What do practitioners need to know?

- **The physiology:** Adolescents experience neurobiological development at a rate second only to infancy. The ways adults interact with youth during this period can permanently shape youths’ brain architecture.

- **The responsibility:** Promoting optimal youth development starts with our own wellness. Using support to manage our thoughts, feelings and behavior prepares us to model and coach the skills we hope to engender in youth.

- **The opportunity:** By supporting youth self-regulation through co-regulation, adults can enhance youth outcomes in the moment and in the future.

Science points to **self-regulation** as a central ingredient in lifelong success. It predicts healthy relationships, economic self-sufficiency, and physical and emotional well-being. Practitioners such as facilitators, case managers, coaches, and other caring adults can foster youth self-regulation development through a process called **co-regulation**. Optimal co-regulation starts with personal self-regulation. Then, adults model and coach youth to use self-regulation skills through warm, responsive relationships in supportive environments. Adolescence is characterized by rapid brain growth, making each interaction between a practitioner and a young person an opportunity for co-regulation. Program implementation, youth learning, and outcomes.

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**Self-regulation**

/self reg ja' lei sh(e)n/ **noun**

the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed behavior. Examples include calling a time out in an argument for the good of the relationship, or avoiding an impulse purchase to save money for something of greater value to you in the future.

**Co-regulation**

/co reg ja' lei sh(e)n/ **noun**

the supportive process between adults and youth that integrates three key types of support: 1) providing warm, responsive relationships, 2) creating supportive environments, and 3) coaching and modeling self-regulation skills.
Though most growth happens in early childhood and adolescence, self-regulation is strengthened at any age through supportive interactions and environments—whether at work, school, or home. Integrating a co-regulation framework into youth-serving programs may enhance staff experience and performance, program implementation, and youth learning and outcomes. This series includes six modules to equip youth-serving practitioners to support self-regulation in their relationships with co-workers and with youth, through the practice of co-regulation.

The Co-Regulation Framework

Practitioners can enhance their relational impact by focusing on four key influencers of self-regulation in interactions with youth (and each other).

In the co-regulation framework, adult self-regulation (arrow) enhances co-regulation (dark blue ring), and fosters youth self-regulation development (green triangle).

These influencers make up the Co-Regulation Framework:

- Practicing personal self-regulation
- Fostering warm, responsive relationships
- Creating supportive environments
- Modeling and coaching self-regulation skills

With co-regulation support, young people can take healthy risks, learn, heal, and thrive.
What is contained in this series?

This toolkit offers a set of promising evidence-informed and theory-based strategies that practitioners can intentionally layer onto pre-existing youth programs to support self-regulation. These strategies were developed and piloted through a project called SARHM (see the last page in this document for more information). SARHM was a partnership between researchers and practitioners who deliver youth relationship education programs in schools and community-based organizations. These relationship education programs are delivered primarily through workshops, and some programs include individual coaching or case management as well. Each strategy focuses on enhancing one aspect of co-regulation (relationships, environment, skills coaching), yet each strategy can affect the whole co-regulation process. Each strategy is evidence-based or evidence-informed, rooted in theory, and refined through formative research in SARHM. The study’s scope did not include effectiveness testing of strategies. Strategies can be combined and tailored for use in different program contexts such as one-on-one meetings with youth or staff meetings and workplace interactions.

For a deeper dive into self-regulation and co-regulation, the next three pages offer examples of self-regulation and co-regulation skills, followed by reflection questions about applying a co-regulation framework to your practice.
What is Self-Regulation and why does it matter?

Self-Regulation is the act of managing our thoughts and feelings so we can behave in ways that help us reach our goals in the moment and in the future.

Self-Regulation matters because it enables us to...

- **Handle** stress in our jobs and relationships
- **Resist** immediate gratification
- **Avoid** quick decisions we later regret
- **Make** short- and long-term plans, and stick to them
- **Solve** problems
- **Adapt** and be flexible in different contexts
- **Take** healthy risks
- **Be** more effective partners, parents, and practitioners

Cognitive Regulation

- Resisting temptations and impulsive actions
- Choosing what to focus on
- Holding temporary information in mind for processing
- Adapting to new circumstances
- Taking different perspectives
- Transitioning from thinking about one concept to another
- Solving problems and making decisions
- Setting and committing to goals (short and long term)
- Planning

Emotion Regulation

- Using self-calming strategies
- Labeling, expressing, and managing emotions
- Tolerating appropriate levels of distress or discomfort
- Practicing mindfulness
- Identifying, challenging, and changing unhelpful feelings or thoughts
- Practicing empathy and compassion

Behavior Regulation

- Organizing time and materials
- Coping in healthy ways (breathing, exercise, self-care)
- Persisting in the face of intense or difficult emotions
- Delaying gratification
- Resolving conflict
- Communicating in pro-social or cooperative ways
Co-Regulation: A framework for masterful program delivery

Co-Regulation is the supportive process between caring adults and youth that fosters youth self-regulation development.

Co-regulation integrates three key types of support:

1. **Providing** warm, responsive relationships;
2. **Creating** supportive environments; and
3. **Coaching** and modeling self-regulation skills.

### Warm, Responsive Relationships
- Respond with warmth and affection; avoid harsh, judgmental, or shaming remarks
- Validate feelings; offer support during intense emotion
- Share your perspective; allow youth to make decisions and experience natural consequences
- Show and encourage compassion for self and others

### Safe, Supportive Environments
- Co-create group norms that promote safety and positive program climate
- Incentivize good choices (e.g., those who enact skills receive a reward)
- Offer anticipatory guidance for youth to consider as they navigate different environments
- Offer space and time to calm down in times of arousal, conflict, or stress (e.g., create a ‘refuel’ zone)
- Provide prompts for skill use (e.g., posters)

### Coaching and Modeling Skills
- Coach awareness of and labeling emotions and discuss their value
- Coach stress management and distress tolerance; model self-calming
- Encourage help-seeking
- Support goal-setting and monitor progress; support persistence
- Coach problem-solving and healthy risk-taking
- Coach decision-making that aligns with youths’ values
Reflection questions:

**Does each program participant...**

- Believe you care about them and know you are there if they need you? Do they feel welcome? Do they feel they belong?
- Feel safe in the workshops/program? Are they able to focus on learning? Is the program space free from distractions?
- Have an opportunity to learn, practice, and reflect on the skills they are learning in your program? Do they see you modeling positive management of thoughts, feelings, and behavior, especially in times of intense emotion or stress?

**Do you...**

- Experience these qualities in your workplace environment and in your relationships with co-workers?
- Have the ability to practice and reflect on skills you are learning and teaching in a supportive environment?
- See changes you can make or actions you can take that would strengthen your relationships, environment, or the quality of skills coaching you experience?
Youth are highly attuned to relationships, social cues, and the emotional expressions of others. During adolescence, youth are especially aware of how others perceive them and whether or not they belong. It is important for practitioners to understand these normal developmental experiences, and to foster inclusion and acceptance. In youth-serving programs, performance or programmatic benchmarks can sometimes shift the focus away from the socio-emotional needs of youth. Additionally, keeping up with paperwork and materials may distract us from thoughtfully checking in with participants, or we may unintentionally interact more with some youth than others. The welcoming strategy brings us back to simple, yet meaningful ways to build authentic relationships with youth through warm, responsive engagement practices that communicate caring and help youth feel known.

The Strategy:
This welcoming strategy involves three parts.

We expect regular use of these approaches will promote positive relationships between participants and practitioners, enhance workshop climate, improve student motivation, and model the use of prosocial interpersonal skills.

1. SHEET
Youth complete a worksheet that helps them feel known.

2. GREET
Warmly welcome each youth to create a sense of belonging.

3. MEET
Connect with youth, and follow up to form an authentic, responsive connection.
Before you begin:

- Prepare for your lesson in advance so you can free up the time at the beginning of the workshops, during breaks, and in individual activities to connect with participants one-on-one.
- Keep a list of the participants in your cohort so you can track your efforts and be sure you are connecting with everyone in the program, not just the easy-to-reach or extroverted participants.
- Arrive early enough that you are focused and calm as youth enter.

Sheet: Provide a handout for each student

- Consider asking youth to answer the 3-question survey about how they would like to be known (see handout), if you are fortunate enough to have the time and capacity. This can be turned in at the end of class and may inform your interactions with youth throughout the program.

Greet: Personalized Warm Greeting

- Stand at the door or the part of the program space where participants arrive.
- Smile.
- Make eye contact with each person.
- Greet each person, and use names whenever possible (nametags can help with this).
- Include a friendly gesture, if permitted (e.g., high-five, fist bump, touch on the shoulder).

Meet: Individual Connection with Follow-Up

- Find a few minutes during each workshop to connect one-on-one with different participants to ask relevant, personalized questions about how they are doing and the skills they are trying out.
  “I heard your grandma was sick, how is she doing?”
- Prioritize connecting with youth who are quieter or less engaged.
- Keep track of those with whom you connect, so you are sure to connect with everyone in the first few workshops. Make notes about important events so you can follow up as appropriate.
I’d like you to call me:

Something I’d like you to know about me is...

In class, I like it when you...
POSITIVE PRAISE

Two Strategies for Positive Praise: Verbal and Written

Hearing words of praise often sparks positive feelings within us. Praise can build our self-esteem, help us feel we belong, and even motivate us to change our behavior for the better. When we feel good about ourselves, we are more patient, more compassionate, and more caring. In this positive mental space, we are better able to learn and more likely to try new things.

This module explains how to use two praise strategies—2-Part Verbal Praise and 4-Part Written Praise—to build warm, authentic relationships with participants or co-workers and to foster a supportive environment in your program.

TWO WAYS TO PRAISE

2-Part Verbal Praise

Verbal praise works well in the moment to motivate positive behaviors and strengthen your connection with participants.

4-Part Written Praise

Written praise requires more time, but it is a powerful tool that fosters warm connection, builds a sense of accomplishment, and motivates positive behavior. It can mean so much to receive a thoughtfully written compliment. When that message can be read again and again, it may influence the recipient’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior at important moments over time, having a positive effect that lasts well beyond the first read.
Praise is powerful. But not all praise is equal. Consider the difference in how you feel when you hear “You’re the best!” versus “Dashia, I really appreciate your effort to get here. I know you have to take a couple of buses, and it tells me how committed you are—not just to the program, but to yourself and to the rest of us.” Vague praise feels nice, but it does not impact our motivation in the long run because it lacks clarity and specificity about what behavior, effort, or accomplishment made a difference. When praise is personal and specific, it becomes a tool that not only feels good to give or receive but also supports self-regulation development.

Praise is most often used as an expression of happiness or gratitude in response to something pleasing. In this way, praise acts like a positive consequence for a positive behavior. However, praise can also be used as an antecedent, meaning it can be used to motivate a person to behave in ways that align with individual or collective values and goals. For example, “Joe, I have noticed that when you work hard to focus in this class, it has such a powerful impact on our class community.” When using praise as an antecedent, the praise comes before the specific behavior rather than after, and is likely to generate more positive behavior both now and in the future.

**The Strategy:** Try setting a goal to use 2-Part Verbal Praise with two different participants in each workshop!

1. **MAKE IT PERSONAL**
2. **MAKE IT SPECIFIC**

Giving specific, personal praise not only affects the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the recipient, but it also helps us feel better about ourselves and the people around us. When we make time to notice and praise the efforts and accomplishments of co-workers and program participants, we focus our attention on the positive, increase our gratitude, and make supportive connections with others. When we feel better, we do better.
Positive verbal praise can be done publicly in a group or privately in one-on-one conversation. Consider the culture and preference of the recipient first. For this strategy, target praise toward the use of self-regulation skills and behaviors that promote healthy relationships, a positive workshop or workplace environment, and the well-being of others. Keep track of whom you praise and be sure to first target those who may not experience positive praise often.

Before you begin:

- Positive verbal praise can be done publicly in a group or privately in one-on-one conversation.

Make it personal

Praise is more meaningful when it calls attention to the actions of an individual rather than a group. “Jeff, I noticed you did...” rather than “You are such a great group.”

Make it specific

Praise has a lasting effect when it involves details. Include information about the effort, behavior, or accomplishment that made a difference. “I heard you take a deep breath when the group started to get rowdy. That kind of practice is not only good for you, it’s also good for your friends to see. Thank you!”
Research suggests it can take as many as 20 positives to outweigh one negative. Think about how many negatives might accumulate in a day. Psychologists say that to tip the scale, it is easier to add positives than take away negatives. Brain science also suggests that we have what is referred to as a “negativity bias” (Baumeister et al., 2001). This means that even when the intensity is equal, experiences of a negative nature (e.g., unpleasant social interactions, upsetting thoughts or emotions, harmful events) have a greater and longer-lasting effect on how we think and feel than neutral or positive experiences. One way to counter all this negativity is to build longer-lasting positives by writing them down!

**The Strategy:**

This written praise strategy involves four parts.

1. **Make it personal.**
2. **Make it specific.**
3. **Praise effort and accomplishment, not natural ability.**
4. **Tie the praise to a bigger purpose.**

Try to give every participant a praise note or text during the first half of your program. Praise your co-workers, too!
Before you begin:

- Positive praise notes can be post-its, cards, texts, or emails given to youth or coworkers that praise specific efforts and accomplishments. Written praise is recommended because it can have repeated positive effects (through re-reading). To be most effective, focus praise on skills-practice or efforts that foster healthy relationships, a positive workshop or workplace environment, and the well-being of others. Keep track of whom you praise and be sure to first target those who may not experience praise often. Try to give every participant a praise note or text during the first half of your program. Praise your co-workers, too!

Make it personal.

Praise is more meaningful when it calls attention to the actions of an individual rather than a group. “Kevelle, you answered that question so thoughtfully…” rather than “You all are the best!”

Make it specific.

Praise has a lasting effect when it involves details. Include information about the effort, behavior, or accomplishment that made a difference. “I heard you take a deep breath when the group started to get rowdy. That kind of practice is not only good for you, it’s also good for your friends to see. Thank you!”

Praise effort and accomplishment, not natural ability.

There is evidence that general praise about natural ability, e.g., “You’re so smart,” or “You’re such a natural facilitator,” can sometimes backfire, reducing motivation to work hard, try new things, or practice. By contrast, praising effort helps the recipient see a direct link between trying hard and achieving positive outcomes. “Things may not have gone how you hoped, but I could really tell you tried. To me, that matters more than doing it right the first time.”

Tie the praise to a bigger purpose.

When people see how their behavior contributes to the good of the community or helps accomplish the goals of the organization, the praise makes even more of an impact. “When I saw Jordan come back to our program, I got a burst of inspiration that we can connect participants again if we don’t give up.”
Research has shown the positive impact deep breathing has on our bodies’ ability to deal with stress. A successful breath supplies our bodies with oxygen, regulates the pH of our blood, supports blood pressure control, and replenishes the brain and vital organs with essential nutrients. The act of taking slow, deep breaths triggers a cascade of mind-body systems that can result in increased comfort, relaxation, vigor, and alertness, and reduced symptoms of confusion, anxiety, depression, and anger.

**Stress and breathing:** When we experience stress, our breathing gets shallow and fast. This kind of breathing can narrow our perspective and increase anxiety and anger. Prolonged periods of stress can mean we breathe shallowly over time. As a result, we can have trouble connecting with others and staying alert, our cognitive abilities go slack, and it can be hard to have fun. Fortunately, we can override this state by building breathing skills.

**The Strategy:**
Taking a few slow, deep breaths is a strategy that not only improves our physical health, but also helps us manage intense feelings and stress, focus our attention where we need to, and communicate more effectively with others. As adults, it is important to practice slow breathing to manage our own stress or persist on a challenging task. Then as practitioners, we are better positioned to coach youth to use this skill for managing their feelings as well.

1. **Inhale and exhale.**
2. **Model the skill authentically.**
3. **Plan when to breathe.**
4. **Breathe as needed.**
Inhale and exhale.
This strategy is quite simple in practice. It involves taking a slow deep breath through the nose and deep into the lungs, pausing for a second, then slowly exhaling through the nose or mouth. **Repeat 3-5 times.**

Model the skill authentically.
Because breathing deeply can feel awkward or vulnerable, especially to adolescents, expect some resistance. **It is critical to push through the resistance by authentically demonstrating the behavior as you invite youth to breathe so they experience increased comfort and ease with the skill themselves.**

Plan when to breathe.
Most classes have natural transitions between activities and didactic content or lessons. By anticipating when it would be helpful to modulate the group’s energy, you can plan to integrate *Breath to Refocus.* **Tell youth you will be coaching them to use this skill by integrating it throughout your classes.**

Breathe as needed.
Sometimes youth (and adults) experience intense emotion or high stress or energy at unanticipated times. When this occurs, breathing can help manage feelings and/or refocus the group. **As long as you do not make this skill seem like punishment for bad behavior, you can integrate the skill into workshops whenever it would be helpful to slow down and give the brain some oxygen.**
GROUP AGREEMENT

Whether in a typical classroom setting or in a community-based workshop, collaborating with youth to co-create a safe, trusting environment is an important key to a successful group.

Facilitators often experience time pressure. When this happens, it is a natural response to cut activities short and lecture more. However, implementation science says that experiential learning is more effective than lecture. One essential program activity that is often shortchanged is the process of establishing a cohesive workshop climate or “group culture” early on in the program. Facilitators can do this by asking youth to identify relationship values that they can practice as a group, and then bringing the group to agreement about how to demonstrate their values as participants. Group agreement can allow for more authentic engagement with the content and permit greater group cohesion—outcomes that enhance learning in programs.

Establishing collective group agreements provides structure and builds predictability. Structure allows us, and the youth we work with, to feel safe. When we feel safe, we are free to be ourselves, open to learning, and can establish the connections that reduce isolation and help us feel we belong.
ESTABLISHING A GROUP AGREEMENT

The Strategy:
It is ideal to establish a group agreement in the first workshop or meeting, but if you don’t have the luxury of doing this, it’s okay to roll out the process a few sessions into the series or school year. If you are starting midstream, prepare for some resistance, but take it in stride and know that there is still value in the process.

There are two aspects of the Group Agreement strategy: 1) the process of establishing group values and agreement, which is important in and of itself, and 2) the way you maintain accountability for them on an ongoing basis. This module provides recommendations for both.

1. Language is Key.
2. Start with Values.
3. Use the Workshop like a Relationship Lab.
4. Add Your Values Last.
5. Include a Refocusing Strategy.
6. Get Agreement.
7. Post the List, Adjust as Needed.
ESTABLISHING A GROUP AGREEMENT

**Language Is Key:**
Avoid the notion that you are drafting a list of “ground rules” or “norms.” “Rules” imply a power dynamic of “enforcer and follower,” which is counterproductive to your group process. “Norms” suggest a common way of being, a word which may challenge the independence adolescents seek. The goal here is to enter into an agreement about a set of values and how they’re enacted for the collective well-being of the group. For this reason, it works well to call the strategy Group Agreement or Group Values.

**Start with Values:**
Rather than coming in with a list of *behaviors* you expect from youth, ask youth to list *values* (e.g., equality) and then explore what that value looks/sounds like in practice (e.g., asking for perspectives on a topic from different genders). Get specific. Allow time to explore each value listed. What does enacting this value look like? What does it sound like? How does it feel?

**Use the Workshop Like a Relationship Lab:**
It can be enlightening to suggest that youth think of the workshop environment as a relationship and generate their list of values with that in mind. What values do they want to experience in a healthy relationship? Can they practice those values in a group workshop setting to get clearer on what it’s like to enact and experience them?

**Add Your Values Last:**
Pre-consider the values you want to include, but refrain from listing them before youth have spoken. Once youth have generated a list of about four values, you can explore adding your ideas to the list.
Include a Refocusing Strategy:
When the group gets off track, use a pre-established strategy to calmly bring everyone back to focus. Add the refocusing approach to your Group Agreement (see the script for an example of language). This enhances trust. We offer the *Breath to Focus* strategy as a tool.

Get Agreement:
Agreement from each participant is critical for ongoing accountability. Depending on your context, if possible, try to get a visible (not just a verbal) agreement. Agreement can be achieved by asking youth to stand, raise their hand, add their signature to the values list, etc. This will support the group in times when the agreement is broken—which is to be expected.

Post the List, Adjust as Needed:
Keep the agreement alive throughout the program. It can be helpful to have the list visibly posted for the group and to prepare for conversations when the group dysregulates. At any moment, it is okay to call the group agreement and values to mind and make adjustments as the group requests.
SAMPLE SCRIPT
FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A GROUP AGREEMENT
~ 20 MIN

Before you begin

CONSIDER YOUR VALUES

- Before engaging the group in a collective value-setting exercise, consider the values you would like to recommend. We suggest several examples below. You can add your values after those recommended by youth.

- Think about any commitments you might want to make to the group as their facilitator. One example is committing to staying calm and using the refocusing strategy when the agreement is broken. Of course, this is often easier said than done! Our own loss of control or disengagement escalates group dysregulation, and given our goal to model good self-regulation for youth, staying calm ourselves is a key opportunity to demonstrate accountability for the agreement as the adult. You can communicate that even if you feel you are being disrespected, you will treat them with respect. Commit to not raising your voice and becoming an “enforcer” (i.e., commit to making the Breath to Focus your own self-awareness practice and be intentional every time you use it—and state this explicitly to your group/class).

EXAMPLES OF VALUES TO RECOMMEND AND DISCUSS WITH YOUTH*

- **One Mic** (This means not talking when someone else is talking.)

- **Respect and Nonjudgmentalism**

- **Encouraging Each Other** (We all need others to support us when we feel overwhelmed. Encouraging our peers to manage their thoughts and emotions helps everyone stay on track.)

- **Authentic Engagement** (This means making a commitment to coming to class and trying the skills in your own way.)

- **Growth Mindset** (This means acknowledging that we all make mistakes and that setbacks are opportunities for learning and growth.)
EXAMPLES OF VALUES TO RECOMMEND AND DISCUSS WITH YOUTH* (CONT'D)

These are important values to add as the facilitator. They will be added after youth share their values.

- Rest and Return (This means taking a mental or physical break until you are able to refocus and return to the class.)
  - Sample language is included in italics in the green callout boxes:

    Sometimes the stuff we’re talking about can bring up intense feelings. If that happens to you, it’s okay to take a break and come back in a few minutes.

- Breath to Focus (This is a refocusing technique where we take an inhale and an exhale and repeat as needed.)

*Note: We have not included confidentiality because it is usually unrealistic, especially given the use of social media. You can have a discussion about confidentiality, but (given social media and peer influence) unless everyone in your group is likely to keep things confidential, it is wise to avoid setting a false expectation.
Establishing the Group Agreement

FRAME THE PROCESS

- Sample language is included in italics in the green callout boxes:

  We will be spending some time together talking about relationships. Since healthy relationships don’t come naturally, it helps to practice the skills that make them great. We’ll start by thinking about some of the values that make a relationship feel supportive. Or in other words, let’s talk about what we want this group to be like. We will get the most out of our time together if we decide how our interactions should feel and sound. This is how we work together to create the culture and experience of our group. It’s kind of like a group agreement.

  We think of it as a group agreement rather than ground rules or group norms. Let’s talk about why. What’s the difference between a rule and an agreement?

- You are looking for the following kinds of responses (feel free to share these responses if youth do not say them): “Rules have an enforcer and a follower.” “When you break a rule, you get punished.” “Agreements are based on the agreement of everyone involved. If they are broken, there is a conversation, not a punishment.” For example, “I thought we agreed to [fill in the blank]. Do you still agree?” “Agreements give everyone a say in the matter.”

IDENTIFY VALUES

I’m not going to ask you to say it out loud, but take a moment to think about something you want to learn from this program/class/workshop.

- Give an example (“I want to learn how to deal with conflict.”) Pause to let youth consider the question.
With what you want to learn in mind, think about—but don’t share out loud—the kinds of things that have made it hard to get what you want out of a group/class in the past—maybe it is behaviors or things that distracted you (like people having side conversations or getting a text), things that made you feel like you couldn’t trust the group (like judgmental comments from others or teachers who seem like they don’t care), or things going on inside of you (like stress, or thinking about what is happening later in the day). What makes it hard to get what you want from a class? (Remember, keep it in your head.)

List Values from Youth:

- Now that you know what you want to learn, and what you don’t want to experience in our group, I’d like to invite your input to list a few key values we want for our group. What do you value that would make this group feel safe and establish trust?

- Generate a list of about 4-8 values, writing ideas on large easel paper (the idea is that you will repost at each workshop) or a white board for that group. Be sure there is space between each suggestion to include a definition, as necessary. If youth have trouble starting, feel free to give an example.

Get Specific. Describe Behaviors that Demonstrate Each Value:

- For each item, ask:
  
  When you see this value in action, what does it sound like? What does it feel like? What does it look like? Does anyone have another idea of what it could mean?
Write the behaviors next to their associated value (e.g., if “inclusivity” is the value, write behaviors that demonstrate that value in action, like “calling on different types of people” or “don’t dis somebody’s idea.” Be sure to get input from diverse participants before moving on. (This will make establishing an agreement easier.)

Add Your Values as Needed:

Once the group is reaching a pause, you can include suggestions of your own and the reason you included them. Be sure to give youth time to respond and offer input on each value and how it might look in action.

I have a few thoughts about what can help make a group feel safe.

Add and discuss your recommendations and their associated behaviors. The Rest and Return and refocusing strategies come after this step.

Add Language to Define Rest and Return:

Sometimes the stuff we’re talking about can bring up intense feelings. If that happens to you, it’s okay to take a break and come back in a few minutes. We call this Rest and Return. This doesn’t necessarily mean you leave your seat—it could just mean putting your head down or looking out the window. Just take a moment to take a mental break and breathe. And, as you do, take care not to check out for the rest of class. That’s why it’s called Rest and Return. This practice means you agree to refocus once you’ve taken a quick break. Does that sound okay to you?
COME TO AGREEMENT

Ask about Disagreement and Adjust As Needed:

It looks like we have a nice list here (restate each value). Is there anything on this list that anyone does not agree with?

- Resolve any disagreement by asking the person for whom agreement is not yet possible.

  What words could we change to make this list work for you?

Get Visible Agreement from All:

- Visible agreement means everyone in the group can visibly see a sign of one another’s agreement. If needed, you can add an audible agreement, too.

  I would like you to [stand/raise your hand] (pick one) if you agree to be part of this group and will work to maintain these values.

- Alternatively, you can ask participants to show their agreement by signing the list of values.

Share Your Commitments to the Group:

Finally, I would like to make a commitment to you by adding one more value: a refocusing technique called Breath to Focus. Even though we agreed to all the other agreements, most of us know that sometimes we get off track.

Sometimes we’ll be talking when someone else is talking. Or sometimes we might get upset and not uphold our agreement of (insert appropriate value, e.g., respect). These things happen. We’re human beings. We make mistakes sometimes.
What I’d like to do is when something like that happens, when we get off track, I’m just going to gently say to the group, Hey all, let’s go ahead and take an inhale ... and an exhale. We will do it together. It might feel odd at first, but we will get used to it and see how it works to train our brains.

CLOSE THE PROCESS

- It’s okay to create language that is authentically yours. The important thing is to develop a strategy, share it with the group, commit to using it, and model it as you use it.

  My commitment to you is that I’m not going to yell at you. I’m always going to ask the group to refocus in a calm tone like this. I’m always going to treat you with respect and dignity. Is that okay with everyone? That that’s how I’ll deal with it when we get off track.

- Thank the group for engaging in the group agreement setting exercise.
Refocusing the Group As Needed

**WHEN THERE IS GENERAL DYSREGULATION**

- As you acknowledged when setting the group agreement, there will come a time (or many times) when you will need to refocus the group. To do so, begin by taking a deep breath or two yourself, and then repeat your *Breath to Focus* phrase calmly until the group focuses. Breathe along with the group as you coach them.

  *Hey all, let’s go ahead and take an inhale ... and an exhale.*

**WHEN THE GROUP AGREEMENT/VALUES ARE BROKEN**

- If an individual or few individuals break the group agreement, you can pause and bring attention to the list of values. Avoid calling out any participant or drawing attention to negative behavior. Instead, address the group as a whole.

  *I am noticing that we’re getting off track with our agreement. I thought we agreed to [restate value that is being broken]. Do you still agree? (discuss)*

  *It’s normal to get off track once in a while. And when we do, we can just remind each other of the things we wanted to get out of the workshops and, without judgment, hop back on the agreement train again. If there are parts of our group agreement that we need to revisit, just let me know. These are our values, and we can work together to protect and adjust them. My goal is for this group to be a caring and safe place for every one of us.*

- Throughout the workshop series, don’t hesitate to acknowledge positive behaviors that demonstrate adherence to group agreement. For example, “Michael, I appreciate you coming tonight even though I know it was hard to get here,” or “Jameelah, I know you and Beth disagree, but you handled that difference of opinion with a lot of respect. Nicely done.”

- *Positive Praise* interspersed into the workshop can reinforce more of what you want to see while also building supportive relationships with the group.
**Co-Regulation in Practice**

**STRATEGIES FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO SERVE YOUTH AGED 14-24**

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**REST AND RETURN**

**Sometimes we need permission to tend to our needs.**

*Rest and Return* is a strategy for taking a mental, and if possible, physical break—from life, intense emotions, or being distracted from what we’re doing—to refuel, rest, or refocus. It can mean physically leaving the room, moving to another space, putting your head down, or just taking a mental break, like looking out the window.

The notion is that you are committing to taking care of your needs by taking a break, and also committing to coming back. The “Return” part of the strategy means this is not abandonment, disengagement, or checking out—it is self-care with a promise to re-engage.

*Rest and Return* is a strategy that is important to coach youth to use in programs (and in life) and for staff to use at work. Both approaches are offered in this module.

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**IN WORKSHOPS/PROGRAMS**

**The Strategy:**

✓ Explain it.
✓ Support it.

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**AT WORK**

**The Strategy:**

✓ Locate it.
✓ Label it.
✓ Equip it.
✓ Prioritize it.
✓ Use it.
This strategy is important to introduce at the beginning of a program series, and it works great in tandem with the Group Agreement module. It builds off of trauma-informed facilitation and behavior theory as a concrete way to manage dysregulation. The basic concept is that you give youth permission to take a mental or physical break from the workshop anytime they need to, and in exchange, they commit to return and re-engage. Anecdotally, this has helped some programs with mid-workshop attrition.

**The Strategy:**

1. **EXPLAIN IT**

   Here's sample language:

   *Sometimes the stuff we’re talking about in these workshops can bring up intense feelings. If that happens to you, it’s okay to take a break and come back in a few minutes. We call this Rest and Return. The idea is that you have the group’s permission to either physically step out or mentally check out when you need to, and in return, you commit to the group that you will come back ready to engage when you can.*

   Give an example of how they might enact Rest and Return in ways that align with school program/workshop protocols. If they can’t leave the room, let them know where to go and what’s allowed. It’s nice to encourage them to take some deep breaths too.

2. **SUPPORT IT**

   When you notice youth using this strategy, it’s okay to ignore it or to nonverbally acknowledge and support it—like with a subtle nod—to provide positive reinforcement to the person using the strategy. If they seem like they’re having a difficult time emotionally, it may be helpful to check in with them during a break or at the end of the workshop to be sure they are okay.
AT WORK

There is no shortage of overstimulation and stressors in our world. With the pressures of work and challenges to finding balance amid the frenetic pace of life, most of us get overwhelmed from time to time. In order to cope, we all need a break, a chance to regroup and center ourselves so we can stay clear about who we are and where we are headed.

Taking time out of our day is not easy. It can be a challenge to press pause and give our brains a break. This module provides the simple structure that will allow you to create a space for the practice of taking a break. We call it Rest and Return.

**The Strategy:**
This Rest and Return at Work strategy involves five parts.

1. **Locate it.**
2. **Label it.**
3. **Equip it.**
4. **Prioritize it.**
5. **Use it.**
Co-Regulation in Practice
Strategies for practitioners who serve youth aged 14-24

REST AND RETURN

Locate it.
Find a quiet, somewhat private spot in your environment. The level of privacy you will need depends on the preferences of those who use the space. (Rest and Return need not require complete silence or privacy.) Take care to choose a place with fewer distractions and that does not have a negative association for staff. If you are a mobile employee, you can equip your car to serve as a Rest and Return space if you like.

Label it.
Label it. Post a sign or otherwise designate the spot for “Rest and Return.”

Equip it.
Gather the things that will make the space feel safe, nurturing, and peaceful (not overstimulating) to those who will use it. Ask staff for feedback about what to include. Suggestions:

• A comfortable chair and perhaps a pillow or blanket
• Encouraging visuals, soothing sounds (inspirational quotes, posters, water features, etc.)
• A gentle timer to indicate when you have reached the desired time for your break (we recommend spending 5-20 minutes in the space, if possible)
Prioritize it.
Establish a group value or workplace policy that supports at least one daily visit to the *Rest and Return* space for each person. Time in the space should be protected.

- It may be helpful to post a visible schedule to be sure everyone has a designated time slot, unless the space is large enough for multiple staff (see sign-up sheet provided).
- Your workplace may be such that spontaneous visits are preferred. In this case, place an “in use” or “open” sign on the space (if it has a door), to communicate when it is available.

Use it.
Enter, set the timer, and relax. Make *Rest and Return* a regular practice to take a break, quiet the mind, breathe, and give yourself a place with no demands. You can use the time to “veg out,” focus on breathing, eat a snack, strike a yoga pose, or tap into a meditation or mindfulness app on your phone and follow a guided technique—whatever you feel you need to *Rest*. Then, *Return*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME OF DAY</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10 MIN WINDOW)</td>
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In Use

Open
The *Take Note* strategy is about pausing to breathe, notice feelings or sensations in the body, and connect to the present moment. Often referred to as being mindful, this kind of strategy shows promising benefits like reduced anxiety, depression, and stress; increased focus; improved self-awareness and acceptance; and decision-making that honors both emotion and reason. Research also links the practice of being mindful to improved job performance and reduced desire to quit, suggesting it may have an important role in the workplace. Integrating this strategy facilitates emotional and cognitive self-regulation, and may enhance staff capacity for co-regulation.

Mindfulness exercises are rarely framed in ways that resonate with people of color, and, as a result, are sometimes reported as awkward or irrelevant. To resonate with diverse individuals, and, as a result, begin addressing this gap, several exercises in this module were developed in partnership with diverse staff and participants.

The module includes several approaches to the strategy, indicating those for use by staff and/or participants.
Take Note at Work: Working in the human services field can be very rewarding. It is inspiring to serve people who have demonstrated profound bravery and resilience, and humbling to witness individuals and families struggling with staggering adversity. Staff who give of themselves to support others, however, often experience vicarious trauma and significant stress in their roles. It is important to build skills that make it easier to cope with the stressors and demands of work in healthy ways.

To do this during your workday, you can Take Note of the present moment—not judging what has been, and not worried about what comes next—as a way to check in with your brain and body. With practice, you can discover messages your body is trying to communicate, increase your compassion for yourself and others, and refuel for the important work you do.

Take Note with Youth: Youth are uniquely affected by stress, heightened emotions, and a hypervigilance about themselves. Developments happening in the brain make youth acutely attuned to the emotional content of a situation, which can trigger reactivity and stress that sometimes leads to interpersonal conflict. At the same time, youth are motivated to take greater risks, seek rewards, try new experiences, and establish increased independence. To balance the risks and opportunities presented by this stage in their development, youth need support from caring adults through authentic relationships. In the context of supportive relationships, adults can coach youth to pause and Take Note of their feelings and their surroundings to become mindful. This strategy can help youth become more aware of their emotions and values, serving as a precursor to emotion regulation and helping them move from a state of stress and myopic focus to a state of awareness and understanding of feelings in the broader context of life.
AT WORK / WITH YOUTH

The Strategy:

**At Work:** The exercises in this module are designed for use either as a group or individually. We recommend using a *Take Note* exercise at least weekly for about ten minutes, or daily if possible.

**With Youth:** The strategy can be used in group workshops or individual sessions with youth. We recommend trying one *Take Note* exercise during each meeting for 3-7 minutes, if possible.

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1. Make a plan.
2. Select your exercise.
3. Model the strategy.
4. Support emotional safety.
Make a plan.

**At work:** *Take Note* exercises can be done anytime, like at the beginning of the workday, at the start of staff meetings, or during a *Rest and Return* break. Select a time and location to practice that is right for your team. Try out different approaches to find what works best, and keep it going by putting it on the calendar regularly.

**With youth:** Decide when to introduce the strategy (the introduction takes about three minutes, followed by the first exercise) and make a schedule for integrating the strategy over the course of the workshops.

Select your exercise.

This module offers several resources to practice *Take Note* with youth or in the workplace, including recordings and scripts. Choose resources that will resonate with the audience. You are not limited to the resources in this module. If you have other mindfulness exercises you would like to try, please do. You might even suggest participants could find an exercise they like and share it with the group.

Model the strategy.

Because slowing down to *Take Note* can feel awkward at first, it is very important that the facilitator model the practice with comfort and openness. As a result, over time, participants will feel more at ease using the strategy themselves.

Support emotional safety.

Sometimes tuning in to one’s feelings can trigger intense emotions. It is important to give people the freedom to *Rest and Return*, or to opt out if they feel unsafe or uneasy about the strategy for any reason. It can be helpful to have a staff person available for emotional support, if needed.
Exercises in this module

There are numerous resources on the internet, and in books, audio files, and apps for guided imagery, meditation, mindfulness, noticing, and breathing exercises. For your convenience, this module includes exercises we developed, as well as a few from other sources. The approximate length of each exercise is included below, with all exercises taking 10 minutes or less.

1. **Introduction to Take Note:** A sample script for introducing the *Take Note* strategy for the first time. *(3 minutes)*

2. **The Basic Practice:** A simple breath and body-scan exercise produced by Headspace and based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD and Myla Kabat-Zinn, BSN. The purpose of this exercise is non-judgmental self-awareness. This is a foundational exercise for the practice of noticing and mindfulness. This exercise is appropriate for use with staff and with participants. *(6 minutes)*

3. **Feel the Rhythm:** A guide to a kinesthetic exercise for use with participants or staff that involves playing music and finding a rhythm both individually and as a group. The purpose of the exercise is to become present in the moment and demonstrate the value of each individual to the collective group. The exercise was developed by Aly Frei, MN, RN, in partnership with staff and youth at Children’s Harbor in Pembroke Pines, Florida. *(5 minutes)*

4. **Rebooting the Mind:** A script and/or recorded exercise in MP3 format developed by Aly Frei, MN, RN, and Chelsea Yamamoto, MA, for use with participants or staff. This exercise engages the listener by comparing the overloaded mind to a computer with too many open windows, in need of a restart. The listener focuses on the movement of breath in and out of the body and the resulting rhythm as a way to “reboot the mind.” *(4 minutes)*

5. **My Phone:** A script and/or recorded exercise in MP3 format developed by Aly Frei, MN, RN, for use with participants and staff. The exercise is about noticing how we react to our phones with the goal of increasing our awareness and perspective about their role in our emotional balance. *(5 minutes)*
Other Resources

**Learning to Breathe (L2B):** A series of four recorded exercises in MP3 format from the evidence-based mindfulness program for teens and young adults developed by Patricia Broderick, PhD. These exercises are focused on improving self-awareness and emotion regulation.

The four following audio-based exercises for use in workshops can be found at [https://learning2breathe.org/](https://learning2breathe.org/):

- Body Scan (10:33 minutes)
- Awareness of Thoughts (9:29 minutes)
- Awareness of Feelings (8:12 minutes)
- Kindness Practice (9:29 minutes)

**“Six Mindfulness Exercises to Try Today”**: A handout with content developed by Alfred James, published by Pocket Mindfulness, and presented in an outline style, for those who prefer more flexibility with the language and practice. This group of exercises is focused on being present and in the moment. These exercises can be longer or shorter, as you prefer, and are appropriate for use with staff. [https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today/](https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today/). Each of the following exercises can be done in 3-10 minutes:

- Mindful breathing
- Mindful observation
- Mindful awareness
- Mindful listening
- Mindful immersion
- Mindful appreciation
**TAKE NOTE INTRODUCTION SCRIPT**

**Introduce Take Note to Youth**

Sample language is included in italics in the green callout boxes.

We have a strategy called Take Note that we are going to try out in our [program/workshops]. Take Note can help us understand ourselves, notice what we feel, and reduce some of the stress in our lives. This strategy will help us get perspective about the reactions or emotions within us so we have more control and more choice about how we respond when we are upset. This kind of “noticing” or “mindfulness” practice can help us have more compassion, less judgment, and more acceptance for ourselves and others around us.

Feel free to share this definition of mindfulness by Jon Kabat-Zinn: “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, with an attitude of nonjudgment, or with an attitude of acceptance.”

Let’s try it! Is that okay with everyone? If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can Rest and Return (i.e., take a break).

(Ask after completing a Take Note exercise [i.e., Feel the Rhythm] for the first time.)

- Have any of you ever tried this kind of exercise before? (discuss)
- How many of you have heard about noticing or mindfulness? (discuss)

Great! Some of you have heard about this idea before. Sometimes it’s called mindfulness; sometimes it is called meditation. We like to call it Take Note.
TAKE NOTE SAMPLE SCRIPTS

The Basic Practice¹ (Script) 6 MIN

It’s okay if you’ve never done an exercise like this before. These instructions will guide you through each step. Some days these exercises will feel easy. Other days, it might feel difficult. The trick is to try to stay with it, no matter how challenging it feels.

Make sure you’re sitting comfortably before you start. We recommend sitting in a chair with your legs and arms uncrossed, feet flat on the floor, and arms resting in your lap or on your legs. Try to keep your back straight but not too tense. That’s it. Now you’re ready!

All you need to do is sit back, relax, and allow your body and mind to unwind. Take a moment to get comfortable. Please begin with your eyes open. Not staring too intently, just aware of the space around you, and maintaining a soft focus with your eyes. Start off with a couple of big deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you’re breathing, feel the lungs expand as they fill with air, and as you breathe out, notice how the muscles soften as the body exhales. Then one more time. As you breathe out this time, gently close your eyes and allow your breath to return to its natural rhythm in and out through the nose.

Now take a moment to feel the weight of the body pressing down into the seat beneath you. The feet on the floor, the hands, the arms just resting on the legs. Start to notice any sounds in the space around you, just allowing those sounds to come and go. (Pause for 5 seconds.)

¹ Practice adapted from Headspace, a guided mindfulness meditation app for beginners, based on the work of John and Myla Kabat-Zinn.
Then bring the attention gently back to the body, noticing how the body feels right now. To help with this, start at the top of the head, gently scanning down through the body. Notice what feels comfortable, what feels uncomfortable. Smooth, even, steady, from head to toe. (Pause for 5 seconds.)

As you scan down, start to notice the movement of the breath in the body and how the breath creates a rising and falling sensation. For some people, that’s in the stomach; for others it’s in the chest or diaphragm. If you can’t feel anything, just gently place your hand on your stomach, and notice that movement.

Don’t worry if your mind wanders off; that’s perfectly normal. As soon as you notice it’s wandered, gently bring your attention back to the breath again. (Pause for 25 seconds.)

Start to notice whether the breaths are long, short, deep, or shallow. (Pause for 35 seconds.)

For a few seconds, let go of that focus on the breath and allow the mind to do whatever it wants to do. So, if it’s been wanting to think, just let it think now. (Pause for 25 seconds.)

Then bring the attention back to the body again. Coming back to that feeling of weight pressing down, perhaps noticing the sounds around you again. And you can open your eyes in your own time.

Ask yourself how that feels, having taken a few minutes out of the day. Whether there’s a greater sense of calm, perhaps clarity. Don’t worry about whether there are a lot of thoughts in your head. That’s perfectly normal. The mind can change a lot from day to day. But before you jump up, take a moment to sit back and appreciate how it feels to Take Note.
3. Feel the Rhythm (Script)

Note to the facilitator: This exercise may be useful when you don’t want the group to become too relaxed, but want to increase focus and work to integrate the right and left hemispheres of the brain. To participate, the youth will listen to the rhythm of the music and then drum a beat on their desk, table, or lap. You can also invite the group to stand, find space on an open wall or counter in the room, and use the wall/counter like a drum (gently, of course). The group may sound chaotic at first, but ideally, the group comes together to create a rhythm in harmony with the music. Then, the music may be turned off and the group can continue their beat together.

Hi everyone, let’s try an exercise to increase our focus, to help us think more clearly, and give us some space from things that get in the way of feeling present.

This exercise is about tuning into rhythm. We’re going to play music, and you will start by just listening for a beat. Then, as you feel the rhythm, each of you will drum your own beat to the music. You can sit and drum on your lap or stand and drum on the wall—whatever feels right to you. You can have your eyes open or closed as you tap the beat, whichever helps you focus.

This kind of exercise might seem awkward at first, but as we try it, our senses—and the different parts of our brain—have to focus and work together. We engage our senses to listen and both hands to find the rhythm—and that wires the brain in powerful ways.

The point of this exercise is to take a break from the past, avoid thinking about the future, and focus only on the here and now. Finding our beat allows us to be who we are (our unique selves) based on what we feel now—and then contribute to the rhythm of the group as a whole.

To get started, put down anything you are holding, be sure your phones are off, and find a spot to drum. (Give folks a moment to move around, stand against the wall, near a table, or use the back of their chair.)
Everyone ready? (Notice if the group looks ready. If there are distractions [e.g., air blowing on someone] feel free to adjust the situation as needed.)

I’ll play the music, and you can follow with your beat after I start mine.

Note to the facilitator: Play music. Wait until a clear rhythm forms (maybe 15-20 seconds) to begin to beat your rhythm. Then participants can follow. Let the group beat for several minutes, finding their rhythm and listening to how it changes over time. At the end, you can ask the participants to keep their rhythm going as you turn down the music (or the song ends). See what happens as they continue their beat together.

See if you can help them come to an end by either guiding them to wind down to a very simple beat and then saying something like “And ... cut!” or winding them up to something complex and then saying “Yes!” and applauding, encouraging them to applaud themselves as well. When finished, ask for volunteers to debrief the exercise:

Music can make us feel powerful, calm us down, and bring us clarity. It can bring us to a place of mental focus if we really feel the rhythm. Music can be with us anytime we want.

- What was it like at the beginning of the exercise?
- What did you notice as you kept going?
- How did your emotions change from the beginning to the end?

One of the cool things about this exercise is that we begin to see how we can be totally ourselves and totally connected to each other at the same time. If any one of us were not here, the rhythm would change. At the same time, our beat is our beat, and that is unique to who we are in that moment—no judgment, just acceptance.

Thanks for doing this with me!
Note to the facilitator: The language here is a guide, but if there are words or phrases that feel awkward, please say them in your own way.

Hey all, I’m [name]! Thanks for trying this exercise to reduce stress and build mental strength.

This is a chance to increase our ability to focus when it counts and avoid being controlled by thoughts and feelings when we are upset. Practicing this kind of exercise enhances the circuits in the brain and helps us handle relationship or life challenges in positive ways instead of reacting in ways that might make things worse.

To get started, put down anything you are holding, focus your eyes on the floor so you aren’t distracted by others, and get comfortable while I explain how stress can affect our minds and our health. Then we’ll all give it a try.

Imagine your mind is a computer. It can work fast and efficiently, until we open too many tabs, or ask it to do too many things at once. Then it starts to work slowly. It might get hot or freeze up, and pretty soon, it crashes. Too much stress or anger affects us in the same way.

In order to get the computer functioning again, it needs a reboot. This means you shut everything down, and when you do, you realize (often fairly quickly) which tabs you need to return to and which tabs can stay closed. It is clear which ones were important and which were more like background noise causing extra stress on the system.

(Use an increasingly relaxed, soothing voice, and slow the pace gradually. Pause between phrases so youth have time to experience the moment.)
This exercise is a mental reboot for our brains. We are concentrating on the most basic task needed for survival: breathing. Focusing on the breath quiets the mind and brings clarity.

So, now, take a moment to re-position your body if you need to. Set aside your phone, snacks, whatever it might be. Let your arms and hands rest uncrossed in your lap. Put both feet flat on the floor. Sit so your back is straight, but not tense, and focus your eyes on the floor. Be sure you’re comfortable, and when you are ready, take one deep breath.

As you breathe out, you can let your eyes close. Begin to notice the sounds around you, and the sensations within the body. And then, just like restarting your mind, let all the distractions go and focus your attention just on your breath—the way it feels as it passes through your nose.

Let your breath come to its natural rhythm. (Pause for 3 seconds.) Does the rhythm feel fast or slow? Do the breaths feel shallow or deep? (Pause for 2 seconds.)

Notice where you feel movement as you breathe. (Pause for 1 second.)

Just rest your attention on that movement. (Pause for 5 seconds.)

If you find your mind wandering, that’s okay. Remember we’re not trying to stop thoughts. We’re simply allowing them to come and go. Not judging them, just noticing them and allowing them to move on. (Pause for 2 seconds.) Now gently bring your attention back to the breath again, not breathing in any special way—just following the natural rhythm of the body. (Pause for 2 seconds.)
For a moment, let go of the focus on the breath—just let the mind do whatever it wants—no sense of control. Just let the mind be free. (Pause for 6 seconds.)

Then bring the attention back to the body, once again—back to the space around you as you notice any sounds.

In your own time, when you’re ready, go ahead and open your eyes. (Pause for 2 seconds.)

(Return to a conversational tone to debrief.)

Do you feel a bit clearer in the mind? Sometimes rebooting makes us anxious at first because we have to process what to let go of and what to keep. But in the end, once we reboot, we feel calmer, clearer, and a lot less stressed. Then, our mind can respond again with clarity, compassion, and a new perspective.
Hello everyone! We’re going to do an exercise that actually uses our phones—it’s about noticing how we react to them. The goal is to increase our awareness and perspective. To get started, put down anything you are holding, feet flat on the ground, sit up straight, focus your eyes on the floor so you aren’t distracted, and get comfortable while we notice our reaction to our phones. You can keep your eyes open for this exercise.

Silently in your head, answer these questions:

- Where is your phone right now?
- How do you feel when you can’t find your phone and don’t know where it is?

Let’s get some perspective on how the brain responds to the phone and the thoughts and feelings that come up because of our phones.

- First, take two deep breaths: Inhale ... Exhale. (Pause.) Inhale ... Exhale. Focus your mind on your breathing and not on anything else in the room.

- Now, gently reach for or take out your phone. But don’t try to turn it on or activate the screen yet. (For some phones, the screen lights up just by picking it up. You can click it off if that’s the case.)
  - What do you notice first as you hold the phone?
  - Pay attention to how it feels in your hand. Does it have familiar size, shape, and weight as you hold it? Think of the words you might use to describe the phone. Soft? Heavy? Other words?

- Take another inhale ... and exhale.
What emotions, urges, or thoughts are happening right now for you? What is your body’s response as you hold your phone?
- Is it harder to stay focused on the exercise? Do you feel a strong urge to turn on the screen, tap an app, or check texts? Is it hard to resist the urge?
- As you notice the influence of the phone on you, what reaction do you have to that awareness?
- Remember: your feelings are never right or wrong. They just are. This is simply an exercise to notice them, not to judge them or change them.

Now, go ahead and turn on your phone and notice how you feel as the screen lights up.
- What is different about how you feel now that your phone is on and you can see the screen? Is the urge stronger to text or check an app? Or do you feel relieved to know what’s there?
- Please take a deep breath in ... and exhale.

You’re not going to actually tap any apps or send any texts right now, but think to yourself:
- If I were going to open an app, which one would it be?
- Why do I want to open that app right now?
- Do I notice a feeling that is making me want to do something with my phone?

If you phone beeps or buzzes, how does the sound or buzz make you feel?
- Stay with that feeling and just be aware of it. How would you describe it? (Pause for 3 seconds.)
- Is it hard not to do something on your phone? (Pause for 5 seconds.)
- How much power does your phone have in this moment over your emotions? (Pause for 4 seconds.)
Take an inhale and an exhale. Remember, this exercise is only about awareness, not judging yourself or others. The goal isn’t to resist technology, but to simply notice how it affects you. The urges, frustrations, worries, or impulses that you have inside you when you hold your phone and what they might mean.

(Pause for 10 seconds).

Bring your attention back to the feeling of the phone in your hand. Take a deep breath in and notice how the breath feels as it moves past your skin and into your lungs.

Now slowly release the breath and exhale.

Our phone can seem like part of our body, part of who we are. Sometimes, it can almost control us—like part of our brain. It’s with us in bed, in the bathroom, at the dinner table. Many of us keep our phones close by at all times. Hey, I love my phone too! It makes life better and easier in so many ways.

But, how often is that glowing screen the last thing we say goodnight to and the first thing we tap in the morning? Sometimes I realize I check my phone in the morning before I even check in with myself or those I love. What feelings are inside us causing us to post certain things or hit certain buttons? Are those feelings telling us important information we should notice before we touch our phones?

The beeps and buzzes of our devices can be reminders to take a breath or pause for a second to be sure it’s you that’s really in control, and not your phone.

Thanks for doing this exercise with me!
Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth (SARHM)

The SARHM project was a study that aimed to increase the capacity of practitioners in youth-serving Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) programs to promote self-regulation development among participants. It is funded through a collaboration between the federal Administration for Children and Families’ (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) with the aim of further advancing relationship health and self-sufficiency by applying a developmental frame to human services. SARHM translated theory about co-regulation—the interactive process of adult support for youth self-regulation—into practice by developing a set of strategies that aligned with an evidence-informed co-regulation framework. The strategies were developed based on theory and evidence, but have not yet been tested for effectiveness.

As part of a nationwide initiative to promote healthy relationships in adult individuals, couples, and youth, OFA funds comprehensive healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services. The SARHM project team partnered with two youth-serving HMRE programs to conduct formative, rapid-cycle evaluations to develop and refine co-regulation strategies by pilot testing them, providing data about their implementation, and refining them in the field without changing their curricula. Visit OPRE’s website for a detailed final report on SARHM (Baumgartner et al., 2021). A list of additional products, including a guide for practitioners (Frei et al., 2021), a brief describing a preliminary draft co-regulation measure (Alamillo et al., 2021), and additional resources are available on OPRE’s website under SARHM.