

# Activities for Youth

## Mirroring

The story “Falling Into Trust” (p.7) is about empathy and trust. To get your group to experience those things physically, lead them through the following exercise, known as “Mirroring.”

Everyone gets a partner. If there is an odd number, you can partner with one of the youth. Assign everyone to be either A or B, then instruct partners to stand facing each other, arms’ length apart. Explain that one will be the leader, and the other will be the “mirror.”

Explain that the leader makes simple, continuous movements, and the “mirror” follows. If the leader raises her right hand, the “mirror” should raise his left, just like the reflection in a mirror. Then say “A’s lead” and have them begin.

Tell the youth to try to maintain eye contact the whole time. The goal is to mirror the partner perfectly, so the leader should move slowly. The “mirror” should not try to anticipate the leader’s movements. Encourage the leader not to try to “trick” her partner with tough moves—the leader should perform movements that the “mirror” can follow.

After three minutes, call out “change,” and have the B’s start leading the A’s, picking up from where they are. After three minutes of that, say, “Now, no leaders. Try to mirror each other. If nothing seems to be happening, start a movement, but also be watching for your partner’s move.”

Let them do this for three minutes. Then call “Stop” and have the group sit in a circle. Ask everyone to report on how that felt for them. If nobody brings it up, ask about how it felt to hold eye contact for so long. Many will describe feeling initially uncomfortable and then less so. Encourage them to talk about what got them past their discomfort. Ask how it felt to collaborate on the third, leaderless part of the exercise. Finally, ask for words or phrases that describe what this exercise calls on or builds up in a person. If nobody says them, suggest “trust,” “empathy,” “understanding,” “patience,” and “ability to tolerate discomfort.” You may point out that the leader-follower segments also involve power, and the no-leader part shows how power can be shared.

## The Feelings Behind Behaviors

### Opening Activity: 10 minutes

Ask youth if they’ve ever done impulsive or self-destructive things and not been able to explain why. Ask them to write down a few of these things they regret doing that happened two or more years ago. It’s important that they have some distance from these mistakes. Emphasize that you are looking for things they regret.

### Read and Discuss the Story: 20 minutes

Then have them read “My Mother Jenny” by Selena Garcia on p. 4. Ask them to identify places in the story where Selena behaved badly and only later figured out why. Answers include, from the beginning of the story, her running away, smoking weed, cutting school, and getting in fights and figuring it out like this: “I felt that I could do whatever I wanted because no one cared enough to stop me. I was angry with myself: I thought I was the reason I was placed into foster care. I had so much rage that I found anybody and everybody to take it out on.”

Another answer: After she moves in with Jenny, she still smokes weed, fights, and threatens teachers. Her later explanation: “With previous foster parents, I had wanted to leave but been afraid to say so. Therefore, I would try to make them not want me anymore. Jenny was different; I wanted to stay with her. Looking back, I think I acted out because I was afraid of getting hurt again. I would make her send me back before I could get too attached.” Finally, when Jenny yells at her for not stopping her foster brothers’ fight, she concludes that Jenny doesn’t love her, when really Jenny just lost her temper.

### Closing Activity: 10 minutes

Have them go back to the list of old mistakes they wrote down. Give everyone 5-10 minutes to write about why they think they might have done those things. To guide students and steer them away from focusing on blaming themselves, write these questions on the board:

What were you going through at that time in your life?  
How were you feeling? What did you need that you were not getting? What were you reacting against or trying to change?  
How might you handle the situation now?

Ask teens to consider these questions as they write. After 5-10 minutes, ask for volunteers to share. Ask for ideas on why you should bother trying to understand mistakes you’ve made in the past. (Elicit that this can be helpful if you want to do things differently in the future, and can prevent you from judging yourself too harshly.)

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