

INSTRUMENT 1: UNDERSTANDING YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-REGULATION

NOTE: *This protocol is intended as a guide, not a script. The protocol has been developed to apply to youth participating in HMRE programs. Some of the scenarios may be altered slightly in order to increase their relevance for the youth in the group.*

A. Facilitator and assistant moderator introductions (3 minutes)

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are from Mathematica, an independent research firm. We identified you through your participation in *[HMRE program]*. My name is *[name]* and my colleague is *[name]*.

B. Explanation of project and purpose of group discussion (5 minutes)

During our discussion today, we are interested in hearing about what's important to you, how you work to make the things you care about happen, and what happens when something gets in the way. Ultimately, our goal is to learn about the words you use to describe how you respond to adversity, and how you stay on track with your goals. We plan to use information from this conversation and others we are having to help educators learn how to better support youth to develop skills to achieve their goals.

We will use the information you share to write a summary of what we have learned, but we will not use any of your names, so please feel free to talk openly about your opinions. We would like to hear from everyone in the group and we plan to have time for both individual reflection and group discussion. We will start with one activity where everyone will be given time to individually think and then provide an answer. During this and other activities, we'd like for you to listen to each other's ideas and provide your thoughts on what others are saying. We look forward to a great discussion!

All information will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. We are required by law to report on any situations where someone may be in imminent danger of hurting themselves or someone else.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this information collection is 0970-0351 and the expiration date is 07/31/2022.

C. Ground rules for discussion (7 minutes)

Before we start our discussion, we want to provide guidance about how our time together will go:

- Participation is voluntary and you can stop participating at any time.

- Some of the questions may touch on personal experiences, and you do not have to share those if you don't feel comfortable doing so.
- We have prepared a set of scenarios to guide our conversation today. I'll read the scenarios and ask you to respond to a set of questions about them, and share your thoughts with the group. If you hear something someone else says that sparks your thinking (like you agree, disagree, or want to build upon something that you hear), please speak up at any time. You can either just jump in or signal to us that you have something to say. We would like your help making sure everyone in the group has a chance to talk, so please do your best to wait your turn to speak and not to talk over each other. We want this to be a free-flowing conversation and we want to hear your thoughts on each other's ideas. You can also decline to answer any question you don't feel comfortable answering.
- The discussion will last until [End time, 90 minutes from scheduled focus group start]. There will be no formal breaks. If needed, please feel free to stretch or go to the bathroom.
- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will ask. We are interested in learning from each of you. We very much appreciate your input and hope that everyone will contribute.
- To keep us on schedule, I may change the subject or move ahead from time to time.
- We will be taking notes and audiotaping the session. The notes are to help check our notes and make sure that we accurately capture what you share with us. We're not going to record your names, so anything you choose to share with us today won't be connected to you personally. The write-up we'll put together after today will be about what we learned overall from all of you; it won't focus on any of your individual experiences. No one other than the SARHM research team—not your teacher, program educator, or parent—will have access to the audiotape or the notes from today. Does anyone object to us audiotaping the discussion?
- Each person here today will receive \$25 to show our appreciation for your feedback.

D. Questions (75 minutes)

Group example (10 minutes)

Give everyone a chance to introduce themselves. Ask just for first names only and start the recording. Remind everyone to use only first names when addressing one another.

Let's get started. We all have things that are important to us. It could be something like having really strong friendships, making your family proud, having fun, becoming an independent adult, or achieving personal goals like being in the starting lineup on a sports team or getting a summer job. Sometimes it's not always easy to do those things, and sometimes things get in the way, like if you really want to go to college but don't know how your family can afford it. Sometimes, the things you care about might conflict with each other—like, if you have an important paper due for a class you want to do well in, but on the day you need to finish it up, your boss puts you on the schedule at work, and you're also trying to save money for a big purchase. Sometimes, you

might be in a situation where you have one goal, and another person has a different goal—like, if you’re hanging out with someone you just want to date casually, but they want to take it to the next level. The point is, interactions we have with people every day, whether it’s in the hall at school, at work, in our family, or on the street—affect us, and affect our future. Sometimes the interactions make it easier to achieve our goals and stay on track with our values, sometimes they make it harder.

When situations come up where your values are in conflict with each other, or with someone else’s, it can be stressful. When you feel stressed, you might experience an immediate flood of thoughts, feelings, and impulses and then you react. We are interested in hearing you describe those thoughts, feelings, and impulses.

And, what we want to learn from our conversation today is how you respond—both in the immediate moment, when something gets in the way of something you care about, and also later on, how you figure out how to address the situation. We are asking you to share the words you use to talk about your response and anything you do to manage or control the thoughts, feelings, or impulses you might have.

Let’s walk through a scenario together to start.

For high-school aged youth in school-based programs:

Assume that you have one more class that you have to pass to get the credits to graduate high school. You really care about passing the class. If you graduate, you’ll get to be the first person in your family to walk across the stage to get your diploma, and you’ll be going to college in the fall. At the beginning of the school year, you weren’t sure if you’d ever even get to this point, but the teacher noticed you struggling early on and has really helped you and believed in you. She even helped you with your college application. You don’t just want to do well for yourself and for your family, but you want to make her feel like she was right to believe in you.

The problem is that the final project for the class is due next week, and you still haven’t picked a topic. It’s your free period, and the rest of your friends who already have all the credits they need to graduate are goofing off and talking about their weekend plans. In some ways, your friends are like your family and you don’t want to miss out on the good times with them. One of them asks you if you want to hang out this weekend.

For older youth in community-based programs:

Let’s say that you have a cousin who you used to be really close to, and a roommate that you have a good relationship with, but they don’t know each other. Even though you and your cousin drifted apart, he’s family, and family sticks together—especially when one of you needs help. A couple of days ago, your cousin asked if he could crash with you and your roommate for a few days. Of course, you said yes to your cousin. You had just moved into your first apartment with a friend, and you were proud of the work you had both put in to pay the rent, be independent, and

be in the position to support family. Being able to afford this apartment and be self-sufficient is really important to you.

This morning, you had to go to work before he was up, so you left him sleeping on the couch. Later that afternoon, you got a text from your friend saying that your cousin was gone and that he couldn't find the \$40 he had stashed in his nightstand..

Okay – freeze time, right at the moment where the story ends, and think about this:

- **What sensations do you notice in your body in that moment?** *Pause for group input.* Maybe you tighten up, or your heart starts racing, or maybe you just feel like you got the wind knocked out of you.
- **What thoughts are coming through your head?** *Pause for group input.* *For high-school aged youth:* Maybe you're thinking "I hate this stupid project," or "What's the difference? I'm going to fail anyways, I should just go to summer school." *For older youth:* Maybe your first thought is "how dare you accuse my cousin of stealing!" or, "don't threaten me—It's my place too!" Maybe you're thinking "If I cut out of work now, I can find him and get the money back."
- **Is there a word that would describe your feeling in that moment?** *Pause for group input.* *For high school aged youth:* Maybe it's worthlessness or resignation or frustration, or some mix of the two. *For older youth:* Maybe it's anger, or disappointment, confusion, or maybe it's all of those.

Now – unfreeze time. What happens next is your response to those feelings. How do you want to respond in the moment?

Now, imagine some time passes, and you have a chance for the all of those thoughts, feelings, and emotions to stop washing over you (like 30 minutes). Think about how you respond a little later. Think to yourself: does your response change over time? What could you do to get back on track with your goal, or prioritize what's really important to you? Describe how you handle things.

This is the kind of process we want to think through with you. In situations like this, some responses make the situation better, some make the situation worse. Everyone responds differently, and we're trying to learn about all the different ways people deal with these kind of tough situations.

Additional scenarios (50 minutes)

We are going to go through a few scenarios. I want to pick situations that you can relate to.

1. First, I would like to hear from the group: what kinds of problems have you had to deal with recently? It could be at home, work, school, or with friends.? *Repeat back and write down the different things that focus group participants say.*

- 1.1. What's important to you about these relationships?

- 1.2. Some of these are things that are hard in the moment and how you deal with them also affects your future. Which of these challenges are the hardest to deal with? *Ask the group to pick their top three.*

2. Now, let's go through some scenarios that have to do with the things you just told me are important. I'll read a scenario out loud to everyone. You'll have a few minutes to write down your thoughts on a note sheet (*see final page*). Then we'll share. While we share, [Assistant moderator] is going to write some words and phrases that we hear you using up on the board/paper.

The moderator reads a scenario. The moderator should choose scenarios describing situations, values, and goals similar to how participants replied to question 1. Give youth 2-3 minutes to brainstorm their responses on their worksheets. The moderator begins the group discussion as youth start to wrap up their writing.

While Moderator facilitates the discussion, the Assistant Moderator writes key phrases and words that youth use to talk about the processes they describe their answers up on a piece of chart paper or a white board that youth can see. Use check marks or hashes when words are used repeatedly.

Repeat questions 2.1 – 2.10 for each scenario. Aim to cover 3-4 scenarios.

- 2.1. In the moment, what sensations do you notice in your body? (*only give examples if they don't come up with responses. Examples could be sweaty palms, pounding heart, and clenched teeth*)

- 2.2. What thoughts are coming through your head?

- 2.3. Is there a word that would describe your feelings in that moment?

- 2.4. How do you want to respond to those thoughts and feelings? What do you do next?

- 2.5. What is most important to you in this situation? What's a goal that you have?

- 2.6. Which responses will help the situation, and what could harm what's important to you?

- 2.7. Could you do anything in the moment to help you act in a way to make the situation or yourself feel better (like counting to 10)?

- 2.8. How does your response change if you have a little time to think everything through?
- 2.9. How could you handle the situation to get back on track with your goal or prioritize what's really important to you?
- 2.10. *If nobody has brought up a personal example:* Has anybody ever been in a similar situation before and feel comfortable sharing what happened?

Closing (15 minutes before the end of the focus group)

3. Here are some of the things we've heard you say today about how you navigate daily interactions while keeping your goals and what's important to you in mind. [*Read examples*].
 - 3.1. I'm curious to hear whether there's anything else you'd add. Are there other things that are really important to you that we haven't covered?
4. Some of these words describe things that generally make a situation better, and some might make a situation worse. What I'd like us to do now is to group the words in these categories.
 - 4.1. What words describe something that would generally make a situation better? Is there a label or umbrella word you'd use to describe this group?
 - 4.2. What words describe something that would make a situation worse? Is there a label or umbrella word you'd use to describe this group?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. [*Distribute gift cards, collect scenario work sheets*]

Table 1. Scenarios for focus group

Scenario	Examples of what's important (for moderator reference)
<p>1 Assume that you have this friend—Maria—who you've been close with since at least middle school. You've admitted things to Maria that you wouldn't tell anybody else, and you're pretty sure that you know more about him than anybody else, too. You value that friendship, and you'd do anything for him.</p> <p>You've never been one of the popular kids, but you don't really have any enemies, either. You like having a lot of friends and being able to avoid being the focus of any drama. But recently, you noticed people looking at you differently in the hallways at school. And avoiding you. And then you started hearing rumors. It was about something that you hadn't told anybody—except Maria. Now you're between classes. You look down the hallway, and there she is. She sees you, but then she looks away.</p>	<p>Challenges: dealing with rumors and drama at school.</p> <p><i>Values/goals</i></p> <p>Friends: Shared feelings of friendship</p> <p>Positive social attributes: Being likeable and being liked</p> <p>Belonging/social approval: Not being humiliated</p>
<p>2 Let's say that there's someone who you're really into. Imagine that you're sick of just "hanging out" or "hooking up." You want to experience a real relationship, and they don't really want to be exclusive. Plus, summer is coming up, and if you ended up dating, you could spend it all together.</p> <p>Now, you and this person are in a group text with a larger group of friends. They are pretty active in that conversation, replying to others and liking others' chats. But suddenly they aren't saying much in the side text you have going. For the last few days, it's been one or two word answers, and it's taken longer and longer for a reply. Then, while you're walking home one day, you see this person joking and laughing with a group of your mutual friends at the park.</p>	<p>Challenges: not being sure if someone likes you or not. Not wanting to be vulnerable if you can't be sure of how they feel.</p> <p><i>Values/goals</i></p> <p>Romance: Goal of having a relationship</p> <p>Romance: Wanting to experience romantic love</p> <p>Belonging/social approval: Avoid rejection</p>
<p>3 In this situation, you got a job at the mall so you could pay for your college applications. The application process is super expensive, and you know that even though your mom would find a way if you asked, it would be hard for her to come up with the money.</p> <p>You let your boss know months ago that you couldn't work this coming weekend, because you signed up for a practice SAT. But when you come in for your shift, you notice that your boss has put you on the schedule for the weekend.</p>	<p>Challenges: not being listened to, juggling multiple responsibilities and goals.</p> <p><i>Values/goals</i></p> <p>Money and freedom: Goal of self-sufficiency</p> <p>Achievement: Goal of getting to college</p> <p>Family: Value being a good child and not being a burden</p>
<p>4 Imagine that your passion is singing. You really want to make it as a singer. You've been working on writing your own songs and practicing really hard to record some music and even find open mic nights and other places where you can show your talent in the hopes you get noticed.</p> <p>At a barbecue with your whole extended family over, your mom tells everyone about how hard you are working and</p>	<p>Challenges: not being taken seriously by family</p> <p><i>Values/goals</i></p> <p>Achievement: Goal of being a singer</p> <p>Individuality: Singing is part of subject's identity</p> <p>Recognition: Value being recognized for your talent</p>

asks you to play one of your songs for them. But your uncle—who you're pretty close with—says that being a singer is a stupid dream, and that you should focus on getting a real job, like working in a trade or a warehouse. Nobody else says much of anything. Then, your mom asks come on, aren't you going to sing for us?

Family: Avoid disappointing parents

- 5 Imagine that you are a part of this really close group of friends. Your friends are the most important thing in your life. You do everything together. They're like sisters to you, and you really treasure feeling like part of this group.

Challenges: juggling friends and obligations at home

At lunch one day in the beginning of the school year, you are all talking and make plans to all try out for the cheerleading team together. It would be so much fun. Cheerleaders are popular. You are so excited and tell your mom later that night when she gets home from work. She reminds you that you can't go to after-school practices. Because of your mom's work schedule, you have to pick up your little sister from school every afternoon.

Values/goals

Belonging: Value a sense of belonging in a group

Social approval: Goal is to be part of a group and be popular

- 6 Imagine that from the time you were young, you have been a really fast runner. Running makes you feel good, and it also makes you feel good to know that you're the fastest on your track team. Running is a huge part of who you are.

Challenges: sticking to a long-term goal

Your coach came to you a while back and told you that he thought you could get a college scholarship with your running. Sure, you were fast, but you had the potential to be even faster, if you could get up early in the mornings for some extra workouts. If that could mean that you went to college for free, then that would reduce a lot of stress.

Values/goals

Achievement: Goal of going to college

Recognition: Value being recognized

Individuality: Running is part of subject's identity

Support from others: Value mentorship from coach

At first it felt great. You even liked getting up early to see the sun rise, and you liked the individual attention from your coach. But it's been a few months and the initial motivation has faded. You know what your goal is, but college seems so far away. It's getting colder, and the sunrise is later, and it's getting harder and harder for you to get out of bed in the morning when your alarm goes off.

- 7 Imagine that there's a party this weekend and you got invited. You like that you're seen as fun enough to get asked. Not everybody is being told about the party. You also know that some of your good friends are going to be there and they'll be disappointed if you don't show.

Challenges: feeling peer pressure, resisting temptation, delaying gratification

Here's the problem: you just started a job that requires a drug test, and you know that there's going to be weed at the party. Even if you choose not to smoke, and if your friends didn't pressure you, you are worried that you could get a contact high and then fail the drug test.

Values/goals

Friends: Value friends

Social acceptance: Value being popular

Money and freedom: Value having money to become self-sufficient

Romance: Value your romantic relationship

This job is really important. If you can make it past the six month trial period, you'll be set. A stable job means that you can finally move into your own place. The next time you see your friends, they ask if they can expect to see you at the party.

Marriage and freedom: Goal of moving out of your partner's parents' house