

Module 6: Problem Anticipation (Proactive Coping)

The ability to anticipate problems is an important component of the coping process. This module encourages teens to develop a future orientation by strengthening their coping skills through the anticipation of problems and taking action before a stressor is fully developed. Adolescents will have the opportunity to experience problem anticipation through participation in an obstacle course that illustrates the steps of the problem anticipation process.

Cohesion Building Activity 1: The Balloon of Problems

- Task Objectives: Problem identification; problem solving
- Materials: One balloon for each group member and a sharp object to pop the balloon with (i.e. – a straight pin). If popping will be too loud, instead have scissors available to cut the knotted bottom of the balloon to let the air out.
- Directions:
 - The facilitator can begin the activity by discussing the importance of problem identification and explaining to the group that some problems can be controlled and others cannot. For example, a teen with a bad temper can control outbursts but cannot control decisions that his or her parents make. Elicit examples from the group by asking questions like: **“In your own life, what is a problem you can do something about and what is one that you can’t?”**
 - Balloons are passed out to each member of the group. Each person blows up his or her balloon; using one breath to represent each problem they are experiencing in their life. Facilitators can cue the teens by saying: **“It may be problems with parents or siblings; it might be problems with school, friends, or the law.”** If a teen has only one or two problems, they should blow those problems into the balloon over and over again. Eventually each group member should blow up his or her balloon to capacity and tie into a knot.
 - Once all the balloons have been blown up, the facilitator instructs the students to hold their balloons with two hands, placing their palms flat against the balloon. Then the facilitator tells them to keep both hands on their balloons and pick up a pencil. Now holding the balloon and a pencil, the facilitator tells the students to also pick up a piece of paper. Now holding all these things, the students are told to pick up a book, and then another book... After students struggle a bit, tell them they can put the items down.
 - The facilitator acknowledges that this is hard if not impossible, just like it is hard in real life to deal with tasks in our day-to-day lives when we hold onto a lot of our bad feelings.
 - The facilitator says that one way s/he gets rid of stress and bad feelings is to _____ (say what you do: read, run, listen to music, talk to a friend) and then asks how the students get rid of stress in their own lives. After the students share their ideas, point out that there are many good ways to reduce stressful feelings.
 - Conclude the activity by having the students either: pop their balloons, gradually let the air out of their balloons, or place their balloons (disposing of the stress) into a trash bag.

Cohesion Building Activity 2: *The House of Cards Activity*

- Task Objectives: to increase understanding of the importance of coping effectively with stress
- Materials: decks of cards (enough for each student to have 10-15 cards).
- Directions: Give each student 10-15 playing cards. Tell them they need to build a tower with their cards, the taller the better. They have 10 minutes to build their towers. When time is up, see how well they accomplished the task. Ask: "What made this difficult/frustrating?" "How did you deal with this difficulty/frustration?" "If you were successful in building a tower that stood, what strategies did you use?" (Talk about their strategies; did anyone team up with another person and work together – if so ask why they did this; point out the value of using social support). After discussing the student responses, point out that building a tall tower of cards that is stable is a challenging task. It requires using self-control when the tower falls and you have to start over. The tower of cards also represents how hard it is to move ahead in our lives when we do not cope well with life's frustrations and upsetting situations. What happened when you tried to make a second or third level to your tower? If we think of each layer as adding more stress, the taller the tower, the more likely it will topple. Ask: What kinds of stress do you experience in your lives? What are some stressful situations that you experience over which you have absolutely no control? What are some stressful situations that you experience over which you do have some control? As people, the more we hold onto our stress and don't find ways to handle it effectively, the more likely we are to topple. To cope with stress in a helpful way, some people find a supportive friend to talk to; other people might do physical activity like play basketball or go for a long walk. Ask: How have you coped with stress in a helpful way?

Cohesion Building Activity 3: Action-Consequences

Students will compete with the clock to see how many negative consequences they can call out for each action:

Drug abuse is the action----- possible negative consequences include: death, jail, poor grades, lose job, not graduating, get sick

Unprotected Sex is the action----- possible negative consequences include: disease, pregnancy, bad reputation, paying child support, not graduating, feel used, being poor....

Gang membership -----possible negative consequences include: not finish school, have to kill someone, criminal record, jail, death, physical pain, see people get hurt....

Cheating-----possible negative consequences include: school punishment, failing a grade, poor grades, not graduating, lose friends, lose self-respect, can't keep job,

Stealing-----possible consequences include: arrest, criminal record, jail, lose friends, lose trust of others, no future.....

Set a time (such as 1-2 minutes) and have students call out (or write down) as many negative consequences they can think of for each action. After listing the consequences for an action, ask:

1. Do any of the consequences we've listed make you less likely to want to do this activity?
2. What kinds of pressures they face to engage in any of this activity?
3. What are some things you can do to make it less likely you will be pressured to engage in this activity?

Have students come up with additional "actions" that they feel pressured to do and talk about the possible negative consequences? Ask them if there are other ways that they think they can avoid or reduce these "problems" in their lives? You also might ask which potential consequences are the most powerful for helping them reduce the likelihood of engaging in these risky actions.

CENTRAL ACTIVITY: *Obstacle Course Activity*

- Task Objectives: Illustrate problem anticipation process; problem solving; planning; receiving social support
- Materials: Obstacles for students to hold (foam boards), paper and tape for goals; students play the "obstacles" and the "supports"
- Directions:
- Have each student write in large letters on a piece of paper, one of his or her life goals. Examples include: "Finish college" "Get married" "Own a Business" "Support a Family" "Travel to Another Country" "Be a Community Leader"
- After students write down their goals, tape them on the wall that is at the far end of the room. Have the students read out their life goals as they tape them on the wall.
- Ask the group for the **first volunteer** to complete an obstacle course. Instruct the first volunteer to leave the room with one of the facilitators and use the group members still in the room to make an obstacle course for the student to navigate. That is, chairs, tables, desks, and the students themselves serve as the obstacles in the obstacle course. Have about 8 students play the obstacles. As obstacles, the students' feet need to remain "glued" to the floor and they need to hold the foam board up in front of them. At the end of the obstacle course is the wall with the life goals. Once the obstacle course is complete, blindfold the first volunteer and then have him or her reenter the room. Tell the volunteer that s/he will attempt to make it the obstacle. After the first student has made it through the course, ask the volunteer: **"What made it difficult to get through the course?"**
- After the first volunteer has completed the course, ask for a **second volunteer**. Have the volunteer leave the room with one of the facilitators. While the person is gone, select 8 new people to play the obstacles. Tell them that their feet are glued to the floor but they can move their foam boards around (stick them out so they get in the way of the person moving through the course). Have all obstacles assume their positions. Have the second volunteer reenter the room. Permit the volunteer to study the layout of the obstacle course. Then blindfold the second volunteer and ask him or her to walk through the obstacle course. When the second volunteer is finished, ask: **"What**

problems did you run into while navigating the course” Did it help getting to see the course before you walked through it?”

- The **third volunteer** is selected, and different people get to play the obstacles. This third time, the person will be blindfolded after studying the course. Select 1-2 of the observers (those not playing obstacles) to walk near the blind folded person and give the person directions for getting through the course as safely as possible (i.e., running into as few obstacles as possible). They need to tell the person whether to turn right or left, how many steps they can take forward... After the third volunteer has successfully navigated the course, ask: **“Did the guidance offered by other members of the group help you get through the course?”**
- Finally, a **fourth volunteer** is selected. Select 8 students to be the obstacles. Have the fourth volunteer leave the room with a facilitator. Then select 1 person to give helpful directions and 2 people to give unhelpful directions. Have the person reenter the room, study the course, and then put on the blindfold. Tell the person that she or he will be getting directions, but some of them will be helpful and some will be unhelpful. His or her job is to try to figure out which directions are the helpful ones and to follow those. Tell the person s/he can ask questions of the guides to help him or her figure out how to get through the course. As the person walks through the course, the direction givers will offer suggestions and the obstacles can move as long as their feet stay glued to the floor ... After the fourth volunteer has successfully navigated the course, ask: **“Were you able to figure out who to listen to as you tried to get through the course?”**
What made it easy (or hard) to figure this out?

Process Questions:

- Once the activity is finished, review what happened each time a volunteer went through the course: Have the students describe what the obstacle course was like for each volunteer and what made it hard or easy for them to get through the course.
 - The first time – the volunteer went through without seeing the course; the person had no plan.
 - The second time-the volunteer was able to see the course (had a plan), but had to deal with unexpected obstacles (just like in real life, it is good to have a plan but we have to be flexible enough to deal with things that are unexpected).
 - The third time-the volunteer was able to get guidance through the course using social support.
 - The fourth time-the volunteer also was able to get social support, but also was given unhelpful information. Just like in real life, there are helpful kinds of information and people and there are unhelpful kinds of information and people. We have to figure out who we should listen to; whom we should trust.

Ask the group:

- How do you use social support in real life to get through life’s obstacles?
- Who are the people in your life that you trust most to give you social support?
 - How do you know you can trust them.
 - What do you do to get social support when you need it?

Outside Experience: During the next week, notice who it is you go to for help when you face challenges or problems.

Retrospective Pre/Post Evaluation (see attached)

MODULE 6: PROBLEM ANTICIPATION (PROACTIVE COPING)

County _____ School _____ Code _____
 (completed by facilitator)

Grade in school _____ Age _____ Circle one: male female

Race/Ethnicity: Black/African American White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino
 Native American Asian American Other _____

Please indicate how much you enjoyed the activities.

	Not At All	A little	Some	A lot
1. I enjoyed The Balloon of Problems activity.	1	2	3	4
2. I enjoyed the Obstacle Course activity.	1	2	3	4

Please indicate what you knew before and after participating in this session.

	Before this session				After this session			
	Not At All	A little	Some	A lot	Not At All	A little	Some	A lot
I knew how to distinguish between problems I can and cannot do something about.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I knew how to let go of problems that I cannot do anything about.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I knew how to plan for ways to deal with life's challenges.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I knew how to identify people who can give me support in my life.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I knew how to ask for help from people in my life to help me deal with life's challenges.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4