go.
- Notice your mind also. Is your mind clear, or dull? Is your mind busy, or is it calm? Are you thinking about things unconnected to this practice, or do whatever
thoughts that you have center on what you are doing right now? Notice these things with no judgment—just acknowledgment.

In a few seconds, I am going to ask you to stop and I would like you to come to a natural halt. So, you are not freezing on the spot; you are just allowing yourself to come to a stop.

So, do that now; come to a stop. And just experience yourself standing. Just notice what it is like to no longer be in motion.

Notice once more the complex balancing act that is going on to keep you upright. Feel the weight traveling down through the soles of your feet into the earth; simply standing, and experiencing yourself and, finally, bringing this meditation session to a close.

Body Scan Meditation  
(adapted from meditations found at www.upaya.org)

You may do this practice laying down or sitting in a chair.

Let your body relax and soften. Bring your attention to your breath. Breathe deeply into your belly. Your body is beginning to settle. If you become uncomfortable, you can quietly adjust your posture.

Breathing deeply, bring your awareness to your body. Remind yourself of its inherent awareness, ease, and vitality. Invite yourself to relax into these elements. Let your body feel open and safe.

Bring your attention to the top part of your head, to your skull and scalp. Breathe into your scalp. As thoughts arise, just let them be. Be aware of any tension in your scalp. On your next inhalation, breathe out gratitude.

Move your attention to your forehead. Be aware of your forehead, accepting whatever tension might be there. Breathe into your temples. Let your temples feel cool and relaxed. Accept any tension or pain in your temples. As you breathe in, let your temples feel open and soft.

See if you can soften your eyes as you breathe in. As you breathe out, let go of all hardness in and around your eyes. Breathe openness and awareness into your eyes. Breathe out gratitude for your clear, bright, and relaxed eyes.

Bring awareness to your ears and the muscles around and in your ears. Breathing in fully, opening your ears. Exhaling, feel grateful for being able to listen and bear witness.

Breathe in through your nose. Feel air passing in and out of your nostrils. Breathing in, imagine that the air you are inhaling is full of vital energy. Breathe out with gratitude. On your next inhalation bring your awareness to the place in your nostrils where you can feel air entering. Feel the exhalation passing out of your nostrils. Let your concentration deepen, as you are aware of where the air enters and leaves your nose.

Bring your awareness to your mouth. Relax your whole mouth, letting your jaw soften. On your inhalation bring a slight smile to your mouth. On your exhalation feel yourself letting go of tension in your jaw, your cheeks, your lips, your tongue, and your throat.

Gently move your awareness to your throat and neck. Let your awareness rest lightly in this area. Feel your neck and throat. Breathe into your neck and throat and accept whatever tightness might be in this area. Breathe out gratitude.

With your awareness on your shoulders, breathe into your shoulders. Let all tension melt from your shoulders as you exhale. Let your shoulders drop as you relax them. Give away any sense of heaviness in your shoulders, letting go of your burdens. On your inbreath give your shoulders space. On your outbreath drop your shoulders even farther.

Let your awareness be in your arms. Inhaling and exhaling, breathe into your arms. Be aware of any tightness in your arms. There is nothing that you need to hold. With your attention lightly on your arms, breathe spaciousness into your arms. Breathe out relief and release.

Touch your hands with your awareness. Let them open. Your palms are facing upward. Breathe into the palms of your hands. Inhaling, feel simple generosity in your hands. Exhaling, imagine the tension in your arms and hands flowing out through the ends of your fingers. Let your hands feel light and alive.
Bring your awareness to your spine. Breathe into your spine, letting it stretch with your inbreath. Feel the strength of your spine on your outbreath. On your inhalation, be aware of your rib cage expanding. As you exhale, feel the aliveness of your spine. Appreciate the strength of your spine.

Bring your attention to your chest and lungs. Breathe deeply into your lungs and fill them so that your chest rises after your belly does. Give your chest space in which to breathe deeply. Breathing in, you feel your chest opening, your lungs expanding. Breathing out, appreciate your lungs.

Now breathe into your heart. Be aware of any tightness in and around your heart. Feel your heart open, as it trusts your attention and your breath. Bring your attention to the tissue around your heart. Feel your heart being supported by healthy tissue and cells. Bring your attention to the veins and arteries leading to and from your heart. Visualize your arteries as clear and open. See your veins carrying healthy blood into your heart. As you breathe in, appreciate your heart. Breathing out, feel gratitude for your good heart.

Bring your attention to your diaphragm. Let your diaphragm open as you breathe in deeply. Be aware of your whole torso as you exhale and feel your diaphragm. Breathing in, feel your diaphragm drop, giving your heart and lungs space in which to expand. On your exhalation, allow yourself to let go of tension.

Move your attention to your stomach. Breathing in, you are aware of your stomach. Breathing out, appreciate your stomach. Breathing in, be aware of the digestive function of the stomach. As you exhale, let yourself feel grateful for your stomach.

Breathe into your legs as you settle your attention into them. Breathing out, let your thighs soften. On your inhalation feel gratitude for the support of your thighs. Breathing out, appreciate your thighs. Your awareness is on your knees. Breathe into your knees. On the outbreath, be aware of the small muscles around your knees. Feel grateful for your knees. Breathe in healing to your knees. Breathe out any tension and pain in your knees. Bring your attention to your calves and shins.

Breathe into your calves and shins. Exhaling, be aware of any tension in your calves. Breathe in spaciousness to your calves. Breathe out gratitude that your legs have taken you so far in your life.

Breathe into your feet, bringing all your attention to your feet. On your outbreath, be aware of any tension in your feet. On your inbreath, imagine that you are breathing all the way through your body into your feet. Your mind touches your feet. On your outbreath appreciate your feet.

To complete this practice, slowly, gently, and smoothly bring your awareness from your feet to your legs; to your stomach; to your chest, heart, and lungs; to your spine; to your shoulders, arms, and hands; to your neck; to your face; to the top of your head.

Breathe in and out smoothly as your awareness travels up and through your body. When you have reached the top of your head, return your awareness to your breath, then let it gently spread to your whole body. Stay this way for some minutes.

Take a few moments to relax with an open and quiet mind.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

YOGA POSES

While yoga was developed centuries ago as a spiritual exercise, it is widely practiced today as a general approach to wellness. The yoga practices presented in Young Women Choosing Action focus on the connections between mind, body, and breath. When introducing yoga to participants, be sure to discuss these points:

Yoga is widely used as a mindfulness practice, as it can help regulate the nervous system and deepen the mind-body connection through stretching and balancing activities.

The yoga poses presented in Young Women Choosing Action are basic poses which may be practiced at home, as part of a mindfulness practice.
It is important to breathe while practicing yoga. Holding one's breath makes it harder to stretch and can lead to injuries in some cases.

Practicing yoga might mean you stumble or fall at times. Many yoga teachers speak to the idea that what we do in our yoga practice prepares us for what we do in life. Encourage participants to accept where they are in their practice without judgment and to patiently keep trying. This is what it means to be mindful on and off the yoga mat.

It is important to honor your body and meet it where it's at. Young women should feel free to adjust poses to suit their needs. They should abandon the images they might have of perfect yoga poses and find what feels good.

If anything feels uncomfortable, then stop. The pose could be adjusted, or alternate poses could be practiced.

Participants always have a choice about how to participate. They should be aware of their own limits and push themselves only so far as feels good.

It is not necessary to wear any particular kind of clothes for these activities, but participants should try to dress comfortably and choose clothes that do not constrict their movement.

Students may practice yoga with their shoes on or off.

Be sure to move slowly through the instructions and encourage participants to move slowly and intentionally to prevent accidental injury.

Whenever possible, facilitators should model poses for participants. The instructions for each pose below are adapted from those found at www.yogajournal.com. Further instructions are available online. Facilitators should teach each day’s poses then invite participants to try or adapt the poses, as they are comfortable.

Yoga mats are not necessary for practicing yoga, however, as many of the poses involve sitting or lying on the floor participants would likely appreciate having them available. If it is not possible to provide yoga mats, towels or blankets may be used instead. Young women may also appreciate the option of having additional blankets or towels available to support their hips or knees in certain poses.

If participants are interested in deepening their yoga practice, there are several YouTube yoga channels offering free practices young women might find appealing. These include:

**Jessamyn Stanley’s 8-Minute Yoga for Self-Love | Health:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdIX8auOH_M

**Yoga for Youth:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEUdh_3q9OU

**Yoga for Complete Beginners 20 Minute Home Yoga Workout:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7AYKMP6rOE
Additionally, participants who are seeking alternative yoga practices may be interested in the following links, which highlight ways yoga may be adapted for greater cultural relevance and/or body-positivity:

**Trap Yoga:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1bbhLnB3YQ

**Yoga for Every Body:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6mboxnmrc8

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**Pranayama:**
This is the practice of synchronizing the breath with movement. This can be practiced by raising arms with an inbreath and lowering them with an outbreath. Encourage participants to focus on their breath during all yoga practices.

**Easy Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Sit on the floor. Cross your shins so that your feet slide beneath the opposite knees. Participants might know this position as sitting crisscross applesauce. Knees should be bent at a comfortable angle. There should be a triangle formed by the two thighs and the crossed shins. Feet should be relaxed.

**STEP 2:** Lengthen your spine, imagining it reaching for the floor while simultaneously lifting your belly button up. Bring your shoulder blades together and in toward the torso to support this movement.

**STEP 3:** Hands may be placed in the lap, palms up, or placed on knees, palms down. Take several conscious breaths in this position.

**Child’s Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Kneel on the floor. Touch your big toes together and sit on your heels, then separate your knees about as wide as your hips (or as wide as is comfortable).

**STEP 2:** Bring your torso down between your thighs as you exhale. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of the pelvis while you lift the base of your skull away from the back of your neck.

**STEP 3:** Step 3 Lay your hands on the floor alongside your torso, palms up, and release the fronts of your shoulders toward the floor. Feel how the weight of the front shoulders pulls the shoulder blades wide across your back.
Alternatively, arms may be stretched out in front of the head, with palms facing down.

**STEP 4:** Stay in this position for 30–60 seconds, breathing for relaxation.

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**Bound Angle Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Sit with your legs straight out in front of you. Exhale, bend your knees, pull your heels toward your pelvis, then drop your knees out to the sides and press the soles of your feet together.

**STEP 2:** Bring your heels as close to your pelvis as you comfortably can. Always keep the outer edges of the feet firmly on the floor.

**STEP 3:** If it is comfortable hold the big toes with your thumb and index finger. If you cannot reach your toes, hold your ankles or shins with your hands or place hands on the knees. Tell participants not to force their knees down. If necessary, use blankets, to comfortably support the knees.

**STEP 4:** Breathe in this pose up to a couple of minutes. When you are ready to release, inhale, lift your knees away from the floor and stretch your legs out in front of you. Shake your leg muscles out if it feels good.

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**Cobra Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Lie on your stomach. Stretch your legs back with the tops of your feet on the floor. Spread your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Hug your elbows back into your body.

**STEP 2:** Press the tops of your feet and thighs firmly into the floor.

**STEP 3:** As you inhale straighten your arms to lift your chest off the floor, going only so high that your thighs and legs maintain a connection to the floor. Press the tailbone toward the floor and keep your muscles firm through the legs from the hips to the feet.

**STEP 4:** Firm your shoulder blades against the back. Lift through the top of the sternum but stay relaxed through the ribs. You should feel a slight back bend. Do not overextend.

**STEP 5:** Hold the pose anywhere from 15–30 seconds, breathing easily. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

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**Sphinx Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Lie on your belly, legs side by side. Firm your tailbone and lengthen it toward your heels. Then, rotate your thighs inwardly by rolling your outer thighs toward the floor. This helps broaden and lengthen your lower back and sacrum (the downward-facing triangular bone at the back of your pelvis) to protect it in a back bend.

**STEP 2:** Reach actively through your toes. As you move into the pose, be sure to continue lengthening your tail toward your heels to protect your lower back. Your buttocks should be firm but not clenched. Although your legs are active, your tongue, eyes and brain should be quiet.

**STEP 3:** Now set your elbows under your shoulders and your forearms on the floor parallel to each other. Inhale and lift your upper torso and head away from the floor into a mild backbend.

**STEP 4:** Stay for 5–10 breaths, then exhale and slowly release your belly and lower your torso and head to the floor. Turn your head to one side. Lie quietly for a while, broadening your back with each inhale, and releasing any tension with each exhale. Repeat once or twice more if you like.
**Upward-Facing Dog Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Lie on your belly on the floor. Stretch your legs back, with the tops of your feet on the floor. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your waist so that your forearms are relatively perpendicular to the floor.

**STEP 2:** Inhale and press your inner hands firmly into the floor and slightly back, as if you were trying to push yourself forward along the floor. Then straighten your arms and simultaneously lift your torso up and your legs a few inches off the floor on an inhalation. Keep the thighs firm and slightly turned inward, the arms firm and turned out so the elbow creases face forward.

**STEP 3:** Press the tailbone forward. Pull your bellybutton in. Firm the shoulder blades against the back.

**STEP 4:** Look straight ahead or tip the head back slightly but take care not to compress the back of the neck and harden the throat.

**STEP 5:** Holding the pose for 15–30 seconds, breathing easily. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

Often, it is difficult to keep the legs strongly suspended above the floor. Before you move into the pose, position a thick blanket roll below your top thighs. When you are in the pose, lightly rest your thighs on this roll as you press the tailbone closer to the roll.

**Mountain Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand with the bases of your big toes touching, heels slightly apart (so that your second toes are parallel). Lift and spread your toes and the balls of your feet, then lay them softly down on the floor. Rock back and forth and side to side. Gradually reduce this swaying to a standstill, with your weight balanced evenly on the feet.

**STEP 2:** Firm your thigh muscles and lift the kneecaps, without hardening your lower belly. Lift the inner ankles to strengthen the inner arches, then imagine a line of energy all the way up along your inner thighs to your groins, and from there through the core of your torso, neck, and head, and out through the crown of your head. Turn the upper thighs slightly inward. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor and lift the pubis toward the navel.

**STEP 3:** Press your shoulder blades into your back, then widen them across and release them down your back. Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight toward the ceiling. Widen your collarbones. Hang your arms beside the torso.

**STEP 4:** Balance the crown of your head directly over the center of your pelvis, with the underside of your chin parallel to the floor, throat soft, and the tongue wide and flat on the floor of your mouth. Soften your eyes.

**STEP 5:** Stay in the pose for 30–60 seconds, breathing easily.

You can check your alignment in this pose with your back against a wall. Stand with the backs of your heels, sacrum, and shoulder blades (but not the back of your head) touching the wall.

**Warrior I Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose. With an exhale, step apart so legs are in a wide stance—wider than hip length but not so wide you lose your balance. Raise your arms perpendicular to the floor (and parallel to each other) and reach actively through the little-finger sides of the hands toward the ceiling.

**STEP 2:** Turn in your left foot 45–60 degrees to the right and turn out your right foot 90 degrees to the right. Align the right heel with the left heel. Exhale and rotate your torso to the right. As the left hip point turns forward, press back the head of the left femur to ground the heel. Lengthen your coccyx toward the floor and arch your upper torso back slightly.
**STEP 3:** With your left heel firmly anchored to the floor, exhale and bend your right knee over the right ankle so the shin is perpendicular to the floor.

**STEP 4:** Reach strongly through your arms, lifting the ribcage away from the pelvis. As you ground down through the back foot, feel a lift that runs up the back leg, across the belly and chest, and up into the arms. If possible, bring the palms together. Spread the palms against each other and reach a little higher through the pinky-sides of the hands. Keep your head in a neutral position, gazing forward.

**STEP 5:** Stay for 30 seconds to a minute. To come up, inhale, press the back heel firmly into the floor and reach up through the arms, straightening the right knee. Turn the feet forward and release the arms with an exhalation or keep them extended upward for more challenge. Take a few breaths, then turn the feet to the left and repeat for the same length. When you are finished return to Mountain Pose.

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**Warrior II Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose. With an exhalation, step or lightly jump your feet 3.5–4 feet apart. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides, shoulder blades wide, palms down.

**STEP 2:** Turn your right foot slightly to the right and your left foot out to the left 90 degrees. Align the left heel with the right heel. Firm your thighs and turn your left thigh outward so that the center of the left kneecap is in line with the center of the left ankle.

**STEP 3:** Exhale and bend your left knee over the left ankle, so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor. If possible, bring the left thigh parallel to the floor. Anchor this movement of the left knee by strengthening the right leg and pressing the outer right heel firmly to the floor.

**STEP 4:** Stretch the arms away from the space between the shoulder blades, parallel to the floor. Do not lean the torso over the left thigh: Keep the sides of the torso equally long and the shoulders directly over the pelvis. Press the tailbone slightly toward the pubis. Turn the head to the left and look out over the fingers.

**STEP 5:** Stay for 30 seconds to one minute. Inhale to come up. Reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time to the left.

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**Warrior III Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose, exhale, and fold forward to a standing folded bend. From this position, exhale and step your left foot back into a high lunge position. Your right knee should be (more or less) at a right angle. Lay the midline of your torso down on the midline of the right thigh (from the knee to the hip crease) and bring your hands to your right knee, right hand to the outer knee, left hand to the inner. Squeeze the knee with your hands, lift your torso slightly, and with an exhalation, turn it slightly to the right.

**STEP 2:** Now from the lunge position, stretch your arms forward, parallel to the floor and parallel to each other, palms facing each other. Exhale and press the head of the right thighbone back and press the heel actively into the floor. Synchronize the straightening of the front leg and the lifting of the back leg. As you lift the back leg, resist by pressing the tailbone into the pelvis.

**STEP 3:** Normally students come up into Warrior III by lunging the torso forward. This tends to shift the body weight onto the ball of the front foot and unbalance the position. Do not allow the torso to swing forward as you move into position; instead, as you straighten the front knee, think of pressing the head of the thighbone back. Doing so centers the femur in the hip joint, grounds the heel into the floor, and stabilizes the position.

**STEP 4:** The arms, torso, and raised leg should be positioned relatively parallel to the floor. For many students, the pelvis tends to tilt. Release the hip of the
raised leg toward the floor until the two hip points are even and parallel to the floor. Energize the back leg and extend it strongly toward the wall behind you; reach just as actively in the opposite direction with the arms. Bring the head up slightly and look forward—but be sure not to compress the back of your neck.

**STEP 5:** Stay in this position for 30–60 seconds. Release back to the lunge on an exhalation. Bring your hands to the floor on either side of the right foot, and on an exhalation, step your left foot forward to meet your right. Stay in this forward bend for a few breaths, then repeat for the same length of time on the other side.

**Chair Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose. Inhale and raise your arms perpendicular to the floor. Either keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward, or join the palms.

**STEP 2:** Exhale and bend your knees, trying to take the thighs as nearly parallel to the floor as possible. The knees will project out over the feet, and the torso will lean slightly forward over the thighs until the front torso forms approximately a right angle with the tops of the thighs. Keep the inner thighs parallel to each other and press the heads of the thigh bones down toward the heels.

**STEP 3:** Firm your shoulder blades against the back. Take your tailbone down toward the floor and in toward your pubis to keep the lower back long.

**STEP 4:** Stay for 30–60 seconds. To come out of this pose, straighten your knees with an inhalation, lifting strongly through the arms. Exhale and release your arms to your sides into Mountain Pose.

**Tree Pose:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose. Shift your weight slightly onto the left foot, keeping the inner foot firm to the floor, and bend your right knee. Reach down with your right hand and clasp your right ankle.

**STEP 2:** Draw your right foot up and place the sole against the inner left thigh; if possible, press the right heel into the inner left groin, toes pointing toward the floor. The center of your pelvis should be directly over the left foot.

**STEP 3:** Rest your hands on the top rim of your pelvis. Make sure the pelvis is in a neutral position, with the top rim parallel to the floor.

**STEP 4:** Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor. Firmly press the right foot sole against the inner thigh and resist with the outer left leg. Press your hands together in Prayer Pose. Gaze softly at a fixed point in front of you on the floor about 4 or 5 feet away.

**STEP 5:** Stay for 30–60 seconds. Step back to Mountain Pose with an exhalation and repeat for the same length of time with the legs reversed.

**Upward Salute:**

**STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose. Turn your arms outward (or laterally) so your palms face away from your torso and thumbs point backward. With an inhalation, sweep your arms out to the sides and up toward the ceiling.

**STEP 2:** If you are tighter in the shoulders, stop when your arms are approximately parallel to each other. But if possible, without hunching your shoulders forward, press your palms firmly together by touching the bases of your palms first, then the palms themselves, and finally the fingers.
**STEP 3:** Extend your elbows fully and reach up through your pinkies so your thumbs turn slightly down toward the crown of your head. Making sure not to compress the back of your neck, tip your head back slightly and gaze at your thumbs.

**STEP 4:** Don’t let your lower front ribs protrude forward. Bring your front ribs down (toward your pelvis) and in (toward your spine) and lengthen your tail bone toward the floor. Then lift your rib cage evenly away from your pelvis to stretch the circumference of your belly. Hold for a few breaths.

**STEP 4:** Exhale and, as you sweep your arms out to the sides, tip your torso forward from the hip joints to fold into a forward bend.

**Kali Mudra:**

**STEP 4:** Bring your hands together with your fingers interlaced.

**STEP 4:** Extend your index fingers.

**Goddess Pose:**

**STEP 4:** Start in Mountain Pose at the front of your mat. Step your right foot a stride length towards the back of your mat. Turn your toes out and your heels in, so your feet land on a 45-degree angle.

**STEP 4:** Bend your knees deeply out the sides and sink your hips down to the height of your knees.

**STEP 4:** Bring your arms out at shoulder height and bend your elbows so that your fingertips point skyward. Spread your fingertips wide apart from one another and activate the muscles across your back to hold your arms here.

**STEP 4:** Engage your core muscles and draw your tailbone in the direction of the floor. Do not hunch forward with your shoulders; keep your spine long and your muscles engaged.

**STEP 4:** Stay here for 30–60 seconds, breathing.

**Yoga Flow:**

This practice may be delivered using either of the following options. It is intended to provide participants with an opportunity to “play” with their yoga practice while engaging with poses they have learned in *Young Women Choosing Action*.

**Option 1:** Participants may use the time to move at their own pace through the yoga poses they have learned over the course of the program. Facilitators may choose to play instrumental music and encourage participants to find their own creative approach to the yoga poses.

**Option 2:** Facilitators may lead participants in the following sequence (with or without instrumental music playing in the background).

- **STEP 1:** Stand in Mountain Pose.
- **STEP 1:** Inhale and raise arms over the head, as if you are holding a big ball.
- **STEP 1:** Exhale and dive down into a forward bend, belly resting on the thighs, head hanging down.
- **STEP 1:** Inhale and rise halfway with hands on the knees, calves, or thighs. Back should be straight and head reaching forward.
- **STEP 5:** Exhale and return to forward bend.
- **STEP 1:** Inhale and reach all the way up, hands over the head as before.
- **STEP 1:** Exhale and bring hands together in front of the heart in prayer pose, elbows pointing out.
- **STEP 1:** Inhale and reach hands above head.
- **STEP 9:** Exhale and return to forward bend.
- **STEP 10:** Inhale and move carefully to lay on belly. Place hands to support.
- **STEP 11:** Exhale
- **STEP 12:** Inhale and move to Upward-Facing Dog or Cobra position.
- **STEP 13:** Exhale and move to Child’s Pose. Stay in Child’s Pose breathing naturally for up to 30 seconds.
- **STEP 14:** Move back to Mountain Pose.
- **STEP 15:** Repeat the entire sequence or take several deep breaths in Mountain Pose before ending the practice.
SOCIAL ACTION LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The leadership component of Young Women Choosing Action requires young women to collaborate in the design and implementation of a social action leadership project. The projects provide young women opportunities to practice a range of skills, including effective communication, planning and executive functioning skills, and personal responsibility. A well implemented social action leadership project may provide young women with a greater sense of efficacy and motivation. To ensure an effective project, several factors must be considered and accounted for.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The social action leadership project is an intentional element of Young Women Choosing Action for several reasons, including:

1. Social action leadership projects provide opportunities to practice the skills and dispositions addressed in each session of Young Women Choosing Action in an authentic, real-world context.

2. Projects are culturally relevant, as they are designed to address participant-identified community needs or issues.

3. Projects empower young women to employ choice and to be agents of change.

4. Projects are collaborative and allow for the development each participant’s leadership skills.

5. Projects may provide opportunities for healing, as young women find that it can be possible to transform negative feelings into positive action.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL ACTION LEADERSHIP PROJECT

For the purposes of Young Women Choosing Action, a social action leadership project shall be defined as a collaborative project designed to actively address a pertinent issue of injustice or bias as determined by the consensus of the group.

Though social action leadership projects may involve elements of community service, they are not purely voluntary in nature. Projects require participants to take the lead in determining a social need and to address this need through relevant action. Preferably this action happens in a social forum for maximum impact.

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL ACTION LEADERSHIP PROJECTS

Adolescents have a predilection for engagement around issues for justice and fairness. While each cohort of Young Women Choosing Action will determine a project that is most relevant and feasible for themselves, young women may be find the following types of projects, particularly engaging:

- Creating a social media campaign to draw attention to the issue of school push-out among young women of color.
- Engaging advocacy and organizing to influence a local decision-maker to do something in the best interest of the community.
- Producing a vlog or blog to encourage and teach mindfulness strategies to peers.
- Organizing and hosting a clothing drive for low-income teens.
- Organizing and hosting community discussion groups around issues of gender, economic, or racial bias.
- Developing a campaign to encourage young women to become more politically aware and active.
- Collaborating with a local agency to provide an unmet need, such as soliciting donations of prepaid cell phones for survivors of domestic violence on behalf of a crisis center.
- Organizing a flash mob as a show of unity in the face of divisiveness.

The internet provides plenty of examples of youth-led social action leadership projects, which can be used as inspiration or to clarify the nature of a social action
leadership project. Using the search term “youth-led social action leadership project examples” will provide an array of relevant samples.

**ROLE OF PROGRAM FACILITATORS**

Program facilitators should be prepared to act as a “guide on the side” through each stage of the project. The social action leadership project is a process and requires patience and focus from all facilitators and participants. Ultimately, the project’s success will rely on the selection of a viable project with attainable goals. Each session of *Young Women Choosing Action* includes dedicated time for project work, as well as useful instruction and materials for guiding this work.

**Program Facilitators are Responsible For:**

- Explaining what a social action leadership project is and why it is a vital part of *Young Women Choosing Action*.
- Leading young women through the consensus building and project selection process, including discussions of project feasibility.
- Encouraging productive and respectful participation.
- Providing outlines and materials, as needed.
- Assisting with making community connections, as necessary.
- Establishing safety and etiquette protocols for any internet or social media usage.
- Maintaining a safe and encouraging atmosphere for the duration of the project.

**Program Facilitators Are Not Responsible For:**

- Pre-selecting the project (though they may decide to provide a selection of viable options).
- Directly problem-solving for participants.
- Completing work participants neglected.

**STEPS FOR CARRYING OUT A SOCIAL ACTION LEADERSHIP PROJECT**

1. Define social action.
2. Select an issue.
3. Identify resources.
4. Design the project.
5. Plan the action.
6. Implement the project.
7. Reflect on learnings.

**Other Considerations**

Supporting Success: Most participants will have little, if any, experience designing and carrying out a project meant to make a real-world impact. The young women in this program will likely need support in planning the steps of their activities and following through on personal commitments to the project. Facilitators can support this process by:

- Working with the group to build an action plan that includes a suitable amount of work for each participant and outlines the work that must be done to complete the project on time.
- Keeping all relevant goals and information posted for easy visibility and reflection.
- Encouraging each participant to keep a checklist of actions they must personally take to complete their designated tasks.
- Checking in regularly and framing questions around the specific skills participants must use to complete tasks (e.g., “It looks like we may have to be flexible about how we approach this, what are some other options we can manage in this amount of time?”).
- Encouraging pairing up with other participants as some young women finish their work and others need support.
- Focusing on individual participants’ strengths while encouraging goal setting in less-developed skill areas.
Staying positive and focusing on the big picture.

Encouraging stress-management and mindfulness strategies if participants start to show signs of fatigue or stress.

**Timing:** Every group develops its own rhythm depending on its size, the individual skills and characteristics of participants, and facilitators’ styles. Therefore, it is important to monitor individual and group progress as the project work begins and proceeds. You may find that your group requires more time or support to complete their social action leadership project on time. If this is the case, consider incorporating the following steps:

- Use the option for extended social action work time in Module 9.
- Use the *Young Women Choosing Action* social media page to plan and support action steps between sessions.
- Adapt the project if it starts to seem unwieldy or overwhelming.

**Relevance and Choice:** The social action leadership project offers a great opportunity to regularly engage young women in conversations about the issues that matter most to them. Use social action planning and work time to raise questions about how young women’s basic needs and power to choose is supported or inhibited in their community. Help them to strategize how to choose actions that support their goals and wellbeing throughout the course of the project.

**Project Culmination:** Consider the nature of your group’s selected project and decide on the best way to bring closure to the program once it is completed. If the project is very public in nature, such as a rally, there may not be a need to give a presentation about the project. However, if participants decide on a less public social action, such as a letter-writing campaign, a public presentation could help them make others aware of the actions they have taken and bring further awareness and validation to their work.

**Presentation:** If you decide to include a presentation as part of the final module, consider the following:

- Encourage participants to think of the presentation as a vital part of their social action work.

- Start planning for the presentation in the initial stages of the social action work. Include presentation planning in your action plan.

- Discuss what a successful presentation looks like and sounds like. Be clear about what information to include in the presentation (what the project was, how successful was it, who was involved, what participants learned, etc.).

- Work with participants to decide who will be invited to the presentation and invite them early.

- Work with participants to decide how the presentation will be delivered and who will be responsible for preparing and delivering the presentation.

- Encourage creativity and clarity in the presentation.

- Think about seating and creating a welcoming venue for audience members.

- Allow adequate time in the fine social action work sessions for scripting and rehearsing the presentation.

**Reflection:** This is a vital step in processing and acclimating one’s learning. Participants should be encouraged to reflect on their learning, their progress, and their goals throughout the program, but it is particularly important to process the social action work. Giving a presentation allows for reflection but asking specifics about individual contributions and group process is important. Reflection activities are included in Module 13.

**Celebration:** Consider how you want to celebrate these young women for the courage and commitment they brought to the program. Options include:

- Presenting certificates of completion in a graduation-style ceremony.

- Acknowledging the contributions, growth, and achievements of each participant.

- Having a cake or other festive party foods.

- Letting loose with music and dancing.
WORKS REFERENCED


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