

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.

A. Facilitator and assistant interviewer introductions (1 minute)

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is [Interviewer 1 Name] and I work for Mathematica, an organization that studies how different programs and policies affect children and families. My colleague, [Interviewer 2 Name] is also here to take notes. I expect that we will talk for about an hour. Is it still a good time? [If so, proceed.]

I'm looking forward to talking with you today. Before we get started with our interview, I would like to provide some background.

B. Explanation of project and purpose of interview (5 minutes)

The Administration for Children and Families is a federal agency that works with organizations like [ORGANIZATION] to help improve the lives of children, youth, and families. They are supporting this project to better understand ways in which young people take steps to get closer to the goals and priorities they care about in their lives. We're talking with you and others at [ORGANIZATION] and similar organizations about how young people handle situations where something gets in the way of achieving something that is important to them. We've been asking about how people your age work to make the things they care about happen, and what they do when something or someone interferes with that plan, value or goal.

Ultimately, we want to learn about how people your age talk about their response to challenges—both how young people immediately react or deal with thoughts and emotions that arise when a challenge occurs and how they respond later when emotions may have calmed down. We're wondering what helps or gets in the way of staying on track with their priorities and other things that are important to them.

We plan to use what we learn to help people who work for programs like [ORGANIZATION] learn how to better support youth to develop skills to make what is important to them happen.

After we're done with these conversations, we will write a short summary. We will not use your name, so please feel free to talk openly. This conversation is totally voluntary, so if there's a question that you do not want to answer, or if you want to stop the interview, just let me know and we'll move on to the next question or wrap up. You are in control. If it's possible, I encourage you to find a private place to talk so others don't overhear you.

I want to reassure you that all of your information will be kept private. However, we are required by law to report on any situations where someone may be in immediate danger of hurting themselves or someone else, or are being physically or sexually harmed by another person.

Before the call, you should have received a letter with information about the study, and a list of resources you can access if the discussion of any of the situations we talk about today brings up tough emotions for you. Did you receive this letter? Do you have any questions about it or what I just said?

Before we go any further, I'd like to confirm that you've agreed to participate in this conversation.

C. Ground rules for discussion (3 minutes)

Ok, great. Thanks again for agreeing to participate. Before we get into the questions, we want to provide some information about how our time together will go:

- 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. Some of these scenarios may relate to personal experiences that are similar to ones that you have had. You do not have to share anything you don't want to, or don't feel comfortable talking about.
- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will ask. Everyone has different priorities and ways they respond to situations. We are hoping you can share your perspective with us. I am very grateful for all of your input.
- You will receive \$25 to show our appreciation for your feedback.
- I would like to record today's conversation. We are especially interested in the words young people use to describe what happens when they face a challenging situation that is getting in the way of something important to them. The recording is only to check our notes and make sure that we accurately capture what you share with us. We're not going to record your name, so anything you choose to share with me today won't be connected to you personally. No one other than the team doing this work—not your teachers, counselors, program educator, or parent/guardian—will have access to the audiotape or the notes from today. Is it okay if I record? [*If yes, start recording*]

Finally, since this study is sponsored and approved by the federal government, I have to read you a statement. **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.**

Do you have any questions before we get started?

D. Questions (50 minutes)

We all have things that are important to us. It could be something like having really strong friendships, assisting or helping out with a cause you care about, making your family and community proud, being able to support yourself and/or helping to support your family, or achieving personal goals like saving for something you really want or having a boyfriend or girlfriend.

It's not always easy to achieve goals, and sometimes things get in the way, like if you really want to enroll in a certification program for a job but don't know how your family can afford it. Sometimes, different things you care about might conflict with each other— like, if you really want to attend a rally or a protest about an issue you care about, but your mom needs you to watch your younger siblings so she can work. 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, our everyday interactions with people affect us (our thoughts, our feelings, our behaviors), and therefore, they 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.

Can you think of an example of this kind of situation? [*Pause for response.*]

It is stressful when something gets in the way of your values, or makes it harder to do the thing you care about. When we feel stressed, our bodies send out a rush of chemicals that create a big flood of thoughts and feelings that make us want to react immediately. We are interested in hearing you describe those thoughts, feelings, and reactions that happen when you feel stress, how things might change after that initial rush of feelings is over, and how you regain focus or get yourself back on track.

I have a set of scenarios to guide our conversation today. The scenarios describe situations where something or someone gets in the way of a person's goals or wishes. The scenarios bring up situations that lead to stress or conflict. I'll read the scenarios, one at a time, and ask you to respond to a set of questions about how you or someone your age might respond and what types of feelings, emotions, body sensations and thoughts might arise. You can decline to answer any question you don't feel comfortable answering.

Scenario 1: Accusations from a family member or a roommate

The first scenario is about accusations from a family member or a roommate.

Let's say that you or someone your age just moved into your first apartment with a friend, and you are proud of the work you had both put in to pay the rent, be independent, and be in the position to support family. 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.

In the 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 \$100 he had stashed in his nightstand.

1. Right at the moment that the text comes through, what sensations do you notice in your body? [*Prompt if needed: muscles tighten up, heart starts racing, or feel like you got the wind knocked out of you*]
2. What words would describe your feelings in that moment? [*Prompt: anger, or disappointment, confusion, or maybe it's all of those*]
3. What thoughts immediately come through your head? [*Prompt: 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."*]
4. In that moment, how do you want to respond to those thoughts and feelings? What do you do next?
5. What is the most important to you in this situation? What's one goal you have? [*Prompt: Friends: Value friends, Family: loyalty to family, Individuality: being independent and supporting yourself*]
6. What could you do in the moment to help you act in a way to make the situation or yourself feel better?
 - a. What do you do to move from your immediate knee-jerk response to a response that is more likely to get you closer to your goals? [*Prompt: Walk away or remove yourself from the conversation, count to 10, go for a run*]
 - b. What would you call that kind of response? How would you describe it to someone else [*Probe: self-talk, motivational speech, something else?*]
7. Now, imagine some time passes. You have a chance for the all of those strong thoughts, feelings, and emotions to stop washing over you. How does your response change if you have a little time to think everything through?
 - a. What values or goals did you consider?
 - b. What skills or personal strengths might you draw on to plan this response?

Scenario 2: Sticking to a long term plan for reaching a set of goals that are connected to each other.

This scenario is about sticking to a long term plan that helps you reach a number of different goals you have that are connected to each other.

Imagine that from the time you or someone your age was 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.

Your coach came to you a while back and told you that he thought you had a chance to win regionals 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.

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 regionals seem 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. Now, it's 5:30 a.m., and your alarm has just gone off.

8. Right at the moment that the alarm goes off, what sensations do you notice in your body? [*Prompt: feeling like your arms and legs are covered by a weight; extreme exhaustion*]
9. Is there a word that would describe your feelings in that moment? [*Prompt: weariness, or a sense of defeat, dread, or maybe it's all of those.*]
10. What thoughts immediately come through your head? [*Prompt: "Not again," or "I'm so tired, can I just skip practice today?" Maybe your first thought is "Am I sure that I am really that good?"*]
11. In that moment, how do you want to respond to those thoughts and feelings? In other words, what do you do, think, or say in that moment?
12. What is most important to you in this situation? What's a goal that you have? [*Prompts: **Achievement:** Winning races, possibly getting a scholarship to college; **Positive Recognition:** Value of individual's gift for running being recognized and bringing positive attention to individual, school and community; **Individuality:** Running is part of individual's identity, helps them feel good about themselves; **Support from others:** Value mentorship from coach, support from team and family*]
13. What would you do in the moment to help make the situation better or resolve it in a positive way?

- a. What do you do to move from your immediate knee-jerk response to a response that is more likely to get you closer to your goals? [*Prompt: Force yourself out of bed; Remind yourself of your ultimate goal; Visualize what winning regionals would look like; Think about the people who support you*]
 - b. What would you call that kind of response? How would you describe it to someone else? [*Probe: self-talk, motivational speech, something else?*]
14. Now, how might your response change if you have a little time to think everything through?
- a. What values or goals did you consider?
 - b. What skills or personal strengths might you draw on to plan this response?

Scenario 3: Feeling peer pressure and resisting temptation when you want to spend time with friends

This scenario is about feeling peer pressure and resisting temptation when you want to spend time with friends.

Imagine that there's a party this weekend and you or someone your age 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 and your boyfriend or girlfriend really wants to go with you. They'll be disappointed if you don't show.

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.

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 help out your family and maybe move into your own place. But your boy/girlfriend is really pressuring you and you don't want to let them down. They ask if you can pick them up and take them to the party.

15. Right at the moment that your friend asks you to drive, what sensations do you notice in your body? [*Prompt: muscles tighten up, heart starts racing, panicky, teeth clenching*]
16. Is there a word that would describe your feelings in that moment? [*Prompt: stressed, irritated, guilt, queasy, defeated.*]
17. What thoughts immediately come through your head? [*Prompt: Maybe your thoughts keep going back and forth because you don't know what to do. Or, "I know I shouldn't." Maybe you're thinking about what would happen if you failed your drug test—or if nothing happened.*"]

18. In that moment, how do you want to respond to those thoughts and feelings? What do you do next?
19. What is most important to you in this situation? What's a goal you have? *[Prompts: **Friends:** Value friends **Social acceptance:** being popular. **Money and freedom:** having a good job and money to buy things and to help family. **Romance:** Don't want to let down boy/girlfriend who are really looking forward to this party. **Family:** being able to contribute money to help family, don't want to disappoint family by failing a drug test and losing job]*
20. What would you do in the moment to help you act in a way to make the situation or yourself feel better?
 - a. What do you do to move from your immediate knee-jerk response to a response that is more likely to get you closer to your goals? *[Prompt: Take a deep breath; Remind yourself of your ultimate goal; Ask if you can call your boy/girlfriend back]*
 - b. What would you call that kind of response? How would you describe it to someone else *[Probe: self-talk, take a breather, center yourself, something else?]*
21. Now, how might your response change if you have a little time to think everything through?
 - a. What values or goals did you consider?
 - b. What skills or personal strengths might you draw on to plan this response?

Scenario 4: Juggling friends and obligations at home

This scenario is about juggling friends and your obligations at home.

Imagine that you or someone your age 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 siblings to you, and you really treasure feeling like part of this group.

At lunch one day in the beginning of the school year, you are all talking and make plans to all get tickets to a weekend music festival. It would be so much fun. 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. Because of your mom's work schedule, you have to watch your little sister during the days on the weekends.

22. Right at the moment that your mom tells you that you can't go, what sensations do you notice in your body? *[Prompt: heart sinks, feel like you have a pit in your stomach, you see red]*
23. Is there a word that would describe your feelings in that moment? *[Prompt: angry, trapped, self-pity, like nothing is fair.]*

24. What thoughts immediately come through your head? [*Prompt: Maybe you immediately begin thinking about how you could get out of watching your sister. Or you want to cuss out your mom, or be mean to your sister.*]
25. In that moment, how do you want to respond to those thoughts and feelings? What do you do next?
26. What is most important to you in this situation? What's a goal you have? [*Prompts: **Belonging:** Value a sense of belonging in a group. **Social approval:** Goal is to be part of a group and not feel left out*]
27. What would you do in the moment to help you act in a way to make the situation or yourself feel better?
 - a. What do you do to move from your immediate knee-jerk response to a response that is more likely to get you closer to your goals? [*Prompt: Take a deep breath; Walk away; Remind yourself that your mom would rather not work on the weekends, either; Remember you're your family depends on you.*]
 - b. What would you call that kind of response? How would you describe it to someone else (*Probe: self-talk, take a breather, center yourself, something else?*)
28. Now, how might your response change if you have a little time to think everything through?
 - a. What values or goals did you consider?
 - b. What skills or personal strengths might you draw on to plan this response?

Closing (5 minutes before the end of the interview)

These scenarios have been of stressful situations and situations in which you have goals or values that conflict. We've been interested in learning about the words you use to describe how you work through those situations.

29. If you had to sum everything up, is there a word or a group of words you or people your age would use to refer to that immediate response? [*Prompt: repeat back some of what the interview participant said to jog their memory*]
30. Now, what about how you handle that initial response? Is there a word or a group of words that you or people your age would call the skills and strategies you use to act in a way that makes you or the situation feel better?
 - a. Researchers call this "self-regulation." Have you heard this term before? If so, where?
 - b. What do you think about the term "self-regulation?" What comes to mind?

1. Are there other things that are really important to you that we haven't covered before we end our conversation today?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.