



Upgrade

A Curriculum Guide
for Managing the Transition to High School

Tim Fredrick, Ph.D. and Janelle Greco, M.A.



Harness the Power of Youth Voice

to Build Social and Emotional Learning & Literacy Skills

A Story-Based Approach that Will Engage Your Students

Students are **highly motivated to read** Youth Communication stories because they **see their own challenges and triumphs** reflected back to them. All of our curricula and professional development sessions are built around highly compelling **true stories by teens**.

In the stories, **the writers show how they used social and emotional learning (SEL) skills to make positive changes in their lives**. They are **credible models** for your students. In each session, your students read for meaning and participate in fun, interactive activities that reinforce SEL and literacy skills.

Youth Communication has helped marginalized teens write powerful personal stories since 1980. The stories and curricula have **won more than two dozen top awards from the Association of Educational Publishers**.

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Each Youth Communication program includes:

☑ One-Day Professional Development Session

- Experience a lesson
- Practice essential facilitation skills
- Learn about the theories underlying the curriculum

☑ Comprehensive Curriculum Guide

Each session in the curriculum guide includes:

- Opening activity
- Read-aloud and story discussion
- Interactive Explore the Ideas activity
- Closing circle and reflection

☑ Anthologies of True Stories

Each instructor receives a set of anthologies to use with students in the group.

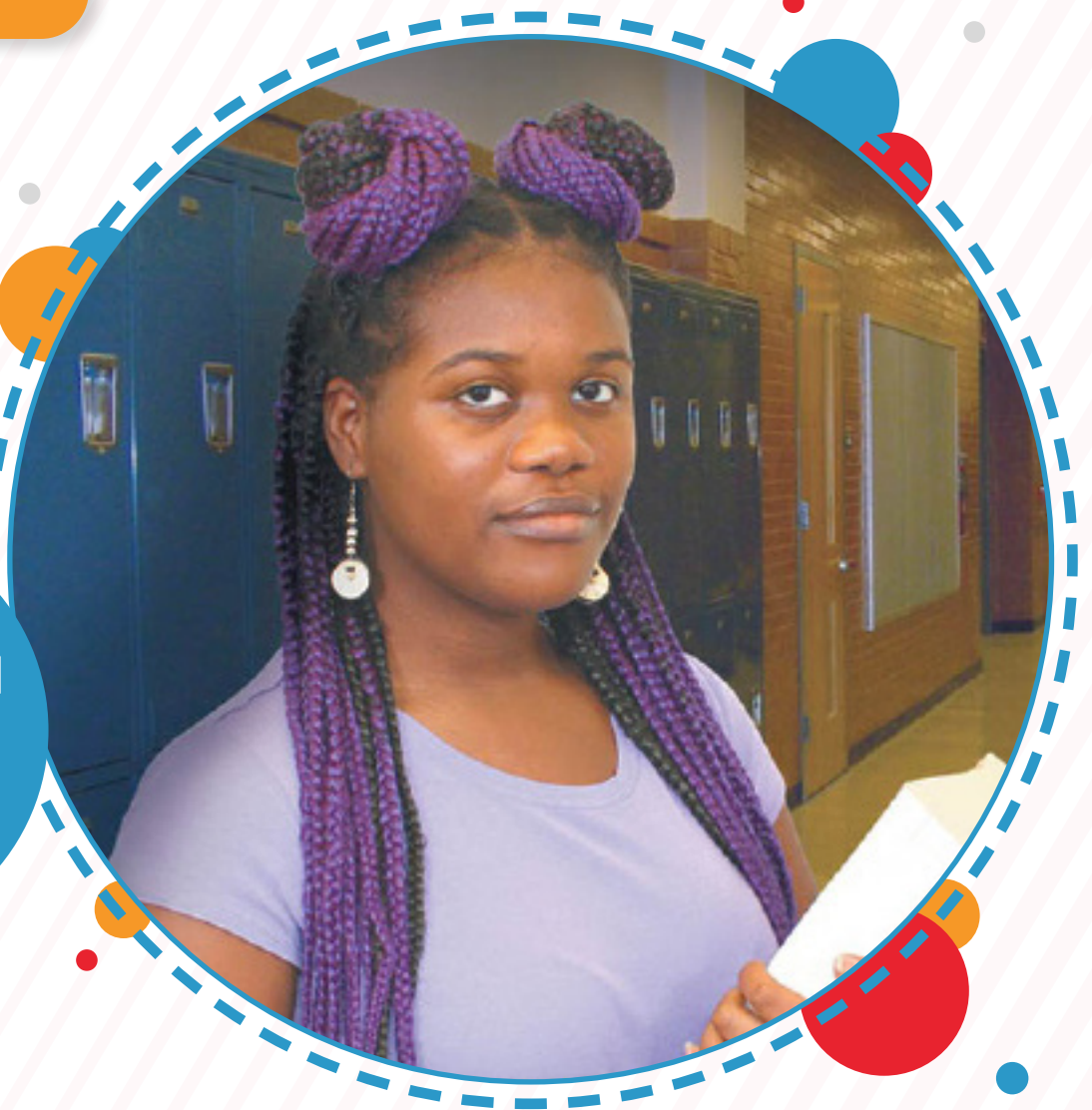
☑ Ongoing Coaching

- Technical assistance for group leaders



Middle School

TRANSITION
TO HIGH
SCHOOL



Upgrade

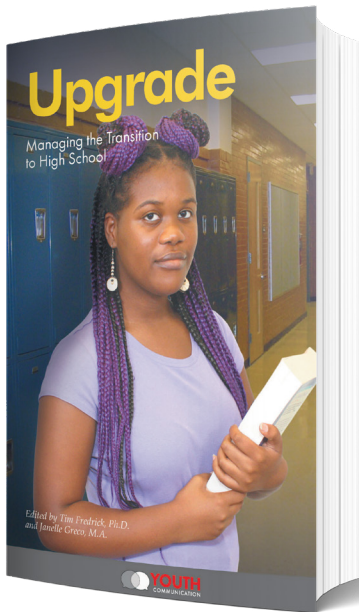
Managing the Transition to High School

Training and Session Plans
Using **Real Stories by Real Teens**

Social and
Emotional
Learning



Social and Emotional Learning for Middle School



Use **Upgrade** for:

- Advisory • Summer Bridge
- Mentorship Programs
- Common-Core Aligned ELA Lessons

This program includes:



**Facilitator
Training**



**Session
Plans**



**True
stories by
teens**



**Ongoing
coaching**

Upgrade includes 15 true stories written by teens, with session plans on:

Creating Support Networks • Persistence • Utilizing Strengths
Overcoming Academic Challenge

“

If I hadn't been willing to try something new...I wouldn't have made the friends I have now.

José Polanco, from his story "How I Overcame Shyness"

”



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Session 8

Finding the Right Friends

SEL FOCUS: RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Story: “Not the Friends That I Needed” by Hande Erkan

Story Summary: Hande joins a new clique of friends and loves the feeling of inclusion and togetherness she has with them. But in time she realizes the group does not share her values. Her grades begin to fall. Her boyfriend and brother question her relationship with this clique. The writer decides to focus on other relationships.

Learning Objectives

Youth will build their SEL by:

- Differentiating between trivial and serious differences in relationships
- Clearly stating needs and wants to peers

Youth will increase their literacy by:

- Making meaning of text through group read-aloud and discussion
- Writing to express personal connections and insights
- Practicing communicating clearly and actively listening

Materials

- ☐ Group Agreements and agenda, posted
- ☐ *Upgrade* anthologies, one for each group member
- ☐ Group Sort cards (p. 100), one for each group
- ☐ Chart paper and marker
- ☐ Sticky notes and pencils

Preparation

- Read the story and session plan ahead of time.
- Prepare the session agenda.
- For the Opening Activity, write on the top of a chart paper:
“A good friend is...” and post on a wall where everyone can see it.
- For the Explore the Ideas Activity:
 - copy the Group Sort cards handout (one set for each small group) (p. 100), and
 - cut out a set of 12 cards for each small group of three to four group members.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone and have them sit in a circle. Review the agenda (posted):

Agenda: Finding the Right Friends

- Review Group Agreements
- Opening Activity: Group Brainstorm
- Read and Discuss: “Not the Friends That I Needed” by Hande Erkan
- Explore the Ideas Activity: Group Sort
- Closing Circle

OPENING ACTIVITY — GROUP BRAINSTORM

(10 minutes)

This pre-reading activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Give each group member three sticky notes. Explain that they will be using the sticky notes in a brainstorming activity. Group members should not write their names on the notes. Their comments should be anonymous.

AUTHORITY FIGURES	PEERS

2. After reviewing the agenda, point to the chart paper. Read aloud the statement you have written on it.
 - **A good friend is...**
3. Review these steps with the group:
 - “On each of your sticky notes, you will write one thing you look for in a friend.” [e.g., trustworthy, supportive, etc.]
 - “When you’ve finished, you will post your notes on the chart paper.”

4. Before they begin writing, model the activity by sharing one or two of your own responses. (Your ideas will serve as a guiding example for their own thinking and make the expectations of this activity clear.)
5. Tell participants to post their notes on the chart paper as they complete them.

6. When most or all notes are posted, read each one aloud.
7. Guide a brief discussion using some of these questions:
 - “What stands out for you about what we value in friends?”
 - “Is it hard to break off a friendship with someone who is not being the kind of friend we want or need? Why?”
8. Thank group members for sharing their thoughts.

READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (20 minutes)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. **Introduce the story:** Explain to the group that you are going to read a story by a young woman who realizes that her group of friends is not meeting her needs and that she needs to focus on other relationships.
2. **Set expectations for reading the story:** Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



Tell the group to turn to p. TK in their anthologies.
(See the leader's version in this guide for stories with discussion questions included.)

3. **Read and discuss the story together:** As group leader, you should pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (**in bold**). Ask the group this question and facilitate a short discussion before returning to the text.



Not the Friends That I Needed

By Hande Erkan

During middle school, I was a model student. I had good grades and attendance, I was in dance and acting classes, and I received awards. But after 8th grade, I decided I wanted to be more popular in high school.

The popular girls at my new school seemed more like 18-year-olds than kids right out of middle school. They did things I hadn't done—went to parties, had sex, and drank. They wore makeup and designer jeans and spent a lot of time doing their hair. Since they looked older, it was easy for them to get into clubs, which sounded exciting to me.

I started hanging out with these girls. In the beginning, I loved the feeling of togetherness with my new friends. We had sleepovers, went out to dinner, and spent afternoons in the park. They complimented the way I dressed and acted. I felt relaxed with them, making jokes, returning their compliments, and sometimes exchanging gifts with them.

I also loved the attention I received as one of the popular girls. Every day, other kids wanted to talk to me or take a picture with me, and everybody knew who I was. High school was going just as I'd hoped.

But then I started to notice things about my friends that made me uncomfortable. They would go to strangers' homes to drink or have sex. It felt dangerous, and I didn't want to go along. I also noticed that they were friendly if I went with them, but when I didn't, they ignored me, put me down, and sometimes talked about me behind my back.

They could be manipulative. One of them wanted me to go out with her brother, so she tried to cause problems between my boyfriend and me. Sometimes they made up stories to hurt me, like telling my boyfriend that I was kissing other guys. He believed me when I told him it wasn't true, but I began doubting whether I could trust them.

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

["What do you think of Hande's choice of friends?"]

One day after school, my friend Lila's mom called her. In a threatening voice, she told Lila to come home right away to talk about Lila's bad attendance and grades. Because her mom trusted me, Lila asked me to go home with her so when she lied to her mother about trying hard in school, I'd agree with her. I knew I shouldn't lie, but I didn't want Lila to be in trouble.

We started walking toward Lila's house, but then she spotted a Chinese restaurant and decided to stop and eat. As we ate, a guy that I didn't know called her to invite us to a party. I didn't feel safe going to a stranger's house. "I'm not going," I said.

She ignored me and called a cab to take us to the party. I told her again that I wasn't going. She was angry, but I didn't let Lila push me around. To this day I'm glad I didn't go.

We remained friends after that, but I started to see the whole group differently. They invited me to join their Facebook group, and I was surprised about what went on there. They mostly talked about sex—making fun of it and their sexual partners. I didn't find it funny that they spent so much time putting people down. My opinion of them sank further.

My boyfriend didn't have a high opinion of my friends, either. He didn't trust them. When I joined their Facebook group, he was disappointed and said, "Oh, now you are one of them." He told me good friends should encourage each other, but these girls didn't do anything worth encouraging.

I noticed that my boyfriend treated me differently from how my friends' boyfriends treated them. Some of their boyfriends used them for sex and pressured them to cut school. I knew I didn't want to be treated that way in a relationship. I was beginning to see that my friends' lives were not so perfect.

["If you were Hande, would you stay friends with this group of girls? Why or why not?"]

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

By the beginning of the second semester, my grades had fallen to Cs and Ds. I went to school in the morning, but I hardly ever attended my classes. It wasn't just because of peer pressure. Someone had started an ugly rumor about me

hanging out with an older boy. I didn't want to be around the gossip. I was discovering the dark side of popularity.

My teachers noticed I wasn't in class, and they encouraged me to come after school to make up work, telling me they saw potential in me. But after a few months, they stopped reaching out.

Every time my school sent a progress report home to my family, it caused a big fight. My parents were scared about what was happening to me and told me I'd regret my actions. Then, during parent-teacher conferences, my teachers told my parents that I was in danger of repeating freshman year if I didn't get my grades and attendance back on track. It was a wakeup call. I couldn't believe how far I was from the girl I used to be.

During the conferences, my mom gave me a look that said, "I am going to kill you when we get home." She'd immigrated to the United States from Turkey at the age of 40 for my brother's and my education. It must have been disappointing for her to hear those words about me. I was embarrassed.

After my parents lectured me at home that night, my brother, who is three years older, gave me a pep talk. "Mom and Dad are right. You see how I don't hang out like I used to, because friends are just for the moment. If you don't take action now, it will be too late for your future."

My brother's words had a powerful effect on me. I thought about all the things I'd done that year and decided that I wasn't going to be a failure. I did my homework that night and, with my brother's help, started handing in my late work. I was grateful that he was willing to help me.

I got serious about school again, and I felt the old me, the one who loves to learn, coming back. I also joined the newspaper club and discovered a passion for writing. I signed up for a drawing contest and I won. I joined the Student Government Congress, where we talk about what we could do to improve our school.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

**["What do you think of the changes Hande is making?
What do you think is causing her to change?"]**

I stopped seeing the popular girls. They made up more rumors about me, like that my boyfriend was cheating on me, but I didn't care. I decided to spend more time with my family, my boyfriend, and myself. I also made new friends who are more like me, who are responsible and care about doing well in school.

Now I am doing much better. My favorite science teacher recently wrote me a letter saying: "It is amazing to see you growing up and finding the real you. You are an excellent writer and you will achieve your goals." Another teacher made a joke that maybe my twin had replaced that girl who didn't come to class or hand in her work. I felt good about the change in myself.

Now I understand that hanging out with the popular kids isn't a good idea if they do things that make me uncomfortable or take me away from being the person I want to be. I'm willing to go without lots of friends until I find people I can trust. I only want friends who support me, care about me, feel comfortable with me, and who want to help me succeed.

8

["Turn to a partner and share your thinking in pairs: What stood out to you about the writer's choices in this story? How do her choices harm her and help her?"]

**READ-ALOUD
QUESTION**

*Hande wrote this story when she was in high school.
She went on to attend Ithaca College.*

EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — GROUP SORT

(10 minutes)

During this post-reading activity, group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce the next activity by saying to the group:
 - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to do a hands-on activity.”
2. Review the purpose of this activity with the group: “At first, the writer of the story loves being part of a group of friends. But then she notices things that make her question whether this group of friends is right for her. We are going to do an activity where we think about what we want in a friend.”
3. While they are all seated, review the directions with the group:
 - “The whole group will break up into small groups of three or four.”
 - “When you get the Group Sort cards, sort them into one of the following categories:
 - actions that are worth leaving a friendship over;
 - actions that should be discussed; and
 - actions that can be let go of or ignored.”
 - “Continue until you have put all the cards in the category that feels right to your group. Be prepared to explain to the larger group why you sorted the cards the way you did.”
4. After checking for understanding, have them form small groups and find a space in the room to meet.
5. When all groups have gathered, pass out the Group Sort cards.
6. If necessary, help each group get started by briefly joining in, thinking aloud, and giving an example of a card, the category you would put it in, and why.
7. Give groups five minutes to sort, or until they reach a stopping point. (If you notice groups sorting cards too quickly or not engaging in discussion with one another, join in and ask them to explain their thinking.)

8. When time is up or the hum of conversation has died down, have each small group share how they sorted their cards and why they did so.
9. After all groups have shared, lead a brief discussion of the following questions:
 - "What are some of the similarities and differences in how groups ordered the cards?"
 - "What's hard about building a friendship?"
 - "What's hard about breaking off a friendship?"
10. Thank group members for sharing.

CLOSING CIRCLE (5 minutes)

In Closing Circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with each other.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. "What stood out for you in Hande's story, 'My So-Called Friends,' and our activities today?"
2. Finish this sentence: "One thing I'll consider when deciding whether or not to be friends with someone is..."

LEADER REFLECTION

After leading this session, reflect on the prompts below through writing, discussion with a colleague, or just by sitting and thinking:

- What did group members share about friendships today? How does today's discussion relate not only to relationship skills, but also to responsible decision-making?
- What connections do you see group members making among themselves? How can you nurture positive friendships or connections within the group?



Group Sort Cards



PHOTOCOPY BEFORE CUTTING

**Your friend lies
to you**

**Your friend
talks about you
behind your back**

**Your friend
can't hang out
because they
have too much
homework**

**Your friend joined
the soccer team
and spends most
of their time with
the team or at
practice**

**Your friend
forgets your
birthday**

**Your friend asks
if they could
cheat off of
you on a test**

**Your friend has
another friend
that they hang
out with**

**Your friend snaps
at you one day
after class**

**Your friend never
asks how you're
feeling**

**Your friend hits
you when they
get angry**

**Your friend cuts
class often**

**Your friend
pressures you
into doing drugs
with them**