

LIFE SKILLS HANDBOOK FOR PEER LEADERS

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PEER MENTORING

HANDBOOK

Welcome to *Overcoming Obstacles Peer Mentoring*! You were chosen to take on this leadership role because you have demonstrated exemplary communication, decision making, and goal setting skills. And while you are helping your fellow students develop their life skills, you will no doubt be improving your own as well!

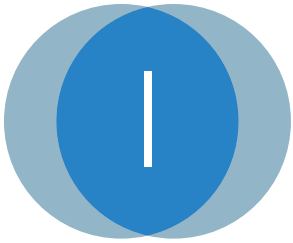
Here are some tips for presenting life skills lessons:

- Before teaching a session, read through the lesson very carefully and practice teaching it once or twice. To lead students in the activities, you need to be familiar and comfortable with the material.
- Introduce yourself at the start of the lesson and, if there is time, ask students to introduce themselves one at a time.
- Always speak slowly and clearly.
- Make eye contact with students when you are speaking. Smile and show that you are friendly.
- Always show respect for the students and the classroom teacher. Remind students to show respect for each other throughout the lesson.
- Remember that it can take time for students to feel comfortable answering personal questions or participating in activities. Be patient and encouraging.
- Don't try to rush through the activities. Leave enough time for students to understand each one thoroughly.
- Leave time for your students to ask questions, and try to answer them to the best of your ability. Never laugh at or ignore student questions.

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Getting to Know You

ACTIVITY 1: Names...

Objective: Students will introduce themselves and learn their classmates' names.

Time: 20–25 minutes

Have the class form a circle. Explain that each student will need to think of an adjective beginning with the same letter as their first name to describe themselves (*for example, Talkative Trevor*). Ask the class if anyone can define the word “adjective.” Call on students for a definition and clarify if you need to help them (*an adjective is a word or a phrase that names an attribute and it is added to a noun to describe it*). Then give students a few moments to consider their adjective.

Explain that each student in the circle will state their name and adjective, and explain why the word they chose describes one of their traits. Emphasize that the explanation should be one or two short statements (*for example, Talkative Trevor is very sociable and can easily hold a conversation with new people*).

Before beginning the introductions, let the students know that the challenge of the activity is that they must repeat the names of all the students that have come before them in the exact order of the circle. You should choose whether the game will go clockwise or counterclockwise around the circle. They should then begin the game by stating their own adjective / name, briefly explaining why the adjective describes them, then having the student next to them begin the game by saying their adjective / name, their brief explanation, and repeating *your* name and adjective.

Debrief: Ask the students what skills are necessary for performing this activity (*for example, listening*). And why is it important to be able to remember peoples' names? Also, how can knowing a way someone describes themselves or a simple fact about them help you get to know them better?

LESSON 1: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

ACTIVITY 2: True or False?

Objective: Students will identify facts about themselves and learn more about their classmates.

Time: 40–45 minutes

Ask students to work quietly to develop three statements about themselves (*for example, “I was the leading scorer in basketball last year,” “I moved here when I was nine,” “I love watching movies”*). Two of the statements should be true, and the third statement should be false/incorrect/invented. You should model this for the students by developing your own statements and presenting them to the class being certain not to tell students which one is false until after the students have created their own statements.

Once everyone has thought of their three statements, explain that everyone will come to the front of the classroom to share them. The rest of the class will then have to guess which statement is *not* true. Encourage students to make it as difficult as possible for their classmates to guess the false statement.

Ask for a volunteer to start the activity by coming to the front of the class and sharing their three statements. Then, repeat the activity with all of the other students in the class.

Debrief: As students share their statements and guess about their classmates’ information, encourage as much discussion and sharing as possible. In other words, if a student has an interesting fact that turns out to be true, have him or her explain the story behind it. As students take guesses, ask them to explain the reasons behind their attempts (*for example, “Why did you think Kevin was not a good basketball player?”*). Also, lead a discussion on how this activity helps us understand how our assumptions about other people can change when we learn more about them.

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Confidence Building

ACTIVITY 1: Tall Towers

Objective: Students will work together to complete a task.

Materials Needed: 15 sheets of newspaper or blank paper for each group of 5 students, 3 feet of masking tape for each group, a clock or other way of keeping time.

Time: 30–35 minutes

Begin the activity by telling students that they are going to participate in a contest to see who can build the tallest tower. Explain that everyone will use the same materials and that everyone will have the same amount of time to work.

Ask the students to help you clear space for the contest by moving all of the chairs and desks to the front, back, and sides of the room. Stand back and allow the students to do the work. Ask them not to block the door of the classroom or to pile chairs or desks dangerously high.

Ask students if they are ready to begin the contest (*they should say, “No!” because you haven’t given them the rules*). Tell them to ask you questions about the contest to provide them with the following information:

- Students will work in teams of five to build towers.
- Each group will be given fifteen sheets of paper and some masking tape. These are the only materials that can be used.
- Towers must be freestanding—they cannot be taped to desks, the floor, or any other objects. (*You should be able to move a finished tower and set it up somewhere else.*)
- Teams will have ten minutes to build their towers.
- The tallest structure that can stand on its own will win.
- The winning group does not have to participate in cleanup.

Now that students are familiar with the rules, it’s time to begin the contest!

- Divide the class into groups of five and give each fifteen sheets of paper and a strip of masking tape. Make sure all groups get an equal amount of tape.
- Suggest that students discuss options and then try them out in order to consider pros and cons before using the tape.

LESSON 2: CONFIDENCE BUILDING

- Start the contest and observe the students as they work. Keep students aware of how much time is remaining (*for example, once five minutes has passed, when they have one minute remaining*). After ten minutes have passed, announce that time is up.
- Have the class decide on the winning tower or towers, then instruct the students to put the room back in order. Observe their ability to work with one another.

Debrief: Ask students to describe the winning strategies. Through questions and comments, guide students to describe what worked and what didn't work. If necessary, help students realize that the towers with the strongest bases were those that were the most successful. Discuss what skills they relied on to participate in this contest and build the towers. Through discussion, help the students realize that in addition to decision making and problem solving skills, they also used goal setting, planning, and time management skills, as well as their abilities to follow instructions and work together as a team.

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LESSON 2: CONFIDENCE BUILDING

ACTIVITY 2: Bingo!

Objective: Students will recognize their individual strengths by playing a game involving group interaction.

Materials Needed: *Enough copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet for you and each student in the class (you will find copies in the back of this handbook).*

Time: 15–20 minutes

Distribute copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet and allow time for students to review it. Then, give the following directions:

- Move around the room and ask your classmates to sign their names in a square that describes one of their strengths. For example, if a square reads “Knows how to swim,” find a classmate who knows how to swim and ask him or her to sign that square.
- Your goal is to get “bingo.” That means that you must fill five squares in a row with names. Completed rows may read across, down, or diagonally.
- A person’s name cannot be in any winning row more than once.
- When you have filled a row with signatures, call out, “Bingo!”
- If you sign your name to something, you may be asked to prove it.
- You have five minutes to play.

Tell the students to begin, allowing them to move freely around the room. After five minutes, quickly poll the class to see how many students are just one square away from bingo. Decide whether to allow an additional minute or two before ending the game.

Ask the students if they found it difficult to get signatures for the various squares. As volunteers respond, encourage them to support their responses with details and examples. Allow students to challenge one another. For example, if a student has signed his or her name to the square that reads “Speaks more than one language,” the student may be asked to say a few words in another language. This often allows students a chance to show off their strengths, and further encourages the class to build trust and positive relationships.

Debrief: Summarize the activity by observing that the activity sheet has twenty-four different squares, each listing a different skill or strength. Point out that everyone has strengths, which is why each student was able to sign his or her name to at least one square. *(In the event a student claims that he or she felt unable to sign any square on the sheet, remind the class that it’s impossible to measure all of the skills and strengths that people have—the sheet listed only twenty-four, which is a small number. If pressed, tell the student that he or she kept the commitment to be in class today and that keeping commitments is a very valuable strength.)*



Communication

ACTIVITY 1: Listen Carefully

Objective: Students will understand the importance of active listening.

Time: 25–30 minutes

Divide the class into two equal groups and have each select a representative to come to the front of the room. Explain to the class that you will whisper a message to these students. They will then go back to their groups and whisper that message to another student. That student will whisper it to another student, and so on until everyone in the group has heard the message. Remind students to repeat the message exactly the way they heard it.

Give students the following message, or a similar example: *“I had some friends over Friday night for dinner. Three of us wanted to order pizza and stay in, but the other four people wanted to go to a restaurant. To make it worse, the people who wanted to go out couldn’t agree with each other, because some wanted McDonald’s and others did not.”*

Have students return to their groups and pass the message on. Remind them to whisper or quietly tell one other student, who should then pass it on.

When the students have finished, ask the last person in each group to repeat the message to the class. After the students have shared, ask the class how many people were at the get-together. How many people wanted to order pizza? After some debate, read the message again to the class and repeat the question. Invite students to make observations on how successfully the message was transmitted. Encourage them to explain if it was difficult to get the details of the messages correct and, if so, why?

Debrief: Make the observation that there is more to good listening than just hearing, and ask students to comment. Invite students to share ways in which they could have better remembered the message whispered to them. Have students share the parts of the message that were the most difficult to remember. Ask the students why it is important to listen carefully to details.

LESSON 3: COMMUNICATION

ACTIVITY 2: What Am I Trying to Tell You?

Objective: Students will experience and understand the power of nonverbal cues.

Materials Needed: 10 index cards with 1 of the following emotions written on each card: *Angry, Bored, Confused, Excited, Frightened, Mischievous, Nervous, Sad, Sleepy, Surprised.*

Time: 20–25 minutes

Ask for ten volunteers. Give each volunteer an index card with an emotion written on it. Help students understand the meaning of their word if they need help. Have volunteers then communicate to the class the emotion assigned using only nonverbal cues. Briefly discuss with the students how to use non-verbal cues such as their facial expression, body language, and gestures to communicate the emotion on their card.

You should demonstrate the activity by thinking of an emotion not used on one of the cards, and use non-verbal cues while students try to determine what emotion you are portraying. For example, you can act out “happy” by smiling and walking with an exaggerated swing in your step, or you can act out “impatient” by stamping your foot, looking around the room, and checking the time.

Have each of the volunteers come to the front of the room to “act out” the emotion on their card. Allow the other students to call out their guesses. When a student guesses the correct emotion, the volunteer can return to her or his seat, and the next may come up to the front of the room.

When all of the volunteers have completed their demonstration, begin a discussion with students about how the volunteers communicated the emotions through gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Ask the students to identify which gestures, facial expressions, and body language worked best to portray the different emotions (*for example, “Slouching and looking at the ground when you walk makes you look sad”*).

Debrief: Ask the students how recognizing the messages of non-verbal communication might be helpful. Direct the students to the understanding that knowledge of non-verbal communication can help them recognize what an individual is feeling and thinking. Ask the students why knowing how to use effective non-verbal communication can be a valuable tool. Direct the students’ understanding to the fact that effective non-verbal communication can strengthen the message they wish to communicate.



Decision Making

ACTIVITY 1: Thinking about Consequences

Objective: Students will experience and understand that some decisions are more difficult than others.

Materials Needed: *A small ball or object that can be thrown and caught easily in the classroom.*

Time: 20–25 minutes

Start by talking about the decisions everyone may have already made today (*for example, what to wear, what to eat, when to wake up, how to get to school, whom to text*). These are all decisions, even if they seem very minor. What kind of thought do people give to these types of decisions? Are they hard to make? Why or why not?

What about bigger and more important decisions students may have made lately? These could include whether to audition for the school play, how to end a fight with a friend, or whether or not to disobey a parent. How much thought do students give to these types of decisions? Are they hard to make? Why or why not? Are they harder to make than the minor decisions you make every day? Why or why not?

Explain to students that the class is going to play a game. You will toss the ball to a student while asking him or her a question. He or she must catch the ball and immediately throw it back to you while simultaneously answering your question. Students should not stop to think about their answers but just respond quickly while tossing the ball back to you.

Ask students to remember how they feel making decisions quickly and under pressure.

Begin with simple questions and move to more challenging ones as the game goes on. If students hesitate in tossing the ball back to you, urge them to return it quickly with their answers. Keep the game moving, even if students don't completely answer the questions. Questions could include any or all of these:

- On which wrist would you wear a bracelet?
- What color socks did you put on today?
- Name a celebrity you find annoying.
- What will you do after school today?
- If you could travel anywhere in world, where would you go?

LESSON 4: DECISION MAKING

- If you found money by your locker, would you keep it and not tell anyone, or try to find out who dropped it?
- What would you do if you went to class and realized you forgot you had a test that day?

Debrief: To prompt a discussion about varying degrees of difficulty in making decisions, ask students if some questions seemed harder to answer than others. Have them identify which questions seemed easy, which seemed more difficult, and which seemed the most difficult. Ask them to explain why.

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LESSON 4: DECISION MAKING

ACTIVITY 2: Valuable Squares

Objective: Students will identify people, possessions, activities, and future plans they value.

Materials Needed: *16 squares of paper for each student, and a pen or pencil for each student.*

Time: 30–35 minutes

Give each student 16 squares and explain that on each square they should identify one of the following:

- Three of their favorite activities/things to do
- Five people whom they admire
- Three dreams they have for the future or things they want to accomplish
- Three of their favorite possessions
- Two things they would like to own someday

Each person or thing should be written on a separate square. Tell the students to keep the squares in separate stacks on their desks and that they should have four stacks: activities, people, dreams, and possessions.

Explain to the students that you are going to read a story to them. After you complete each part of the story, they will be asked to make a decision on which of their cards to discard. They will have only ten to fifteen seconds to make the decision, and all decisions are final. Discarded squares must be crumpled or torn up.

Read the following story aloud to the students:

“WHILE AT THE ZOO”

1. While at the zoo, you are bitten by a rare species of monkey. You are starting to feel very sick, and your doctor diagnoses you with a very serious illness. The doctor is unsure of how to cure you and says that until she decides how to treat you, you will have to give up one of the things you like to do.
2. Because of the disease, you are hospitalized for a short time. Your career suffers, and it becomes clear that you will not be able to accomplish everything you wanted to. You lose two of the goals you set for yourself.
3. Because of your time off from work, you are short of cash and have to sell one of your possessions.
4. You are hospitalized again. Your doctor requires you to give up another activity. The medical bills keep coming, and you have to give up another possession.

LESSON 4: DECISION MAKING

5. You are exhausted from the illness and trying to work. You lose another goal and must also give up an activity. Also, two important people disappear from your life because you no longer seem able to maintain relationships.
6. You are permanently hospitalized. You are only allowed one visitor and can take only one possession to the hospital with you. You lose contact with two more important people and must sell one more item.
7. Your doctor finds a hospital far from home that specializes in rare monkey bites. Once there, you will have to live near the hospital for the rest of your life in case you ever suffer from symptoms again. Because you have to be at the hospital immediately, you can only take one person or possession. Which one will it be?
8. You are starting your life over again with only this person or possession.

Now, ask students to think about and evaluate the decisions they made in “WHILE AT THE ZOO” by asking:

- How did you feel about the decisions you made? Why?
- Which were the hardest decisions for you to make?
- Would it have been easier if someone else had made the decisions for you? Why or why not?
- Was anyone surprised by the squares he or she had left at the end? Do these squares reflect what’s really important to you?
- If you were to play this game again, would you choose to have different squares at the end? Raise your hand if you would.
- If you were to play this game again, would you change some of the things you wrote on your squares to begin with? Raise your hand if you would.

Debrief: End the activity by explaining that we all value different people and things for different reasons; each person lives by different personal rules. Tell students that while it’s important to respect the values and rules of others, it’s difficult to be the person you want to be and to respect yourself unless you live according to your values and rules.

5

Goal Setting

ACTIVITY 1: Stepping Stone Goals

Objective: Students will identify goals as short term, medium range, and long term.

Materials Needed: *A board and markers or chalk, or chart paper and markers.*

Time: 20–25 minutes

Invite students to consider an example of a long-term goal. On the board, draw five large boxes in a row, connected with arrows from left to right (*see the activity sheet for a clear example of how to create the drawing*). In the last box on the right, write, “Buy a new phone.”

Ask students to evaluate this goal and decide whether it is a valid one. Encourage students to add a deadline or time frame (*for example, by the end of summer next year*). Then, above the box, label it as a long-term goal.

Invite the class to brainstorm a plan of action for achieving this goal. Guide students to formulate a series of steps and record them in the boxes you have drawn on the board. Encourage them to erase and rearrange the order of steps as the plan evolves. If needed, add another box or two. However, through questions and comments, help students to keep the plan brief and practical. The final plan may resemble the following:

- Discuss with my parents. (*Bottom box*)
- Shop for styles and prices. (*Second box*)
- Choose the phone I want. (*Third box*)
- Earn and save the money. (*Fourth box*)
- Buy a new phone. (*Top box*)

Point out that students have just created an action plan by setting stepping stone goals. Explain that there are three different kinds of stepping stone goals:

- Short-term goals, which are steps that you want to take in a short time frame (*for example, today, tomorrow, or within the next week*).
- Medium-range goals, which are steps that will take a little more time (*for example, a week, a month, or more*).
- Long-term goals, which are what you hope to accomplish in the future (*for example, buying a new phone, getting into college, establishing your own business*).

LESSON 5: GOAL SETTING

Debrief: Ask students to identify which steps in the plan are short-term goals, and label those boxes. Then, do the same for medium-range goals. Tell students that whenever they feel like giving up on a long-term goal, they should make a plan with stepping stone goals. The plan will give them direction. It will help them find a way to do whatever they wish to do. Remind students that if they need information in order to create a plan, they can do research on the Internet.

NOTES

LESSON 5: GOAL SETTING

ACTIVITY 2: On Your Way

Objective: Students will set stepping-stone goals for themselves in order to begin working on a long-term goal.

Materials Needed: 2 copies of the “On Your Way” activity sheet for each student. You will find the activity sheet at the back of this book.

Time: 20–25 minutes

Distribute one copy of the “On Your Way” activity sheet to each student while reminding them that this is the same goal setting tool they used in the prior activity. Give the students time to read over the directions. Then, answer any questions they may have. Tell the students that they may not need to use all six boxes in the chart; they should use as many as their goal requires.

To prompt students’ thinking about their goals, suggest that they consider things they would like to accomplish in the future at home, at school, in sports, over the summer, in high school, or when they are adults.

If time permits, invite students to share their goals and the steps they set for achieving them. Then, distribute the remaining copies of the “On Your Way” activity sheet, and suggest that students keep these copies to fill out the next time they want to establish a new goal.

Debrief: Ask students to explain the concept of stepping stone goals. Encourage the students to discuss the following key points that were taught in this lesson: Every long-term goal, even one that seems impossible at first, is made up of smaller goals that can be achieved one at a time. And creating stepping stone plans is necessary to achieve long-term goals and dreams.

NOTES



Problem Solving

ACTIVITY 1: Scale of Difficulty

Objective: Students will recognize that they already possess the ability to solve many problems.

Materials Needed: *A small ball or object that can be thrown and caught easily in the classroom.*

Time: 20–25 minutes

Tell students that they are going to play a game. Explain that you will state a problem and then toss a ball to a student. That student must catch the ball and toss it back while giving a solution.

Begin the game. State problems that increase in difficulty, such as the following:

- What does twelve plus four equal?
- Your shoe is untied.
- How do you avoid a puddle in your path?
- Your locker is jammed.
- You need to wake up in the morning to get to school on time, but you don't have an alarm.
- You're supposed to go home after school to babysit today, but you have detention.

If students hesitate in tossing the ball back to you, urge them to return it quickly and answer with the first thing that comes to mind.

Debrief: When all students have had a chance to solve a problem, ask them if they thought that some of the problems were easier to solve than others. Ask students to identify which problems were more difficult and to explain why. Explain to students that the last few problems were more difficult because they had to think about a number of different ways to solve the problems before choosing a solution.

LESSON 6: PROBLEM SOLVING

ACTIVITY 2: Solutions, Please

Objective: Students will identify a problem and propose solutions.

Time: 25–30 minutes

Divide the class into four groups and ask each group to go to a different corner of the room. Quietly give the following instructions, without letting the other groups hear you:

- Group 1: Your task is to move all of the chairs to the left side of the room.
- Group 2: Your task is to move all of the chairs to the right side of the room.
- Group 3: Your task is to put all of the chairs in straight lines in the middle of the room.
- Group 4: Your task is to put all of the chairs in a circle in the middle of the room.

Allow students to work against each other for a few minutes. When the frustration level becomes high, end the activity. Ask the students to help you put the room back in order.

Next, help students identify the problem they faced in the activity by asking questions such as the following:

- Why couldn't your group complete this task?
- What were the other groups trying to do?

Call on volunteers to give their ideas. Then, have students from each group explain their assigned tasks. Help students come to the conclusion that the problem arose because each group was trying to accomplish a different task at the same time.

Ask students how they might solve this problem and still complete all four of the assigned tasks (*for example, the groups must take turns completing their tasks*). Through questions and discussion, guide students to conclude that it is necessary to do the following in order to solve the problem:

- Identify the problem.
- Talk to others and get information about what they are doing and why.
- Decide on a solution.
- Work together in order to complete one task at a time.

Emphasize that students should never feel that they must solve problems by themselves. Point out that asking for assistance with problems is a great way to solve them successfully.

Debrief: Ask students to explain why it is important to identify a problem before acting on a solution. Encourage students to discuss the following key points that were taught in this lesson: 1) Always identify problems before acting on solutions and 2) once the problem has been identified, decide if you can solve it yourself or if you need assistance.



Teamwork

ACTIVITY 1: Shhh...It Goes over Here

Objective: Students will evaluate the importance of nonverbal cues to communication.

Materials Needed: 1 “Square Puzzle Set” for each group of students that is already cut into pieces before class begins. You will find the “Square Puzzle Set” activity sheet at the back of this book.

Time: 20–25 minutes

Organize students into groups of three, four, or five (*whichever will best divide the class into equal groups*). Give each group one set of puzzle pieces. Explain that:

- Each team has seven minutes to put the puzzle together without speaking to each other.
- Any group that is talking or writing notes will be disqualified.
- When teams complete the puzzle, they should cover their solution and raise their hands; you will then go over to the group and check their solution.
- Suggest that as the students work at solving the puzzle, they should pay attention to the interaction within the group.

When seven minutes are up and you have checked the groups to see their work, ask each team to list what they observed as they were solving the puzzle and record their responses where students can see them. Encourage students to think about these things:

- How the team members communicated
- The messages the team members gave and received during this activity, both positive and negative
- The ways the messages were conveyed (*student responses should include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and body language*)

Ask the students what they were feeling as they first tried to solve the puzzle. Then ask if their feelings changed during the activity and if the nonverbal communication became easier as time passed.

Debrief: Tell students that the puzzle obviously would have been easier to solve if they could have talked, but it was important for them to experience non-verbal communication in a team environment. Have teams summarize their experience and then explain to the class any insights that occurred to them during the game or discussion. Be sure that each group contributes at least one idea to the class conversation.

LESSON 7: TEAMWORK

ACTIVITY 2: Hand It Over

Objective: Students will demonstrate behaviors that promote teamwork and cooperation.

Materials Needed: 2 pennies

Time: 20–25 minutes

Divide the class into two groups of equal size. Have each group form lines facing each other, with members of each team standing next to each other.

Explain that the groups will compete to pass a penny from one end of the line to the other. One student at the end of each line will have a penny placed on the back of one hand. Upon a signal, the person will then transfer the penny to their other hand by placing the back of their other hand over the penny and then flipping both hands at once. When the penny is on the back of their other hand, it must be passed to the next player using the same method. If a penny is dropped, it must be taken back to the beginning, and the team must start over.

Before beginning the race, you should model the passing technique to make sure the process is clear. Then, place a penny on the back of the hands of two students at the end of the team lines. When both groups are ready, signal for the race to start. The first group who completes the penny pass is the winner.

Debrief: Ask the students what factors helped their group perform the task. What factors made the race difficult? How does this challenge relate to teamwork in general?

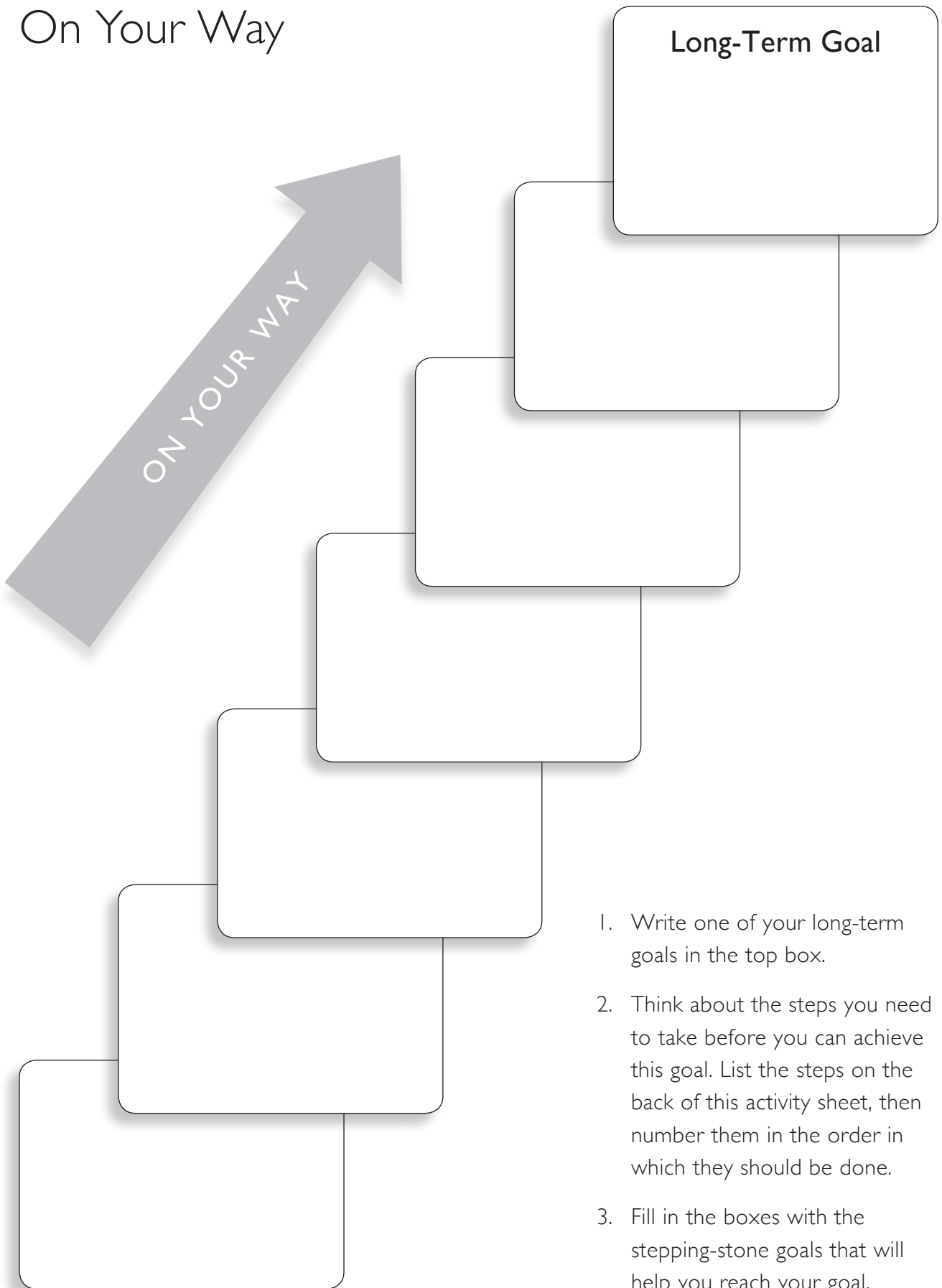
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Activity Sheets

Bingo

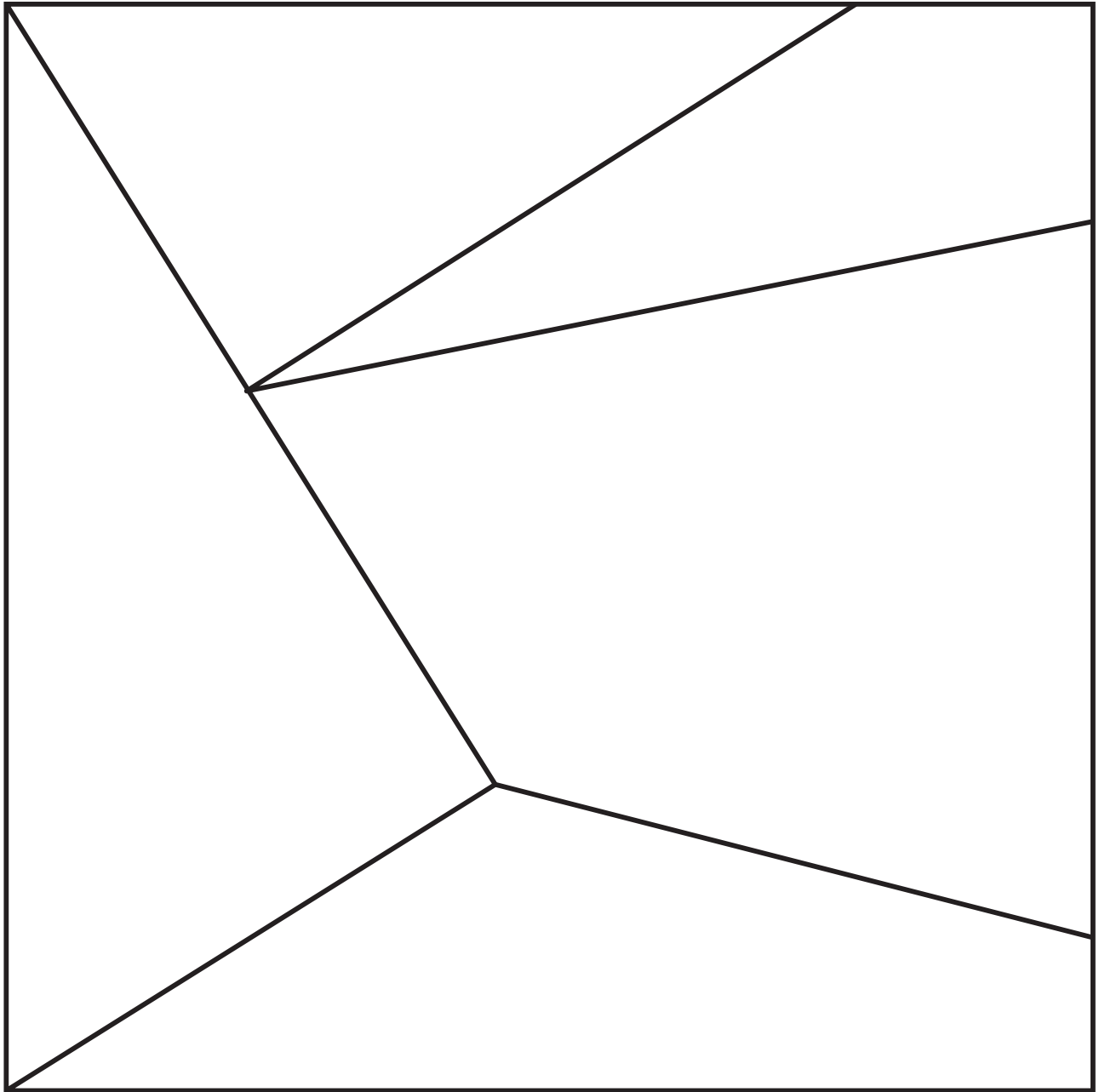
Is good at math	Always works hard	Likes to join in activities	Can organize anything	Can use a computer
Speaks more than one language	Tells great stories and jokes	Is a good speller	Plays a team sport	Likes to read
Knows how to swim	Can play a musical instrument		Has a good memory	Is good at building or making things
Likes to make charts and graphs	Likes to figure out how things work	Likes to write	Likes to be in plays	Likes to help others
Is a good cook	Keeps a personal diary or journal	Likes to design posters and murals	Is a good artist	Is a great dancer

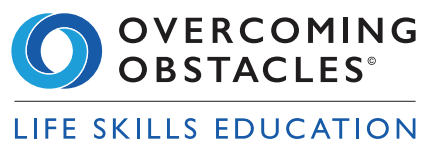
On Your Way



1. Write one of your long-term goals in the top box.
2. Think about the steps you need to take before you can achieve this goal. List the steps on the back of this activity sheet, then number them in the order in which they should be done.
3. Fill in the boxes with the stepping-stone goals that will help you reach your goal.

Square Puzzle Set





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