

A Leader's Guide to

DREAM

Up

NOW

THE
Teen Journal
FOR CREATIVE
Self-Discovery

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free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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About This Leader's Guide

This leader's guide is a companion to the book *Dream Up Now™: The Teen Guide for Creative Self-Discovery*. The guide is intended for counselors, youth leaders, educators, and other caring adults to support teens as they use the journal to work through fluctuating emotions, know themselves better, and create healthy and meaningful lives. You can use the guide with teens who are working individually or in a small group such as a youth group, school club, counseling group, library, camp, specialized classroom, or similar setting. The guide provides background about *Dream Up Now* and how it benefits students, offers suggestions for preparing to guide the activities, presents a template for conducting a group circle meeting, and discusses some key considerations for working with teens as they explore and share emotions.

About *Dream Up Now*

Dream Up Now: The Teen Journal for Creative Self-Discovery helps teens work together or independently to uncover, deal with, and creatively resolve difficult emotions. Addressing 36 emotions commonly experienced by teens, the *Dream Up Now* guided journal is organized in emotion sets: each “dark” and painful emotion is presented with its “light,” positive complement. With insights and inspiration from 18 diverse leaders in arts, education, and wellness, the emotion sets illustrate ways to use emotional and social insights and skills to move from dark, challenging emotions to light, uplifting ones. Activities within the pages of the journal—including creative writing, art, movement, music, and poetry—help teens transform emotions such as confusion, perfectionism, pressure, or anxiety and make space to pursue the feelings they want to have more often—like confidence, worth, hope, and passion. Bonus pages are included throughout the journal and online. These simple tools help teens recognize strengths, release intense feelings, and consider where they are on their personal journey of emotional growth.

Three Key Concepts

At the heart of *Dream Up Now* are three important things to know:

- 1. All emotions are valuable and can teach us something.** For adolescents, self-control can prove challenging, but teens can learn to choose how they react to difficult situations and strong emotions. By learning to identify feelings and completing the creative tools in the journal, a teen can begin to cultivate mastery of the inner self. Relief comes with the realization that every dark emotion has a companion, a light emotion. Both are normal and can happen anytime to anyone. Both offer opportunities to gain self-awareness and an invitation to grow.
- 2. Emotions are impermanent.** One of the most significant benefits of working with *Dream Up Now* is the revelation that emotions fluctuate and evolve, and that we each have the power to change how we feel. Teens have at their fingertips the tools and the power to explore their challenging feelings and move to emotions that are more empowering. Students can start anywhere in the journal, depending on how they feel. Each activity helps teens explore their authentic self, determine the root of their immediate feelings, and discover creative ways to understand and neutralize dark emotions. Once a teen completes a dark emotion activity, they move right into learning about its corresponding light emotion. A new, uplifting activity is included to help them begin cultivating the positive emotion quickly. This fluid nature of emotions and the limitless ways to express and more deeply understand them are a gift students can turn to again and again.

Sometimes resolving one dark emotion uncovers another one. For example, a teen who begins using the journal feeling “so mad” about a disagreement with a friend or a parent might turn to the “I Feel . . . Angry” section. Then, once they’ve closely examined and created art around feeling angry, they may realize that in truth they feel hurt or lonely. When this happens, rather than explore feeling tolerant (the lighter emotion that pairs with anger), they can move to the hurt/powerful or lonely/sociable emotion set to sort out the root feeling. The good news is that whatever difficulty they’re going through, there is a corresponding light emotion available to them.

3. Creativity is for everyone. We were all born to create, and there are countless, diverse ways to express creativity. Our daily thoughts and actions—from daydreams and deepest wishes to the clothes we wear and the music we listen to—are all revelations of ourselves as artists. Writing, drawing, and listening to music can help teens realize what is really going on inside—the truth.

Poor choices and destructive acting out take the place of *unexamined* emotions. When a teen is given an opportunity to shine a light on their feelings, to discover the words or images to articulate pain, disappointment, or fear, it relieves the feelings of their power. Expressing a challenging feeling with words, visual images, or movement helps a person take inventory of their strengths, pinpoint their talents, and create a concrete plan for directing their days toward the completion of a heartfelt goal. Teens desire this power. The *Dream Up Now* journal gives them the tools.

Every journal activity is designed to instill hope. Of course, people may seek happiness as a destination, the endgame prize after sadness or depression. Feeling happy *is* good, but it’s what a teen does with their positive feelings that brings real change. Action matters. Gaining self-awareness allows teens to grow and make positive changes. When a young person cultivates feelings of happiness, confidence, and power, it’s potently meaningful because they did it themselves. A teen’s completed journal serves as an artistic portfolio of self-understanding, transformation, and self-control—a tangible, living record of the growth they’ve accomplished.

Benefits for Teens

Education in adolescence is often peer oriented. During the teen years, young people frequently look to their friends to mirror who they are as they develop their self-image. The journal features activities to help its readers make a careful selection of friendships by sharing positive values. *Dream Up Now* can help teens who are:

- in need of help with family or school relationships
- struggling with emotional issues such as sadness, stress, or pressure
- high-achieving but unsure how to focus their goals

- not achieving their potential
- lonely, isolated, or wishing to get plugged in
- struggling with identity or the need for mastery of the self

Teens who have something to say but feel powerless might express their feelings with destructive behavior. The curated arts-based activities in *Dream Up Now* give teens the freedom to create something meaningful that represents a portion of their inner world. Having focused time using the journal can:

- calm anxious or agitated students
- improve attendance and increase school attachment
- increase social-emotional wellness
- increase emotional intelligence
- increase student organizational and time-management skills
- inspire young people to set goals and achieve them
- inspire problem-solving through creativity

All *Dream Up Now* activities aim to improve:

- coping strategies to help with fluctuating moods
- confidence and positive self-talk to increase calmness and decrease the likelihood of the fight-flight-or-freeze response
- successful management of difficult emotions in the future
- self-awareness by identifying emotions, improving impulse control, and using stress management strategies
- identification of goals and better organizational and problem-solving skills to create a viable plan to accomplish them
- constructive choices, fostering autonomy and a sense of accomplishment

Preparing for Your Role

You can support teens in using their *Dream Up Now* journal independently or together with peers in a small group. Some educators and counselors have introduced the journal to students who are distance learning, to alleviate feelings of loneliness or isolation.

For students who are struggling with emotional issues, having a tough day, or feeling anxious or agitated, the opportunity to work quietly on their own—at school or at home—on their chosen emotion set can honor their current emotional state and help them process and refocus their feelings.

While individual students can progress while working independently, creating space for an ongoing small circle of peers often has greater and more lasting impact. Some benefits of leading a small group circle include:

- built-in motivation before you even begin, because teens attend with the desire to achieve the theme's goal
- greater likelihood of positive, constructive friendships being formed, thanks to peer bonding over shared experiences
- increased positive regard for you and the group, thanks to improved mood management and/or achieving a desired goal

Choosing Emotion Sets and Activities

When establishing a peer group circle, it's helpful to select one emotion set to support a theme that benefits everyone present (for example: goal-setting, improving self-esteem, creating the life you want to live, or creating a trustworthy circle of real friends). Similarly, an emotion set can be selected to support a desired outcome (for example: improved school attendance, behavior, and school attachments by showing how to get positively plugged in to school). Just as every young person has their own path to self-expression, the many successful and creative adults who contributed to the guided journal have each harnessed the power of positive emotions to create success and resolve difficult emotions.

Here is an overview of the journal's emotion sets and activities:

I Feel . . . Tired/Fired Up contributed by **Courtney Oliver**, licensed mental health counselor and chemical dependency professional.

Activities

Self-care: Design a personalized sleep routine.

Collage: Create a vision board to illustrate your vision for your best self.

For teens who: wish to fulfill their potential; enjoy working with their hands; are disorganized; fall asleep during the day; have difficulty concentrating; feel pressured; wish to perform better in sports or other endeavors.

I Feel . . . Pressured/Hope contributed by **Antonio Manuel Chavira**, author, screenwriter, and university professor.

Activities

Memoir: Write your life story in the form of a fable.

Creative writing: Revisit your fable and answer Antonio's quiz about it; then rewrite your fable.

For teens who: feel pressured or fear failure; have racing minds and need to find clarity; have experienced trauma and need to make sense of their past; naturally enjoy creative writing.

I Feel . . . Loss/Peace contributed by **Lisa Manterfield**, grief expert and author of acclaimed Young Adult (YA) novels.

Activities

Creative writing: Write a letter to the person or thing you've lost.

Self-care: Create a goodbye ceremony to allow for closure.

For teens who: have experienced trauma and need to make sense of it; have difficulty concentrating; are self-isolating, lashing out, or carrying unresolved emotional issues.

I Feel . . . Jealous/Appreciation contributed by **Stacie Shewmake**, board-certified music therapist, singer, and classical guitarist.

Activities

Music appreciation: Create a playlist of songs to match your feelings. Draw or write about them.

Music appreciation: Create a playlist featuring positive words.

For teens who: struggle with social problems; feel possessive or inadequate; are attention-seeking; are critical of others.

I Feel . . . Confused/Confident contributed by **Kristin Tollefson**, visual artist and sculptor and director of education at an art museum.

Activities

Drawing/collage: Create a series of images representing the past, present, and desired future.

Drawing/collage: Create a Personal Icon of best qualities.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; struggle with racing thoughts or thoughts that “freeze”; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Hurt/Powerful contributed by **Tanesha “Ksyn” Cason**, dancer, actor, model, and positive body awareness instructor.

Activities

Creative writing: Use freewriting with self-image exploration prompts.

Drawing, movement, and affirmations: Sketch a powerful image of yourself; learn tips to improve posture; create personalized affirmations.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; feel powerless or victimized; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Lonely/Sociable contributed by **Korum Bischoff**, Grammy-nominated songwriter and drummer.

Activities

Music appreciation: Address feelings and seek understanding using music outside of your comfort zone.

Team building: Create a workable plan for meeting like-minded friends to pursue a shared interest or goal.

For teens who: are self-isolating; are dealing with suicide or grief; are worrying excessively; need school attachment; are lonely or not “plugged in”; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Perfectionism/Worthy contributed by **Shelley Klammer**, expressive arts educator/consultant and former teen model.

Activities

Collage: Create a self-portrait to represent the perfect social mask you show to others.

Affirmations and collage: Learn to speak kindly to yourself; create a dynamic self-portrait to represent the authentic self.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Sad/Happy contributed by **Rich Redmond**, drummer, actor, motivational speaker, and coauthor of *FUNDamentals of Drumming for Kids*.

Activities

Gratitude: Create a gratitude inventory of large and small blessings.

Team building/drawing: Draw an image of yourself sharing your talents with others; list three ways to give more of yourself.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; feel powerless; feel a sense of lack; are insecure or jealous; desire confidence; need school attachment.

I Feel . . . Cynicism/Faith contributed by **André Hardy**, former NFL running back, journalist, and author.

Activities

Self-awareness: Examine issues from the perspectives of group thought and your own values. Reflect on and explore your passion and vision for the future.

Finding a mentor: Create a workable plan toward pursuing your dream.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; feel powerless; lack direction; are insecure or jealous; desire confidence; need school attachment.

I Feel . . . Anxious/Passionate contributed by **Rayne Lacko**, creativity motivator and author of YA books *A Song for the Road* and *Dream Up Now*.

Activities

Letting go/envisioning the future: Examine your anxieties and focus on your own values, hopes, and goals for the future.

Goal-setting/affirmations: Envision the life you want to live.

For teens who: are anxious; struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Angry/Tolerant contributed by **Gem Seddon**, teen librarian, professional drummer, guitarist, and writer.

Activities

Letting go: Identify all angering issues; create a colorful depiction of a boundary word that helps you cool down; find solutions for resolving anger.

Self-awareness: Write or draw what you stand for; determine healthy responses to intolerance.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; jump to conclusions; show aggressive behavior; feel vulnerable to intolerant behavior; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Nervous/Self-Assured contributed by Sara Bourland, award-winning English and creative writing teacher, designer, and artist.

Activities

Self-awareness: Identify the root of nervousness; make an inventory of good qualities.

Decorating/organizing: Find clarity and emphasize best qualities by creating an organized and thoughtful personal space.

For teens who: struggle with disorganization; are self-isolating; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Disorganized/Organized contributed by Lesley Holmes, *Dream Up Now* community outreach advisor.

Activities

Creative writing: Write a Shuffle Slam—a poem, spoken word, or rap about your chaos.

Organization: Get organized using Get-It-Together Trees to create solutions to the chaos identified in the Shuffle Slam.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; need school attachment; are disorganized; are confused or overwhelmed; desire better time management; need help managing homework.

I Feel . . . Doubt/Valued contributed by Angie Godfrey, certified music teacher, choir director, and multi-instrumentalist.

Activities

Goal-setting: Identify self-doubts, set desired goals, make a plan to achieve goals.

Writing or drawing: Write a letter or make a drawing as a token of appreciation for a trusted person.

For teens who: are anxious; struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Controlling/Accepting contributed by MaLee Muse, graphic designer, artist, and creator of Quantum MeMoir.

Activities

Drawing/goal-setting: Create a Quantum MeMoir to discover steps to achieving your goals.

Drawing/goal-setting: Create a Quantum MeMoir to discover steps to resolving an issue.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; are critical of self or others; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Indecisive/Decisive contributed by **Melissa Dinwiddie**, motivational speaker and author of *The Creative Sandbox Way: Your Path to a Full-Color Life*.

Activities

Drawing: Starting with an improv drawing prompt, use free-drawing to let go of outcomes.

Drawing/goal-setting: Pursue your passion and desired future using prompts and timed free-drawing.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

I Feel . . . Argumentative/Chill contributed by **Ryan “Bodhi” Marcus**, physical education teacher, yogi, children’s book author, and soccer coach.

Activities

Problem-solving: Using prompts, find alternatives to aggressive or emotional explosions.

Drawing: Pursue your passion and desired future using prompts and timed free-drawing.

For teens who: struggle with self-image; place unreasonable demands on themselves; are insecure; desire to speak up for themselves; desire confidence.

Before You Begin

You will need your own copy of the *Dream Up Now* journal so you can read the introductory sections and familiarize yourself with emotion sets, activities, and bonus pages. Also be familiar with the bonus activities in the digital content, which you’ll find [here](#) under the Free Downloads tab. Select the emotion set you will use for the first group meeting and gather any additional materials you may need, such as drawing supplies.

It’s essential that teens understand that their privacy is respected and that sharing is a choice, not mandatory. With a group, be prepared to invite members to commit to confidentiality guidelines and to treating other members respectfully and kindly using the **Rule of Kindness**.

Also be ready to provide information about local resources for teens who may be feeling depressed, suicidal, or violent. Be sure to familiarize yourself with your organization or school’s guidelines for handling “red-flag” issues within the group and for referring students for needed help.



Working with a Student Independently

If you are supporting a student who is using the journal independently, be sure to check in with the student regularly. When you interact, here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

It is essential to move from dark to light. Encourage the student not to dwell too long on the dark emotion activity; gently nudge them to complete the light activity so that they improve their mood and outlook.

Remind the student that they aren't being graded. They don't need to be concerned about their grammar or punctuation. They are creating for themselves, not to achieve a grade or to impress anyone. Encourage them to use the words or images that come naturally so they express what is really true for them.

All of the student's feelings and expressions are worthy and valuable. There is no need for you to make suggestions about how to improve or complete their activities. The student simply needs to be accepted and seen.

Take care not to point out what you see as an error in judgment. Rather, you might ask, "How would you have liked this situation to turn out instead?" This invites the student to consider what they're working toward and what they might have done differently or could approach in a new way in the future.

Ask for more. This is the simplest and easiest way to remember how to give encouraging feedback. If you would like to lead a student to dig deeper or express more, ask open-ended questions:

- "I'm not sure what you mean. Is it possible to clarify?"
- "I'm curious about how you felt in the circumstances you described. Can you tell me more about your feelings?"
- "How does knowing someone who has lived with this kind of situation affect you?"
- "I find myself wondering how you felt after that happened?"

Some of the suggestions and activities in the **agenda for the first group meeting**, such as identifying ways you and the student are creative and setting micro goals, can also be helpful in supporting a student who is working independently.

Sample Agenda for Your First Group Meeting

PREPARATION:

- Each student will need their own copy of *Dream Up Now*. It can be helpful to invite everyone to read “How to Use This Creative Journal” (journal pages 6–7) in advance.
- Think about how you will share your own story about a creative way you worked through a difficult emotion as a teen. If you wish, use the **“Tell Your Own Artist Story”** form to frame your ideas.
- Print enough copies of the **“Micro Goal Record”** form so each teen can have several copies.

I. Getting Started (20 min)

Begin by explaining why you’ve created this *Dream Up Now* circle, including what teens can expect, and the desired outcome(s). (For example: greater confidence, building your life to go the way you want, managing your emotions and organizing your life.)

Give context about how everyone is creative—even you. (You may be a margin doodler; playlist curator; baker of pies; photographer; gardener; or a fan of fashion, car, or videogame design. Share from your completed “Tell Your Own Artist Story” form if you wish.)

Activity: Invite each person to identify something that makes them creative.

Activity: Micro goal-setting. This tiny but powerful act helps teens achieve a simple goal, finish an outstanding task that has been nagging at them, and practice overcoming procrastination. Examples of micro goals: put the clothes from my bedroom floor in the washing machine, cook a meal for my family, finish a homework assignment, turn off social media an hour before I go to bed, empty out my backpack.

Invite each person to write one small goal they plan to accomplish within the next 24 hours.

THE POWER OF MICRO GOALS

Peer group discussion helps teens get closer to reaching goals they’ve set for themselves, while building connections with others. Micro goal-setting can prove a powerful and inspirational tool, giving teens:

- A series of little wins that demonstrate the potential for achieving bigger goals. It feels good to see successes in writing.
- Freedom, by eliminating nagging tasks. Consider how uncomfortable it is to walk with a tiny pebble in your shoe. The 30 seconds it takes to remove it can make you feel 100 percent more comfortable! Little efforts can equal a big shift in your feelings.
- Mastery over procrastination. Achieving one small goal can prove how pleasurable and easy it is to set and accomplish goals. The size of the goal isn’t important; the completion of it is.

II. Emotion Set Introduction (10 min)

Introduce the emotion set you have selected for everyone to complete.

Invite participants to share and discuss how they have dealt with these emotions in the past. What has worked? What hasn't?

Options: Rather than establishing an emotion set, invite teens to browse their journals and select their own emotion set to explore, based on their current feelings. Or have them review the downloadable chart ["Where to Start? A Feelings Flowchart"](#) to determine where to begin. Or teens might choose an emotion set based on a preferred artistic expression (writing, acting, poetry, drawing, dancing, making music, meditation and movement, or decorating) and try to connect their interests with their feelings.

III. Creative Time (30 min)

Allow each teen to complete their emotion set independently, beginning with the dark emotion and ensuring everyone has enough time to finish the light emotion activity.

Stress the importance of always moving from dark to light. While a teen may be dealing with some darker themes, it's important not to dwell in negativity. Completing both the dark and light activities creates a foundation of greater self-esteem and resilience.

Teens also benefit from being willing to move out of their own comfort zones and to dare to try something new. If a teen isn't satisfied with what they've drawn or written, the best solution is to make more art. Equally important to remember is that if a teen is having a great day and is full of confidence and courage, it may be a safe and powerful time to use those positive emotions to face a past painful event. Approaching a dark activity with a sense of personal power can create an opportunity to make peace with a long-standing disappointment or hurt—and lead to renewed lightness.

In all cases, the activities offer opportunities both to grow and to find fun, discover untapped talents, or develop a new passion or interest.

IV. Circle Time (30 min)

In person, teens leave their desks or chairs and gather in a circle on the floor to share their completed activities. (Online, everyone pauses from their work to listen and share.) Allow 3 to 5 minutes for each teen to share.

Explain the Rule of Kindness: Everyone is welcome to say what they admire, what stands out for them, or ask a question without debating the response. Advice may be offered, but only if requested. Your group will be talking about emotions. Emotions are very personal; it's essential to convey respect and to expect respect among all participants.

Sharing should always be voluntary, and a student who does not wish to share should feel free to pass. After an initial awkward pause, once one teen musters the courage to share about

their completed activities, others will become more willing to do so too. The Rule of Kindness prompts group members to highlight peers' strengths instead of faults, helping teens feel motivated, cheered on, seen, and heard. Here are some guiding questions you can incorporate to encourage group members to support one another:

- “How can we give Kaneesha some support now?”
- “Has anyone been through a similar experience?”
- “Skyler, what can you suggest to Charlie that might help?”

When it's time to wrap up, put on some upbeat music and invite everyone to clean up. Thank each one for their time and honesty. Encourage them to complete their micro goals within the next 24 hours.

Conclude with the BIG IDEA: All emotions are valuable. Moving from darkness into light, we learn from our inner struggles and gain the tools for making the most of each day.

KEEPING DREAM UP NOW MEETINGS ON TRACK

Emphasize the importance of examining both dark and light emotions. Your workshop is not meeting to just complain about ongoing struggles. Recognize that celebrating successes or feeling confident is something that can be difficult as well. Often we can spend hours ruminating on things that went wrong or were embarrassing or disappointing, but it's equally important to spend time focusing on good things that happen. From there, we can be empowered to build our lives to go the way we want.

Encourage learning from patterns and repetition.

Emotion sets can—and should—be completed repeatedly. As you work with teens in subsequent meetings, bear in mind that as a teen's circumstances change, their feelings change. For example, if a teen is repeatedly feeling anger or loneliness, encourage them to review those completed activities and ask themselves honestly: “Is it still true? How is my experience of this emotion different today?” Using the “Patterns and Reflections” bonus pages (journal pages 167–168), teens can make note of repeated mentions of topics, people, or events to uncover key stressors and build self-awareness.

Support the needs of struggling (or eager!) participants. Here are several ideas you can offer to students who seem stuck or in need of redirection:

- Complete (or revisit) any bonus page in the *Dream Up Now* journal.
- Work on one of the [free downloadable bonus worksheets or writing prompts](#).
- Re-do a completed activity to see if their outcome or insights have changed.
- Choose another emotion set in the journal; perhaps they haven't resolved what they're feeling, or maybe another contributor's viewpoint will better resonate with them.
- Focus on the [free downloadable Leadership Tools for Your Life and Your School](#).
- Draw, doodle, or write on one of the blank pages at the back of their journal.
- Review the [“How do you feel right now?”](#) feelings flowchart to help uncover the emotion they want to explore next.



The Power of the *Dream Up Now* Circle

The most powerful method for building mutual respect and understanding is establishing a peer group circle by inviting teens to leave their tables and chairs and gather in a circle on the floor. If not everyone in your group is able to sit on the floor, have students join together in a circle of chairs. You might include a special item that can be passed around the circle; when a teen is holding the item in the circle, they are invited to talk and share. This special item might be a small figurine, stuffed animal, fidget toy, handmade craft—anything you and your peer group prefer.

The circle's purpose is to establish and nurture insights and connections that can have a profound impact on every student in the group. These impacts include:

The opportunity to be heard and understood. Circle time is so meaningful because it offers a level playing field to everyone. It can be striking to see how much change takes place when teens leave their desks and gather on the floor. This arrangement encourages a sense of community and nonverbally suggests that all dialogue is equally desired and invited because everyone is sitting in the “front row.” A circle formation also allows everyone to see one another and communicate more easily.

Taking turns, everyone is invited to share their completed journal activities. Each teen will approach an emotion set from the viewpoint of their personal experiences, stresses, hopes, and self-image. The result is a glimpse at their individual inner landscape. By sharing these unique creations, teens have an opportunity to be authentically seen and understood.

Among peers, the issues teens wrestle with are deeply empathized with by other teens, including conflicts with parents or social groups, issues of gender identity or body image, or stress around homework or time management. Even if a teen is experiencing extraordinary circumstances, adolescent emotions are relatable to other adolescents. But if these are not shared, a teen often believes they are the only one experiencing them.

Circle time on the floor creates an opportunity to grow in self-understanding and to experience ways to make an impact on others.

A setting to find the courage to share. There will inevitably be teens who remain silent, possibly for weeks. Some need to observe others first before summoning the courage to share. Those reticent observers still benefit tremendously from participating in this way, beginning with feelings of compassion for the personal stories shared by their peers. It's important to note that a teen may have adopted an unwillingness to share their authentic self because their

ideas, feelings, or artwork were criticized in the past by people whose opinion greatly mattered to them. However, once they have shared, others in the group have an opportunity to truly see the teen and give them the support, understanding, and acceptance they may have worried was an impossibility.

While it isn't mandatory to share, when a teen does gather the courage to show their completed activities, profound positive transformation is possible. Sometimes the most resistant student is sitting on what is to them their most significant, poignant art. When a teen explains the meaning behind their completed dark and light *Dream Up Now* activities, the rewards are many, including:

- emotional release
- being authentically heard
- being valued for one's true self
- receiving appreciation and admiration

A forum that fosters attachment to school and to the group. *Dream Up Now* has activities to help teens make careful selection of friendships so they can improve their own lives by sharing positive values. The structure of circle time involves the need to make oneself vulnerable, to reveal a personal truth. When a teen dares to reveal a portion of their inner world, they allow themselves to be heard, respected, and understood. Some teens don't have many opportunities to enjoy these positive feelings; when they happen among their peers at school, it significantly shifts their attitude toward more affinity for school. School attachment often depends on belonging. A positive change in one teen can influence your entire circle. Similarly, a positive shift in a small group of teens can create profound change beyond the circle, in the classroom, school, and community.

A place to build trust. When a teen doesn't believe they know many—or any—other people who are going through what they are dealing with, it can lead to feelings of isolation. Your *Dream Up Now* circle chips away the isolation by celebrating each teen's point of view, affirming their creativity, and offering a safe place to transform their feelings for success.

Providing ample time and space to allow your students to talk, and just as importantly, allow time for their peers to respond, helps establish trust and openness. Teens can empathize with the challenges of adolescence, help the others feel authentically heard and understood, and share the type of practical insights that can only come from firsthand experience.

Thank you for your commitment to leading young people to better understand their emotions and their place in the world by engaging in the arts.

Rayne Lacko

TELL YOUR OWN ARTIST STORY

Introduce yourself to your participants by sharing your own experiences as a teen when you used your natural, inherent creativity to manage your emotions. Answer the following questions to create your own artist story.

First, name the **dark emotion** you struggled with most as a teen:

What opposite, **light emotion** did you feel when you managed to resolve your darker feelings?

Now, let's take a moment to congratulate you for all you've accomplished as an adult:

What organization do you currently represent?

What are you known for? (For example, your title, key relationships, or groups to which you belong.)

Years in this capacity, professionally:

Do you have a mission or guiding philosophy you currently uphold?

continued →

Certifications, awards, or recognition:

In what ways are you creative? (Consider the things you love to do: baking/cooking, dancing, curriculum design, photography, travel, decorating, singing, exercising, gardening, journaling, video editing, gaming, fashion, playing with children/pets, being in nature, etc.)

Now, think broadly about your personal experience:

Based on your personal experience, what do you believe is the toughest part of being a teen?

What emotions did you choose to explore for this exercise, and why?

Remember a time when you struggled with your dark emotion as a teen. How did you change your mood by engaging in your favorite form of creative expression? What did you do? How did you feel, before and after?

continued →

What memorable event in your teen life gave you a deep feeling of your light emotion? What happened? What did you do with those good feelings? What did you learn about yourself in that moment of positivity?

As an adult, how do you cultivate more experiences of your light emotion?

Do you want to include any encouraging advice or a favorite quote?

Great work! Now, combine all your ideas above into one or two paragraphs to introduce yourself. Limit yourself 400 words or less; teens appreciate when adults get right to the point. The more succinct you are, the more likely teens are to engage with you.

continued →

MICRO GOAL RECORD

Name: _____

Date	One goal you are physically able to complete in the next 24 hours	Result

About the Author



Rayne Lacko is a Young Adult author and an advocate for the arts as a form of social and emotional well-being. A teen-writing mentor, she cohosts a youth creative workshop, an annual writing camp, and a teen arts showcase. Through her work, she inspires young people and their families to use creativity to stimulate positive change in their lives and communities. Rayne lives near Seattle, Washington, with her spouse and two boys (a pianist and a drummer), a noisy cat, and her canine best friend. Rayne offers transformative keynotes on fiction writing and social-emotional learning for K–12 and adults. Reach out at raynelacko@gmail.com.

Interested in becoming certified to lead arts-based, social emotional workshops incorporating the *Dream Up Now* journal? Enroll in “Six Easy Steps to Leading the Social-Emotional Workshop Teens Want to Attend” and receive a free leader kit including all the tools and bonus materials to lead with ease. Learn more at dreamupnow.com.