

# A Better Place: The Curriculum



Based on the “A Better Place” multi-media global project spearheaded by the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley. Educational staff at Mohawk Valley Community College, (Utica, NY) have designed a community-based learning package for after-school staff and youth programs to access to resources.

This toolkit provides youth-serving organizations with developmentally-appropriate lessons plans that can be implemented in any classroom or curriculum to provide the foundation for making our world A Better Place..



## Ages 2- 18 years old

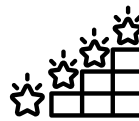
The curriculum is specifically outlined with plans for ages 2 through 18 years old, conveniently organized by age. Simple modifications can be made to address the individual development levels of youth.



## Developed by Educators

The curriculum was developed by the educational staff of Mohawk Valley Community College, founded developmentally appropriate practice and childhood development theory.

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## 5 Core Units

The curriculum focuses on five specific units, or themes, based on the book “A Better Place”, building off of previous knowledge and skillsets of the educational team. Units include: Acceptance and Diversity, Empathy and Love, Hope and Faith, Health and Safety, Unity and Collaboration.



## Free Resource for All

There is no charge for acquiring and implementing this curriculum. We feel strongly that all youth-serving organizations have access to educational materials needed to share the messages of hope, faith, and empathy. An optional donations can be made to the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley in support of these efforts.

A Better Place Curriculum is one component of the global multi-media movement. We encourage you to visit our website for additional resources, and to view our documentary, songs and purchase the accompanying book collection.

[www.abetterplaceproject.org](http://www.abetterplaceproject.org)



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## Customizing Your Plan

Please consider adapting the delivery of your lesson plans around the needs of your specific program. Following you will find templates and examples that will help guide you to implement the plan in a 1-week or a 5-weeks format. Consider the structure, needs, and specifics of your YMCA program when deciding which timeline you want to follow.

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### **\*\*Pen Pals**

A wonderful way to enhance the student experience throughout this process is to pair up with another YMCA that is also participating. The more you coordinate, the more students will be able to engage with each other during the experience. The advantage technology offers today will allow you to enhance the “Pen Pal” experience beyond just written words. While you can write classic letters that are sent in the mail, which makes for a personal touch, you can also email, send video messages, or even go as far as a meeting on Zoom while doing some of the activities. It is up to the discretion of each YMCA to decide if they want to set up and participate in a Pen Pal program. Feel free to enhance the experience with Pen Pals if you feel your group would benefit from it!

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**1-Week Option** (Prep possibly required each day prior, and for some lessons the week prior):

This timeline is optimal if you are using this for a program where you may only have a group of children for a few weeks at a camp or a similar function. This works well if you have many other activities and themes planned and want to incorporate this into your existing program.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Acceptance and Diversity Activity</b>	<b>Empathy and Love Activity</b>	<b>Health and Safety Activity</b>	<b>Hope and Faith Activity</b>	<b>Unity and Collaboration Activity</b>

### **Guidance:**

- Choose an activity for each age group in each theme for the day of the week you’re focusing on.
- Be sure to check if any of the lesson plans you’ve chosen require any substantial preparation.
- If you’ve decided to participate in the Pen Pals option schedule a follow-up later to share messages from the other participating YMCA and decide to continue communicating as desired.

**1-Week Option Planning Template** (Pick a Theme and Lesson Plan(s) for Each Day)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Theme:	Theme:	Theme:	Theme:	Theme:
Lesson Plan(s):	Lesson Plan(s):	Lesson Plan(s):	Lesson Plan(s):	Lesson Plan(s):

(If your program’s attendance shifts day by day take this into consideration when gathering materials)  
 (You may have multiple activities (lesson plans) each day if you service multiple age groups)

**Monday: # of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday: # of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday: # of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday: # of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Friday: # of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**5-Week Option** (Prep possibly required the week prior for some lessons):

This timeline is optimal if you would like to incorporate this as a large part of your overall program and want to immerse your students in this material for approximately a month. It works especially well if you have many of the same students attending your program for longer periods of time.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 <b>Acceptance and Diversity</b>	Prep Listen to “A Better Place” Song	Main Activity (Lesson Plan)	Pen Pal Option	Second Activity if Desired	Follow-Up As Desired
Week 2 <b>Empathy and Love</b>	Prep	Main Activity (Lesson Plan)	Pen Pal Option	Second Activity if Desired	Follow-Up As Desired
Week 3 <b>Health and Safety</b>	Prep	Main Activity (Lesson Plan)	Pen Pal Option	Second Activity if Desired	Follow-Up As Desired
Week 4 <b>Hope and Faith</b>	Prep	Main Activity (Lesson Plan)	Pen Pal Option	Second Activity if Desired	Follow-Up As Desired
Week 5 <b>Unity and Collaboration</b>	Prep	Main Activity (Lesson Plan)	Pen Pal Option	Second Activity if Desired	Follow-Up As Desired

**Guidance:**

- Choose an activity for each age group in each theme for the day of the week you’re focusing on.
- Be sure to check if any of the lesson plans you’ve chosen require any substantial preparation.
- If you’ve decided to participate in the Pen Pals option schedule a follow-up later to share messages from the other participating YMCA and decide to continue communicating as desired.
- The above example is not set in stone, you can choose the day of the week to implement activities and can plan as many activities as you’d like each week. You can even have one activity a day if you can find enough lesson plans to fill all 5 days! Do what works best for your YMCA and your program.
- If multiple activities within the same week incorporate the pen-pal option, you can choose to share your messages after each lesson or possibly consolidate all the communication into a larger letter at the end of the week’s theme.

**5-Week Plan Weekly Planner:**

Week of \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**This week's Theme:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Monday**

**Activity or Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday**

**Activity or Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday**

**Activity or Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday**

**Activity or Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Friday**

**Activity or Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prep needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials on hand: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**5-Week Option Planning Template** (Pick a Weekly Theme, add your lesson plans/activities for each day)

- Choose an activity (lesson plan), prep, pen-pals, follow-up, or other to add to each cell

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 Theme:					
Week 2 Theme:					
Week 3 Theme:					
Week 4 Theme:					
Week 5 Theme:					

(You may have multiple activities (lesson plans) each day if you service multiple age groups)

# Unit 1: Acceptance & Diversity



We aim to give voice to and meet the needs of people rooted in our diverse communities and recognize that we are all unique with different needs, experiences, and opportunities.

Our goal is to create and sustain a culture of equity, in line with the YMCA's mission and vision, enabling everyone to achieve their potential, live a fulfilled life and contribute positively to society.

## Show and Tell

Ages 2- 10 years old: Adaptations for 6-10 years old and 15-18 years old

Objective: Children can express their family's uniqueness by sharing their traditions.



## What Makes You Shine

Ages 6- 10 years old

Objective: Children will be creative in art and writing while expressing what makes them shine.



## This is Who We Are

Ages 11-14 years old: Adaptations for 6-10 years old and 15-18 years old

Objective: Participants will share traditions via a verbal, pictorial, or video presentation.



## I Am Not Only What You See

Ages 15-18 years old

Objective: Participants will identify both visual and invisible identities while identifying ways that assumptions can create unintentional misunderstandings and conflict.



**Activity Name:** Show and Tell

**Acceptance and Diversity Ages 2 – 10**  
(Can be adapted for 6 – 10 & 15 – 18)

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**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 week to give children time to pick an item)

**Summary:** Student will bring a special item from home that tells a story about their family. Examples, picture, statue, family belief symbol/item.

**Objective:** Children can express their family's uniqueness by sharing their traditions.

**Materials:** Students will provide an item from home, may need parental assistance.

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. In large group area have students come together to share their show and tell items.
2. Have each student share their items one at a time and tell how unique it is to their family.
  - a. The facilitator will prompt the student stories and questions from the group.

**Closure:** Talk about similarities and differences of each student's item/story.

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**Individualization:** Parents are welcome to assist students with sharing their stories. If not available, parents can send in information about the item being shared to assist with the student's story telling.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Assisted writing from facilitator(s) for the younger groups, share your show & tell experience with your Pen Pal(s)!**



**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** Student will create a craft sun and write a small paragraph describing why their family is special.

**Objective:** Children will be creative in art and writing while expressing what makes them shine.

**Materials:**

1. Paper plates
  2. Yellow paint, paper, and gold/yellow glitter
  3. Glue and scissors
  4. Paper and writing materials.
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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. Have each student create a sun out of the paper plate and cut yellow strips from the paper for sun rays.
2. Students can paint and glitter the plate as desired.
3. Glue sun rays to the plate, set aside to dry.
4. Students will write a short paragraph about what makes their family special to them.
5. Once their sun is dry, they can attach their stories to the suns and share stories with the group.

**Closure:** Talk about similarities and differences of each student's item/story.

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**Individualization:** Assistance with cutting, gluing and/or writing as needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** Have students write about what makes them shine and what they feel makes their family special to them.

**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** The group will learn about each other's various family traditions.

**Objective:** Participants will share traditions via a verbal, pictorial, or video presentation.

**Materials:** Participants brought items, projector/television/computer screen to display videos.

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. The week before doing this activity inform all participants that you would like them to bring in an item or items to share with the rest of the group that highlights a family tradition that they have. Ask, what are traditions? Explain that traditions are things we do that help pass on our culture. After a conversation, the presenter can share a tradition of their own from their family as an example. Explain to students they can talk with their families over the next week to develop their share. Give them the option to film a video with their family if they would prefer to present it in a video format. Inform them that the purpose of this is to share family traditions with one another and it is meant to be a fun activity. It can be anything, something fun, something religious, a reunion activity, literally anything.
2. On activity day, participants can volunteer, or the presenter can choose the order.
3. Have participants give their presentations and allow a few minutes of questions after each one. The presenter should take a picture of everyone who is presenting. For the videos, the presenter should get a screenshot of the highlight of their presentation.
4. Ask participants, "Were there any traditions that surprised you or that you were very interested in?"
5. After everyone has presented, the presenter should print out the photos from each presentation.

**Closure:** The day the photos are fully printed, have students put their own pictures up on a board or posterboard that is hung in class with the title for said board being "This Is Who We Are: Our Traditions."

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**Individualization:** Instructor may need to provide individual support to students with disabilities or allow a family or friend to assist with their presentation.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Share your show & tell experience with your Pen Pal(s)!**

**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** Through discussion, participants will explore the differences between visual and invisible identities.

**Objective:** Participants will identify both visual and invisible identities while identifying ways that assumptions can create unintentional misunderstandings or conflict.

**Materials:** paper, pencils, marker/whiteboard, or chalk/chalkboard, or markers/easel w/flip paper)

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. The presenter should inform students they are going to talk about various identities that make up who a person is. Let them know you're going to start with things that are very apparent and visible when you look at someone. Write "visible" on the top of the left side of the board.
2. Ask participants, "what are some identifying things or visible traits that you can see when looking at someone?" If they're stuck, give examples like eye color, body type, skin color. Write their ideas on the board.
3. Now, on the right side of the board, write "Invisible" and ask participants to think of all the identities a person may have that you can't see when looking at them while writing these on the board. If they're stuck, give examples like learning disability, native language, single mother etc.).
4. After exploring the invisible items, shift the participants focus back to the left side of the board and revisit some of the identities they produced. Ask, "are there any on the visible side that might not be what they seem?" If they're stuck, examples might be clothing, a rich person might be wearing shaggy clothes or someone who appears to be overweight might be a power lifter.
5. Ask participants, "have you ever known or seen someone unhappy because someone made an assumption about them?" Field examples.
6. Ask participants, "how can we prevent ourselves from making assumptions?" Field answers, hopefully finding an answer that relates to simply not just judging someone based on what you see. Then ask, "what is the best way we can truly learn about a person?" Field answers, hopefully finding someone mentioning having a conversation and asking questions.
7. Have students write on a piece of paper a visual or invisible identity about them that others might not know that they're excited about along with one thing they'd like others to know about that identity.

**Closure:** Follow up a week later and ask students if they've been mindful of the visual and invisible identities since the lesson and if they have noticed anything different about people. Did you find yourself more open and curious about others because of this activity? Encourage them to find someone they don't know and learn something about them. If they do this, add an incentive where they could win a prize if they share. The facilitator should make a disclaimer that you shouldn't share someone's private information.

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**Individualization:** Students with writing difficulties may need help with the paper activity.

# Unit 2: Empathy and Love



We aim to provide children with the tools they need to love others and to be empathetic to their well-being.

Our goal is to create and sustain a culture of mutual understanding and positivity through learning to love ourselves and others for who they are. We are focusing on the development of empathy through identifying and understanding our own emotions and how they relate to others.

## Hank is Sad! Help Him!

Ages 2- 10 years old: Adaptations for 6-10 years old and 15-18 years old

Objective: Children will be able to express common emotions and ways to overcome sadness



## Share Your Kindness

Ages 6- 10 years old

Objective: Children will create messages of kindness to share with friends and community.



## You Can Be the Light

Ages 11-14 years old

Objective: Empower participants to use their words and actions to help others thrive.



## Be the Light in Your Community

Ages 15-18 years old

Objective: Participants will create and implement a community service project.



**Activity Name:** Hank is Sad! Help Him!

**Empathy and Love Ages 2 – 10**

(Can be adapted for 6 – 10)

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**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 week to give children time to pick an item)

**Summary:** Students will discuss common emotions that they feel throughout the day. They will talk about how they feel and what makes them feel this way.

**Objectives:**

1. Children will be able to express common emotions and ways to overcome sadness.
2. Students will describe their idea of how to help Hank.
3. Cut a heart shape and create a drawing.

**Materials:** Paper and drawing supplies. Age-appropriate scissors

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Read “A Better Place” as a group.
2. Talk about Hank’s emotions throughout the book. If Hank was sad, what do you think would make him feel better.
3. Have students cut out hearts from construction paper and draw their idea of what Hank needs.

**Closure:** Have students present their hearts to the class in a circle.

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**Individualization:** Assist with cutting where needed. Assist with engaging conversation about ways to make Hank feel better.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** Have students write to their pen pals about their emotions & their thoughts about Hank. For younger preschool aged children, the facilitator will need to do the writing element for the class, gathering ideas as a group from the children to develop the message that will be sent.

**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** Students will create messages of kindness to share with friends and community.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to express written messages in a shared activity.
2. Students will use their fine motor skills to create an origami fortune teller or paper airplane.

**Materials:** Paper and writing materials

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**Procedural knowledge:**

**Activity 1**

1. Students will fold an origami fortune teller including positive messages as the final tab.
2. Students will group together to share the fortune tellers and receive each other's messages.

**Activity 2**

1. Students will write a positive message on a sheet of paper and fold it into a paper airplane.
2. Students will launch their planes across the room.
3. Have students retrieve an airplane that is not theirs and read the message.

**Closure:** Come together in a large group and discuss how the messages made you feel. How could you share these messages within the community.

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**Individualization:** Assist with folding/writing where needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** Have each student write a kind message to their pen pal.

**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** This activity explores how an individual's actions can impact others. It contrasts negative influences like bullying with positive influences that help others thrive. It aims to help participants realize the power their words and actions have on others and encourages them to wield such power in a positive way and learn to be active bystanders.

**Objective:** Empower participants to use their words and actions to help others thrive.

**Materials:** Banner paper or equivalent, looseleaf paper, pencils, markers, masking tape or staples

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Each student is given a writing utensil and paper. Read the following statement: "think about a time one of your peers said or treated you in a way that made you feel sad or angry, or when you witnessed someone treating a peer that made you feel sad or angry." Tell them to put their ideas down on paper.
2. Lead a group discussion using the following:
  - a. How did you feel to be treated or spoken to that way?
  - b. Did you feel multiple emotions?
  - c. What did these feelings make you want to do?
  - d. Did it affect you just in the moment or did you feel it later?
3. Instruct them to flip over the paper and have them consider the following: "now think about a time when one of your peers said or treated you in a way that made you feel good, positive, or empowered." Instruct them to respond.
4. As in #2 above, bring the group together and address the same questions in #2 above.
5. Now, the facilitator should make it a point to highlight how different the emotions and responses were to each. For example:
  - a. Did you notice any physical reactions that came with your emotions? Describe them. What were they?
  - b. You've seen the power words and actions can have on someone from your own experiences and others. Do you think your words and actions have power?
  - c. Knowing this, what can you do to make a difference in the lives of others?
6. By this point students will begin to understand their power to do good. Facilitate the creation of a pledge created by this group to have a positive impact using their words and actions. Based on your classroom's needs, you can focus this either on the classroom, community wide, or worldwide. The scope is your choice.
7. Write the main pledge on the banner or equivalent paper with the markers. Then, have students with their pencils write their own ideas on the banner with ways they can support the goal. They can help each other come up with ideas.

**Closure:** Hang the banner in the room for everyone to see to support ongoing efforts.

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**Individualization:** Depending on the setting and choice of paper, a participant with physical limitations may need help hanging their ideas. Pay attention to the classroom non-verbal reactions to see if anyone has a residual effect from shares and check in with them.

**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** This activity is aimed at empowering participants to learn how to develop and implement a community service project and realize their ability to have a positive impact on a large scale.

**Objective:** Participants will create and implement a community service project

**Materials:** Likely a chalk or white board, chalk/markers, paper, pencils

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. The facilitator should introduce participants to the idea of community service. Ideas could include things such as the following:
  - a. Raising money for a cause
  - b. Compliment communications
  - c. Creating affirmations (for people who could use a boost)
  - d. Sharing a meal and conversation (such as with people in a nursing home)
2. The facilitator should bring the group together and brainstorm together putting ideas on the board for different groups of people they might be able to help. Generate a healthy number of options and then have the participants choose their top 3.
3. Of the top 3, discuss as a group different ways they might be able to help each group.
4. Have students pick their favorite for each as the finalist and vote as a class on their favorite that they would like to put together.
5. Students will now work as a team to figure out the following with facilitator guidance to help their ideas fall within the group and organization's funding and practical capabilities. Participants should consider what materials they need, a timetable, assign roles as needed, and a plan for implementing their project.
6. The next phase will be implementation and will depend entirely on what is chosen. Revisit the closure of this activity after completion of the project.

**Closure:** Upon completion of the project, facilitators are encouraged to ask the following questions

What was your favorite part of doing this project?

Do you feel like you made a difference?

How might you get involved in the future to have an impact again?

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**Individualization:** Based on the project they choose. Facilitators may need to help students be mindful if any participants have limitations where they would need to consider ways to ensure they are included.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Share your community service project with your pen pals!**



# Unit 3: Hope and Faith



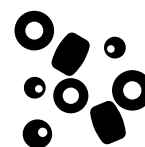
We aim to provide children with the tools they need to imagine the future they want for themselves and others, while maintaining a positive outlook on the possibilities.

Our goal is to teach children how to understand their own needs, the needs of their community and how through hope and faith and working together- all things are possible.

## Needs Beads

Ages 2- 5 years old

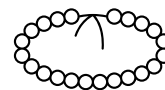
Objective: Children will be able to express the basic needs of their community and that those are shared by the needs of the world.



## Story Beads

Ages 6- 10 years old

Objective: Children will be able to express the basic needs of their community and that those are shared needs of the world.



## Hope Mind Map

Ages 11-14 years old: Adaptations for 15-18 years old

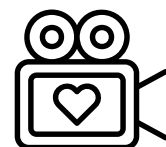
Objective: Participants will create mind maps to explore ways they can better the world and the lives of others.



## My Hope for You Video

Ages 15-18 years old

Objective: Participants will create a mind map about human needs and create a TikTok (or equivalent video) that highlights what we can do to help.



**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** Student will string specific color beads that represent the basic needs of all people. Students will have a conversation about how it would be to not have these needs met. Conversation will extend to talk about how to help meet the needs of their community.

**Objectives:**

1. Children will be able to express the basic needs of their community and that those are shared needs of the world.
2. Identify colors and patterns.
3. Use pincher grasp to string beads.

**Materials:** Pipe cleaners, vine, string, yarn, colored beads (size appropriate)

Bead colors: Blue-water,  
Brown-housing,  
Green-food,  
Red-Safety,  
Purple-People,  
Yellow-Health

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. The instructor will discuss what are the basic needs for survival (Water, housing, food, safety, people, health).
2. Students will express how their needs are met and by whom.
3. Talk about people in the community/world not having these needs met.
4. Students will create a bracelet representing the hope they have for people whose needs are not met. Talk about the colors and ask students to create patterns with their beads.

**Closure:** Brainstorm ways to help your community.

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**Individualization:** Supply different size beads based on fine motor ability. Stabilize bracelet materials as needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** Have students write as a whole class to their pen pals about their hopes for their needs being met. Facilitator should compile this as needed due to limited writing and language abilities of this age group.

**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** Student will string specific color beads that represent the basic needs of all people. Students will have a conversation about how it would be to not have these needs met. In small groups students will work together to write a short story about the need they feel is most important to them. (Students choosing water would group together to write the story)

**Objectives:**

1. Children will be able to express the basic needs of their community and that those are shared needs of the world.
2. Create complex patterns.
3. Work as a team/group to create a short story.

**Materials:** String, yarn, colored beads (see colors below), paper and writing utensils  
Beads: Blue-water, Brown-housing, Green-food, Red-Safety, Purple-People, Yellow-Health

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. Instructor will discuss what are the basic needs for survival (Water, housing, food, safety, people, health)
2. Students will express how their needs are met and by whom.
3. Talk about people in the community/world not having these needs met.
4. Students will create a necklace representing the hope they have for people whose needs are not met.
  - a. Talk about colors and ask students to create patterns with their beads.
5. After creating necklaces, students will express their favorite need and work with other students having the same favorite need to create a story about that needs importance to them.

**Closure:** Student groups will share their stories with the class. Brainstorm ways to help your community.

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**Individualization:** Supply different size beads based on fine motor ability and stabilize necklace materials as needed. Assist with engaging conversation and story writing where needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Have students write about the basic needs of their community.**

**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** This activity will focus on building awareness around various needs people have in the world and what actions the participants could take to make a difference.

**Objective:** Participants will create mind maps to explore ways they can better the world and the lives of others.

**Materials:** Paper, pencils, mind map sheets

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. The facilitator will introduce the mind map concept to participants with the main “topic” being at the center and related ideas branching out into “thought bubbles” from the center.
2. Have participants draw a circle in the middle and write “what someone in the world might need right now” and explain that not everyone always has what they need and may need help.
3. Now have the students brainstorm ideas for different needs people might have and put these into bubbles around the main idea.
4. Bring the group back together and create a large class sized mind map on the board or banner paper asking for the best ideas from everyone’s own mind maps. Leave a bit of room for each idea.
5. For each idea, ask participants what feelings are associated with each bubble. Point out the commonalities of these feelings and how many seem to be repeating.
6. Ask the group, “knowing all of these needs exist and how they are making people feel, how do you think young people like you might be able to make a difference and help change the world.” Have an open discussion about this.
7. Ask “How can we have faith that we’ll be able to change some of these things? Further discussion as appropriate.

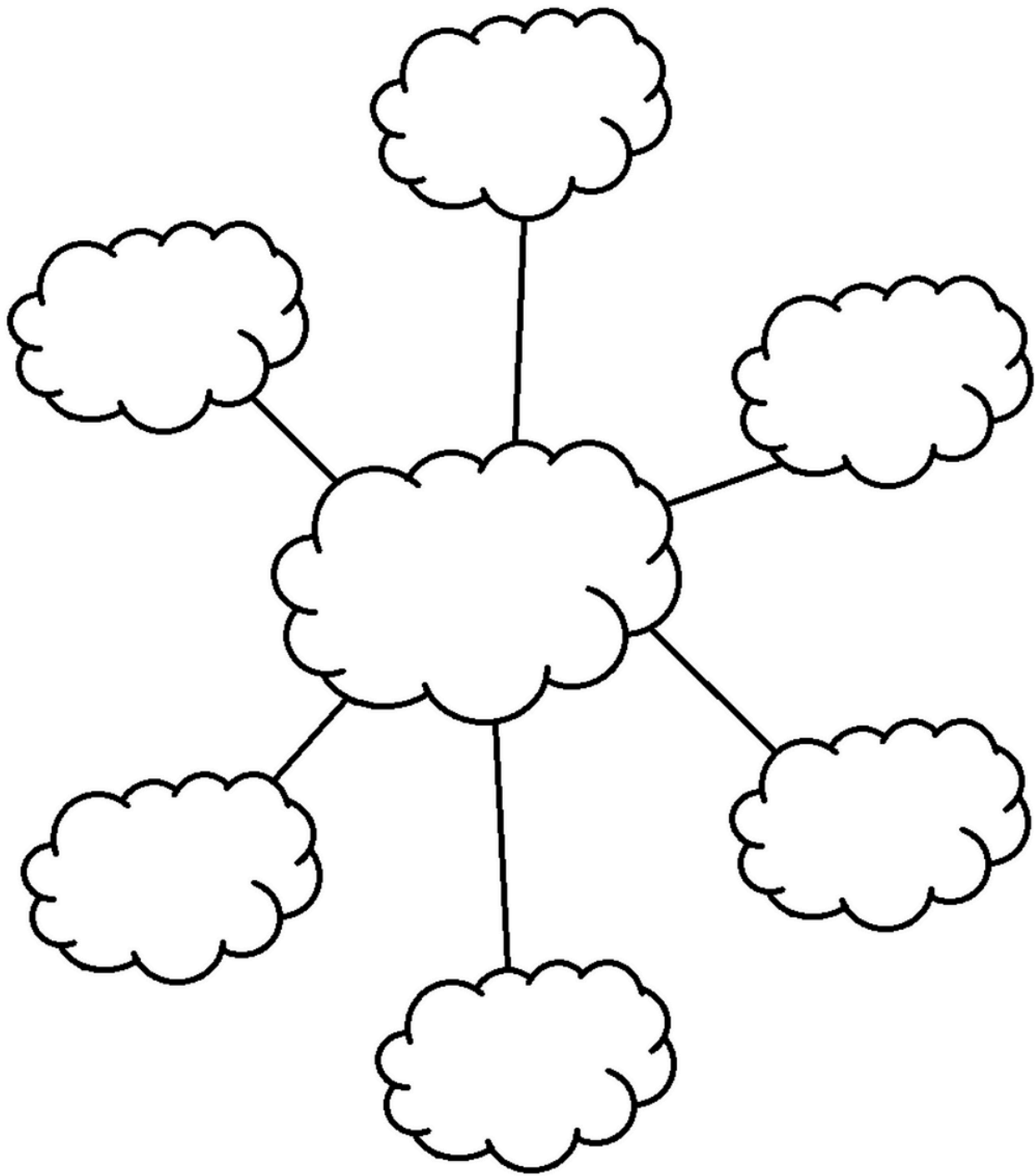
**Closure:** Have participants on a new piece of paper make a bubble in the middle. Now have them write their name and map out bubbles with all their favorite ways that they might like to make a difference. Post the created mind maps in the classroom for everyone to see.

---

**Individualization:** Writing help may be needed for some students

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Share your ideas for bettering the world with your pen pals!**

# Mind Map



**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Summary:** This activity will build awareness of the hierarchy of needs and how we all play a part in helping others with their basic needs met.

**Objective:** Participants will create a mind map about human needs and create a TikTok (or equivalent video) that highlights what we can do to help.

**Materials:** paper, pencils, Maslow’s Hierarchy handout, phone or video recording device

---

**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. Introduce Maslow’s hierarchy of needs handout that illustrates the pyramid depicting the various levels. Discuss briefly a few examples of each so participants have a basic introduction to the topic.
2. Ask participants, “Looking at this hierarchy, what are some of the needs you see in your community or around the world where people might be struggling?”
3. Compile a list of their ideas on the board.
4. From here, count how many of their ideas fall into each category to find out what category or categories seem to have the greatest need in their community.
5. Explain to participants that “hope” can be one of the strongest forces to drive change in someone’s life. Sharing that hope can help others find hope for themselves. Have participants generate a list of hopes for others in their community or the world. This can be done on the board, or on paper.
6. Have participants use their list of hopes to create and upload a TikTok or video equivalent highlighting their hopes for people in their community, the world, or other targeted group of their choice.

**Closure:** Post creation of the TikTok or equivalent video, bring the group back together to process the following questions:

1. Why would you do something for someone for no other reason than to just help them or raise them up with no expectation of something in return?
  2. How does it make you feel?
  3. How do we have faith that the things we do can help others with the various challenges they are facing?
- 

**Individualization:** Participants who have reading difficulties or public speaking difficulties may need additional time to get multiple takes when shooting the videos.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Share your video with your pen pals and tell them about the experience making it!**

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:**

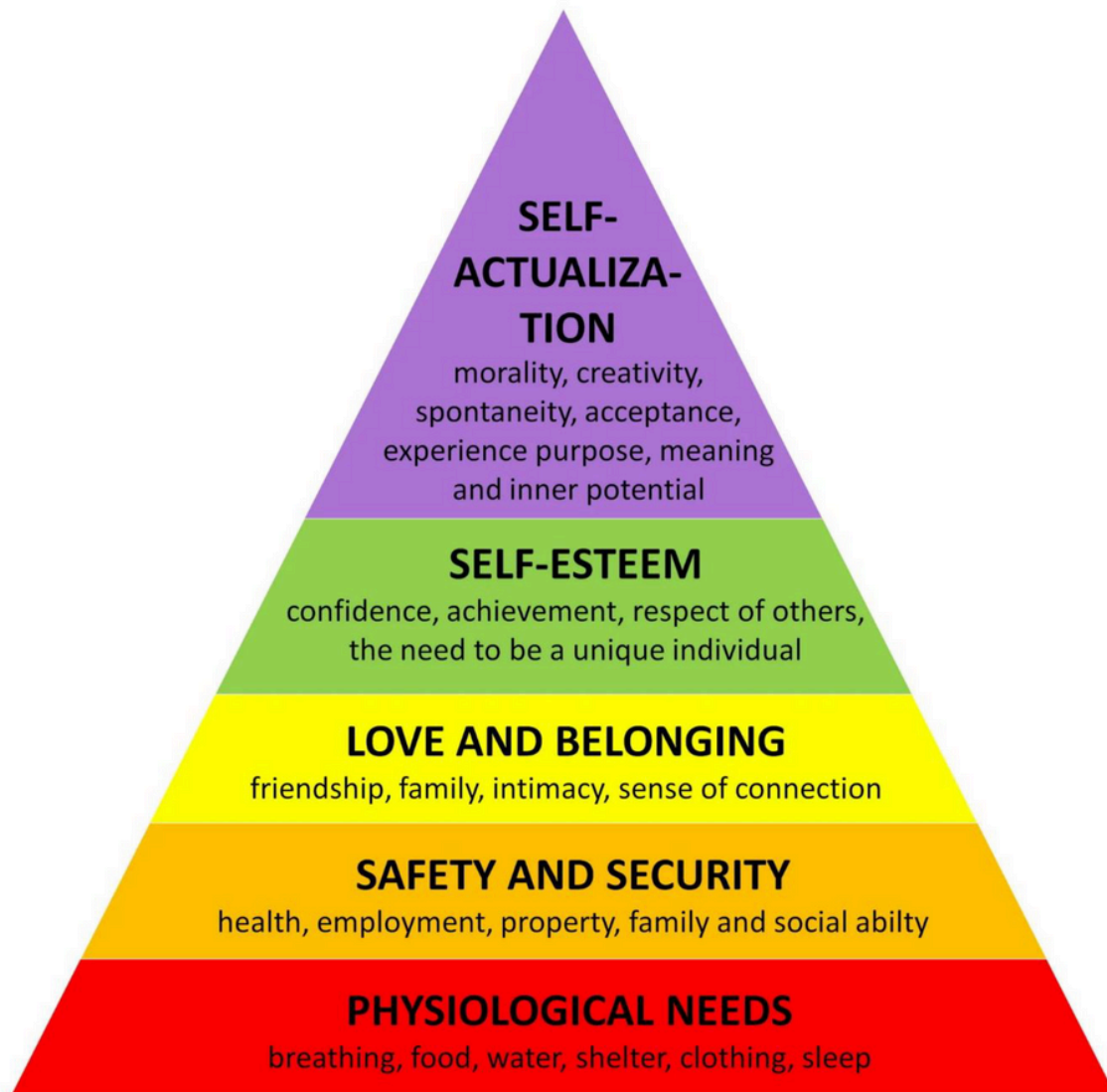


Image Source:

Mcleod, Saul. "Maslow's Hierarchy." *Simply Psychology*, [www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html).

# Unit 4: Health and Safety



We aim to provide children with the tools they need to contribute to their personal health and safety and to provide them with the resources to better express their own needs.

## Build a Safe Place

Ages 2- 5 years old

Objective: Children will be able to identify safe places and safe people in their lives.



## Safe Place Safe People

Ages 6- 10 years old

Objective: Children will be able to identify safe places and safe people in their lives.



## Healthy Good Times

Ages 2-10 years old

Objective: Children will demonstrate how to properly wash hands and brush teeth. They will describe healthy foods and ways to exercise their bodies.



## Maintaining Safe Spaces

Ages 11-14 years old: Adaptations for 15-18 years old

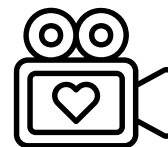
Objective: Participants will discuss the various people and places they feel safe and then choose three things they can do to help maintain a safe space.



## Make Your Own Dance Video

Ages 11-18 years old: Adaptations for 2-10 years old

Objective: Participants will develop a native dance based on their own culture or cultures that moves to the Better Place song.



## Bystander Effect

Ages 15-18 years old: Adaptations for 11-14 years old

Objective: Participants will produce ways they can intervene that specifically address problems in their school or community related to the bystander effect.





**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials and cut out large construction paper circles)

**Summary:** Student will be able to identify safe places and safe people in their lives.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will talk about where they feel safe and who they feel safe with.
2. Students will create a 3-D structure.
3. Students will identify colors.

**Materials:** Clay or playdough and popsicle sticks. Red, yellow, and green construction paper circles (cut large enough for one child to stand on).

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Talk with students about buildings they feel safe in, home, church, school.
2. Have students build a “building” with clay and popsicle sticks.
3. Talk about people that students feel safe with. Have the students jump on a colored circle of their choice and identify someone they would consider that color, green (very safe/parent, friend), yellow (somewhat safe teacher/bus driver), Red (not safe/stranger)

**Closure:** Have students have a conversation about the importance of safety.

---

**Individualization:** Assist with activities where needed. Utilize prompts and examples in conversation if needed.

**Attributes:**

1. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)
2. Pen pal option

**Activity summary:** Student will be able to identify safe places and safe people in their lives.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will talk about where they feel safe and who they feel safe with.
2. Students will create a 3-D structure.
3. Each student will create columns of people they feel are safe, somewhat safe, and not safe.

**Materials:** Glue, popsicle sticks, paper, and colored markers

---

**Procedural Knowledge:**

1. Talk with students about buildings they feel safe in, home, church, school.
2. Have students build a "building" with clay and popsicle sticks.
3. Talk about people that students feel safe with. Have them fold a paper into 3 columns. Have students identify people in each column by color, green (very safe/parent, friend), yellow (somewhat safe teacher/bus driver), and red (not safe/stranger)

**Closure:** Have students have a conversation about the importance of safety.

---

**Individualization:** Assist with activities where needed. Utilize prompts and examples in conversation if needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in: Write to pen pals about who makes you feel safe and where you feel safe and why!**

**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)

**Activity summary:** Students will care for themselves and learn ways to be creative with healthy living.

**Objective:** Children will demonstrate how to properly wash hands and brush teeth. They will describe health food and ways to exercise their bodies.

**Materials:** Soap, warm water, cloth for drying. Toothbrushes and toothpaste. Cut fruit (common fruits), cream cheese or other spread, crackers/bread, plastic knife or another spreading tool.

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Have each student properly wash and dry their hands. Sing the better place song while rubbing to make sure students are washing for 30 seconds.
  - a. Talk about the importance of clean hands.
2. Students will build their own snack with food provided.
  - a. Give each student a cracker. Have the spread it with cream cheese. Then top with fruit pieces to create a fruit pizza.
  - b. Talk about healthy foods and how they help the body grow.
  - c. Students will clear their garbage and wipe down tables and chairs.
3. After eating, students rewash their hands and brush their teeth.
  - a. Talk about the importance of clean teeth and a healthy smile.
4. Tell students that in addition to hygiene and a good diet, physical fitness contributes to health as well.
  - a. Have students line up for a 5 – 10 minute long walk in the area and go on a walk together.
  - b. When you return, play an approximately 5-minute song for students to free dance to
  - c. Then, lastly, for a group workout activity, have all students do 15 jumping jacks, 15 sit-ups, and 15 push-ups in sequence together.
  - d. Ask students, what physical exercise did you like best, walking, dancing, or the group workout we did? Are you more likely to do a physical activity that you love?

**Closure:** Have students as a group discuss their favorite nutritional snacks and favorite physical activities. Then, ask them, why is it important to find healthy snacks and activities that you love?

---

**Individualization:** Assist students with activities as needed. Make necessary accommodations for any food allergies.

**Attributes:**

1. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials)
2. Pen pal option

**Summary:** A discussion-based activity where students will explore what they think makes a space feel safe and what they can do to help maintain a safe space.

**Objective:** Students will discuss the various people and places they feel safe and then choose three things they can do to maintain a safe space at the YMCA.

**Materials:** Board, and chalk or dry erase markers.

---

**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Emphasize to students that it is important to have safe spaces and people that you feel safe around in your life. This can include places where you feel physically safe, or safe to speak, or safe to be yourself. It can include how you are spoken to, or how you are touched.
2. Create a list on the board of people that students feel safe with. Ask students for examples to contribute. Emphasize that this may be different for everyone so some answers may not apply to everyone. Ask students what makes a person feel safe. Discuss.
3. Next, create a list of safe spaces or places that students feel safe. Have them share their answers. Emphasize again that this may be different for everyone so some answers may not apply to everyone. Ask students, what makes a space feel safe? Discuss.
4. Ask students, are there any words or situations that can make a safe space start to feel unsafe? Discuss as a whole group or have students brainstorm in groups of 3 and share with the whole group after.
5. Ask students, "If we know these words and other circumstances can make a safe space start to feel unsafe, what are things we can do to help keep a place feeling safe?" Discuss as a group and list ideas on the board.

**Closure:** From the list of ideas that the students came up with to help keep a place feeling safe, have them choose the top three that they would like to work hardest to try to maintain a healthy space at the YMCA.

---

**Individualization:** Facilitator can assist where needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** This is a fantastic opportunity to share with your pen pals about ways you plan to maintain a safe space at your local YMCA.

**Attributes:**

1. Prior prep needed (1 week, exposure to song, planning, retrieve materials)
2. Pen pal option

**Summary:** The group will be creating a video of a native dance based on the Better Place song.

**Objective:** Participants will develop a native dance based on their own culture or cultures that moves to the Better Place song.

**Materials:** Phone or video equipment, access to TikTok or equivalent App, any outside materials or clothing necessary for performing dance, lyrics to A Better Place song, speakers

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. **The week before:** Play the “A Better Place” music video and song for the group. Please talk with students about creating a dance video for the Better Place song that highlights their culture. Discuss what items, clothing, or material might be needed for the video and plan to bring in the items on the day of the activity.
2. **Day of the activity:** As a group, listen to the “A Better Place” song again.
3. Ask students to write their dance plan on the board.
4. Have students begin developing and choreographing the dance.
5. When students have had enough practice, film the dance with the “A Better Place” song.
6. Upload video to TikTok or equivalent social media site and tag YMCA.

**Closure:** What did you enjoy most about creating the video? Did you enjoy infusing your own culture into the song? Did you find physical activity more fun when you turned it into a group dance?

---

**Individualization:** Students who have physical disabilities may need specific roles if a group dance is chosen. Students with cultural conflicts with being filmed may need roles like the recorder. Be sure to close caption the lyrics to the song on your video. If adapting to include younger children give older children leadership roles to help younger children learn various dance moves and choreography.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** This is a fantastic opportunity to share with your pen pals about the experience developing a dance video for the song. You can also share your dance video with them!

**Attributes:**

1. Prior prep needed (1 day, retrieve materials and read up on Bystander Effect). The facilitator should look through link in step 1 below to familiarize themselves ahead of time.
2. Pen pal option

**Summary:** A discussion-based activity where students explore the bystander effect and will discuss ways they can address instances where it is happening in their school and community to make it a safer place.

**Objective:** Participants will produce ways they can intervene that specifically address problems in their school or community related to the bystander effect.

**Materials:** Board, chalk or dry erase markers.

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**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Introduce the concept of the bystander effect to students. Information on this can be found at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/bystander-effect>
2. Provide students with an example to help them better understand. Feel free to use the one below or use your own.
  - a. Example: Someone is sitting on the ground by a sidewalk short of breath and looking pale. With many people walking by, most people will ignore the situation, hoping someone else might intervene or assuming someone else already had. Again, if only one person is there to potentially help, they are more likely to call for help.
3. Ask students, what kinds of problems are you seeing in school or our community that people often ignore like this? (Bullying? Racism? Inappropriate jokes? Etc.)
4. What can we do about this? What actions can we take? What can we say? How can we intervene? Have students brainstorm ways they can make a difference here and put them on the board.
5. Optional. If you have a group that is interested, act out some scenarios where they can confront several types of situations.

**Closure:** Have students reflect on all the ideas you have discussed today and have each of them share one thing they hope to do this week to make their school or community a better place.

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**Individualization:** Facilitator can assist where needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** This is a wonderful opportunity to share with your pen pals about ways you plan to make your school or community a better place by addressing various solutions that you discussed.

# Unit 5: Unity and Collaboration



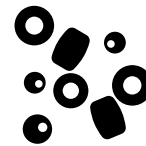
We aim to provide children with a sense of belonging in the world. We strive to ensure that all children, no matter their background or lived experience, can reach their full potential with dignity through shared experiences of co-created unity that ground identity and collaboration with others.

Our goal is to ensure that every young person has the power to reach and find a sense of belonging.

## Team Puzzle

Ages 2- 5 years old and 11-14 years old

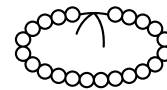
Objective: Younger participants will work together with an older group of participants to complete puzzles created from the Better Place Project.



## Building the World Together

Ages 6- 10 years old and 15-18 years old

Objective: Younger students will work with an older group to complete a world globe.



**Attributes:** Prior prep needed (1 - 3 days, retrieve, scan, and print materials)

**Summary:** Younger students will work with an older group to complete puzzles created from the better place project

**Objectives:**

1. Students will work with a partner to make a puzzle.
2. Working with a different partner they will put puzzles together.

**Materials:**

1. Print outs of pictures associated with the better place project (choir photo, song lyrics page, photos from the book).
  2. Puzzle piece templets (<https://www.typecalendar.com/printable-puzzle-piece.html> or free cut them yourself into triangles, other shapes, etc.)
  3. Scissors
- 

**Procedural knowledge:**

1. Students will cut a photo into puzzle pieces using the templets and scissors.
2. Once puzzles are created student will work in another pairing to put puzzles back together
3. Depending on the time allotted, students may share puzzles or try cutting out different puzzle designs.

**Closure:** Have students talk about what it was like to work with a partner. Would it have been harder for the younger kids to accomplish the task without help from the older kids? Did older kids enjoy the leadership and teaching role in the partnership? Why is working together helpful for everyone?

---

**Individualization:** Assist with cutting and patterns as needed.



**Activity Name:** Building the World Together    **Unity and Collaboration Ages 6 - 10 and 15 – 18**

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**Attributes:**

1. Pen pal option
2. Prior prep needed (2 days, one to retrieve materials, then an overnight to allow for drying of the materials)

**Summary:** Younger students will work with an older group to complete a world globe.

**Objective:** Students will work in a small group to make a paper mâché globe.

**Materials:** Paper, water, flour, balloon, paint (world colors), bowls

---

**Procedural knowledge:**

**(Day 1):**

1. Have older children assist younger children at mixing the water and flour to create the paper mâché paste. Start with water and add flour until it reaches a thick smooth consistency. If it gets too thick, simply add water.
2. Students will dip paper strips into water and flour mixture then drape gently over the balloon.
3. Once the balloon is covered allow it to dry (24 hours).

**(Day 2):**

1. Once dried, pop the balloon and paint the outer shell to represent the world.

**Closure:** Have students talk about what it was like to work in a group. Discuss how students can build a better world by working together. How does helping each other help everyone?

---

**Individualization:** Assist with activity as needed.

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:** Have students write to their pen pals about their experience making the globes and the ways they feel they can make the world a better place by working together.

## Sharing Your Own Activities and Lesson Plans

Would you like to share your own activities and lesson plans? We would love that! We do hope that as time goes on YMCAs across the world will be able to create and share their own ideas for lesson plans and activities. With this “A Better Place” can get better and better over time. Please see below for some guidance when putting together your plan with a blank page at the end showing the general format.

**Activity Name:** (Make a Title That Reflects your Activity). Feel free to get creative here!

Which of the five themes is your focus? Here are the five primary focuses:

**Acceptance and Diversity**

**Hope and Faith**

**Empathy and Love**

**Health and Safety**

**Unity and Collaboration**

What is your age group? Developmentally students fall into four main groups but there can be overlap. You can also determine if your activity can be adapted for multiple age groups.

**Ages 2 – 5**

**Ages 6 – 10**

**Ages 11 – 14**

**Ages 15 – 18**

**Attributes:** Here you can indicate if this activity requires prep time and what the presenter may need to consider ahead of time. This is also where you can indicate if it works well for Pen Pals so that if another YMCA is looking for Pen Pal friendly activities they’ll know right away.

**Summary:** This is a quick explanation of what the activity involves.

**Objective:** The specific action the students will perform in the activity.

**Materials:** List of items needed for the activity

**Procedural Knowledge:** Step-by-step directions for your lesson plan or activity. Keep in mind that someone who has never done this before needs enough explanation to do it without you there to guide them. So, more detail is good but try to keep it to one page. Try to keep everything to a page, if too much information is included it can make it harder for facilitators.

**Closure:** It’s great to conclude the activity with something that brings everything together or to a close.

**Individualization:** Include anything here that you may need to modify any of your activity so that students with physical limitation or students who are neurodiverse can thrive?

**Pen Pal tie in:** Here you can provide ideas for how the children participating in the activity can engage with their pen pals.

**Activity Format:**

**Activity Name:**

**(Theme) Ages**

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**Attributes:**

**Summary:**

**Objective:**

**Materials:**

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**Procedural Knowledge:**

**Closure:**

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**Individualization:**

**\*\*\* Pen Pal tie in:**

# Thank You!



Thank you for participating in this curriculum with your students and participants. We hope that this helped you help our youth to make the world a better place, even if in some small way.

Just like the "A Better Place" multi-media project, sometimes it only takes one to start a movement.

These activities were designed to be used in a creative way that you can tailor to your own environment. Please feel free to be creative!

Please share the results of your work, either in writing, with video testimonials, or any other way you wish. We would be happy to post the reactions on our website. The shared inspiration and outcomes is what makes this curriculum and project so impactful.

When posting on social media, please include #abetterplaceproject

You may also email your video, photos, curriculum modifications, and shared experiences to:

Hank Leo  
hleo@ymcatrivalley.org

