



## What Is the Transitions Program?

The program consists of this Leader's Guide and a Teen Journal. Youth Communication also offers training in how to use the materials.

**The Leader's Guide:** That's this book. It has lessons for 16 weeks of workshops that you can run with teens. (See a week-by-week calendar on p. 4.) The workshops are divided into two parts.

Part One begins with activities that focus on building trust in the group and easing into the concepts. Then it gets specific about the tools teens can use to manage transitions in their lives. In Part Two (weeks 8-16), every teen picks a change they want to address and then works on it for six weeks. They meet weekly to talk about their progress and to get feedback and support from the group (and from you, the facilitator).

**The Teen Journal** includes worksheets and stories that teens will need

to participate in the program. You'll need one copy of the Journal for your own reference. In addition, each teen in your group should have his or her own journal. It will help them be active participants in the workshop. They'll complete activities that will help them learn about themselves and their strengths, and how to mobilize their strengths to manage transitions successfully.

When teens have completed the program, the journal will be a record of their accomplishments. It will also serve as a template for handling future changes—on the job, in relationships, and in other aspects of their lives.

**Training:** Youth Communication can offer training to your staff in how to implement the *Managing Transitions for Teens* program. Training can range from phone consultation to half- or full-day workshops at your site. For more information, contact Loretta Chan (lchan@youthcomm.org).

## Who Should Lead These Workshops?

It's important that the workshops in this program be led by a trained professional—a social worker, psychologist, or caseworker who has experience working with teens in groups on sensitive topics.

Change is hard. It can be especially hard for youth who have been in foster care. To them, change is often associated with abandonment, betrayal, danger, and vulnerability. When faced with change, they may shut down, or act out. The goal of this program is to help young people become more effective at managing their responses to changes in their lives. But to reach that goal requires revisiting some changes from the past and practicing new responses to change.

While testing these lessons with teens, we found that going through that process inevitably brought up some raw emotions and painful memories. Teens will process these feelings in many different ways—feeling sad or depressed, acting out, skipping sessions, wondering if they should be in the workshop, projecting their feelings onto the adults or other teens in the group, etc. It's important that the group leader have some experience in managing these kinds of reactions.

Furthermore, in all of the groups that we ran while developing these lessons, we used two staff members. The second staff member does not need to be as skilled as the group leader. However, merely having two adults in the room at all times makes a big difference. You'll each notice different things, and you'll be able to compare notes after each session. That reduces stress on the adults and helps you to process any secondary trauma you may feel from the teens' revelations and struggles.

Finally, it is important to keep the adult-to-teen ratio low so you can respond thoroughly and supportively to the issues the teens raise. For two adults, a group of six to 10 teens is ideal. If the group grows beyond 10, we suggest adding a third staff member. And if the group grows much larger than 12 youth, we recommend splitting it into two groups, with two staff each. A big element in the success of this workshop will be the trust that develops among the participants, and it is easier to build that trust in a smaller group.

## Who Should Participate?

*Managing Transitions for Teens* is designed for youth ages 15 to 20. We designed the program with youth in foster care in mind—and the struggles they will face when they leave the system to live on their own. However, this program could also be used with youth who are leaving juvenile justice systems, or making other difficult changes in their lives.

The workshop does not require strong academic skills, though teens will need reading skills at

about the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level or above to read the stories and worksheets. It helps to have a few teens in the group with good conceptual skills who can get a solid grasp of the idea of the stages of transition. *But the real understanding of the concepts comes through the activities, not the reading.*

Throughout the program we refer to the participants interchangeably as teens (though some may be older), students (though some may not be in school), and youth.

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## Why Use Stories by Teens?

The most powerful influence on adolescents is their peers. They turn to each other for advice on everything from fashion to relationships to how to cope with traumatic events. But peer advice raises two challenges. The first is that much of it occurs outside of adult knowledge or supervision. Teens don't generally share their struggles with adults, especially not in adult-led group discussions. In addition, the quality of peer advice is mixed. There is a good reason why peer pressure—though it can sometimes be constructive—has a decidedly negative reputation.

Youth Communication's true stories by teens (and the activities that accompany them) help address both of those challenges. The stories have been carefully edited to insure that they include accurate information and show teens taking effective and appropriate action to learn new skills, develop more constructive attitudes, and manage the challenges in their lives.

The stories also work well because talking about the issues in the stories can be a safe way to introduce emotional topics. Discussing a story by a peer allows for some personal distance. This approach allows students to wrestle with important issues without having to delve into their own stories too soon. At the same time, because the writers are honest about difficult emotions and situations, the stories give teens permission to open up about their own experiences and feelings.

In this program, we use stories by teens to introduce the Transitions concepts and to show what different stages of transition look like in real life. In some of the lessons, and in the appendix, we provide journals from some of our teen workshop participants that document their journey through the program. These can be particularly helpful as a way of showing your group that other teens have struggled through this process, and learned from it.