
***PowerUp* Mental and Social Health Life Skill Curriculum Overview, 2024**

Give tweens and teens tools for success in stressful times in a fun, active learning experience!

Youth today are dealing with unprecedented stress and research shows that life skill training can empower them to be resilient and successful. This document summarizes the content of the new, innovative evidence-based *PowerUp* life skill curriculum or program for 4th- through 12th-grade boys and girls. *PowerUp* provides training for all [CASEL](#) (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) core competencies in addition to other life skills listed at the end of this document that support mental and behavioral health, personal and school safety, equality, healthy relationships, and academic success with engaging videos and activities. Building empathy and positive, supportive cultures among students as well as between students and session leaders including school staff and parents is emphasized throughout.

Created by the all-volunteer nonprofit [Youth Empowerment Group \(YEG\)](#) of professionals in mental health, education, and medicine, *PowerUp* is designed to be flexible with minimal preparation and training required. Its half-hour on average video-led sessions can be chosen, combined, shortened, or divided as desired and used with one student to large groups. Videos and printable instructor guides, student handouts, and activity and game supplies are online. Other needed supplies are things likely to be on hand or easily obtainable.

Structure of each 30-minute (on average) video-based session:

- 10- to 15-minute engaging topical teaching presentation followed by a brief review
- 5-minute discussion “talk time” introduced by a rap song reminding students that discussing material and respectful communication are important, during which students write and share thoughts and favorite things learned or heard, and ask questions (we provide discussion prompts for instructors)
- Top takeaway messages
- 10- to 15-minutes of fun or interesting learning activities or games instructed with animation and timed by the video

Youth Empowerment Group (YEG) has completed production of all but one session (the last in the bullying series), and sessions are available for free use by Weld County, Colorado schools

and youth-serving programs, summer camps, and organizations including sports, faith-based, mentor, homeschool, and parent groups courtesy of grantors including The Weld Trust. *PowerUp Co-Ed* and YEG's premier *PowerUp Girls for Life* curriculums are also available for licensed use worldwide on Teachable.com: programs.youthempowermentgroup.org. YEG is beginning to incorporate impactful clips of youth validating, advising, and supporting peers from our national film project published in October 2023 as a [Time Magazine](#) cover story and short film excerpt.

POWER UP CURRICULUM SECTIONS

This mental and social health life skill program is divided into 5 sections according to the content area of knowledge and skill training provided to youth:

1. Self-esteem building without entitlement
 2. Coping with emotions and stress, problem solving, and decision making
 3. Healthy relationship foundations, conflict solving, and social media management
 4. Bullying defense and bystander actions
 5. Mindsets, learning, and habits for academic and life success and equality
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SECTION 1

Self-Esteem Building without Entitlement

PowerUp Welcome Session for Students and Leaders

This opening session builds positive culture, confidence, respectful communication, and teamwork and explains mental health and life skills and how they can make the difference between difficult and empowered lives. The fun game gives students practice following directions and having positive, affirming interactions with other youth they may not know or with counselors, teachers, mentors, parents, or youth organization staff. Outlines session flow and program benefits of feeling prepared, optimistic, worthy, empowered to be equal, and resilient under pressures youth face growing up today (the *PowerUp* acronym).

There are two versions:

- *Version 1* is for when students take YEG's online anonymous pre-participation survey of attitudes toward self-esteem, depression, anxiety, bullying, conflict management, body image, and persistence. The 23-minute survey introduction video welcomes

students and briefly explains why and how to take the survey and then provides soothing music while they complete it. The 30-minute main welcome session can be done after survey-taking for a one-hour session or during the next class period. You may obtain global comparisons of pre- and post-survey scores from us to use as support for obtaining funding for our curricula and to guide your student mental, social, and behavioral support education plans.

- *Version 2* consists of the 30-minute main welcome session video with the mixer game but without the survey.

Activity: Either the Inside-Out Circle Game for 10 or more players including instructors or the Pass the Question Game for fewer than 10.

Goal: build participant engagement, comfort, pleasant interaction, and a respectful, supportive, inclusive culture

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: self-efficacy; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, respect for others; Relationship Skills: social engagement, teamwork

Session 1: Self-Esteem and How to Build It

Explores what good, healthy self-esteem looks and feels like, where it comes from, how it is very different from harmful entitlement, and how students can start or continue building it. Explains how things such as empathy for others, self-compassion, recognizing strengths, valuing diversity, social engagement, optimism, and standing up for oneself and others feed self-esteem.

Activity A: Start your positive affirmations and share one (students will finish sheets at home)

Goal: enable self-esteem building by teaching how to create positive self-affirmations (formulate positive aspects of themselves)

Activity B: You are amazing! game

Goal: provide fun interaction while students vocalize positive personal qualities to and about each other and start to build a supportive group culture

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, self-efficacy, optimism; Social Awareness: empathy (for self and others), appreciating diversity, understand social and ethical norms for behavior (regarding entitlement)

Session 2: Things that Can Break Down Self-Esteem if We Let Them

Reveals common stressful exposures that can reduce self-esteem, which are termed self-esteem breakers. Reframes things that may seem to support positive self-views but are unlikely sources of lasting self-esteem (e.g., body image, appearance, popularity), and things that may make us feel good temporarily but then lead to harm. Encourages ways to feel more in control, be optimistic and resilient, seek help, and not allow people or events to degrade self-worth. Ends with a brief review of self-esteem builders and sources of strength from session 1.

Activity: Self-esteem builders and breakers relay race

Goal: help students remember things that build lasting self-esteem and recognize and seek support for things that can reduce it

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: recognizing strengths, self-efficacy, optimism; Self-Management: stress management; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, recognizing support systems; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: identifying problems

SECTION 2

Coping with Emotions and Stress, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Session 3: Brain Development Basics

Investigates how and why brains remodel at their ages, what brains do in general, and the functions of parts that change. Use it or lose it brain connection types and good connections to set goals for making while young. Portrays the sensitivity of the brain to permanent changes during remodeling, and how to protect their developing brains by limiting harmful exposures such as substances and maximizing good exposures such as positive social interactions.

Activity: Pin the post on the brain fact game

Goal: reinforce knowledge of brain development and play a fun game

CASEL competencies: Self-Management: impulse control, self-motivation, goal setting; Relationship Skills: teamwork. Other life skill competencies: Basic brain development knowledge, effects of harmful and helpful exposures during development.

Session 4: Feelings, Actions, and Thoughts: Check Your Thoughts!

Clarifies why all emotions are normal and OK but need to be managed to work for us. How to measure, recognize, and manage intense emotions and the triggers that lead to them. Reveals the connection sequence between events, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors:

thoughts determine feelings and reactions to an event, but thoughts can be inaccurate and unhelpful. Covers types of thinking errors that cause stress, over- or underreactions, or unhelpful reactions and how to check and change unrealistic or inaccurate thoughts for best results.

Activity A: Emotion charades

Goal: provide an opportunity to practice expressing and recognizing emotions, fun interaction

Activity B: Guess what they're thinking game

Goal: help students recognize the connection between emotions and thoughts and how changing thoughts can change our emotions and reactions for the better

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing how emotions and thoughts influence behavior; Self-Management: impulse control, stress management; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: identifying problems, analyzing situations, evaluating, reflecting. Other life skill competencies: how to examine and change inaccurate thoughts for realistic feelings and effective behaviors.

Session 5: Depression, Anxiety, and Why Self-Harm Happens

Explains sadness versus depression, feeling anxious versus having anxiety that interferes with life, the common nature of these problems, and why self-harm including dying by suicide happens sometimes. Encourages use of trusted adults and resources (given to students and parents). Gives warning signs of needing help and reinforces that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Teaches multiple ways to manage anxiety. Reassures there are always better solutions for distress than self-harm, and that help is available.

Activity A: When you're worried and you know it exercise

Goal: introduce using best, worst, and probable outcome analysis, and cognitive reframing of anxiety-producing situations

Activity B: Floor deep breathing and visualization technique training

Goal: briefly introduce and provide a practice session of relaxation techniques for anxious situations

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: identifying emotions, self-efficacy; Self-Management: stress management; Social Awareness: empathy (for self and others), recognizing support systems; Responsible Decision-Making: identifying problems, ethical responsibility

Session 6: PowerUp Your Coping Skills for Stress

Validates that feeling stressed is normal and common. Defines coping as a learned skill and explains how it feeds resilience, optimism, happiness, and success. Provides ways to manage stress such as using support people, emotional control, self-care, healthy media, planning, and choices as well as avoiding things that harm coping. Reminds youth to check their thoughts when stressed because they may be thinking things that aren't accurate, causing unnecessary stress.

Activity: The let it go to cope game

Goal: help youth remember ways to cope with stress by acting them out, and provide creative, fun physical activity

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: identifying emotions; Self-Management: impulse control, stress management (coping methods)

Session 7: How Media and Substances Affect Coping and Decision Making

Defines media and explains how media including social media can help or harm feelings, behaviors, and coping with stress. Examines how the substances alcohol, marijuana, narcotics, and vaping can harm coping, motivation, learning, decision making, and mental and physical health and explains addiction.

Activity: Tag the media or substance race

Goal: physical fun while reinforcing knowledge of the risks of media and substances as well as positive benefits of some media

CASEL competencies: Self-Management: stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: evaluating, ethical responsibility. Other life skill competencies: media, social media management; risks of substance use knowledge.

Session 8: When and How to Get Help for Yourself or Others

Specifies how students can recognize when they or other people are not coping well enough and need help, and how to get help. Reveals how to recognize warning signs that someone is dangerous to self or others and what to do about it including suicide and school violence prevention measures. Provides resources and hopeful, empowering messages.

Activity: Describe a trusted adult puzzle race

Goal: help youth be able to identify the qualities of trusted adults

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: identifying emotions, optimism; Self-Management: stress management; Social Awareness: recognizing support systems; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: analyzing situations, ethical responsibility

Session 9: PowerUp Decision Making and Problem Solving

Explores factors that make it easier or harder to handle common problems and difficult situations such as being pressured by peers, concerned about a family member, worried about school, or lonely. Describes decision making and problem solving as two crucial life skills that feed happiness, confidence, and success while reducing stress. Explains how to make decisions and determine what to do about problems by using YEG's 5-Step Decision Problem Tool which includes weighing pros and cons, considering consequences for self and others, and evaluating and learning from results.

Activity: Practice using the 5-step tool to make decisions and solve problems

Goal: provide experience working as a team to solve problems and make decisions using the 5-step tool

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: self-confidence; Relationship Skills: teamwork, resisting inappropriate social pressure; Responsible Decision-Making: identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating outcomes, reflecting, ethical responsibility

SECTION 3

Healthy Relationships, Conflict Solving, and Social Media Management

Session 10: Signs of Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Overviews the many types of relationships people have and their importance. Explains how to recognize healthy and supportive relationships (communication, balanced social engagement, perspective-taking, empathy, trust, and respect), as well as unhealthy ones (pressure to do what someone thinks is wrong or to exclude others including diverse people, manipulation, drama, violence, and threats) that don't help but can harm us. Specific elements of healthy versus unhealthy friendships are included.

Activity: Train Wreck mixer game

Goal: positive culture and relationship building, provide fun physical activity and practice talking with others to get to know them

CASEL competencies: Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others; Relationship Skills: communication, social engagement, relationship

building

Session 11: Basics of Being a Good Friend

Clarifies the qualities of people who are good friends to have and how to be a good friend such as empathy, good listening, and respecting opinions as well as personal space. Reviews healthy expectations for friendships before adulthood. Unravels unhealthy aspects of friendships such as drama, pressure, put-downs, manipulation, danger, and one-sidedness. Covers practical aspects of healthy friendships including the details of good listening as well as things to avoid that can make it harder to form or maintain friendships.

Activity: Good and bad listening game

Goal: have fun acting out and identifying good and bad listening behaviors while practicing good listening skills

CASEL competencies: Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity; Relationship Skills: communication, social engagement, relationship building

Session 12: PowerUp Your Friendship-Making Skills

Presents friendship-making as a learned life skill that includes finding people who are good friends to have in good places and at good times. Explains the Importance of participating in group activities and being open to different people who aren't into popularity or drama, and how to approach kids for initial brief positive interactions, have full conversations, do things that indicate being a good friend to have, and connect while avoiding clinginess and unrealistic expectations. Offers healthy perspectives about rejection along with reassurance that making and keeping friends gets easier with age and experience.

Activity: Chitchat? Did that!

Goal: promote confidence using social communication needed to make new friends and maintain relationships

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: self-confidence; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity; Relationship Skills: communication, social engagement, relationship building, resisting inappropriate social pressure

Session 13: PowerUp Your Conflict Solving Skills

Defines conflict between people and explains conflict-solving skills, the many benefits they provide, and how to use them. Spells out why violence never resolves conflict, fear, anger, or disappointment. Teaches how to prepare for conflict-solving discussions by setting goals and regulating emotions, and then effectively communicating with I-statements, perspective

taking, empathy, a chocolate-cookie method, and assertiveness as well as how to find compromises. Compares assertiveness to aggressiveness.

Activity: Solve THIS exercise

Goal: provide an opportunity to practice resolving or making sample conflicts better

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: self-confidence; Self-Management: impulse control; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, respect for others; Relationship Skills: communication, relationship building, teamwork, negotiating conflict constructively; Responsible Decision-Making: solving problems, evaluating. Other life skill competencies: assertiveness.

Session 14: How to Manage Social Media and Drama So They Don't Manage You

Explores the common nature of social media use today, how it is a choice with good and harmful consequences, what those consequences can be including for games, and how youth can choose to limit uses to beneficial and responsible ones and control their amount of use and with whom for best results. Explains how to recognize when messages are cyberbullying or creating drama and gives healthy ways to react including using empathy and kindness. Promotes social media safety and protective adult input.

Activity: Explore and solve social media and drama situations

Goal: instill healthy approaches to handling common social media difficulties and friendship drama while showing empathy

CASEL competencies: Self-Management: self-discipline; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others, understand social and ethical norms for behavior; Relationship Skills: communication, social engagement, relationship building; Responsible Decision-Making: analyzing situations, solving problems, ethical responsibility. Other life skill competencies: media, social media management; cyberbullying knowledge

SECTION 4

Bullying Defense and Bystander Actions

Session 15: The Who, What, Where, When, How, and Whys of Bullying

Clarifies how to recognize bullying versus teasing, types of harm caused, and methods used. Introduces the roles people play in events and investigates who tends to get bullied, who tends to engage in bullying and why, and what can happen to them when they get or don't

get help.

Activity: Is this bullying or not? game

Goal: help students recognize bullying situations versus what may be uncomfortable but not bullying as a foundation for knowing when to take action

CASEL competencies: Social Awareness: empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others, understand social and ethical norms for behavior; Responsible Decision-Making: ethical responsibility

Session 16: Stopping Bullies When They Mess with You

Explains that bullying is unfortunately common but is never okay or a victim's fault and why it's good for youth to get support and advice for handling it from trusted adults. Gives methods to try when encountering bullying face-to-face or online as well as things to avoid because they can make things worse. Specifies personal protective actions against cyberbullying.

Activity: PowerUp your bully deflector actions

Goal: provide an opportunity to learn and practice effective actions when being targeted for bullying in-person or online

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: accurate self-perception, self-efficacy; Social Awareness: recognizing support systems. Other life skill competencies: effective actions when facing a bully personally or online, cyberbullying knowledge.

Session 17: PowerUp Your Bullying Bystander Actions [Available March 2024]

Delves into being a bystander of bullying, the different effects it can have depending on actions taken, and how witnesses can greatly help youth who are bullied. Empowers effective bystander action by providing options to fit students' comfort level and how well they know a child engaging in bullying. Provides the opportunity for students to discuss and devise a plan for handling bullying or preventing its harm as a group.

Activity: Brainstorm bystander actions and how to encourage other students to follow them

Goal: provide the opportunity for students to create bystander expectations for themselves and peers to effect positive change

CASEL competencies: Social Awareness: empathy, understand social and ethical norms for behavior; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: ethical responsibility. Other life skill competencies: practical bullying bystander actions.

SECTION 5

Mindsets, Learning, and Habits for Academic and Life Success and Equality**Session 18: Mindsets for Good Lives and Learning**

Investigates ways of thinking that make people happy and successful. Explores the differences between growth and fixed mindsets, and why growth mindset thinking works much better for learning and getting good grades. Examines other mindsets—persistence, curiosity, optimism (and its difference from pessimism) and healthy expectations for academic and other success—and how they support good lives and good learning. Introduces goal setting and provides ways to deal with grade pressure.

Activity: What Can I Say Instead? exercise

Goal: help students recognize growth and fixed mindset thoughts and provide the opportunity to work as a team to change fixed statements to growth ones

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: self-efficacy, growth mindset; Self-Management: stress management, self-motivation, goal setting; Relationship Skills: teamwork. Other life skill competencies: persistence, dealing with grade pressure.

Session 19: PowerUp Your Brain for Learning and Academic Success

Unveils common learning myths in a short class game followed by exploring how brains learn as well as common learning detours to avoid. Provides top tips for learning, memory, studying, test preparation, and achieving good grades based on the science of learning.

Activity: Learning tool game

Goal: promote understanding and retention of keys to academic success using a fun, active game

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: recognizing strengths, optimism; Self-Management: self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting, organizational skills; Relationship Skills: teamwork; Responsible Decision-Making: identifying problems. Other life skill competencies: learning, memory, studying, and test preparation.

Session 20: PowerUp Your Brain with Healthy Food and Habits

Shows how brains and bodies function best with enough sleep, good nutrition, hydration, exercise, and limits on entertainment media. Spells out healthy versus unhealthy dietary fats,

healthy complex carbohydrates versus simple carbs, the value of protein, and how to combine good carbohydrates with proteins for brain-healthy snacks.

Activity: Healthy snack bingo

Goal: aid recognition of food choices that provide good enough nutrition on the go

CASEL competencies: Self-Management: stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting, organizational skills. Other life skill competencies: self-care.

Session 21: Understanding and Celebrating Diversity

Explores the differences between people in positive ways and the value of this diversity. Defines race as a social rather than biological characteristic on a developmentally appropriate level as well as ethnicity and culture as other descriptors of differences. Describes why we are equally valuable and encourages celebrating differences amid great human similarities.

Activity: Diversity Bingo

Goal: positive social interactions, help students become comfortable talking to each other and get to know each other and how they are different and similar other than race and ethnicity

CASEL competencies: Self-Awareness: accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, self-compassion; Social Awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others, understanding social and ethical norms for behavior; Responsible Decision-Making: ethical responsibility

	Roman numerals: in CASEL descriptions but not specific to a sub-competency. Letters: related non-CASEL competencies.																					
CASEL Competency	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Self-Awareness		ii,E	ii		i	E			ii										iii	ii		E
Identifying emotions					✓	✓	✓		✓													
Accurate self-perception		✓			✓												✓					✓
Recognizing strengths		✓	✓																	✓		✓
Self-confidence		✓								✓			✓	✓								✓
Self-efficacy	✓	✓	✓			✓							✓	✓			✓		✓			
Self-Management				B																	A	
Impulse control				✓	✓		✓							✓								
Stress management			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓		✓	
Self-discipline								✓							✓					✓	✓	✓
Self-motivation				✓				✓											✓	✓	✓	
Goal setting				✓															✓	✓	✓	
Organizational skills																				✓	✓	
Social Awareness		iv,C	v			v			v						iv,D	iv	v	iv,v				iv
Perspective-taking	✓		✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
Empathy		✓			✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
Appreciating diversity		✓									✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓
Respect for others	✓										✓		✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
Relationship Skills										vi			vi	vii								
Communication											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Social engagement	✓										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Relationship building											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Teamwork	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓	✓		
Responsible Decision-Making				BG				DG							DF	DF	DF	DF			D	
Identifying problems			✓		✓	✓				✓										✓		
Analyzing situations					✓				✓	✓					✓							
Solving problems										✓				✓	✓							
Evaluating					✓			✓		✓				✓								
Reflecting					✓				✓	✓												
Ethical responsibility						✓		✓	✓	✓					✓							✓

ⁱ Recognize emotion and thought links to behavior ⁱⁱ Optimism ⁱⁱⁱ Growth mindset ^{iv} Understand social and ethical norms for behavior ^v Recognize support systems
^{vi} Resist inappropriate social pressure ^{vii} Negotiate conflict constructively ^A Self-care ^B Understand brain development ^C Entitlement harms ^D Media, social media management ^E Self-compassion ^F Bullying knowledge, defense, bystander action ^G Risks of substance use © 2021 youthempowermentgroup.org