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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

DEVELOPMENT OF A RESILIENCE-ORIENTED STRESS MANAGEMENT GROUP  
INTERVENTION FOR MOTHERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

A clinical dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Psychology

by

Lily Danielle Rowland

June, 2020

Shelly Harrell, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This clinical dissertation, written by

Lily Danielle Rowland

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to families and individuals experiencing homelessness throughout the world, and all of the service providers that support them in striving towards healing and life transformation. The incredible persistence, resilience, connection, and dedication that is shown across the challenges of seeking to end homelessness is nothing short of inspirational. May you all have lifelong connection, support, personal development, and well-being as you continue on the many chapters of your lives.

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I would like to pay special regards to the South Central Training Consortium for providing exceptional services for under-resourced communities and outstanding training for mental health trainees. My passion for supporting mothers and families experiencing homelessness—along with a true appreciation for their resiliency—was first fostered through my experiences as part of SCTC. I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve and grow through this organization. This project would not exist without my having been inspired by and trained through SCTC and those they serve.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all of the personal supports I have had throughout this process, particularly my parents and siblings, my partner, my friends, and my cohort-mates. I could not have done this process without all of your love and encouragement. Thank you for keeping me grounded and connected to what matters most.

VITA

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## ABSTRACT

Family homelessness, particularly of mothers and their children, continues to remain an unfortunate epidemic throughout the United States. Personal, relational, and systemic adversity and trauma leave this population at high risk for instability, physical and mental health challenges, and impaired wellbeing. However, despite these difficulties, research strongly suggests that positive functioning can remain in families experiencing homelessness and that many go on to leave shelters and maintain stability, particularly when mothers have effective strategies to manage stress in contexts of adversity. In addition to identifying the needs of mothers experiencing homelessness, the literature also has highlighted factors of individual and relational resilience that promote wellbeing in this population. Existing literature also suggests notable long-term benefit from supporting mothers through culturally-responsive group interventions that build and enhance relationships, awareness, and adaptive stress management strategies. Despite emphasis in the literature on the promotion of individual and relational resilience, there are no current interventions with this population that directly foster these characteristics. Therefore, the purpose of this research project was to develop a relational resilience-oriented stress management group intervention for mothers experiencing homelessness to help build and strengthen their personal and relational resilience. To inform the development and content of the intervention and manual, a literature review was conducted, with an emphasis on interventions for this population. Four individuals with experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness evaluated the group intervention manual. The strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement identified by the evaluators are presented. Recommendations that integrate evaluators' feedback and directions for further development of the group intervention are also provided.

## **Chapter I: Introduction and Literature Review**

### **Population Overview**

Homelessness continues to be a significant social justice and health problem in the United States, particularly as it impacts families. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2019) calculated that nearly 568,000 people experienced homelessness on a single night in 2019, which is a 3% increase since 2018. Further, since the mid-1980's families and children experiencing homelessness has been a significant social issue (The National Center on Family Homelessness [NCFH], 2014). Since at least 2007, families with children have represented at least one-third (33%) of the United States homeless population (over 171,000 people) (HUD, 2019; Los Angeles Almanac, 2015; The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists [ACOG], 2013). These statistics account for nearly 54,000 households of approximately 68,000 homeless parents—mainly mothers—caring for nearly 103,000 children under age 18 (HUD, 2019). Of this population, 10% (over 17,000 people) were in families experiencing homelessness whereby the head of household was under age 25 (HUD, 2019). While statistics of family homelessness continue to decline—dropping by 27% between 2007 and 2019, with a 5% decrease from 2018 to 2019—the number of individuals and families impacted continues to be staggering (HUD, 2019). Additionally, the homeless population throughout the nation is disproportionately people of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos (HUD, 2019; United States Census Bureau, 2019). Disparities are even more apparent with homeless families, where over 52% of homeless families identify as Black or African American and nearly 29% identify as Hispanic or Latino (HUD, 2019).

Families experiencing homelessness are most often headed by single mothers who have been described as emotionally, socially, economically, and educationally at risk (NCFH, 2014;

Swick & Williams, 2010). The majority of these families have very young children, are composed of approximately three family members, and experience short stints of homelessness, often staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens (HUD, 2019; NCFH, 2014; Swick & Williams, 2010). There are many factors that cause and prolong homelessness for families with children in the United States, including: (a) domestic violence and sexual violence; (b) high rates of poverty throughout the nation and lasting impacts of economic downturns; (c) nationwide shortages of affordable housing; (d) limited scales of housing assistance programs; (e) erosion of job opportunities, including stagnant or declining wages and incomes, and decreased value and livability of the minimum wage; (f) declining value and availability of public assistance; (g) challenges related to single parenting; (h) historical and systematic ethnic and racial disparities; (i) lack of affordable health care; (j) mental illness and addiction, especially with highly limited access to necessary and appropriate treatment, case management, and housing; and (k) other traumatic experiences, including natural disasters and accidents (ACOG, 2013; National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH], 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f; NCFH, 2014). Domestic and sexual violence has been considered the leading cause of homelessness for women and families, impacting at least 20% to 50% of homeless women and children (ACOG, 2013; NCH, 2009c).

## **Stress**

Stress can be understood as a normative reaction to pressures impacting an individual and their larger context, which are perceived as threatening or overly taxing, and places demands on personal resources or coping capacities (APA, n.d.; Folkman, 2010). At its most simple, stress is a normal, albeit difficult, part of one's day-to-day functioning (APA, 2013a, 2013b). However, when stress is experiencing chronically, such as with mothers experiencing homelessness, it can

be an incredibly difficult and overwhelming experience (APA, 2013b, 2019; Swick & Williams, 2010; Swick et al., 2014). Recent studies of individuals throughout the United States of all backgrounds and demographics indicate incredibly high rates of stress (APA, 2019). In recent years, research has supported a variety of stress-provoking circumstances that impact individuals generally throughout the United States, including health care, sociopolitical and safety concerns (e.g., politics, terrorism, mass shootings, climate change), discrimination, work, finances, family responsibilities, and personal health concern (APA, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019). Additionally, Americans as a whole tend to experience higher average levels of stress than they consider to be healthy, and this trend is increasingly evident amongst women, people of color, parents, individuals with disabilities, LGBT-identifying individuals, and households with incomes under \$50,000, who report higher burdens of stress (APA, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019). Additionally, a large proportion of United States residents report they are not doing enough, or are unsure if they are doing enough, to manage their stress (APA, 2015, 2016), with approximately one in five noting that they never engage in activities to help manage their stress (APA, 2015, 2016). Many also believe they are not receiving an adequate amount of emotional support to address their difficulties (APA, 2016, 2019). Unfortunately, such high levels of stress can have a large toll on physical, mental, and interpersonal well-being, particularly when stress is chronic or experienced at levels that exceeds an individual's coping (APA, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Over time, re-experiencing chronic levels of stress can become traumatizing (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005).

Due to their unique histories and circumstances, mothers experiencing homelessness face even further heightened levels of stress, adversity, and trauma than the general population, which is already highly elevated (APA, 2019; Swick et al., 2014). Homelessness disrupts nearly every aspect of family life, including damaging the emotional and physical health of family members,

interfering with children’s development and education, and often resulting in the separation of family members (NCH, 2009c). While juggling the demands of parenting and the daily needs of adulthood, including maintaining housing, work, and other daily tasks and care can be quite stressful, mothers experiencing homelessness face additional challenges to meet these demands (Swick & Williams, 2010). Difficulties for mothers experiencing homelessness becomes even more apparent, as emergency shelters tend to have limited openings for families and are largely insufficiently equipped to manage the needs of families (NCH, 2009c). As chronic levels of stress compounds with these mothers’ existing histories of complex trauma, coping effectively can become even more challenging (NCFH, 2003).

Research has highlighted a unique “mosaic of stressors” faced by parents experiencing homelessness (Swick et al., 2014, p. 397). Organized into three categories, these stressors extend to multiple levels of analysis, including the parent, children, and family as a whole: (a) stressors that precipitated family homelessness, (b) stressors that are inherent in the experience of being a homeless parent, and (c) stressors that relate to living in shelters and ultimately (re)gaining an independent living status (Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick et al., 2014). These stressors can be interactive and reciprocal—impacting parents, children, and the family unit as a whole—and are often confounded when families are headed by single mothers (Swick et al., 2014; NCFH, 2014). Further, the stressors that impact mothers experiencing homelessness also include factors related to systemic injustice and intersectional experiences of oppression—including racism, sexism, and classism.

### ***Stressors Precipitating Family Homelessness***

Stressors that precede and lead to family homelessness are numerous. As might be expected, the loss of permanent housing is core, and can be due to factors including eviction,



fleeing domestic violence or other forms of abuse, and natural disasters (Swick et al., 2014). Violence is another common experience of adversity with homeless mothers. There are high lifetime rates of criminal victimization, including physical and sexual assault and abuse, robbery, and mugging in this population (Swick & Williams, 2010; Wong & Piliavin, 2001; Swick et al., 2014; Kilmer et al., 2012). Chronic poverty can also lead to homelessness, while also exacerbating the difficulties associated with it, such as meeting basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their children (Swick & Williams, 2010; Kilmer et al., 2012; NCFH, 2014). Additionally, mothers experiencing homelessness are more likely to have negative family experiences than poor mothers who have never experienced homelessness, including poor parental care; unstable or inadequate family support during childhood; parental substance abuse; out-of-home or foster care placement; juvenile justice system involvement; and histories of running away from home (Swick & Williams, 2010; Wong & Piliavin, 2001; Wood et al., 1990). These issues are further confounded by high rates of mental illness, substance abuse, and trauma exposure (Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick & Williams, 2010). Social and political stressors also cause adversity, including the intersections of chronic unemployment or underemployment; low literacy and educational attainment rates; low rates of job skills; legal challenges; insufficient public assistance; and poor physical health without access to affordable healthcare (Berzoff, 2013; Swick & Williams, 2010; Wong & Piliavin, 2001; Weisz & Quinn, 2017; Zima et al., 1999). Finally, mothers experiencing homelessness often have increased rates of social isolation and a chronic lack of stable housing, which for some have been lifelong (Swick et al., 2014; Wong & Piliavin, 2001).

### *Stressors for Parents Experiencing Homelessness*

There are also numerous stressors that impact the experience of parenting while homeless. As the roles of parents include developing strong emotional and social attachments with children; establishing safe, nurturing environments in which children can grow; and forming strong bonds and garnering resources in parent-child, family, and community relationships, it is apparent that parents experiencing homelessness will experience additional challenges in meeting these demands (Swick & Williams, 2010). First, there are multiple barriers that impact homeless mothers' parenting roles. Demographic elements including being unmarried, chronically unemployed, and having lower levels of education and literacy can serve as barriers to effective parenting (Swick & Williams, 2010). Additionally, losing or never having a stable home can result in the loss of one's support network (Swick & Williams, 2010). While transitional shelters can provide opportunities to rebuild social support connections, they can also lack the nurturance, support, and stability to empower parents and families (Swick & Williams, 2010). Poverty and other economic barriers, such as a lack of overall financial resources due to low rates of employment, little income, low wages, and high debt accumulation, also directly impact their abilities to meet their children's basic needs (Swick & Williams, 2010). Food insecurity, limited availability of affordable, stable housing, and lack of access to health care also adds to contextual stressors for homeless mothers (Kilmer et al., 2012). Challenges of single motherhood, having a lack of childcare resources, and experiences with or fears of Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement also serve as sources of stress (Bassuk, 1993; Haber & Toro, 2004; NCFH, 2003).

Personal characteristics of mothers and children can also cause stress. Regarding maternal characteristics, abuse histories, major disruptions of family, teenage motherhood,

mental health issues, poor physical health, developmental delay, and a dearth of supportive relationships can leave mothers experiencing homelessness overtaxed and less prepared for parenting responsibilities (Swick & Williams, 2010). Additionally, further strains can result from child characteristics—including developmental delay; behavior problems; trauma exposure (including being a victim or witnessing violence or abuse); experiencing loss or separation, including through death, divorce, or foster care placement; depressive or other mental health symptoms; physical illness; and educational underachievement—many of which are at higher rates with children experiencing homelessness (Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick & Williams, 2010; Zima et al., 1999). Additionally, the interaction of maternal and child characteristics and personality factors can also add complexity to parenting stressors for homeless families (Swick & Williams, 2010). For instance, maternal depression, substance abuse, and trauma histories can make it increasingly challenging to parent a child with a developmental disability, hypervigilance following trauma exposure, and academic and behavioral difficulties, particularly when financial resources are limited.

Finally, a lack of knowledge, skills, time, and resources also result in additional parenting adversity for homeless mothers. These women, who are often single parents, are generally attempting to serve as both the family's primary caregiver and wage earner. As a result, single mothers have fewer financial, emotional, and time resources than mothers raising children with the support of a romantic partner or co-parent (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Additionally, due to childhood abuse or a lack of healthy parental role models, mothers experiencing homelessness often lack the knowledge and skills necessary for effective parenting and parent/child relationships (Swick et al., 2014). The combination of lower educational attainment, limited social support, and health difficulties—combined with high levels of stress

and histories of trauma and relative disconnection—heighten the risk of mothers engaging in parenting approaches that are suboptimal, such as parenting or discipline that is reactive, harsh, inconsistent, or neglectful (Sheller et al., 2018; Swick et al., 2014). The parentification of children (i.e., the process in which children become expected to engage in adult responsibilities, or serve in parental roles to themselves, siblings, and even parents) due to experiences of adversity from factors leading to or from family homelessness can also complicate parenting dynamics (Sheller et al., 2018). A lack of child care resources also often results in homeless mothers having little, if any, time to focus on self-development and experience additional hurdles in locating employment and completing daily rituals and necessities, including shopping and personal hygiene (Swick et al., 2014).

### ***Stressors Related to Shelter Living and (Re)gaining Independence***

Additional stressors impact mothers in homeless shelters and transitional living facilities. Although a significant source of resources, crowded conditions, a lack of privacy, and a perceived lack of safety in these facilities can result in tension, fear, and discomfort (Bassuk, 1993; Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick et al., 2014; Swick & Williams, 2010). The constant shifting of people and instability of temporary housing can also add to the stress of families seeking structure, consistency, and predictability (Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick & Williams, 2010). There also can be actual and perceived danger within the shelter or the surrounding environments (Reid et al., 2005). Furthermore, mothers experiencing homelessness also often feel on guard and concerned about judgements for their behavior, particularly as it relates to parenting (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005). This stress can be further exacerbated when there is a mismatch between mothers' previous parenting rules and the rules of the shelter (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005). Shelter living can often result in mothers feeling a loss of self-control, particularly as they work to adapt

to shelter rules and schedules, which they may perceive as rigid and may reduce their opportunity to parent as they were used to (Swick & Williams, 2010; Swick et al., 2014).

Separation from family members and other sources of support (e.g., religious community) due to the location of shelters, shelter rules, and Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement can also strain families (Kilmer et al., 2012; NCFH, 2009c). Familial separation may occur from shelter policies denying access to older boys or fathers, or from out-of-home or foster care placement of children for families involved with CPS (NCFH, 2009c). Additionally, mothers may leave their children in the care of other family members or friends to both protect them from the ordeals of homelessness and to allow them to remain connected to existing communities, often their regular school (NCFH, 2009c). As shelters and other transitional housing locations can be distant from families' existing communities of support—including religious communities, schools, mental health or recovery support services (e.g., “home” 12-Step groups), and community centers—lack of access can also serve as a significant source of adversity (Kilmer et al., 2012; NCFH, 2009c).

Adversity is also present when mothers are seeking to (re)gain independent living status. Factors including low wages, unemployment, transportation difficulties, poor physical health, mental health concerns, histories of eviction, and a lack of affordable housing can make locating, obtaining and keeping affordable housing and a flexible job that pays a livable wage challenging (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; NCH, 2009a, 2009c, 2012; NCFH 2014; Swick et al., 2014; United States Interagency Council on Homelessness [USICH], 2018). The limited availability and scope of housing assistance programs further adds to this difficulty (NCH, 2009f). Further, given that a large proportion of mothers experiencing homelessness—and often their extended families and social support systems—have experienced lifelong poverty and instability, many mothers have

limited awareness, resources, or skills to (re)gain independent living in the context of these difficulties (NCFH, 2009c, 2009f).

### ***Stressors Related to Intersectional Oppression and Systemic Injustices***

The aforementioned stressors are further compounded and complicated by stress and trauma resulting from intersectional oppression and systemic injustice. People of color continue to experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate to the general population and such racial disparities are increasingly notable when considering family homelessness (HUD, 2019; United States Census Bureau, 2019). The literature has suggested several reasons for such racial disparities, including historical and ongoing institutional and systemic racism that results in racial inequality in housing, employment, education, incarceration, banking, mental health, and healthcare opportunities, which in turn increases people of color's vulnerability to homelessness (Carter, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2020; USICH, 2018; Weisz & Quinn, 2017). Additionally, these factors are further heightened as racism, economic inequality, and gender-related and family violence are highly related (Roschelle, 2017). Sexism and gender-related bias and violence from systemic to micro levels—including wage discrepancies, limited child-care opportunities, gendered and family violence (e.g., sexual abuse, interpersonal violence), and inadequate child-support legislation and enforcement—have also been indicated as additional factors that can impact and impair women experiencing homelessness (Bassuk, 1993; Reid et al., 2005; USICH, 2018).

Furthermore, intersectional experiences of oppression, discrimination and stigma—often due to simultaneous racism, sexism, and classism, but also due to immigration status, country of origin, sexual orientation, mental illness, and other demographic and health factors—result in significant added stress that can impact mothers experiencing homelessness (Bassuk, 1993;

Gattis & Larson, 2016; NAEH, 2020; USICH, 2018; Weisz & Quinn, 2017; Zerger et al., 2014). This intersectional marginalization has been suggested to even further impact mothers experiencing homelessness due to the gendered impact of parenting responsibilities with single motherhood (Bassuk, 1993). Stigmatizing images and assumptions around individuals experiencing homelessness can result in personal and family strengths being overlooked in favor of emphasis on stereotypes and aspects of their negative functioning (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Swick et al., 2014). Such social stigma by schools, shelter staff, employers, businesses, and peers can create barriers to being able to access resources, services, employment, and supportive relationships (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Kilmer et al., 2012; Swick et al., 2014). Additionally, intersectional experiences of race-based discrimination and stigma in conjunction with the stigma and stress of homelessness has been indicated to negatively impact mental and physical health to a level beyond that of homelessness alone (Weisz & Quinn, 2017).

Other forms of culturally-based violence and discrimination can impact mothers experiencing homelessness. Hate crimes and violence related to ones' homeless status or other intersectional identity factors—including race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and ability status—are unfortunately relatively common and impact both those directly aggressed against, and those in their communities (NCH, 2012). Additionally, discrimination by shelters due to cultural factors—often LGBTQ identity—can also lead to significant difficulties in finding shelter that is accepting and respectful (NCH, 2017). Such discrimination can lead to people being at increased risk to emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (NCH, 2017). Mothers experiencing homelessness are also can experience stress due to microaggressions based on their housing status—including around themes of (a) being sub-human or invisible, (b) being a criminal or dangerous, (c) having an intellectual disability, mental illness, or substance abuse

issue, (d) being lazy, or (e) being aesthetically unappealing (Torino & Sisselman-Borgia, 2017)—in addition to those impacting them due to other factors of cultural diversity (Nadal, 2013; Roschelle, 2017; Sue et al, 2008 ).

Overall, the impact of intersectional inequities, oppression, discrimination, and stigma has been conceptualized as “direct and indirect power blocks” (Johnson & Lee, 1994, p. 417). Direct power blocks refer to the factors of inequity and discrimination inherent in systems, including health care, education, employment, housing, and child care (Johnson & Lee, 1994). Further, indirect power blocks can be understood as the negative impact of internalizing these facets of oppression—also known as “internalized oppression”—following a lifetime of unequal power structures and opportunities (Johnson & Lee, 1994; Speight, 2007). Thus, the long-term negative impact of intersectional stigma and oppression on mental and physical health has been suggested to contribute to disparities in homelessness and contribute to cycles that prolong homelessness (Bassuk, 1993; Weisz & Quinn, 2017).

Given that the stressors and root causes for mothers experiencing homelessness are strongly related to systemic and chronic social inequities, an approach to stress management that goes beyond specific coping skills is important. More than simply managing chronic stress and trauma—particularly in the face of such longstanding, pervasive adversity—mothers and families benefit from factors, characteristics, and strategies that support them in thriving in and recovering from experiences of homelessness (Narayan, 2015). Despite the seemingly insurmountable amount of stress, trauma, and adversity that these mothers and families face, research strongly and consistently suggests that positive, effective functioning can persist during periods of homelessness and many families experiencing homelessness ultimately leave shelters and maintain long-term stability (Hausman & Hammen, 1993; Narayan, 2015; Paquette &



Bassuk, 2009; Zlotnick et al., 2010). Resilience—or the capacity to manage, recover, and grow from experiences of adversity—is a crucial construct necessary to understand and capitalize on the strengths and capacities of mothers and families to overcome and move beyond their current circumstances (Narayan, 2015). The following sections will detail research on resilience and relational resilience, and manifestation of these constructs in mothers experiencing homelessness.

## **Resilience and Relational Resilience**

### ***History of Resilience Research***

Research on resilience stems back to the early 1970's with the onset of interest in risk and protective factors. Since the 1970's, numerous studies have shown that a significant number of adults and children were able to survive, adapt well, and develop competence despite personal, family, and collective histories of mental illness, trauma, and other experiences of adversity (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000). This ushered in a research movement focusing on understanding individual's various responses to experiences of adversity (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000).

Following these research developments, there came an interest in learning about and identifying protective factors, which can be considered the foundations of resilience (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004). Over time, researchers began expanding on resilience as a process, rather than a stable, individual trait (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000). This shift in understanding directed research to differentiate three sets of interconnected factors that affect the development of resilience: individual characteristics, family characteristics, and aspects of larger social environments (Luthar et al., 2000). This person-in-culture-in-context based understanding of resilience honed in the 1990's and beyond led to the field's current position on resilience

research (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004; Harrell, 2010; Luthar et al., 2000). At present, individual resilience science aims to promote understanding of the protective processes that put individuals on paths towards resilience as well as applied ways to encourage the development and maintenance of resilience in populations experiencing or at-risk of experiencing adversity (Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000).

### ***Resilience Defined***

Resilience research reflects human development research and theory, which recognizes that humans grow and develop across the lifespan naturally depending on the presence of certain environmental factors (Bernard, 1994). All humans are born with an inherent capacity for resilience, by which they develop problem-solving skills, social competencies, autonomy, crucial consciousness, and senses of meaning and purpose (Bernard, 1994). Resilience can be considered both a wellness process and outcome for individuals, interpersonal relationships, and communities. In the context of adversity, resilience involves elements of recovery from challenges and threats, sustainability of well-being, and the capacity to adapt, grow, and prosper (Luthar et al., 2000; Wright & Masten, 2014; Zautra et al., 2008b). However, as more than a static trait of individuals, resilience involves transactional wellness-promoting processes that reflect interconnected and ongoing interactions between persons, culture, and context (Focht-Birkerts & Beardslee, 2000; Harrell, 2010; Ungar, 2011; Walsh, 2003; Zautra et al., 2010). These processes (which must be continuously nurtured) emphasize cultivating, enhancing, and sustaining culturally-syntonic strengths and utilizing internal and external resources to promote multidimensional well-being through positive context- and culture-specific adaptation (Cefai, 2004; Southwick et al., 2014; Ungar, 2010). Fraser et al. (1999) highlighted three foundational aspects of resilience: (a) succeeding despite exposure to adversity, (b) adapting appropriately and

maintaining effective coping in stress-provoking situations, and (c) ultimately overcoming hardship to thrive and prosper after adversity. Overall, resilience can help reduce the intensity by which stress and adversity are experienced, facilitate quicker recovery, and encourage growth.

There have been many ‘myths’ of resilience that have been refuted over time by the literature. First, the concept that only a small portion of people have the “strength” or “resilience” to overcome adversity to lead positive lives is false. Studies have demonstrated that between 50% to 90% of children exposed to early adversity—including sexual and physical abuse, war, imprisonment in concentration camps, and parental substance abuse and mental illness—survived and were ultimately able to lead developmentally typical lives (Bernard, 1994; Clauss-Ehlers & Weist, 2004). Thus, resilience can be considered a type of “ordinary magic” and a “common phenomenon that results....from the operation of basic human adaptation systems” (Masten, 2001, p. 227). Additionally, resilience is conceptualized as a spectrum (Sheridan et al., 2012). Far from the concept of being resilient or not resilient in the face of various stressors, individuals demonstrate differing levels of resiliency to various stressors depending on multiple individual and contextual variables (Sheridan et al., 2012). Contrary to ideas that resilient individuals overcome adversity and stress without experiencing difficulty and quickly bounce back, research instead finds that they struggle well while experiencing the difficulty and pain of the adverse experience (Walsh, 2003). Further, individuals not only bounce back to their pre-crisis functioning, but bounce forward beyond that original functioning to better address future stress and adversity (Walsh, 2003).

The goal of resilience research in multiple contexts, including within clinical psychology, has aimed to identify and foster the processes that can help people adapt and cope effectively and ultimately thrive and prosper in contexts of stress, trauma, and adversity. However, many authors

began to critique early resilience research as spotlighting Western-European traits of individuality and resilience while largely ignoring the relational aspects of this process (Gu, 2014; Hartling, 2008; Zautra et al., 2010). Countless relational ties—including those of family, intimate relationships, friendship, mentorship, counseling, community, and religion and spirituality—have been demonstrated to encourage and promote resilience through their provision of instrumental, emotional, spiritual, and other supports (Walsh, 2003; Zautra et al., 2010). Although scholars from multiple disciplines have varying definitions of resilience (e.g., psychology, trauma studies, social work, biology), they communally acknowledge that resilience develops within a social system of interrelationships and is shaped by the interplay between individuals and their environment (Bernard, 1994; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Gu, 2014; Hartling, 2008; Luthar et al., 2000; Walsh, 2003). It is important to note that relationships extend beyond those between two individuals or groups of people (e.g., family, friendship groups), to include larger communities and institutions (e.g., religious faith community, community within a transitional housing program or shelter, shared community of mothers experiencing homelessness, hobby or interest groups, 12-Step group affiliation) that influence an individual's life experiences and resilience (DeMichelis, 2016). Furthermore, all of these relationships and experiences are impacted by societal, cultural, historical, and political contexts (DeMichelis, 2016). Understanding people as “socially constructed and fundamentally contextual” is a foundational and necessary concept for engaging resilience (DeMichelis, 2016, p. 2). Such expanded understandings of relationships provide perspective to the concept of resilience and help to identify multiculturally-oriented practices that foster resilience (Hartling, 2008).

Following the overarching understanding of resilience and critiques of early models of individual resilience, risk, and adversity, there have been more recent efforts to study and

understand the role that interpersonal relationships have in promoting, enhancing, and sustaining resilience. Resilience research has now expanded to also consider resilience within relationships of multiple—including from family and friendship relationships to communities and larger societal institutions (e.g., Focht-Birkerts & Beardslee, 2000; Graber et al., 2016; Hartling, 2008; Ungar, 2011; Walsh, 2003; Zautra et al., 2010). While a multitude of concepts of relationally-oriented resilience were identified, two facets of relational resilience that are particularly relevant for mothers experiencing homelessness include parental resilience (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2013; Sheller et al., 2018) and family resilience (Black & Lobo, 2008; Borden et al., 2010; Seccombe, 2002; Wright & Masten, 2014).

### ***Parental and Family Resilience Defined***

Parental resilience refers to a parent's capacity to provide competent and quality parenting despite the presence of risk and adversity in personal, family, community, and societal contexts (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015). Quality parenting can be considered the ability to respond in a positive and adaptive way to the changing needs of children and their various environmental contexts (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015). Such factors include providing basic physical, nutritional, and health care; balancing love and appropriate discipline; helping children meet developmental and behavioral milestones, such as delayed gratification and frustration tolerance; and being involved and helping children to be involved in their communities (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015). As such, parental resilience is considered to fit within the framework of daily activities and routines within families with children (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015).

Within the complex and adverse circumstances of homelessness, positive parent-child relationships that are fostered by parental resilience may help mitigate the challenges and negative effects experienced by children during trying experiences (Sheller et al., 2018). In

particular, this can occur by helping children to better self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, form positive and supportive relationships, and enhance their problem-solving abilities, which in turn could improve the family's individual and collective wellbeing (Sheller et al., 2018). Such resilient and positive parenting can be seen with parents who have developmentally appropriate supervision and expectations of their children; are warm, responsive, and encouraging in their conversations and connections; are appropriately consistent and firm; and who regard their children as separate others (Borden et al., 2010; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Sheller et al., 2018). Various factors have been associated with parental resilience, including emotional wellbeing and mental health; positive self-esteem and self-efficacy; spirituality or a strong religious affiliation; positive attitudes; capacities for meaning-making; engagement in self-care activities; social connectedness, including the use of support systems and resources; effective coping and organizational skills; effective communication; positive family relationships; and financial stability (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2013).

Family resilience has been defined as “the ability of the family to respond to stress and challenge in a positive and adaptive manner, characterized by the demonstration of competence and confidence among its members, with the intentional goal of socializing children” (Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 146). Family resilience simultaneously attends to both the resilience of individual family members—the parent, child, sibling, and extended relative subsystems—and the family system as a whole in the context of both external adversity—such as homelessness or systemic racism—and internal familial stress—such as family experiences of trauma, substance abuse, or parental mental illness (Sheridan et al., 2012). Processes that have been suggested to develop family resilience include: close, committed, and positive relationships amongst family; effective, culturally-syntonic parenting and communication skills; established and shared family structure,

routines, values, beliefs, rituals, and recreation; flexibility; family time; cohesive, supportive relationships; a positive outlook; spirituality; and financial management (Black & Lobo, 2008; Borden et al., 2010; Seccombe, 2002; Wright & Masten, 2014). Having strong community ties—such as connections to a church, school, youth groups, sports, or other activities—can also promote family resilience (Seccombe, 2002).

Given the complex experiences of families experiencing homelessness, it is crucial to consider both the current experiences of both parental and family resilience, as well as the capacities to further hone and develop these resilience qualities at both individual, collective, and systemic levels (Black & Lobo, 2008; Seccombe, 2002; Ungar, 2016). Additionally, it is crucial for understandings of resilience to be sensitive to the contextual and cultural factors impacting families, particularly in contexts as complex as familial homelessness (Ungar, 2016).

### ***Relational Resilience Defined***

The term “relational” is key to emphasize the integral role of relationships in the process of resilience (DeMichelis, 2016). Given that relationships can be both sources of stress and well-being (and sometimes both simultaneously), it is imperative that research understand how relationships across levels of analysis help enhance peoples’ recovery and growth in the face of adversity. Researchers have defined and utilized the term relational resilience differently, ranging from that between the relationship between parent and child (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015), to amongst multitudes of people within larger social structures (DeMichelis, 2016). A synthesis of the resilience literature suggests three distinct ways to conceptualize relational resilience: (a) having individual resilience in the context of relational stress; (b) relational engagement through connecting to and utilizing social support structures; and (c) being part of resilient relational systems that strengthen and function in positive, adaptive ways for all

members. For mothers experiencing homelessness, each of these expressions of relational resilience may be highlighted or de-emphasized, depending on context.

One aspect of relational resilience—having individual resilience in the context of relational stress—has been a focus by multiple authors. Lynch (2011) describes relational resilience as the capacity to develop relationships after the experience of interpersonal abuse or neglect. Walsh (2003) discussed relational interactions as having protective, resilience-promoting functions for individuals. Arewasikporn et al. (2013) describe an individual's relational resilience as “[one’s] capacity to be resilient in relation to another entity [e.g., individual, small group, community, or larger system]...across multiple levels of analysis” (p. 225). Jordan (1992) notes that this element of relational resilience “not only protect[s people] from stress but [also] promote[s] positive and creative growth” in individuals (p. 3). Overall, one’s capacity to remain resilient in the context of relational stress is a crucial component of relational resilience. Examples of this form of resilience in contexts of homelessness include a mother sustaining a strong sense of her values and her self-worth after becoming homeless due to escaping domestic violence and a single-mother who is experiencing homelessness coping effectively despite recently entering a homeless shelter and being in conflict with the father of her children.

The second expression of relational resilience is the experience of relational connection through (1) participation in positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., family, friends, communities) that serve as social support resources, and/or (2) having a personally meaningful sense of belonging, identification, and connectedness with something larger than oneself. While this element involves specific interpersonal relationships, it also involves a broader experience of relatedness that might include experiences such as a sense of strong connection to a Higher



Power (e.g., God, Jesus, Allah) or even a strong geographic or place attachment (e.g. a sense of “home” in a city, town, or neighborhood; feeling connected to specific places such as a church building, community recreation center, or tree in a park; or having a general sense of connection to places, such as “the beach” or “the forest”). Overall, it can be understood as a foundational sense of connection to persons or other entities that serve protective functions with respect to internal and external adversity such that the individual feels strengthened or greater security through the connection. It is the presence of affirming, strong, and meaningful relationships that create belongingness, promote growth, and facilitate personal and collective transformation in the face of adversity. Resilience research has emphasized the importance of utilizing social support to encourage and foster relational resilience, including engaging in support seeking as active coping (Graber et al., 2016; Jordan, 1992; Walsh, 2003). This understanding of relational resilience “involves a movement [beyond focus on the self] into the awareness of being part of something larger than the separate self...whether this be a relationship with another person, feeling part of nature, or some aspect of spiritual involvement” (Jordan, 1992, p. 5).

With respect to interpersonal relationships, this second element of relational resilience is optimal when engagement is a bi-directional or multi-dimensional process, expanding beyond “a one-directional need for support from others” to encompass “mutual empathic involvement in the well-being of each person” (Jordan, 1992, p. 3). In turn, this benefits the individuals involved through altruistic contributions and a sense of shared purpose (Jordan, 1992). Relational resilience as social support can be manifested in multiple contexts, including intergenerationally (Johnston et al., 2014). Further, using social support as a type of relational resilience recognizes that “view[ing] cris[es] as shared challenges...[and] pulling together in recovery efforts” allows individuals to utilize others as sources of support and comfort, while simultaneously learning

from others' experiences of coping through adversity (Walsh, 2003, p. 61-62). This aspect of relational resilience draws upon Relational Cultural Therapy (RCT; Jordan, 2018) and has been defined as "the capacity to move back into connection after disconnection [in relationships] and the capacity to reach out for help" (Jordan, 2018, p. 37), and "the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices" (Hartling, 2008, p. 56). These conceptualizations also recognize the importance of mutuality and meaning-making in the development of relational resilience, as "participating in another person's growth is crucial to one's well-being" (Jordan, 2018, p. 70). Examples of this conceptualization of relational resilience for mothers experiencing homelessness include: strengthening the connections and relationships with ones' children despite adversities related to homelessness, remaining connected with God and joining a new church after moving into a shelter, and turning to and collaborating with shelter staff and case management for support while residing in a transitional housing program.

The third element of relational resilience emphasizes the resilience of systems and involves a systemic level of analysis. It goes beyond resilient individuals in relational stress and the individual experience of relatedness, to a focus on systems that can be characterized as resilient. Resilient relational systems are characterized by systemic strengths and consider the qualities of a resilient family, community, or other collective entity. One general characteristic of resilient relational systems is that the system functions in positive, adaptive ways for all members. DeMichelis (2016) defines relational resilience as "a [dynamic] process of complex interpersonal, institutional, and political interactions, which together make it more or less possible for people [in these systems] to do well in the face of adversity...[and] sustain well-being" (p. 1). Relational resilience in the context of families has been defined as "the ability of

the family to respond to stress and challenge in a positive and adaptive manner, characterized by the demonstration of competence and confidence among its members, with the intentional goal of socializing children” (Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 146). It also has been conceptualized as a “multilevel process of interaction between families and other systems in complex or challenging environments that facilitates a family’s capacity to cope with adversity over time” (Ungar, 2016, p. 20). Concerning communities, relational resilience can be captured by “the presence of sustained and substantial positive social interaction among people...[and their] work together to successfully enhance the quality of life of all its members” (Zautra et al., 2008a, p. 139-140). In regards to the interdependent human aspects of communities, relational resilience also includes the “culturally embedded patterns of interdependence [in communities] that give it the potential to recover from dramatic change, sustain its adaptability, and support new growth...[after] a time of crisis” (Ungar, 2011, p. 1742). Overall, this can be described as the system’s ability to respond and adapt to the needs of its members to enhance systemic well-being (Ungar, 2016). Relational resilience, when expressed in this third way, is a crucial process for healing from the perspective of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), a therapy modality that proposes that normal human development involves the formation, maintenance, and nurturance of growth-fostering (or resilience-strengthening) relationships across the lifespan (Jordan, 2018; Hartling, 2008). Examples of mothers experiencing homelessness having resilient relational systems include: a homeless family whose relationship is characterized by communicating effectively, supporting each other, and relying on their relationship with God throughout their hardships; a group of mothers experiencing homelessness who support each other (e.g., emotionally, with childcare, with tips and advice, etc.); and a residential facility for homeless women and children that has a culture of respect and affirmation of diversity.

In sum, the following inclusive definition of relational resilience was proposed by Rowland et al. (2018): a process of recovery and thriving in the context of adversity that includes (a) the ability to demonstrate individual resilience in the face of relational hardships and challenges; (b) the experience of relatedness including active engagement in authentic, affirming, and supportive relationships that promote personal and collective growth and transformation; and (c) the capacity and characteristics of a relational system or entity to enhance well-being and protect against internal and external stressors. Demonstrative examples of these three aspects of relational resilience as they relate to mothers experiencing homelessness is shared in Figure 1.

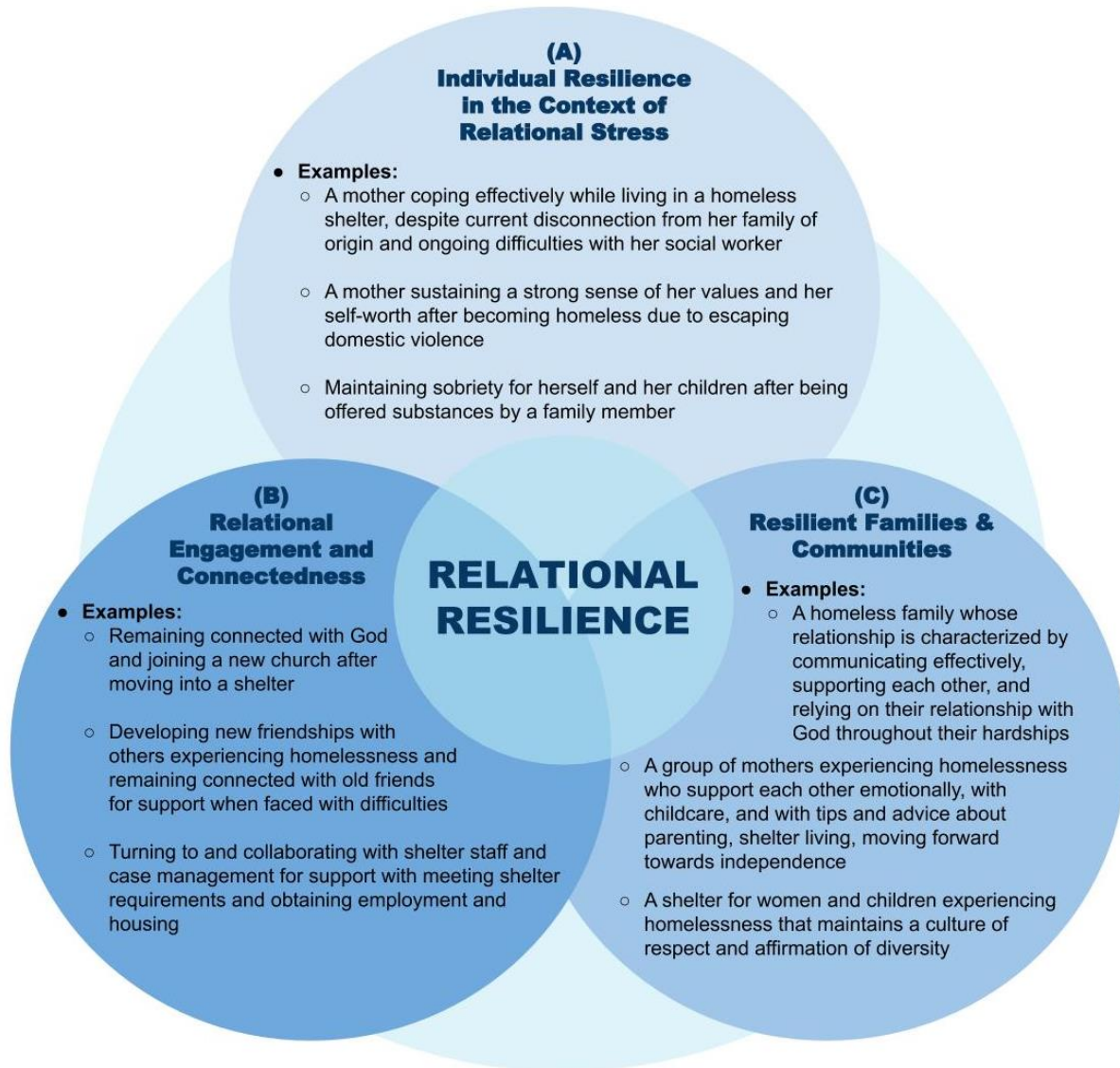
Utilizing a relational resilience perspective requires one to recognize that all people are inherently embedded in cultural and contextual systems that impact their experiences (DeMichelis, 2016; Walsh, 2003). As such, it is crucial to consider individual and collective resilience in the contexts of multiple levels of relationally-situated adversity. The following section will provide more specific insights from the literature on resilience and relational resilience with mothers and families experiencing homelessness.

### ***Resilience and Relational Resilience for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness***

Despite significant experiences of adversity and trauma, research suggests that positive, effective functioning can remain in families experiencing homelessness and that many families leave shelters and establish long-term stability (Narayan, 2015). In fact, research and recent statistics of families experiencing homelessness suggests that it is common for many families to leave shelters and ultimately establish long-term stability (HUD, 2019; Narayan, 2015). Findings suggest that positive functioning in this population is more likely to be observed in mothers who have effective strategies to alleviate or ameliorate symptoms of stress despite current experiences of adversity (Narayan, 2015).

**Figure 1**

*Demonstrative Examples of Relational Resilience for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness*



Through a systematic review of the literature, Narayan (2015) identified the three general levels across which mothers experiencing homelessness can express resilience: personally, interpersonally, and contextually. In regards to personal expressions of resilience, findings indicated that mothers were more resilient when they used effective coping strategies, including

taking responsibility for their difficulties and seeking social support. Additionally, being able to meet their family's basic financial, sustenance, and support needs was indicative of personal resilience. This included being employed, using social welfare, and having at least a high school diploma or GED. Further, personal resilience was indicated through improved mental health with reduced symptoms of psychopathology, which was achieved through factors including social support, spirituality (including belief in a Higher Power and feeling forgiven within their faith), and educational attainment.

Regarding interpersonal expressions of resilience, Narayan (2015) noted the importance of utilizing positive parenting skills and helping their children to adjust to experiences of homelessness. Positive parenting practices included an array of personal and dispositional factors evident in mothers across numerous studies, including being warm and positive—rather than hostile—having self-esteem, identifying spiritually, and having connection with others for emotional and instrumental support. Additionally, there were a number of maternal factors that supported their children's adaptive functioning. In particular, mothers who utilized positive parenting practices, were close to their children, and were highly involved in their children's school tended to have children who had fewer behavioral problems, higher levels of school achievement, and supportive social relationships, particularly with their mothers.

Further, contextual expressions of resilience for mothers experiencing homelessness is found in ways that they end periods of homelessness and prevent future shelter re-entry (Narayan, 2015). In particular, finding and maintaining part-time or full-time employment, having cash benefits through social welfare services, having higher levels of educational attainment, and housing subsidies were helpful in this regard. Additionally, effectively using resources and social support—including intensive involvement with case management or social

support services and having large support networks of family, friends, or romantic partners—and problem-focused coping to find housing were also evidence of contextual resilience. Parental mental health was also paramount, with involvement in therapy and having lower levels of psychological symptoms, alcohol and substance use, and interpersonal conflict also benefitting this resilience factor. Additionally, having fewer children per family, having the mother be on the housing lease, and being the primary tenant in their own home were also factors that helped avoid future homelessness. In particular, housing subsidies, Section 8, and other low-income housing options were found to be the most stable, long-term option to deter shelter re-entry.

Numerous other researchers have identified resilience factors for women and mothers experiencing homelessness. Huey et al. (2013) found that many women experiencing homelessness with histories of trauma express signs of resiliency through their attitudes and coping behaviors, including maintaining an optimistic outlook, recognizing trauma experiences as not their fault, and being able to cognitively and emotionally release (“let go” or “move on”) from experiences of trauma to see alternative perspectives on incidents of violence.

Further, Knight (2017) highlighted that women experiencing homelessness are able to function more resiliently when they recognize that their current circumstance of homelessness is undesirable, believe that changing their circumstances is possible, and work directly to exit periods of homelessness, including through locating and accessing resources and money.

Using effective mental, emotional, and active coping strategies to manage difficulties were also found to bolster resilience (Huey et al., 2013; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Such strategies included problem-solving, maintaining hopeful and optimistic outlooks, developing additional structure in their families’ lives, and participating in physical and mental activities at locations external to the shelter (Huey et al., 2013; Swick &

Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Additionally, strong maternal connections and identification are also factors of resilience. Mothers who desire to protect their children by ending their periods of homelessness as soon as possible, and who see their current experience of homelessness as an opportunity to improve life for themselves and their children, demonstrate high levels of resilience (Huey et al., 2013; Knight, 2017). Other resilience factors with single mothers also include recognizing internal strengths, including optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

Additionally, there are multiple ways in which mothers experiencing homelessness express and experience relational resilience. In particular, the importance of creating and maintaining positive social networks, including with other homeless individuals, and bolstering spiritual and religious connections was highlighted throughout several studies (Huey et al., 2013; Knight, 2017; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2017; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Such networks provide crucial emotional, instrumental, and spiritual supports for the challenges that mothers and families experiencing homelessness experience. Social support, in particular, is such a strong indicator of resilience in this population that simply perceptions of social support has been found to be a resilience factor related to enhanced well-being with single mothers (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Furthermore, spending quality time with children and utilizing adaptive and creative parenting skills were highlighted as important resilience factors (Swick & Williams, 2010). Homeless parents also can encourage the development of resilience in their children by promoting healthy family relationships and communication, and helping them to cope and adjust to their stressors (Doty et al., 2017; Everet alt et al., 2016; Narayan, 2015).

Given the diversity of mothers and families experiencing homelessness—including in terms of family make-up, pathways into and out of homelessness, overall functioning, and



cultural and contextual factors—it is expected that expressions of resilience will vary across individuals (Narayan, 2015). Additionally, expressions of relational resilience in homeless mothers are not only in relation to other people but to larger systems, including homeless shelters and society at large. Thus, resilience within mothers and families experiencing homelessness is understood to cascade within and across people, including to enhance resilience across areas of functioning within individuals, towards children, to other families, and across communities (Doty et al., 2017; Narayan, 2015; Walsh, 2003).

### ***Purpose of a Relational Resilience Approach***

Despite the numerous stressors and traumas that mothers and families experiencing homelessness have, research strongly supports that positive, adaptive functioning and resilience can be common within these communities, particularly when mothers have the strategies and tools needed to address and reduce the stress symptoms in their daily lives and to remain connected with their children and other larger support systems (Doty et al., 2017; Everet et al., 2016; Huey et al., 2013; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Relational models of resilience have been suggested to support individual and collective resilience by “helping them to build supportive interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and political partnership” (DeMichelis, 2016, p. 3). The research strongly supports the importance of these factors with mothers experiencing homelessness, for whom having social connection and support across a variety of relationships—including with their children, friends, family, shelter and social services staff, larger communities, and a Higher Power—is one of the primary facets of relational resilience (Huey et al., 2013; Knight, 2017; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2017; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Having a relational resilience perspective is crucial, as experiences of social isolation and separation leave individuals of all backgrounds—including mothers and families

experiencing homelessness—at risk for significant psychological and physical challenges (Conrad, 1998; Jordan, 1992; Kilmer et al., 2012; Marra et al., 2009). Additionally, relational approaches to resilience can help provide a platform to better understand the diverse experiences of adversity and wellness (“doing well”) that are culturally and contextually based to intervene in an appropriate, culturally-congruent manner (DeMichelis, 2016). Furthermore, by taking a relational resilience perspective in understanding and supporting the experience of mothers experiencing homelessness, these women can normalize and contextualize their stress and distress in the context of shared adversity, helping them to struggle well and ultimately bounce forward (Narayan, 2015; Walsh, 2003).

Research with mothers and families experiencing homelessness strongly recommend that supportive services, clinical practice, and institutional and systemic policy emphasize a resilience and relational resilience perspective to promote families leaving episodes of homelessness and maintaining wellbeing (Holtrop et al., 2015; Kilmer et al., 2012; Knight, 2017; Narayan, 2015). Within the clinical practice sphere, group work has been highlighted as an important setting for mothers experiencing homelessness to enhance their resilience (Berzoff, 2013; Knight, 2017). In particular, resilience-based interventions have been suggested to be important in promoting strategies to “bounce forward” from previous and ongoing adversity, manage future adversity, and transform experiences of adversity into growth and thriving (Walsh, 2003). Additionally, given the inherently interconnected nature of people, research suggests that group therapy treatments promoting resilience can lead to those cascading benefits to other individuals and systems, including children, family, and larger communities (Doty et al., 2017; Narayan, 2015; Walsh, 2003).

An additional benefit of utilizing a relational resilience perspective, particularly with mothers experiencing homelessness, is the emphasis on the cultural and contextual embeddedness of all people (DeMichelis, 2016; Ungar et al., 2013; Walsh, 2003). Relational resilience-focused outlooks inherently recognize that personal, cultural, institutional, and political systems shape the belief systems and lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities (DeMichelis, 2016; Ungar et al., 2013; Walsh, 2003). These interrelated factors impact the individual, family, and community understandings of what is considered to be stressful or significant adversity, what constitutes doing well, and how to engage stressors appropriately to achieve wellness (DeMichelis, 2016; Walsh, 2003). Further, taking a relational perspective integrates the key cultural and contextual elements of resilience research, which can help to protect against the pathologizing and stigmatizing views that can dominate perceptions regarding mothers and families experiencing homelessness (Carrey & Ungar, 2007; DeMichelis, 2016; Torino & Sisselman-Borgia, 2017; Weisz & Quinn, 2017). By considering the unique intersections of diversity as it pertains to mothers experiencing homelessness—including culture, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, social class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, immigration status, nationality, and housing status—individualized, culturally-syntonic strategies can be developed and practiced to enhance their relational resilience (DeMichelis, 2016; Jordan, 2018; Kilmer et al., 2012). Overall, it is crucial that considerations are made for culture and context when engaging in research and practice from relational resilience perspectives.

### **Resilience-Oriented Intervention for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness**

As much of research and intervention with mothers and families experiencing homelessness has historically adopted a deficit-focused and victim-based model, it is refreshing

and crucial that strengths-based and resilience-oriented focuses are continuing to be used (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015). Rather than emphasizing mothers' limitations and pathologies—which can add upon feelings of guilt, blame, and shame that are common with experiences of parenting in the best of circumstances, yet alone for mothers who are experiencing homelessness—mothers can experience empowerment and self-confidence through an emphasis on resilience (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Lau, 2006). In particular, relational resilience can be honed by focusing on mothers' positive competencies, talents, and skills and encouraging redirection of these aspects towards areas of stress and adversity (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Lau, 2006). Therapeutic intervention has been shown to help develop, hone, and maintain the various characteristics of relational resilience (Borden et al., 2010; Yi-Frazier et al., 2017; Saltzman, 2016; Taylor & Conger, 2017).

### **Current Group Interventions with Mothers Experiencing Homelessness**

Mothers experiencing homelessness seem to function best when they have effective strategies to reduce or mitigate stress and symptoms of mental illness in their contexts of daily adversity (Narayan, 2015). In working with this population, group interventions designed to meet their complex needs are highly suggested, particularly due to reduced stigma, cost effectiveness, and the possibility for longer-lasting effects if meaningful relationships are established and maintained (Berzoff, 2013; Daniels, 1992; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Group interventions with mothers experiencing homelessness also allow them to defuse their identity from their current circumstances of homelessness, recognize issues that contributed to their current status, and cultivate adaptive skills for managing adversity (Knight, 2017). Additionally, research suggests that well-planned interventions designed to impact individual family members, such as mothers,

have the potential to improve the well-being of the entire family system by generating cascading effects (Doty et al., 2017; Dodge & Coleman, 2009; Narayan, 2015).

Although the literature does not currently suggest interventions with homeless mothers that directly foster individual or relational resilience, there are numerous group interventions that have been created, adapted, and conducted with mothers experiencing homelessness to address issues of stress management, coping, problem-solving, social support, mental health symptom reduction, personal development, and empowerment (e.g., Coker et al., 2010; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008; Knight, 2017; McWhirter, 2006; Plasse, 2001). Given the intensity of stress, adversity, and trauma within this population, it was surprising that while stress management and coping effectively with the complex stressors faced by homeless mothers was addressed in many groups (e.g., Coker et al., 2010; Jones, 2008; McWhirter, 2006; Racine & Sévigny, 2001), it was the main focus in only a few groups (Dutton et al., 2013; Jones, 2008; Plasse, 2001).

Given the diversity of approaches across the group interventions meant to promote well-being of mothers experiencing homelessness found in the literature, the groups have been subdivided into the following sections based on their overarching themes, foci, and intervention styles for further discussion: skills focused groups, relationship focused groups, and culture focused groups. It is important to note that while the emphases of each group varied, one factor prioritized across all of the groups was the social support within the group setting. Additionally, although not incorporated into most of groups developed for this population, research and practice strongly suggests that mothers experiencing homelessness often would prefer, and benefit from, faith integrated into groups to help empower themselves and their families (Banks & Lee, 2016; Hodge et al., 2012; Swick & Williams, 2010).

### *Skill Focused Groups with Mothers Experiencing Homelessness*

Three groups in the literature for this population emphasized the development of skills to promote wellbeing and reduce stress. Interventions emphasized formal and informal mindfulness skills and relaxation exercises (Dutton et al., 2013; Plasse, 2001), psychoeducation (McWhirter, 2006), cognitive restructuring (McWhirter, 2006; Plasse, 2001), and process-focused discussions (McWhirter, 2006).

Plasse (2001) developed and facilitated a stress reduction and self-care group for women experiencing homelessness who were also in recovery from substance abuse. The 15-session group was composed of largely African American and Hispanic women, with a core group of 10 group participants and 18 total women who attended at least two sessions. The group had multiple aims, including (a) teaching participants' relaxation and meditation techniques, (b) teaching participants how to identify, change, and replace distorted thoughts that caused stress, and (c) supporting participants in improving social relationships. Overall, the group used an educational and supportive structure to teach meditation (including muscular relaxation exercises, focused awareness on the breath, and visualization) and cognitive restructuring. At the end of treatment, group members were able to co-discover healthier strategies for self-care and stress management, constructed self-narratives as resilient survivors, developed more balanced self-talk about their lives, and could provide social support to each other. However, the research was limited in the long-term impact of meditation, as well as their overall stress reduction or improvements in self-care behaviors.

McWhirter (2006) utilized a quasi-experimental comparison design to study the effectiveness of a five-week community-based group therapy treatment for mothers experiencing homelessness within a transitional housing shelter. This intervention aimed to use Cognitive

Behavioral and Gestalt therapy techniques (a) to increase awareness about trauma exposure across their lifetime, (b) to assess and consider the influence of alcohol, drugs, and other unhealthy coping mechanisms in addressing experiences of abuse and trauma, and (c) to find healthy ways to heal and cope with stressors. Overall, the group utilized Cognitive Behavioral strategies—including psychoeducation; exploration of thoughts and perceptions, including cognitive distortions; and feeling identification—and Gestalt strategies—including present-focused dialogues, open communication, and both challenging and encouraging awareness amongst group members. The group topics emphasized discussions about trauma, addiction, emotional expression, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and adaptive stress management (such as problem-solving, relaxation methods, and exercise). This intervention group (of 37 mothers experiencing homelessness; majority identified as European American with other significant proportions identifying as Latina, African American, and Native American) was compared to an alternative treatment comparison group (of 31 stably housed women experiencing major life transition, such as job loss, divorce, and domestic violence, who largely identified as European American). The comparison group was involved a one-on-one community mentoring program focused on employment, support, and social stability. Overall, pre- and post-treatment measures across both groups indicated that both treatments decreased financial stress, improved social network size, decreased social isolation, and increased self-efficacy. However, limitations include significant cultural differences across the groups, including related to housing status, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was also adapted and found to be beneficial in a low-income, ethnically-diverse (predominantly African American) group of women with PTSD, including homeless mothers with histories of interpersonal violence (Dutton

et al., 2013). This intervention focused on teaching participants mindfulness skills, which involves helping them to focus their attention on their present experiences in a nonjudgmental, accepting manner. Additionally, the MBSR curriculum was adapted by Dutton et al. (2013) based on considerations for chronic trauma and challenges present in the lives of low-income and homeless individuals. These modifications included reducing the session length and number of sessions; increasing logistical support for participants (e.g., providing meals, on-site child care, transportation reimbursement); including a wide variety of formal and informal mindfulness, compassion-focused, and lovingkindness meditations; and emphasizing flexibility, safety, and self-regulation throughout the process (e.g., invitations to keep eyes open during meditations; to sit rather than lie down during body scans; reduced emphasis on outside practice). Following the 10 weekly sessions, which lasted for 1.5 hours, and a 5-hour retreat, the approximately 43 MBSR participants reported that the practices they learned reduced their daily stress and promoted their healing from trauma. Overall, feasibility and acceptability of the intervention was found within this population, with improvements in well-being indicated through not only decreased distress reactivity, and avoidance, but also increased self-empowerment, self-care, awareness, self-acceptance, and senses of compassion and belonging. Regarding improvements for future interventions, some participants requested additional emphasis on daily problem solving, while others felt that the MBSR intervention was not helpful to them.

Additionally, Dutton et al. (2013) emphasized several factors that are suggested to encourage when facilitating groups with this population, in addition to the adaptations discussed above. The authors noted the importance of having continual and collaborative feedback and input from the participants and social service providers to address participant concerns and support their ongoing engagement in the program. Further, they promoted the importance of



establishing a relationship between the group instructor and participants through one-on-one orientations to clarify expectations and review the possible benefits. Finally, they encouraged the repeated practice of brief exercises within the group that participants can feasibly use in their daily lives (e.g., “three breaths break” and “mindful listening”).

### ***Relationship Focused Groups with Mothers Experiencing Homelessness***

Five groups facilitated for mothers experiencing homelessness focused on promoting the development and strengthening of relationships for the group participants—including of the parent-child relationship and relationships amongst group members—and promoting effective coping in the face of adversity. Interventions emphasized interpersonal discussions (Berzoff, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2009; Knight, 2017; Racine & Sévigny, 2008; Sheller et al., 2018), psychoeducation (Berzoff, 2013), parenting skills (Sheller et al., 2018), self-care principles (Sheller et al., 2018), problem-solving (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Knight, 2017; Racine & Sévigny, 2008), narrative-focused activities (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Knight, 2017), and creative and artistic activities (Fraenkel et al., 2009).

Sheller et al. (2018) developed and implemented the Family Care Curriculum, a positive parenting support program for families experiencing homelessness. The six session program utilizes a trauma-informed, attachment-based, and culturally sensitive approach to teaching parenting interventions for improving parent-child relations and family wellbeing. In addition to parenting techniques and self-reflective discussions, emphasis is also placed on discussions of oppression, parental self-care, and social support within the group and shelter context. Overall, the program aims to create positive shifts in parental attitudes to enhance parent-child relationships and nurturing parenting skills. While the program has been prolifically endorsed

across shelters and provider agencies in the United State, unfortunately no information was provided regarding the programs' efficacy.

Racine and Sévigny (2008) developed an original, strengths-based group board game to promote problem solving, emotional expression, and social support amongst women and mothers experiencing homelessness. This small-group based board game involved the women sharing their lived experiences and responding to questions based on fictitious situations that were highly probable to occur in the life of women experiencing homelessness within the realms of relationships with family and friends, housing, health, and legal issues. Through the game and group discussion, the 35 participants were able to share their experiences with each other and collaboratively discuss and strategize about problems they encounter in their daily lives. Through participating in this group activity, relationships were fostered amongst the participants and the women expressed a reduction in feelings of isolation and an enhanced sense of social support and community within the shelter. They also indicated learning from other women participants, particularly related to problem-solving strategies to manage their difficulties. Further, the participants evidenced an improved sense of competence and empowerment through recognizing that they have unique knowledge and skills to manage and cope with their difficulties.

Fraenkel et al. (2009) discussed the development and implementation of "Fresh Start for Families," a multiple-family discussion group for families experiencing homelessness. Fresh Start—which is identified as a family/community support program rather than a therapy program—was developed collaboratively with families experiencing homelessness to promote engagement in work-related shelter programming, as the existing programming developed by shelter professionals was not being engaged in by families. Recognizing that families would likely engage at a greater level if they were consulted as experts on their own experiences of

homelessness, rather than being in programs created by professionals without their input, Fresh Start was developed through collaborative development and refinement between families and professionals. Overall, the program emphasized both narrative and collaborative approaches, which provide the opportunity to simultaneously encourage families imagine their desired future, to combat the stigmatizing language of homelessness, and to help families recognize and expand upon alternative ways of viewing themselves.

Multiple narrative-focused activities make up the Fresh Start family program (Fraenkel et al., 2009). Families were invited to share their story of becoming homeless, the challenges they have experienced within the shelter and in moving towards working, and how they have coped. Through speaking their testimony and bearing witness to that of others, families were able to both find benefit in sharing their voice and experience, and in connecting with others and feeling less alone in their experiences. Further, families were able to learn practical strategies to cope with the challenges they share with others experiencing homelessness. The programming also emphasizes artistic and creative forms of expression, including music, visual arts, and dance. The program also emphasized passing down their wisdom through a guidebook to help other families that would enter the shelter, which helps families to feel that their suffering and resourcefulness also had a larger purpose. Further, families are encouraged to share stories that highlight characteristics and experiences they are proud of, both of family at the shelter and of family living outside of the shelter. At the time of Fraenkel et al.'s research publication in 2009, over 300 families—mostly African American, African Caribbean, Latino, or bicultural (e.g., African American and Latino)—had participated in these groups. These families have largely rated the program as highly helpful and have helped families to have increased hope and pride, reduced

psychological distress, enhanced family relationships, improved social support, and helped them move towards securing work and housing.

Knight (2017) examined common themes within a strengths-focused, process-oriented group with mothers experiencing homelessness that prioritized the group members providing mutual aid to their challenges. This researcher highlighted that common themes include anger, self-blame, stigma of being homeless, and feelings of being overwhelmed with their personal histories and current struggles. Within this group, interventions emphasized group discussion, solution-focused and narrative perspectives, social support within the group, and emphasizing existing coping skills, strengths, and resilience. Overall, group members were found to receive mutual aid in terms of support and validation through sharing their life experiences.

Berzoff (2013) also shared important factors for clinicians to consider within support and process groups of women and mothers experiencing homelessness. She highlighted crucial themes commonly present within such groups aiming to help women with psychological and relational support, including safety, empathy and mirroring, social support, emotional expression, and psychoeducation. Overall, such groups can offer mothers and women experiencing homelessness places to talk about, and receive support for, challenges and feelings of powerlessness, disenfranchisement, and oppression. Process groups can support these women in processing and understanding experiences of trauma, and engaging in conversations to better be warned of future dangers. Psychoeducation allows for opportunities to learn about issues including parenting, safety skills, social skills, and coping. Further, group participants can recognize and internalize their own strengths, and well as those of others, to help them address adversity within their lives. Finally, these groups can provide opportunities to develop new relationships and social skills.

### ***Culture Focused Groups with Mothers Experiencing Homelessness***

Four groups in the literature emphasized the importance of engaging cultural strengths and critically analyzing factors of oppression to promote wellbeing and social support for mothers experiencing homelessness. Interventions included discussions and critical consciousness-raising related to oppression and discrimination (Coker et al., 2010; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008), learning strategies to navigate resources and oppressive systems (Coker et al., 2010), spiritual expression and connection (Banks & Lee, 2016), social support (Banks & Lee, 2016; Coker et al., 2010; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008), psychoeducation (Jones, 2008), goal-setting (Coker et al., 2010), and learning positive, community-based, and culturally-syntonic stress management and coping strategies (Coker et al., 2010; Jones, 2008).

Johnson and Lee (1994) discuss a shelter empowerment group meant to engage in consciousness-raising processes with mothers experiencing homelessness. The group included eight mothers who were in recovery from substance abuse, most of whom identified as African American or Latina. The aim of the group was to facilitate discussions about their experiences related to feelings of powerlessness, and to facilitate empowerment and change for themselves, their families, and the shelter community. Interventions throughout the program included validation and empathy, engaging in critical consciousness-raising to identify factors of oppression and insufficient aid, facilitating critical analysis of oppressive systems, reinforcing effective ways to manage oppression, and bolstering social connectedness and support within the group. Ultimately, many group participants felt empowered to end periods of homelessness, had strong relationships with their children and friends, and had a sophisticated understanding of political engagement and activism.

Coker et al. (2010) facilitated a series of personal growth groups for mothers experiencing homelessness residing in a transitional residential facility. The two groups each consisted of five to six members, who were largely African-American mothers aged 17 to 24 with minimal counseling or psychoeducational experience prior to the groups. The aim of the groups were to support mothers in addressing the stressors of being homeless while pregnant or parenting young children by helping them to identify personal goals, consider their life journey, and develop strategies to improve their life and that of their children. The groups was highly influenced by, and integrated with, social justice principles of equity, access, participation, and harmony as their guiding foundation. Additionally, the topics discussed were flexible and selected based on group members' needs, including parenting skills and concerns; issues related to family of origin and intimate relationships; work and educational development; and anger management. Interventions were flexibility utilized and included goal-setting, exploring emotions, identifying positive coping strategies, learning stress management techniques, seeking social support from other group members, and discussing strategies to enhance personal empowerment and navigate public and community resources and administrative bureaucracies. While the researchers highlighted important considerations in running groups with mothers experiencing homelessness in residential facilitates, there were notable limitations to this study, including the absence of discussion of the short- and long-term impact on the group members.

Banks and Lee (2016) discuss the program "Inspirational Singing," a nurturing and spiritual-healing program for women experiencing homelessness created by Reverend Stephanie Lee. This religious-focused program involved singing traditional gospel hymns, giving testimony, healing touch, building relationships, and a general freedom to worship and express their spirituality. Overall, this group provided participants with a voice, a strong sense of hope

and connection to others and God, and a recognition of God’s love and that they mattered as people.

Jones (2008) engaged in an experimental study to test the effectiveness of a culturally relevant, strengths-based therapy group for low-income Black women who self-identify as having difficulty in managing tasks of daily life. This group, entitled “Claiming Your Connections” (CYC), aimed to reduce symptoms of depression while enhancing stress reduction, active coping, and locus of control. The intervention was intentionally developed and oriented around the needs, values, and worldviews of Black women by using Afrocentric and feminist perspectives and psychosocial competence as organizing frameworks. CYC involves 10 weekly, 90-minute sessions that aimed to help group members to gain personal and contextual insight into their personal and environmental stressors—including explicit links to oppression, discrimination, and internalized oppression—and to gain new skills, including stress management and effective interpersonal skills. This intervention utilizes a mixture of psychoeducation, social support, problem-solving, reflective exercises, and discussion on themes present in literature by Black women authors. Additionally, the intervention emphasized positive, community-based, and traditional coping and social support strategies and perspectives of Black women and Black families. Overall, the group aimed to provide a safe and culturally congruent space to discuss issues of self-development and critical self-examination.

A total of 21 Black women experiencing homelessness residing in a long-term shelter engaged in the CYC study, with 10 participating in the intervention group and 11 in the no-treatment control group following random assignment. Pre- and post-test measures were administered to both groups at the same time period. At the end of the group, participants in the CYC intervention group endorsed lower levels of stress and depression. Additionally, they had

significant increases in active coping and an enhanced sense of control and mastery over their mood and outcomes in their life (Jones, 2008).

### **Critique and Rationale**

The review of the literature strongly suggests that despite significant personal, familial, and contextual stressors and traumas, positive functioning and resilience can be observed in families experiencing homelessness, particularly when mothers have strategies to reduce or mitigate stress symptoms in their contexts of daily adversity (Narayan, 2015). While there have been a number of group interventions developed or adapted to address the mental health needs of mothers experiencing homelessness, few group interventions exist with this population that directly address stress management (Dutton et al., 2013; Jones, 2008; Plasse, 2001). Further, while there are some group therapy modalities that address issues of stress management with mothers experiencing homelessness, there is further need for groups to move beyond stress management and coping to promote long-term growth and relational resilience in these families. Despite the fact that resilience-oriented researchers have emphasized the importance of group interventions that foster social support and bolster internal strengths within this population, no interventions currently exist that directly foster characteristics of individual or relational resilience that are key to long-term stability and well-being in this population (Narayan, 2015; Taylor & Conger, 2017).

Improving the well-being of mothers experiencing homelessness by enhancing their social support systems and strengthening their resilience through group-based interventions has been strongly suggested to promote enhanced family relationships, effective parenting skills, and familial adjustment in the face of adversity (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Currently, there are therapies promoting resilience within parental stress management in non-homeless populations



(Yi-Frazier et al., 2017; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Saltzman, 2016). These resilience-oriented therapies include a wide variety of interventions, including mindfulness, relaxation, positive self-talk, and reflection and insight activities (Yi-Frazier et al., 2017; Saltzman, 2016). Given that many groups for parents have historically emphasized parents' limitations and pathologies and notable stigmas against individuals experiencing homelessness, resilience-oriented groups that promote empowerment and self-confidence—rather than guilt, blame, and shame—through emphasis on positive competencies and strengths would be particularly beneficial (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Lau, 2006; Taylor & Conger, 2017; Weisz & Quinn, 2017). Additionally, rather than focusing simply upon reducing suffering, it is also posited that promoting maternal and family resilience in contexts of homelessness also necessitates an emphasis on cultivating positive characteristics and traits of well-being, such as gratitude, hope, authentic connection, love, compassion, forgiveness, belonging, joy, courage, fulfillment, and the pursuit of meaningful goals (Banks & Lee, 2016; Jones, 2008; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Thus, there is an urgent need for the development of a resilience and well-being oriented stress management intervention that addresses the needs of mothers experiencing homelessness.

The primary aim of this study was to develop a resilience-oriented stress management group intervention for mothers experiencing homelessness, with an emphasis on building relational resilience. The purpose of the intervention is to provide a culturally and contextually adaptable group that aims to help mothers experiencing homelessness grow in the areas of personal, family, and communal well-being through the promotion of stress management from a relational resilience perspective. The specific research objectives for this project are:

- (1) To complete a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to stress and resilience among mothers experiencing homelessness, with an emphasis on intervention approaches.
- (2) To utilize the literature to inform the development of a group intervention emphasizing the development of relational resilience (e.g., building strengths to manage relational stress, increasing relatedness and social support, and strengthening relational systems) among mothers experiencing homelessness using Harrell's *Resilience and Reconnection* (R&R) stress management program (2020) as a foundation.
- (3) To conduct a preliminary evaluation of the group intervention and manual by two to four individuals with experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness.

## **Chapter II: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In response to the continued need to address the challenges of mothers experiencing homelessness, this dissertation project focused on the development of a relational resilience-oriented stress management group intervention and manual for mothers experiencing homelessness, entitled WE RISE (Women Experiencing Resilience in Stressful Environments). This project uniquely contributes to the intervention literature through having a relational resilience focused approach to stress management in developing personal and relational strengths to bolster personal and familial adaptive functioning in the context of adversity, and the integration of considerations for cultural and contextual adaptations that can impact the adjustment and resilience of mothers and families experiencing homelessness. This chapter will describe the methodology utilized in developing this intervention program and manual. The first stage of the study involved an extensive review of the literature, research studies, and existing interventions addressing issues of stress management with related populations to inform the creation of the program. The second stage of the study entailed integration of the existing literature to develop the group intervention program and manual. The third and final stage involved the evaluation of the program by four individuals with significant experience in working with mothers experiencing homelessness.

### **Phase One: Review of the Literature and Existing Resources**

The initial phase of the study involved an extensive literature review in regards to the populations' demographics; stress, trauma, and other adversity experiences; resilience and relational resilience; and culture and contextual factors experienced by mothers and families experiencing homelessness. These findings informed the preliminary structure and content of the

group intervention. A comprehensive review of the literature on existing resources was conducted to better inform the content of the WE RISE intervention manual. Literature was gathered from a variety of databases including PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, WorldCat, EBSCOHOST databases, books in print, and other internet resources. The review of the literature focused primarily on the experiences of stress on mothers experiencing homelessness in the United States. In particular, keyword searches included combinations of the following terms: *homelessness, homeless mother, homeless parent, homeless family, homeless women, poverty, stress, stress management, well-being, resilience, family resilience, parent resilience, relational resilience, coping, strengths, group intervention, and women's groups*. Further, additional applicable information was gathered from national organizations including the American Psychological Association, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Coalition for the Homeless, and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Lastly, written manuals for existing programs designed for mothers experiencing homelessness were attempted to be obtained for review.

## **Phase Two: Intervention Development**

The literature review and the empirical foundation for a relational resilience-oriented approach provided the support for the creation of the group intervention and manual, *WE RISE: A Relational Resilience-Oriented Stress Management Group Intervention for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness*. The specific themes and content of the seven group sessions were supported by empirical studies highlighting the needs and resiliency factors of mothers experiencing homelessness, as well as the resources and strategies noted as highly beneficial to their personal, familial, and communal wellbeing. The WE RISE stress management group intervention for mothers experiencing homelessness was developed and informed by a synthesis

of the literature and other information gathered from organizations and existing related interventions. Although intervention authors were contacted in attempts to access current documentation of interventions designed for mothers experiencing homelessness to also inform the WE RISE intervention, no responses were received. Overall, the literature strongly suggests that group therapy interventions that address the needs of mothers experiencing homelessness are particularly effective due to reduced stigma, cost effectiveness, and the possibility for long-term social support (Daniels, 1992; Taylor & Conger, 2017). Furthermore, the literature suggested that effective group interventions for this population are adaptive, culturally-and-contextually focused, and incorporate topics including: social support; coping skills; contemplative practices; problem solving; cognitive restructuring practices; discussions of trauma and oppression; fostering of positive traits, including gratitude, compassion, and forgiveness; and an integration of faith, religion, and spirituality (Coker et al., 2010; Dutton et al., 2013; Jones, 2008; Plasse, 2001; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017).

The WE RISE group intervention program is intended to support mothers experiencing homelessness to develop and strengthen their resilience in the face of multiple stressors. The target population are mothers experiencing homelessness living in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs with their children. It is suggested that the group be comprised of between 6 and 12 mothers experiencing homelessness to maximize participation and learning within the group. The group was designed to be facilitated in a variety of diverse settings in which mothers experiencing homelessness may seek services—including shelters, transitional housing facilities, community mental health agencies, places of worship, and public and private service agencies.

### **Phase Three: Evaluation of the Program Content and Manual**

Four individuals with expertise working with mothers experiencing homelessness reviewed the WE RISE intervention manual and provided feedback. These evaluators were provided with a copy of the intervention manual via email and evaluated the content, design, applicability, possible effectiveness, and quality of the group intervention and manual components. A program evaluation feedback questionnaire was provided via an online survey website, and consisted of questions rated on a Likert scale, open-ended questions, and a section allotted to provide additional comments or recommendations based on the evaluators' impressions of the manual. The data gathered from the feedback forms was reviewed and incorporated into areas for future improvements and directions for the manual's development. Additional strengths and limitations of the intervention that emerged from the evaluative feedback are also discussed in the discussion section.

#### ***Participants***

Participating evaluators were required to meet the following criteria: (1) be at least age 25; and (2) have experience working with women experiencing homelessness, defined as either (a) having a Master's degree or higher in psychology, counseling, education, social work, public health (or related field) *and* have a minimum of two years of experience working directly with mothers experiencing homelessness (i.e., psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) or conducting women's groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers), or (b) having a minimum high school diploma *and* a minimum five years' experience working directly with mothers experiencing homelessness (i.e., psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) or conducting women's groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers). The four evaluators were all recruited

through snowball sampling using professional recommendations from the researchers' professional networks.

### ***Recruitment Strategies and Procedures***

Recruitment of mental health professionals occurred through snowball sampling using professional recommendations from the researchers' professional networks across several shelters and transitional housing programs for mothers experiencing homelessness. The four participants were contacted via email with the opportunity to evaluate the group intervention manual. The email explained the components of the study and guidelines for participation (see Appendix A - Participant Recruitment Email Script). All four of the evaluators met the eligibility criteria (see Appendix B - Evaluator Eligibility Form) and were willing to participate in the study. Two evaluators had a master's degree in clinical psychology and had three years of experience providing psychotherapy to mothers experiencing homelessness in shelter or residential facilities for individuals experiencing homelessness. One of these two evaluators also had an additional two years of therapy experience conducting women's groups in low-income settings. The third evaluator had a master's degree in education and had two years of experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness as a residential assistant in a shelter or residential facility for individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the fourth evaluator had a bachelor's degree and a total of five years of experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness as a case manager, housing specialist, and program coordinator in a shelter or residential facility for individuals experiencing homelessness. This evaluator also reported having one year of experience conducting women's groups in low-income settings as a case manager.

Evaluators were provided with informed consent via email, which described the nature and purpose of the study, the author's affiliation, associated risks and benefits of participation, and considerations for evaluators' privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix C - Participant Consent Form). The informed consent form was reviewed, signed, and returned by all four evaluators prior to their examination of the WE RISE intervention and manual. Prior to contacting potential participants, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained (see Appendix F - IRB Approval Notice). Following receipt of an electronic signature for the informed consent, participating evaluators were provided with links to access the group intervention manual and online survey to provide feedback via the evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix E - Program Evaluation Feedback Questionnaire; Appendix G - WE RISE Intervention Manual). The four evaluators reviewed the group intervention manual and completed the evaluation questionnaire via an online website in approximately one week.

### ***Questionnaire and Data Collection***

An evaluation questionnaire was developed to assess the content and quality of the WE RISE manual by obtaining data from the evaluators regarding their feedback on the design, content, organization, efficacy, appropriateness, practicality, feasibility, helpfulness, cultural and contextual considerations, strengths, and limitations, and to gather additional suggestions and comments to improve the group intervention and manual (see Appendix E - Program Evaluation Feedback Questionnaire). The questionnaire consisted of a total of fifteen items, with nine items scored on a Likert scale and six open-ended questions to encourage a broad range of feedback from evaluators regarding the fit of the population with the group intervention.

The first nine items were scored on a five-point Likert-scale rated from 1 through 5, with one representing a response of "Strongly Disagree" and a five indicating a "Strongly Agree"



endorsement. The nine Likert scale items were comprised of the following statements:

1. The WE RISE intervention is thorough in its attention to issues relevant to mothers experiencing homelessness;
2. The WE RISE intervention provides adequate information regarding the unique stressors experienced by mothers experiencing homelessness;
3. The WE RISE intervention manual is easy to read and understand;
4. The WE RISE intervention manual is well organized;
5. The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are appropriate for mothers experiencing homelessness;
6. The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are appropriate with respect to cultural and environmental considerations;
7. The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are practical and readily applicable for mothers experiencing homelessness;
8. The WE RISE group intervention is feasible and realistic to implement in shelters or residential environments where mothers experiencing homelessness may live; and
9. The WE RISE group intervention will be helpful for mothers experiencing homelessness.

The remaining six open-ended questions included asking for feedback on the strengths, weaknesses, and cultural and contextual considerations of the intervention and manual; requesting suggestions for additional considerations for cultural and contextual adaptation and other stress-reduction/management interventions that are appropriate for mothers experiencing homelessness; and any other suggestions for improvement the group intervention and manual or additional comments.

Data collection involved emailing all four evaluators a copy of the WE RISE group intervention manual and a link to the evaluation questionnaire via an online survey website. Once the evaluators had completed the online questionnaire, the responses were visible to the researcher through the online survey website and reviewed.

### ***Compensation***

As compensation for completing the evaluation, each participant received their choice of a \$20.00 Starbucks or Amazon electronic gift card. Once the completed evaluation of the intervention manual was received, the electronic gift card was emailed to the participant within one week.

### ***Analysis of Evaluation***

Evaluative feedback obtained from the participating evaluators was reviewed to identify themes that can be used to improve the intervention manual. Recommendations and suggestions obtained through the evaluators' feedback were synthesized and are discussed in detail in the results and discussion sections, including the identification of the strengths, limitations, and potential contributions of the WE RISE group intervention. Implications for a pilot implementation of the group and ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention are also discussed.

### **Chapter III: Results**

This chapter will describe the structure and content of the WE RISE group intervention for mothers experiencing homelessness. The program is presented through the facilitator manual entitled “WE RISE: A Relational Resilience-Oriented Stress Management Group Intervention for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness” (see Appendix G – WE RISE Intervention Manual). In addition, the results from the four evaluators will be presented.

#### **The WE RISE Intervention and Manual**

The WE RISE group intervention is presented via a facilitator manual. The WE RISE Group Intervention Manual (see Appendix G - WE RISE Intervention Manual) is 157 pages in length and is overall comprised of a population-specific overview, considerations for fostering relational resilience, cultural and contextual adaptation, and facilitator outlines for the seven group sessions. The WE RISE group intervention and manual was designed to be highly adaptable to be facilitated in the various settings in which mothers experiencing homelessness may seek support, including homeless and domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, community mental health, places of worship, and public and private service agencies. Overall, the intervention was heavily informed by a synthesis of the literature, particularly that focused on interventions with this population, as well as by applications of Harrell’s Resilience & Reconnection (R&R) intervention (2020) with other populations (Alnatour, 2019; Rumburg, 2019). This included the author’s own experience conducting the R&R group in a community mental health context. While authors were contacted in efforts to obtain current manuals and other documentation of interventions for this population, no responses were received.

The manual begins with a vision statement for the use of the WE RISE group. It then provides an introduction to the population and needs of mothers experiencing homelessness,

including current statistics, stressors, and demonstrations and experiences of resilience and relational resilience. This is then followed by a discussion of the WE RISE program and purpose, which also includes an overview of the group structure and suggestions for recruitment, selection of group members, guidelines for facilitators, and suggestions for session preparation, materials, and evaluation. Then, brief tips on running a trauma-informed group are provided, as well as a detailed outline of considerations and suggestions for cultural and contextual adaptations of the intervention, and optional evaluation measures to provide at the end of the group sessions. This is followed by a detailed session-by-session outline of the seven weekly, one-and-a-half hour group sessions, including sample scripts and handouts. The group intervention concludes with several appendices, including some blank session handouts, the opening and closing mindfulness meditation scripts, a sample recruitment flyer, the group evaluation form, and the suggested screening form for group participation.

The manual proposes adaptable recruitment strategies, including a sample recruitment flyer, for the range of settings in which mothers experiencing homelessness may reside. Furthermore, a screening interview form is provided in the manual to determine if mothers are a good fit for the group prior to their enrollment. Individuals who are experiencing high levels of distress or impairment—such as due to active risk due to suicidality or homicidality; current engagement in non-suicidal self-injury; severe psychosis that impedes the ability to participate in group effectively; intoxication or active substance use; and anger, hostility, or other personality traits, characteristics, or behaviors that may negatively impact the group or impair their capacity to participate productively—are not appropriate for the group and should be referred to mental health treatment (psychotherapy and/or psychiatry). These exclusionary criteria are meant to help

ensure the WE RISE group setting will promote optimal learning and sharing from all, and individuals can be reconsidered for the group when exclusionary criteria are no longer met.

Ideally, two co-facilitators would run the sessions. Given the content of the group, at least one co-facilitator should be a licensed mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, LMFT, LCSW, LPCC) or a mental health trainee under close supervision of a licensed mental health professional who is highly familiar with the WE RISE group. A self-assessment checklist for potential facilitators is provided to determine their appropriateness to facilitate the group (e.g., commitment to self-awareness, affirming of diversity, knowledgeable about the lived experiences and diversity characteristics of potential group members, have time to adapt and implement the group effectively).

### ***Organization of the Program Manual***

The group intervention is comprised of seven sessions that are organized into five phases that repeat across each group meetings. Each group is centered on two thematically-similar “Optimal Wellness” resilience themes (Harrell, 2020) relevant to this population, which serve as the topic anchor point for each session. Additionally, all six sessions following the orientation session emphasize the development of relational resilience through explicit emphasis on the group members’ connections to self, others, and the world. Two sessions are allotted for each relational focus, with the 7 group sessions organized below:

- (1) Relationship and Meaning (Orientation Session)
- (2) Compassion and Gratitude (Connection to Self)
- (3) Authenticity and Groundedness (Connection to Self)
- (4) Patience and Reflection (Connection to Others)
- (5) Attention and Flexibility (Connection to Others)

(6) Clarity and Release (Connection to the World)

(7) Transcendence and Wholeness (Connection to the World)

Each group session is organized into the following five sections based on adaptations made to Harrell's Resilience & Reconnection (R&R) resilience-oriented stress management group intervention (2020). Each session is intended to be culturally-adapted by the group facilitators to meet the unique needs of the group, the process of which is outlined thoroughly in the manual. Table 1 presents an overview of each session of the WE RISE program, with sample phrasing and activities.

**Part 1: Opening & Connecting.** The first phase of the group, which lasts 10 to 15 minutes, helps to orient members to the group. Group begins with an opening mindfulness meditation, which helps center clients to the group and connects them to session themes, other group members, and the group's goals. It also can help foster mindfulness as a potentially helpful contemplative practice and stress resilience tool.

**Part 2: Sharing in Wisdom.** During this portion of the group, which lasts approximately 25 minutes, members engage in a focused meditation on a quote that is pre-selected to match the session's overall resilience themes (Harrell, 2020). The process is based upon the Collective Wisdom Emergence (CWE, Harrell et al., 2017) activity utilized in the original R&R curriculum. It is crucial that quotes are selected to match the demographics and context of the group members. Group members are then be invited into a conversation of how the quote relates, or does not relate, to their personal and collective understanding of strengthening relationships and managing stress. This discussion is then followed by an experiential activity that helps group members to experience the week's themes experientially, cognitively, somatically, or

collectively. Explicit links between the session topics, stress management, parenting, and homelessness are strongly encouraged throughout this phase.

**Part 3: Growing through Sharing.** The third part of the group, which lasts approximately 25 minutes, involves group engagement in various interactive, culturally-syntonic stress resilience activities that help group members experience the resilience themes emotionally and actively while providing stress resilience tools to use during times of adversity and stress. Examples of activities may include guided meditations and visualizations, expressive writing, and art therapy activities. Throughout and after the activity, it is encouraged for space to be provided to allow members to share their experiences and struggles related to stress. This space allows for crucial opportunities for social support and for members to connect with and learn from each other.

**Part 4: Choosing to Commit.** The fourth phase, which takes up to 20 minutes, aims to help group members increase their awareness of stress and resilience within the last week, and set goals and work towards applying skills learned in the group to enhance relationships. During this phase, members first engage in answering “The 3 Questions,” (“How do I feel? Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”) to help them “check-in” with themselves to identify areas of personal stress and resilience in the past week, while also considering potential stress resilience strategies to use. Then, group members individually select and commit aloud to “One Thing” that they will do or practice in the next week to enhance a relationship. While the “One Thing” may be inspired by the WE RISE session, it does not have to be. Examples of such commitments could include plans to pray, to spend quality time with ones’ children, to reconnect with a friend, or to engage in deep breathing when dealing with interpersonal conflict.

**Part 5: Closing & Connecting.** The final phase of WE RISE involves a brief closing mindfulness meditation, which takes between 5 and 10 minutes. This meditation aims to synthesize the group members’ experience, learning, and connections that took place throughout the group session.

**Table 1**

*A Session-by-Session Overview of the WE RISE Group Intervention*

<b>Session 1</b>
<b>Relationship &amp; Meaning - “What Matters Most” (Orientation Session)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction, opening mindfulness meditation, and establishing group rules</li> <li>• Quote meditation</li> <li>• Brief Experiential Activity: “Meaning in Relationships”</li> <li>• Stress Resilience Tool: “Reconnecting with My Values”</li> <li>• “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment</li> <li>• Closing Mindfulness</li> </ul>
<b>Session 2</b>
<b>Compassion &amp; Gratitude – “All About Love” (Connection to Self)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening mindfulness meditation</li> <li>• Quote meditation</li> <li>• Brief Experiential Activity: “Lovingkindness Meditation”</li> <li>• Stress Resilience Tool: “Communal Gratitude Board”</li> <li>• “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment</li> <li>• Closing Mindfulness</li> </ul>
<b>Session 3</b>
<b>Authenticity &amp; Groundedness – “Remember Who You Are” (Connection to Self)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening mindfulness meditation</li> <li>• Quote meditation</li> <li>• Brief Experiential Activity: “WE RISE Name Activity” or “What Keeps Me Grounded: Tree Art Therapy”</li> <li>• Stress Resilience Tool: “Living Out My WE RISE Name” or “Being My True Self”</li> <li>• “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment</li> <li>• Closing Mindfulness</li> </ul>
<b>Session 4</b>
<b>Patience &amp; Reflection – “This Too Shall Pass” (Connection to Others)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening mindfulness meditation</li> <li>• Quote meditation</li> <li>• Brief Experiential Activity: “My Relationships at Their Best” or “Mindful Eating”</li> <li>• Stress Resilience Tool: “Bite Size Goals”</li> <li>• “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment</li> <li>• Closing Mindfulness</li> </ul>



## Session 5

### Attention & Flexibility – “*Bend, Don’t Break*” (Connection to Others)

- Opening mindfulness meditation
- Quote meditation
- Brief Experiential Activity: “Clenched vs. Open Fist” or “Nondominant Hand Writing” or “Tunnel Vision”
- Stress Resilience Tool: “Reframing Skills”
- “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment
- Closing Mindfulness

## Session 6

### Clarity & Release – “*Let It Go*” (Connection to the World)

- Opening mindfulness meditation
- Quote meditation
- Brief Experiential Activity: “I’m Releasing Myself From...”
- Stress Resilience Tool: “RAIN Meditation to Help Emotional Struggles and Stuck Places”
- “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment
- Closing Mindfulness

## Session 7

### Transcendence & Wholeness – “*Still I Rise*” (Connection to Others)

- Opening mindfulness meditation
- Quote meditation
- Brief Experiential Activity: “Shield of Strength: What Makes Me Whole” or “My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra”
- Stress Resilience Tool: “My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra” and “Together WE RISE Resilience Poem”
- “The 3 Questions” and “One Thing to Improve a Relationship” Commitment
- Final Closing Mindfulness Meditation or Alternative Closing Activity

## Overview of Evaluators’ Feedback

A total of four evaluators with experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness completed the online evaluation questionnaire, providing quantitative feedback on Likert-scale items and qualitative feedback on open-ended items. Following the evaluators’ completion of the questionnaires, the researcher reviewed the feedback provided to generate a list of improvements to apply to the manual. Through reviewing the completed questionnaires, the strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement of the WE RISE group intervention and manual were identified. A list of revisions focusing on improving the content and quality of the

manual to promote enhanced participation and relational resilience development will be included in the discussion section.

### **Summary of the Results**

The WE RISE intervention manual was evaluated by four participants: two masters-level psychotherapists with three years each of professional experience with mothers experiencing homelessness; one residential assistant with two years of experience with mothers experiencing homelessness and a master's degree in education; and one bachelors' degree educated evaluator who served as a case manager, housing specialist, and program coordinator across five years with mothers experiencing homelessness. This section will summarize their feedback on the WE RISE intervention and manual.

The evaluation form consisted of nine Likert-scale items (one to five, with one being "Strongly Disagree" to five being "Strongly Agree") and six open-ended questions. Overall, the average of evaluators' responses to all Likert scale items on the questionnaire was 4.67. The average of the first evaluators' responses across all nine items was 4.56. The second evaluators' rating average was 5.0. The third evaluators' average was 4.78, and the fourth evaluator's rating average was 4.33. Figure 2 presents the ratings for each of the evaluators on the nine Likert-scale items.

In general, the four evaluators agreed about their assessment of the group intervention manual. The average of the evaluators' responses to item one, "The WE RISE intervention is thorough in its attention to issues relevant to mothers experiencing homelessness," was 5.0. Similarly, on item two, "The WE RISE intervention provides adequate information regarding the unique stressors experienced by mothers experiencing homelessness," the average of the evaluators' responses was 5.0. Additionally, on item three, "The WE RISE intervention manual

is easy to read and understand,” the evaluators’ averaged 5.0 in their responses. For item four, “The WE RISE intervention manual is well organized,” the average of the evaluators’ responses was 4.75. Further, on item five, “The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are appropriate form mothers experiencing homelessness,” evaluators’ responded with an average for 4.5. With regard to item six, “The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are appropriate with respect to cultural and environmental considerations,” the average of evaluators’ responses was 4.5. On item seven, “The interventions within the WE RISE group intervention are practical and readily applicable for mothers experiencing homelessness,” evaluators’ responded with an average of 4.75. Additionally, on item eight, “The WE RISE group intervention is feasible and realistic to implement in shelters or residential environments where mothers experiencing homelessness may live,” the average of the evaluators’ responses was 4.0. Lastly, on item nine, “The We RISE group intervention will be helpful for mothers experiencing homelessness,” the evaluators’ averaged 4.5 in their responses. Figure 3 presents the average rating for each of the nine Likert-scale items.

The evaluators’ described multiple strengths of the WE RISE group intervention manual, including attention to cultural and contextual factors, the instructions and structure of the manual’s sessions, capacity for adaptation and flexibility in the intervention, the array of evidence-based perspectives underlying the program, and the variety of intervention strategies included. Regarding cultural considerations, evaluators noted that the manual did a “great job in giving attention to cultural and contextual factors,” including “attention to intersectionality and cultural implications around working with diverse women.” Evaluators also indicated that the manual instructions were “well written and easy to follow” and had a “level of detail [that was] excellent.” Evaluators noted that the format of the manual felt “extremely usable ‘out of the

box” and that they felt confident that “after reading the manual and instructions [I felt] I could easily deliver each session.” Additionally, one evaluator indicated that they appreciated that to account for the needs and characteristics of the homeless population, the intervention was “not too structured” and thus “left enough space to structure the group in a way that makes most sense for the individual clients being worked with.” Evaluators also cited several of the underlying perspectives and integrated theoretical orientations of the intervention program as strengths. One evaluator highlighted the importance that the treatment was trauma informed, client centered, and goal oriented. They also noted that the intervention is set up to be “empowering participants to be active in the growing process, instead of passive.” Another evaluator recognized strengths in the integration of Multicultural Theory with humanistic, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and mindfulness-focused orientations. Finally, the inclusion of certain intervention strategies were cited as strengths, particularly the use of mindfulness, meditation, and inspirational quotes.

Regarding weaknesses of the group intervention and manual, two evaluators provided helpful feedback and suggestions to improve the intervention. One evaluator highlighted that, in their experience, each intervention session would likely take at least two hours, which is longer than the set one and a half hour timespan. They also noted that the length of the group could be a barrier to attendees, particularly for individuals who “have to pay for child care, transportation, or [have a] limited attention span.” Additionally, another evaluator suggested inclusion of other types of meditation besides more traditional, scripted practices, noting that this style of meditation can often be challenging for individuals in this population. They suggested alternative meditations, such as “following an instrument through an empowering musical number, or meditations that may involve their children for ease of practice once they leave the group.”

Interestingly, the two other evaluators did not cite any weaknesses, with one noting that they believed that the interventions' weaknesses would need to be found through facilitating a pilot group.

Evaluators were also queried specially on their perceptions of the consideration for and integration of cultural and contextual issues within the group intervention and manual. All four evaluators indicated that the inclusion of multicultural issues was strong and well-appreciated. Numerous factors related to multicultural and contextual relevancy were highlighted, including “alternative quotes and phrasings,” the “use of empowerment, authenticity, suggested adaptations for certain groups, use of metaphors, and so many powerful tools within the manual.” One evaluator suggested that potential WE RISE group facilitators may benefit from further guidance on gender identity and pronoun usage as it impacts group participation, particularly as the group is designed for “mothers.”

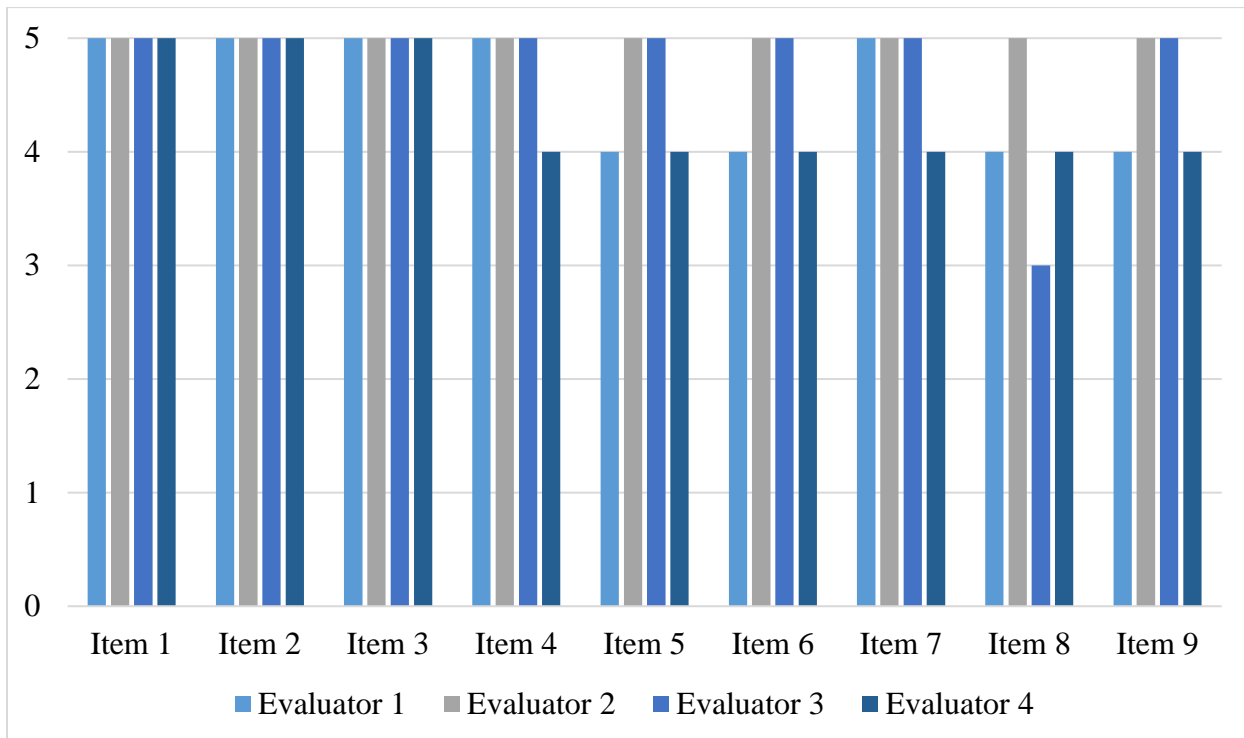
The evaluation questionnaire also included several open-ended questions designed to garner additional recommendations for appropriate interventions or modifications to improve the group intervention and manual. One evaluator noted that regular group attendance and the groups' time frame could be constrained by child care options. Thus, they suggested that having additional supportive staff to provide childcare services during the group would be crucial to prevent the mothers from either needing to pay to arrange childcare or being unable to concentrate due to supervising their children during the groups. Evaluators also suggested a few additional stress management interventions to consider. One evaluator suggested inclusion of the Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) technique entitled “Safe Place,” which involves creating an inner resource—either remembered or imagined—of a place in which they feel safe. Another evaluator noted having successful experiences in explicitly incorporating

self-care activities in their work with mothers experiencing homelessness, noting that these individuals are “often the care takers to their family and don’t prioritize their wellbeing or rewarding themselves [sic].” Lastly, the evaluation form included in the WE RISE manual was described as feeling better suited to an end of program feedback, rather than to be used at the end of each group session. It was suggested that using a short Likert-style feedback form with space allocated for general comments may be quicker for participants to complete on a weekly basis and could be used to track the overall performance of group members.

The evaluators’ responses to the open-ended questions within the evaluation questionnaire are reported in Tables 2 through 7.

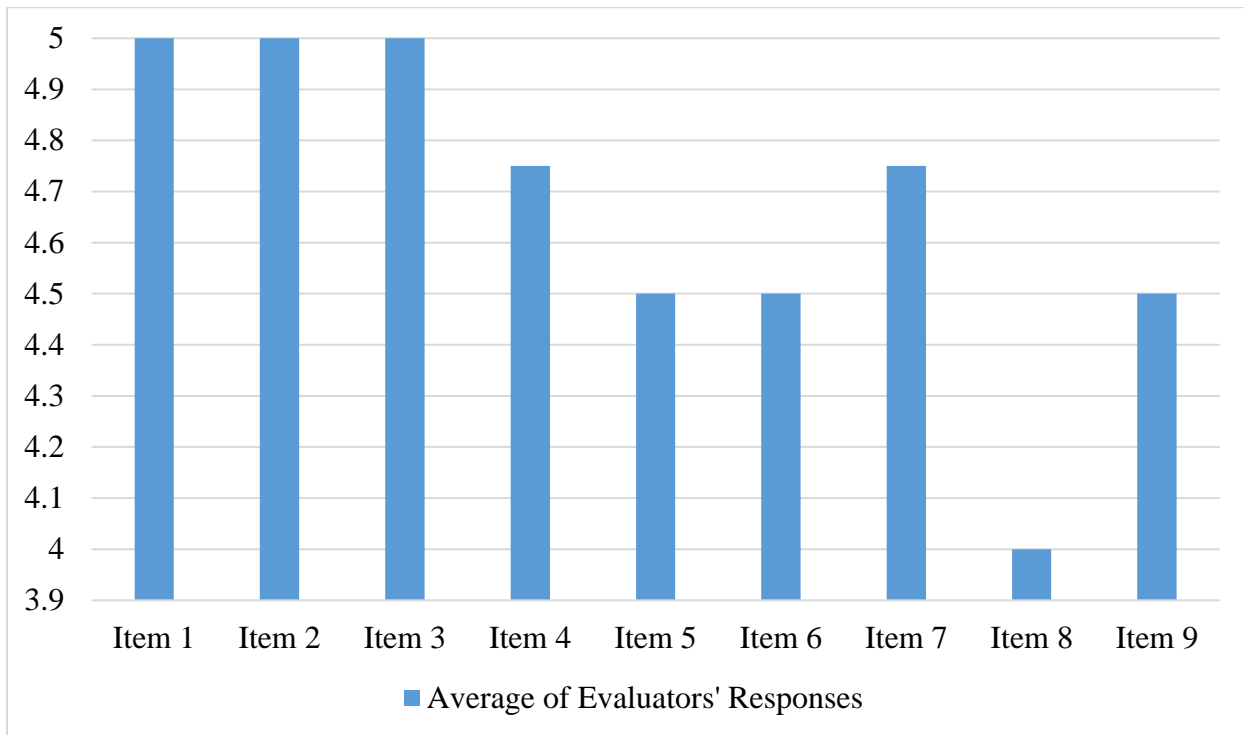
**Figure 2**

*Evaluators’ Responses to Nine Likert-Scale Items*



**Figure 3**

*Average of Evaluators' Responses to Nine Likert-Scale Items*



**Table 2**

*Evaluators' Responses to Item 10*

<b>What do you consider to be the strengths of the WE RISE group intervention and manual?</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	The level of detail is excellent in creating much of the resources needed to run the groups. This makes it extremely useable 'out of the box'.
2	I found that this manual did a great job of giving attention to cultural and contextual factors. I recognized heavy use of Multicultural Theory throughout the manual, integrated with humanistic, ACT, CBT, and mindfulness as well. The manual was well written and easy to follow. I felt as if after reading the manual and instructions I could easily deliver each session. Additionally, I thought it was a great strength that the manual was not too structured. In line with the homeless population, there may be similarities as well as many differences. I felt that the manual left enough space to structure the group in a way that makes most sense for the individual clients being worked with.
3	Attention to intersectionality and cultural implications around working with diverse women
4	It is trauma informed & client centered. Goal oriented. Including meditation and inspirational quotes. Empowering participants to be active in the growing process instead of passive.

**Table 3**

*Evaluators' Responses to Item 11*

<b>What do you consider to be the weaknesses of the WE RISE group intervention and manual?</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	I dunno, honestly I think any weaknesses would need to be found through piloting the manual
2	I had very little criticism with this manual. One suggestion I have may be to insert other types of meditation beyond more traditional scripted ones given that meditation can often be hard for people. Perhaps following an instrument through an empowering musical number, or meditations that may involve their children for ease of practice once they leave the group.
3	I don't have any weaknesses <i>[sic]</i>
4	In my experience it would take longer than an hour and a half to go through each session. It would most likely end up being at least 2 hour group session. This can be a barrier for those who have to pay for child care, transportation or limited attention span.



**Table 4**

*Evaluators' Responses to Item 12*

<b>What did you think about the consideration of cultural and contextual issues in the <i>WE RISE</i> group intervention and manual? Please share any suggestions for additional factors related to cultural and contextual adaptation with this population not currently/sufficiently addressed in the intervention or manual.</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	The consideration for cultural relevancy was strong, including alternative quotes and phrasings. One topic that facilitators may need more guidance is on gender identity and pronouns. This could be a specificity sensitive topic in a group made for "mothers". It may be useful to talk about gender identity as it relates to participation in this group.
2	As mentioned above, I felt that the multicultural and contextual attention within this manual was amazing. I recognized use of empowerment, authenticity, suggested adaptations for certain groups, use of metaphors, and so many powerful tools within this manual.
3	I appreciated it.
4	The manual covered cultural and contextual issues well. No additional suggestions.

**Table 5**

*Evaluators' Responses to Item 13*

<b>Please share any suggestions for additional stress-reduction/management interventions that are appropriate for mothers experiencing homelessness.</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	(no response)
2	SAFE Place EMDR technique
3	None
4	We have success with incorporating self-care activities as our parenting participants are often the care takers to their family and don't prioritize their well being or rewarding themselves.

**Table 6***Evaluators' Responses to Item 14*

<b>Please provide any suggestions for improving the <i>WE RISE</i> group intervention and manual.</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	The evaluation form included feels more suited to an end of program feedback. A short Likert type feedback form could be more helpful at the end of the session, with a space for general comments. This sort of feedback is much quicker for participants to do and can be used to track the overall performance of the group on the desired outcomes.
2	(no response)
3	None
4	N/A

**Table 7***Evaluators' Responses to Item 15*

<b>Additional Comments</b>	
<b>Evaluator</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	(no response)
2	(no response)
3	(no response)
4	I believe a challenge in having regular attendance and meeting the time frame will be child care. I suggest an additional supportive staff besides the facilitator is available to provide child care services so that the participants don't have to pay to arrange own child care or be unable to concentrate due to having to supervise their children during the sessions.

## **Chapter IV: Discussion**

The purpose of this dissertation project was to develop a relational resilience-oriented stress management group intervention for mothers experiencing homelessness. This group intervention was informed through a comprehensive review of existing literature related to the needs, challenges, and resilience factors of mothers experiencing homelessness and their families. Four individuals with at least two years' experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness then evaluated the completed group intervention manual. Information about the group intervention and manual's strengths, limitations, cultural and contextual considerations, and areas for improvement was gathered via an online evaluation questionnaire. The implications of the findings and future directions to improve the group intervention manual will be presented in this chapter.

### **Results in the Context of Existing Literature on Mothers Experiencing Homelessness**

The WE RISE group intervention and manual reflects key findings related promoting resilience, enhancing relationships, and effectively managing stress with mothers experiencing homelessness, both from the current research and from the experiences of the population themselves (Dashora et al., 2012; Holtrop et al., 2015; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010). Research findings strongly suggest that despite notable current and past experiences of adversity and trauma, both individual and relational resilience can be commonly found in mothers and families experiencing homelessness, particularly when the mothers themselves have effective strategies to mitigate the symptoms of stress (Huey et al., 2013; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017). A dominant theme found in the literature and other interventions with this population is the importance of social support to manage adversity, recover from trauma, promote well-being, and foster leaving experiences of homelessness to

reach higher levels of independence (Banks & Lee, 2016; Berzoff, 2013; Coker et al., 2010; Fraenkel et al., 2009; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008; Knight, 2017; Plasse, 2001; Racine & Sévigny, 2008; Sheller et al., 2018). Given the centrality of all aspects of relational resilience to homeless mothers—individual resilience in the context of relational stress; active relational engagement and connectedness in authentic, supportive, affirming relationships that promote personal and collective growth and transformation; and system-wide resilience within families and communities to enhance well-being and protect against internal and external stressors (Rowland et al., 2018)—in ultimately managing and overcoming trauma and adversity, intentional emphasis on promoting relational resilience through connection to self, others, and the world was present throughout the WE RISE intervention. Further, the themes and activities chosen for each group session was guided by research that suggests that interventions for mothers experiencing homelessness are most beneficial when they are strengths-focused; allow opportunities to encourage social support; enhance relationships with others, including the parent-child dyad and whole family; promote the development of effective, community-based, and culturally-syntonic stress management and coping strategies; and ongoing discussions about the impact of discrimination and oppression (Banks & Lee, 2016; Berzoff, 2013; Coker et al., 2010; Dutton et al., 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2009; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008; Knight, 2017; Plasse, 2001; Racine & Sévigny, 2008; Sheller et al., 2018). Finally, given the complex cultural and contextual identities and factors impacting mothers and families experiencing homelessness, as well as the systems that support them, strong emphasis on cultural and contextual adaptation underlies both the theory and practice of the WE RISE intervention. This is strongly supported in the literature, which indicates that intentional consideration for—and inclusion of—cultural/contextual issues and adaptations is absolutely essential for the

effectiveness of interventions with this population (Banks & Lee, 2016; Coker et al., 2010; Dutton et al., 2013; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008).

### **Strengths of the Intervention and Manual**

The evaluators highlighted several strengths of the WE RISE group intervention and manual. Several of the strengths identified included: (a) “amazing” attention to cultural and contextual factors impacting mothers experiencing homelessness; (b) the “well written and easy to follow” structure of the manual and instructions; (c) the intervention’s flexibility and capacity for adaptation; (d) the variety of evidence-based interventions and perspectives underlying the program; and (e) the array of intervention strategies included. The evaluators’ observations reflect recurrent findings within the existing research literature for this population, as intentional cultural adaptation has been strongly suggested as crucial for enhancing participant engagement and improving outcomes (Coker et al., 2010; Dutton et al., 2013; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Jones, 2008). Further, research suggests that having a trauma-informed, population-centered, and empowerment-focused approach, in addition to utilizing a variety of interventions and coping strategies, is beneficial to encourage a safe space for connection and expression of group participants, as well as maximize opportunities to promote resilience and development of new skills (Banks & Lee, 2016; Johnson & Lee, 1994; Knight, 2017; NCFH, 2003; Racine & Sévigny, 2008).

### **Weaknesses of the Intervention and Manual**

The evaluators also noted some limitations of the group intervention and manual that are important to inform future improvements. Limitations highlighted included: (a) the volume of content is more likely to take at least two hours, rather than the anticipated one-and-a-half hours; (b) the length of the group could be a barrier to attendance; and (c) including only traditional,

scripted meditations in the manual could be limiting, particularly as this style of meditation can be challenging for individuals in this population. Some helpful suggestions offered by the evaluators to address some of these limitations will be incorporated into the future version of the group intervention manual. Additionally, there is literature to support these suggestions. Various researchers emphasize the importance of diverse understandings and applications of meditation and contemplative practices, particularly with historically oppressed and marginalized groups, including people of color and individuals experiencing homelessness (Dutton et al., 2013; Harrell, 2018). For instance, Harrell (2018) emphasizes that considerations for culture and context within mindfulness and other practices of awareness, attention, regulation, and transcendence are crucial for maximizing the appropriateness and effectiveness of contemplative practices with such populations. Additionally, prioritizing access to childcare and other supportive services to effectively address barriers to attendance have been highlighted throughout interventions with mothers experiencing homelessness (Coker et al., 2010; Dutton et al., 2013; McWhirter, 2006).

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Directions**

There are several limitations to this study and the WE RISE intervention and manual itself. First, while the four evaluators have significant experience in working with mothers experiencing homelessness, their feedback and perspective on the intervention and manual may be limited in scope. Research has suggested that the collaborative input between professionals and mothers experiencing homelessness is crucial to their effective engagement in programs (Fraenkel et al., 2009). Given the lack of questions asked of evaluators related to their cultural identities and lived experiences on the evaluator eligibility questionnaire (e.g., racial/ethnic background, gender identity, personal experiences with homelessness and/or parenthood, etc.)

beyond educational status and work experience, it is unclear to what extent—if at all—the evaluators share relevant identities or life experiences with either the expected group participants or potential facilitators. While it cannot be assumed that the evaluators do not have personal histories of homelessness, their reported educational histories are significant outliers in comparison to that of most mothers experiencing homelessness (ACOG, 2013; Holtrop et al., 2015; Paquette & Bassuk, 2009; Plasse, 2002). Additionally, given that shelter staff tend to support the needs of residents across a wide array of roles, including supporting in running groups, considering their perspective on the manual is also important (Olivet et al., 2010; Reid et al., 2005; Rodriguez, 1988; Schiff & Lane, 2019). However, despite all four evaluators having at least several years of experience in a homeless shelter or other residential facility for homeless individuals, aspects of their educational background significantly differs from that of many shelter staff (Olivet et al., 2010; Rodriguez, 1988; Schiff & Lane, 2019). Regarding education, most shelter staff have approximately two years of higher education, with a smaller minority having a 2-year diploma or bachelor’s degree or equivalent (Schiff & Lane, 2019). Additionally, it is not uncommon for some staff to have less than 12 years of formal education (Rodriguez, 1988; Schiff & Lane, 2019). Additionally, a recent study on shelter staff found that less than 15% of the 499 shelter participants had a graduate degree (Schiff & Lane, 2019), which contrasts significantly from the 75% of evaluators in this study with graduate degrees. Additionally, staff often represent the cultural backgrounds of the residents (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.) and former residents of the shelter are often hired into staff roles (Rodriguez, 1988). Thus, both without further information about the demographics and backgrounds of the four evaluators, and without having directly sought out feedback of the WE RISE program from mothers

experiencing homelessness, it is likely that there are additional areas of strength, weakness, and suggestions for improvement that were not fully captured in this study.

Regarding the WE RISE intervention and manual itself, there are additional limitations in addition to the areas of improvement noted by the evaluators. First, given high rates of instability and turnover in contexts in which mothers experiencing homelessness reside, it may not be feasible for mothers to attend group sessions across even a 7-week period. Given difficulties and conflicting obligations including childcare; transportation; demands including going to or applying for work, school, social support services, and housing; and general transitions in housing, many mothers may find it challenging to attend most, if even a handful, of the group sessions (Dashora et al., 2012; Dutton et al., 2013; Speirs et al., 2013). Thus, it may be beneficial to provide additional guidance in the manual for alternative uses of the manual for facilitators—such as within an open-format group, with children in attendance, held multiple times weekly, or even potentially in a brief, one-day retreat-style format—to allow more mothers to engage in the WE RISE program. Additionally, some shelters and transitional living facilities experience pressure between mandating groups and allowing them to be optional to residents, which can significantly change the dynamics present in the group and mindset of group members (Coker et al., 2010). Thus, a section detailing reflective questions for programs and facilitators to ask themselves when considering the cost-benefit analysis of the group being mandatory or optional may be beneficial.

Further, while the WE RISE manual emphasizes the importance of cultural and contextual adaptations—which was highlighted as a particular strength of the manual by evaluators—it does not appear to sufficiently address considerations for culture and context in applications of mindfulness and other contemplative practices. As one evaluator highlighted, the



inclusion of largely “traditional scripted” meditations can limit the applicability and fit of these practices (Harrell, 2018). While efforts were made to adapt the meditations to fit the cultural diversity of mothers experiencing homelessness, mainstream mindfulness and meditation practices are not culture-free and tend to be heavily infused with dominant cultural norms, which emphasize White, upper-middle-class, and educated perspectives (Harrell, 2018). This inherently can limit the appropriateness of such practices with mothers experiencing homelessness, whose backgrounds and identities are largely historically marginalized and oppressed. While more mainstream mindfulness meditations have been adapted to the needs of mothers experiencing homelessness—particularly for histories of trauma exposure and logistical challenges for shelter living—and were found to be helpful to some, many others in the same population found that these practices were not helpful to them or were in conflict with their religious faith and spiritual values (Dutton et al., 2013). Additionally, given the adaptability of the intervention, facilitators who are unaware of the extent to which mainstream mindfulness is Westernized may select interventions that may resonate significantly less with the intended audience. As such, the WE RISE manual would significantly benefit both from inclusion of additional and increasingly diverse presentations of contemplative practices throughout the intervention—for instance, soulfulness (Harrell, 2018), spiritual music or singing (Banks & Lee, 2016; The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society [CMind], 2015), or activism (CMind, 2015; Coker et al., 2010)—and from explicit discussion about the importance of considering culture, context, and trauma exposure when selecting mindfulness, meditation, or other contemplative practices for the group.

Additionally, the lack of standardization across groups is another potential limitation of the WE RISE intervention. While the significant adaptations of the intervention for culture and

context were notably appreciated by the evaluators, this adaptability may simultaneously make it challenging to measure effectiveness or efficacy in future implementations. Further, the significant diversity within and amongst mothers experiencing homelessness, and the settings in which they reside and receive care, may also serve to complicate evaluative measures of the program.

The results of the evaluation, as well as additional suggestions from the research literature, indicate that the following modifications to the next version of the WE RISE group intervention manual would further strengthen the program:

1. Logistics and Timing:

- (1a) Include suggestion for additional staff person(s) to support the group by providing on-site child care to encourage regular attendance and enhanced concentration of group members.

- (1b) Note considerations for alternative time lengths, such as for facilitators to optionally increase the weekly sessions to 2-hours to allow adequate time to cover the material in more depth, or to reduce the duration to 1-hour or 1-hour and 15 minutes to accommodate the needs of group members or the context in which the group is being facilitated.

2. Cultural and Contextual Adaptation:

- (2a) Include a section detailing the limitations of Westernized and more traditional mindfulness meditations with mothers experiencing homelessness, and discussing the importance of considering culture, context, and adaptations for trauma exposure when selecting mindfulness, meditations, or other contemplative practices for the group.

(2b) Provide additional discussion on the role of gender identity and pronouns in the group, including providing guidance for encouraging mothers of all gender identities to participate in the group.

3. Content:

(3a) Integrate additional styles of meditation and contemplative practices to be more inclusive (e.g., listening to music, incorporating dance or other movement, spiritual or religious practices).

(3b) Integrate meditations that can involve children to promote ease of practice outside the group setting

(3c) Include additional stress-reduction/management strategies into appropriate sessions in the intervention, including the EMDR technique “Safe Place” and various self-care activities

4. Session Evaluation:

(4a) Create and include a shorter group evaluation form or group members to provide weekly feedback on group sessions, which would include a few Likert-style questions and a space for general comments.

Future directions for this intervention include piloting the WE RISE group intervention to seek direct feedback from mothers experiencing homelessness who are group participants, group facilitators, and possibly other relevant service providers (e.g., case managers, chaplains, or other service providers within the shelters or other programs in which the group is piloted). The resulting feedback would be beneficial to further refine the content and implementation of this intervention. The feedback and comments from all four evaluators from this initial evaluation phase would be considered and intentionally implemented into the WE RISE pilot group

intervention. Facilitating this pilot group would allow for additional strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement to be identified, both conceptually and logistically. Following the pilot implementation of WE RISE, the additional feedback would be integrated into the final version of the group intervention manual prior to the anticipated publication and distribution to agencies and practitioners serving and supporting mothers experiencing homelessness.

### **Conclusions and Potential Contributions of this Study**

The WE RISE group intervention and manual were designed to provide a culturally-adaptable, relational resilience-oriented stress management group to promote the needs, resilience, and well-being of mothers experiencing homelessness. This 7-session intervention is intended for use by a variety of service providers supporting mothers experiencing homelessness, including psychotherapists, social workers, case managers, and chaplains. It is hoped that this dissertation study will benefit the research and field supporting mothers experiencing homelessness by providing a literature-based, culturally-adaptable, and empowerment-and-resilience-focused intervention to support mothers experiencing homelessness. Overall, the intervention aims to support mothers in having a relational resilience-oriented approach to stress management to enhance their relationships, develop adaptive stress resilience strategies, and promote long-lasting wellbeing in themselves, their families, and larger communities.

This study potentially contributes a valuable intervention resource for a significantly underserved and underserved population that is incredibly at risk of trauma and adversity. Findings from the evaluation strongly suggests that this intervention would be welcomed in residential settings for people experiencing homelessness. This program supports themes present in the literature emphasizing the need for therapy groups with this population, particularly those that are facilitated by trained therapists (Berzoff, 2013; Harris-McKoy et al., 2015; Jones, 2008;

Plasse, 2001). This intervention could be used to help service providers across multiple disciplines on the needs and resiliency of mothers and families experiencing homelessness. By focusing on their existing strengths, the WE RISE intervention could also support and encourage service providers and mothers themselves to emphasize their resiliency, rather than taking a deficit-focused perspective and approach.

The WE RISE program also adds to research emphasizing the need for and benefit of having trained psychotherapists working directly with mothers experiencing homelessness (Berzoff, 2013; Harris-McKoy et al., 2015). Many of front-line service providers working with mothers experiencing homelessness (e.g., case managers, support counselors, residence staff) have several challenges that could potentially limit their ability to optimally provide the psychoeducation programs and therapeutic interventions desperately needed by these multi-stressed families with histories of trauma and disenfranchisement (Harris-McKoy et al., 2015; Schiff & Lane, 2019). First, these individuals often do not have the formal graduate-level mental health related education or training that is beneficial to address the complex therapeutic needs of their clientele (Schiff & Lane, 2019). Further, by often not having a background in mental health training, they lack the skills needed to best manage the burnout and vicarious traumatization that often comes with this work (Schiff & Lane, 2019). Additionally, the intersection of these roles with administrative and other facility responsibilities can even further limit the attention they can have to the mental health and stress management needs of the mothers and families experiencing homelessness (Harris-McKoy et al., 2015; Schiff & Lane, 2019). Therapists have been identified as uniquely trained to address the complex mental health and relational needs of mothers experiencing homelessness (Harris-McKoy et al., 2015). Research also supports these professionals as having the training and skill-set necessary to bring structured program

curriculums to life with the flexibility necessary to meet the unique and complex needs of families experiencing homelessness (Harris-McKoy et al. 2015). As shelters and transitional housing communities increasingly request the services of licensed and unlicensed mental health providers to provide group therapy and psychoeducational programming for the shelter residents (Berzoff, 2013; Dutton et al., 2013; Harris-McKoy et al., 2015; Jones, 2008; Knight, 2017; Plasse, 2001), this researcher hopes that the WE RISE can both add to their treatment offerings and encourage ongoing integration of mental health providers in shelter contexts.

Lastly, this program's considerations and suggestions for cultural and contextual adaptation could also help this intervention be further applied to a wide variety of potential group participants. It is the researchers' hope that this study will promote the development of additional resilience-focused interventions for this and other populations facing homelessness, including children, fathers, individuals, and seniors. WE RISE could benefit from being translated into other languages for use with mothers who are non-English speaking or for whom have English as a Second Language (ESL). The program could also be adapted for the unique needs of mothers experiencing homelessness who are identified as "parenting youth"—or mothers under the age of 25 who are parenting one or more children under age 18 (HUD, 2019). Additionally, given that shelters and transitional housing programs often have high rates of resident turnover, further expanding WE RISE to have an option for an ongoing, open-ended group with session themes inclusive of all twenty-one of Harrell's "Optimal Wellness" resilience qualities (2020) could be beneficial. Although their unique needs also are different, extensions of the program could also be beneficial for fathers experiencing homelessness, two-parent families experiencing homelessness, and multi-generational families experiencing homelessness (Paquette & Bassuk, 2009; USICH, 2018). Further adaptations could include either whole-family groups that integrate

parents and children or age-specific youth-only groups, both those within families and who are unaccompanied (HUD, 2019; Paquette & Bassuk, 2009). Overall, it is strongly hoped that this intervention will be continually developed and utilized to support the significant needs and resiliency of those experiencing homelessness.

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## APPENDIX A

### Participant Recruitment Email Script

Dear (Potential Participant):

My name is Lily Rowland and I am a clinical psychology doctoral student at Pepperdine University. I am contacting you to determine whether you would be willing to be considered for participation in a research project reviewing a stress management intervention manual that I am creating for mothers experiencing homelessness, as well as answer a few questions regarding the manual. This intervention manual is an integral component of my dissertation research.

I am conducting my dissertation research under the supervision of Dr. Shelly Harrell, a professor at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. The overall purpose of this research project is to develop a relational resilience stress management intervention manual for mothers experiencing homelessness. At this point in the project, I am seeking at least two individuals with experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness (e.g., psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) or conducting women's groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers) to review the intervention program and respond to a brief questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the manual.

If you are interested in participation, complete the eligibility form, and are found to be eligible, I will e-mail you a copy of the intervention manual, as well as a link to an online questionnaire regarding your perceptions of the manual. Your input in this project will be strictly confidential and you are under no obligation to complete the study at any time. If you are willing to participate and complete all aspects of the research, you would be compensated with a \$20 electronic giftcard to your choice of Starbucks or Amazon for your time and support. If this is something that you are interested in supporting, please either complete the following eligibility questionnaire virtually through this link (Appendix B to be linked virtually), or complete the attached forms (Appendix B), scan them, and send as an attachment in your reply to this email to be considered for eligibility to participate.

Thank you sincerely for taking the time to read this email and consider my request. If you have any additional questions regarding my research project, feel free to contact me, Lily Rowland, M.A., or Shelly Harrell, Ph.D. (shelly.harrell@pepperdine.edu).

Sincerely,

Lily Rowland, M.A.  
Doctoral Student, Clinical Psychology  
Pepperdine University  
WE.RISE.Resilience.Project@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

Evaluator Eligibility Form

Evaluator Eligibility Form

1. Are you 25 years of age or older?    Yes    No
  
2. What is your highest level of education?  
 Less than 12<sup>th</sup> Grade  
  
 High School Diploma or G.E.D.  
  
 Associates Degree  
  
 Bachelors Degree  
  
 Masters Degree in \_\_\_\_\_ (area of study)  
  
 Doctoral Degree in \_\_\_\_\_ (area of study)  
  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Do you have experience working with mothers experiencing homelessness (i.e. psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.)?    Yes    No
  - a) Please indicate the number of years of experience (i.e. psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) you have with mothers experiencing homelessness: \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
  - b) Please indicate your position(s) while engaged in these experiences (i.e., psychologist, therapist, case manager, chaplain, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Do you have experience conducting women’s groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers)?    Yes    No
  - a) Please indicate the number of years of experience (i.e. psychotherapy, support groups, etc.) you have conducting women’s groups in low-income settings: \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
  - b) Please indicate your position(s) while engaged in these experiences (i.e., psychologist, therapist, case manager, chaplain, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Were the services provided to women experiencing homelessness or low-income women delivered within a shelter or residential facility for persons experiencing homelessness?  
Yes    No



APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Form

**IRB Number #19-02-985**

**Study Title:** WE RISE: Development of a Resilience-Oriented Stress Management Group Intervention for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness

### **Invitation**

Dear [name],

My name is Lily Rowland. I am conducting a research study to develop a relational resilience stress management intervention manual for mothers experiencing homelessness. If you are age 25 or older and are experienced in working with women experiencing homelessness (as defined by the participant requirements described below), you may participate in this research.

### **What is the reason for doing this research study?**

This is a research project that focuses on developing a relational resilience stress management intervention manual for mothers experiencing homelessness. In order to participate you must:

- Be 25 years of age or older,
- Be experienced working with women experiencing homelessness, defined as either:
  - (a) Have a Master's degree or higher in psychology, counseling, education, social work, public health (or related field) AND a minimum of 2 years of experience working directly with mothers experiencing homelessness (i.e., psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) or conducting women's groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers), OR
  - (b) Have a minimum high school diploma AND a minimum of 5 years of experience working directly with mothers experiencing homelessness (i.e., psychotherapy, support groups, case management, chaplaincy, etc.) or conducting women's groups in low-income settings (not necessarily specific to mothers).

### **What will be done during this research study?**

Participation in this study will require approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. You will be asked to review the intervention manual and respond to a questionnaire. Both the intervention manual and questionnaire will be available electronically. Participation will take place via the internet.

### **What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

The possible risks for participating in this study are minimal, but may include mild levels of boredom and fatigue during review of the intervention guide and completion of the questionnaire. All research participants are advised to read the manual and complete the questionnaire at a convenient time, taking breaks as necessary to minimize these discomforts.

### **What are the possible benefits to you?**

If you are to complete the intervention manual evaluation questionnaire, you will receive a \$20.00 electronic gift card to your choice of Starbucks or Amazon. This compensation will be emailed to you within one week of completing the study. Additionally, participation in the evaluation of this intervention manual has the potential benefit of exposing you to ideas for intervention with mothers experiencing homelessness, as well as increased knowledge about stress and resilience in this population. The results of the study also has potential future benefits to the mental health field, service delivery agencies, service providers, and potential consumers with respect to implementation of resilience-oriented stress management groups with mothers experiencing homelessness.

### **How will information about you be protected?**

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential. The Informed Consent Forms and all research materials will be stored and locked for five years on a personal laptop in a password protected file to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. After that time all information will be confidentiality disposed of. While comments submitted may be published or presented to a professional audience, no personal identifying information will be released.

### **What are your rights as a research subject?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigators:

Lily Rowland, M.A. (Principal Investigator)

Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education & Psychology

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045

WE.RISE.Resilience.Project@gmail.com

Shelly Harrell, Ph.D. (Dissertation Chairperson)

Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education & Psychology

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045

Shelly.Harrell@pepperdine.edu

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1 (402) 472-6965
- Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### Email Script for Those Not Meeting Inclusion Criteria

Dear (Potential Participant):

Thank you for interest in participating in my dissertation research and completing the eligibility form. Unfortunately, based on your responses, you do not meet criteria to participate as an evaluator. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. If you have any additional questions regarding my research project, feel free to contact me, Lily Rowland, M.A. (WE.RISE.Resilience.Project@gmail.com), or Shelly Harrell, Ph.D. (shelly.harrell@pepperdine.edu).

Sincerely,

Lily Rowland, M.A.  
Doctoral Student, Clinical Psychology  
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX E

Program Evaluation Feedback Questionnaire

Program Evaluation Feedback Questionnaire

1. The *WE RISE* intervention is thorough in its attention to issues relevant to mothers experiencing homelessness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

2. The *WE RISE* intervention provides adequate information regarding the unique stressors experienced by mothers experiencing homelessness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

3. The *WE RISE* intervention manual is easy to read and understand.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

4. The *WE RISE* intervention manual is well organized.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

5. The interventions within the *WE RISE* group intervention are appropriate for mothers experiencing homelessness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

6. The interventions within the *WE RISE* group intervention are appropriate with respect to cultural and environmental considerations.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree



7. The interventions within the *WE RISE* group intervention are practical and readily applicable for mothers experiencing homelessness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

8. The *WE RISE* group intervention is feasible and realistic to implement in shelters or residential environments where mothers experiencing homelessness may live.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

9. The *WE RISE* group intervention will be helpful for mothers experiencing homelessness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

10. What do you consider to be the strengths of the *WE RISE* group intervention and manual?

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11. What do you consider to be the weaknesses of the *WE RISE* group intervention and manual?

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12. What did you think about the consideration of cultural and contextual issues in the *WE RISE* group intervention and manual? Please share any suggestions for additional factors related to cultural and contextual adaptation with this population not currently/sufficiently addressed in the intervention or manual.

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13. Please share any suggestions for additional stress-reduction/management interventions that are appropriate for mothers experiencing homelessness.

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14. Please provide any suggestions for improving the *WE RISE* group intervention and manual.

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Additional comments:

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Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Notice



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

## NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: October 28, 2019

Protocol Investigator Name: Lily Rowland

Protocol #: 19-02-985

Project Title: WE RISE: Development of a Resilience-Oriented Stress Management Group Intervention for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Lily Rowland:

Thank you for submitting your application for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

Based upon review, your IRB application has been approved. The IRB approval begins today October 28, 2019, and expires on October 27, 2020.

Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and will require a submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond October 27, 2020, a continuing review must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX G

WE RISE Intervention Manual

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# **WE RISE**

A Relational Resilience-Oriented Stress  
Management Group Intervention for Mothers  
Experiencing Homelessness

*Facilitator Manual*

Lily D. Rowland

---

**WE RISE:**  
A Relational Resilience-Oriented Stress Management Group Intervention for  
Mothers Experiencing Homelessness

Lily D. Rowland

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## VISION STATEMENT

Welcome to the WE RISE (Women Experiencing Resilience in Stressful Environments) Group Manual. WE RISE is an adaptable 7-session psychoeducational group support program developed to help mothers experiencing homelessness build and strengthen their personal and family resilience. While people's paths to and experiences in homelessness are complex and multi-layered, mothers experiencing homelessness are incredibly resilient and resourceful women who are working hard to support themselves and their families. While at times we can feel a pressure to "go at it alone" in our struggles, it is most often in and through connection—including to our values, to family and friends, to communities, to organizations, to a higher power—that we find the support and strength we need to overcome difficulties. While connection may not always be easy, especially when we have been hurt in the past, being a part of healthy, respectful, and caring relationships is crucial for our wellbeing.

WE RISE aims to help mothers experiencing homelessness connect with their existing strengths and enhance their relationships, while building new skills and bonds to manage and overcome the life stressors impacting them and their families. It is my hope that by engaging in this group, mothers can find the connection, strength, and tools to rise above their current and past challenges to build empowered lives for themselves and generations to come.

-----

*Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.*

~Maya Angelou, And Still I Rise

## INTRODUCTION

WE RISE’s group curriculum is informed by research and clinical experience on stress and resilience with mothers and families experiencing homelessness, with an emphasis on the areas of connection, strength, recovery, and empowerment. This manual is intended to provide WE RISE group facilitators with the tools they need to encourage and empower mothers and families to strengthen their relationships with themselves, others, and their world to effectively overcome the inevitable stresses in life that can be magnified by homelessness. Additionally, this manual is written to be adaptable to the various needs of these mothers and the settings in which they often seek support, including homeless and domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, places of worship, and other private and public service agencies. Areas for customization and adaptation to the needs, culture, and context of the group attendees and setting is highlighted throughout.

This manual is organized into multiple sections. First, there is an overview of the needs of mothers experiencing homelessness, including stressors and resilience factors. Then, there is an overview of the WE RISE intervention. Finally, there is an outline of each of the 7 group sessions, including activity outlines and optional handouts.

### NEEDS OF MOTHERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

#### *Statistics of Families Experiencing Homelessness*

Homelessness continues to be a significant social justice and health problem in the United States, particularly as it impacts families. Since at least 2007, families with children have continued to represent at least one-third (33%) of the United States homeless population (over 180,000 people) (HUD, 2018). This includes over 73,000 homeless parents—mainly mothers—caring for over 107,000 children. Further, such family homelessness continues to disproportionately impact people of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos (HUD, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2019). Most of these families are headed by single mothers who can be described as emotionally, socially, economically, and educationally at risk (National Center on Family Homelessness [NCFH], 2014; Swick & Williams, 2010). Further, the majority of these families have very young children, are composed of three family members, and experience short stints of homelessness, often staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens (HUD, 2018; NCFH, 2014; Swick & Williams, 2010).

There are many factors that cause and contribute to homelessness for women and families with children in the United States, including (ACOG, 2013; National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH], 2007, 2009c):

- Domestic violence and sexual violence
- High poverty rates nationwide and lasting impacts of economic downturns
- Nationwide shortages of affordable housing and limited scale of housing assistance programs

- Erosion of job opportunities, including stagnant or declining wages and incomes, and decreased value and livability of the minimum wage
- Declining value and availability of public assistance
- Challenges related to single parenting
- Historical and systematic ethnic and racial disparities
- Lack of affordable health care
- Mental illness and addiction, especially with highly limited access to necessary and appropriate treatment, case management, and housing
- Other traumatic experiences, including natural disasters and accidents

### ***Stress Impacting Mothers Experiencing Homelessness***

Stress is a generally uncomfortable emotional experience and physiological response to situations that are experienced as exceeding an individual's coping resources (APA, 2019; Folkman, 2010). While a typical part of daily life, stress can be a difficult and overwhelming experience, particularly when it is experienced chronically, such as with mothers experiencing homelessness (APA, 2013; APA, 2019). Homelessness disrupts nearly every aspect of family life, including damaging the emotional and physical health of family members, interfering with children's development and education, and often resulting in the separation of family members (NCH, 2009a). While juggling the demands of parenting and the daily needs of adulthood, including maintaining housing, work, and other daily tasks and care can be quite stressful, mothers experiencing homelessness face additional challenges to meet these demands (Swick & Williams, 2010). Difficulties for mothers experiencing homelessness becomes even more apparent, as emergency shelters tend to have limited openings for families and are largely insufficiently equipped to manage the needs of families (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). The following table shares many of the additional, unique stressors and traumas that impact mothers and their children experiencing homelessness in addressing daily stressors and tending to their needs (Bassuk, 1993; Carter, 2011; Kilmer et al., 2012; NCFH, 2009, 2012, 2014; Gattis & Larson, 2016; HUD, 2018; Reid et al., 2005; Swick & Williams, 2010; Swick et al., 2014; Taylor & Conger, 2017; Weisz & Quinn, 2017; Wong & Pilavin, 2001; Wood et al., 1990; Zerger et al., 2014; Zima et al., 1999):

## **Stressors Impacting Mothers Experiencing Homelessness**

### **Stressors that exist before (and possibly lead to) family homelessness:**

- Loss of permanent housing or chronic lack of stable housing
- Domestic violence
- Eviction
- Chronic Poverty, including difficulties meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their children
- Lifetime experiences of traumatic exposure or abuse, including:
  - Physical assault/abuse
  - Sexual assault/abuse
- High rates of lifetime experiences of instability, including:
  - Instability and/or inadequate family support during childhood
  - Parental substance abuse
  - Out-of-home or foster care placement
  - Juvenile justice system involvement
- Mental health difficulties, including mental illness
- Substance use/abuse
- Chronic unemployment or underemployment
- Low literacy and educational attainment
- Insufficient public assistance
- Poor physical health without access to affordable healthcare

### **Stressors present throughout being a homeless parent:**

- Prior stressors can serve as barriers to parenting and employment
- Loss of support network
- Poverty and other economic barriers, including little income, low wages, and high debt accumulation
- Food insecurity
- Lack of access to health care
- Mother and child's exposure to trauma
- Mental health and developmental concerns of mother and child
- Single motherhood
- Lack of childcare resources
- Need for development of parenting skills and knowledge, often through trauma-informed lens
- Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement
- Poor physical health

<p><b>Stressors related to living in shelters and attempting to (re)gain an independent living status:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of privacy and crowded conditions</li> <li>• Instability in temporary housing/shelters</li> <li>• Perceived lack of safety in shelter or surrounding environment</li> <li>• Feeling a loss of self-control, particularly regarding adapting to shelter rules and schedules</li> <li>• Need to change parenting in shelter contexts</li> <li>• Separation of family members, such as older sons or fathers due to shelter policies</li> <li>• Separation from family and other sources of support (e.g., religious community) due to location of shelters</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stressors related to attempting to (re) gain an independent living status:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of affordable, stable housing</li> <li>• Limited availability and scope of housing assistance programs</li> <li>• Unemployment and difficulty obtaining a flexible job that pays a living wage</li> <li>• Transportation difficulties</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stressors related to systemic injustice and intersectional oppression:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Racial disparities and racism leading to racial inequality in employment, education, housing, incarceration, banking, and healthcare opportunities</li> <li>• Sexism and gender-related bias and violence, including limited child-care, inadequate child-support legislation and enforcement, and wage discrepancies</li> <li>• Hate crimes and violence related to homeless status or other intersectional identities</li> <li>• Stigma of homelessness</li> <li>• Discrimination by shelters related to cultural factors (e.g., LGBTQ identity)</li> <li>• Worsened mental health due to systemic injustices</li> <li>• Additional systemic stressors, such as those related to immigration status, country of origin, and sexual orientation</li> </ul>

***Resilience and Relational Resilience in Mothers and Families Experiencing Homelessness***

Resilience is the capacity to adapt, grow, and prosper despite exposure to stress and adversity (Borden et al., 2010; Luthar et al., 2000; Wright & Masten, 2014; Zautra et al., 2008). Overall, resilience can help reduce the intensity by which stress and adversity are experienced, facilitate quicker recovery, and encourage growth. Further, it can be seen as “bouncing forward” beyond one’s pre-crisis functioning to be better prepared and equipped to handle future stressors and adversity (Walsh, 2003). Such resilience and empowerment can regularly be seen with mothers and families experiencing homelessness. These individuals are able to have positive, effective functioning in the face of homelessness, particularly when the mothers have effective techniques and strategies to manage their stress (Narayan, 2015). Additionally, it is common for many families to leave shelters and ultimately establish long-term stability (Narayan, 2015). The

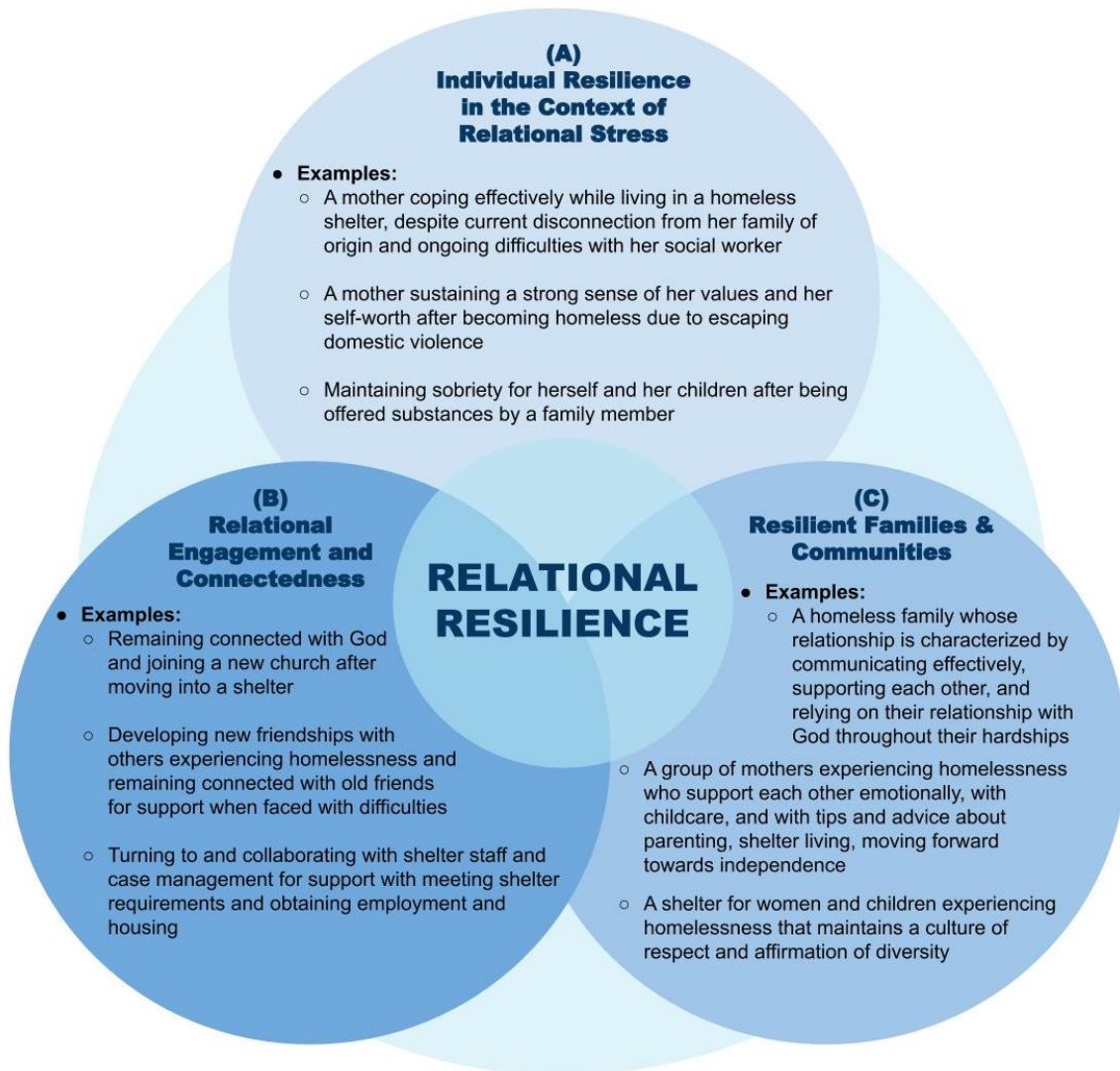
following table shares several of the ways in which mothers experiencing homelessness demonstrate their resilience (Huey et al., 2013; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017).

<b>Resilience in Mothers Experiencing Homelessness</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having social support and connections               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Creating and maintaining positive social connections</li> <li>○ Strengthening spiritual and religious connections</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Using effective coping skills, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Problem-solving skills</li> <li>○ Mental, emotional, and active strategies for managing difficulties</li> <li>○ Having optimistic and hopeful outlooks</li> <li>○ Holding healthy perspectives following trauma (e.g., recognizing it's not their fault, emotionally and mentally releasing following traumas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Utilizing positive, adaptive, and creative parenting skills               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Promoting healthy family relationships and communication skills</li> <li>○ Helping their children cope and adjust with stressors</li> <li>○ Spending quality time with their children</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting their family's basic needs</li> <li>• Addressing mental health concerns, including trauma, addiction, mental illness, and developmental disabilities</li> <li>• Ending periods of homelessness and preventing future shelter re-entry</li> </ul>

Additionally, research suggests that resilience is fundamentally impacted, and rests on, relationships (Luthar, 2006). Relational resilience, in particular, has been considered to be an inclusive and expansive understanding of resilience that also accounts for multiculturally- and community-oriented practices that foster resilience on individual and systemic levels (Rowland et al., 2018; Hartling, 2008). Countless relational ties—including parent-child, family, intimate partnerships, friendship, counseling, mentorship, religion and spirituality, and community—have been shown to encourage and promote resilience through their direct material, emotional, spiritual, and other supports (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Walsh, 2003; Zautra et al., 2010). Relational resilience, which can be conceptualized as three overlapping processes, has been defined as “a process of recovery and thriving in the context of adversity that includes:

- (a) The ability to demonstrate individual resilience in the face of relational hardships and challenges;
- (b) The experience of relatedness including active engagement in authentic, affirming, and supportive relationships that promote personal and collective growth and transformation; and
- (c) The capacity and characteristics of a relational system or entity to enhance well-being and protect against internal and external stressors” (Rowland et al., 2018).

Some examples of these various aspects of relational resilience as they relate to mothers experiencing homelessness is shared in the below figure.



## **PURPOSE OF WE RISE**

Despite the numerous stressors and traumas that mothers and families experiencing homelessness have, research strongly supports that positive, adaptive functioning and resilience can be common within these communities, particularly when mothers have the strategies and tools needed to address and reduce the stress symptoms in their daily lives and to remain connected with their children and other larger support systems (Doty et al., 2017; Everet et al., 2016; Huey et al., 2013; Narayan, 2015; Swick & Williams, 2010; Taylor & Conger, 2017). WE RISE is a unique, adaptable, culturally- and contextually-responsive group intervention that focuses on helping mothers experiencing homelessness build, develop, and hone relational resilience. This group intends to address the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, somatic, and sociocultural difficulties that impact these mothers by strengthening their connections with themselves, others, and the communities/world around them. Further, the group focuses on building relational resilience across three areas of connection: connection to self, connection to others, and connection to the world. By enhancing their relational resilience in this way, WE RISE will help to strengthen their relational stress-management capacities and foster long-term stability and well-being in these families.

**Target Population:** This group aims to support mothers experiencing homelessness living in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs with their children

### **Mothers' Experiences:**

- Histories of trauma and mental health concerns
- Stressors of poverty and difficulties with experiences of homelessness, including housing/shelter, nutrition, and safety/stability
- Difficulties with parenting, often single-motherhood
- Stigma, systemic injustice, and oppression
- Lack of, or separation from, social support and communities
- Feelings of depression, hopelessness, anger, guilt, frustration, isolation

### **Mothers' Needs:**

- To establish strong and healthy connections with others, which provides a network for social support and identification and access to resources
- Ability to view their current circumstances as an opportunity to improve their life for themselves and their children
- Realistic hope for a better future for their family
- Respect, self-esteem, dignity, self-sufficiency, freedom, and empowerment
- Encouragement and recognition for their efforts
- Breaks from stress, particularly engaging in fun or informal activities
- Support in setting goals and finding resources



**Focus of Interventions for Mothers Experiencing Homelessness:**

- Provide a space for emotional expression and communication of their needs
- Build and strengthen resilient relationships with self, others, and the world, including with children, family, friends, and community resources
- Develop stress management techniques that promote resilience
- Improve adaptive coping skills
- Promote adaptive and positive parenting

**GROUP OVERVIEW & STRUCTURE**

WE RISE is intended to be a 7-session, closed group, with each session lasting one and a half hours. The recommended group size is 6-12 members to maximize participation and learning within the group. Length of group sessions and group size can be adapted based on the specific needs of the setting and group member characteristics.

Each group session is centered on two thematically similar “Optimal Health and Wellness” resilience themes (Harrell, 2020), which serve as the topic anchor point for the five phases of each session. Additionally, to focus on the development of relational resilience, each group’s resilience themes after the orientation session are specifically organized around and focused on connection to self, others, or the world. Two sessions are allotted for each relational focus. The 7 group sessions are organized below:

- (1) **Relationship & Meaning** (Orientation Session)
- (2) **Compassion & Gratitude** (Connection to Self)
- (3) **Authenticity & Groundedness** (Connection to Self)
- (4) **Patience & Reflection** (Connection to Others)
- (5) **Attention & Flexibility** (Connection to Others)
- (6) **Clarity & Release** (Connection to the World)
- (7) **Transcendence & Wholeness** (Connection to the world)

Each session is organized into five phases, based on adaptations to Harrell’s Resilience & Reconnection (R&R) resilience-oriented stress management group intervention (2020):

- (1) **Opening & Connecting** (10-15 minutes): This first phase of the group helps to orient members to the group. Group begins with an opening mindfulness meditation, which helps center clients to the group and connects them to session themes, other group members, and the group’s goals. It also can help foster mindfulness as a potentially helpful contemplative practice and stress resilience tool.
- (2) **Sharing in Wisdom** (25 minutes): The second phase of the group involves activities intended to help members begin exploring, sharing, and fostering individual and collective wisdom related to the week’s resilience themes. First, members engage in a focused meditation on a pre-selected quote that matches the session’s overall resilience theme (Harrell, 2020). Group members are then invited into a conversation about how the

quote relates, or does not relate, to their personal and collective understanding of strengthening relationships and managing stress. This discussion is then followed by an experiential activity that relates to the groups' weekly theme, which helps group members to experience the themes experientially, emotionally, cognitively, somatically, or collectively. Explicit links between the session themes, stress management, parenting, and homelessness are strongly encouraged throughout this phase.

- (3) ***Growing through Sharing*** (25 minutes): The third group phase focuses around an interactive, culturally-syntonic stress resilience activity that helps group members experience the resilience theme actively and emotionally, while also providing stress resilience tools that may be used during times of adversity and stress. Examples of activities include guided meditations, expressive writing, and art therapy activities. Throughout and after the activity, it is encouraged for space to be provided for members to share their experiences and struggles related to stress, which allows for crucial opportunities for social support and for members to connect with and learn from each other.
- (4) ***Choosing to Commit*** (20 minutes): The fourth phase emphasizes group members increasing their awareness of stress and resilience within the last week, and setting goals and working towards applying the skills learned in the group to enhance relationships. Members first engage in answering "The 3 Questions" ("How do I feel? Who/What do I need to connect with?" and "What am I going to do?") to help them "check-in" with themselves to identify areas of personal stress and resilience in the past week, while also considering potential stress resilience strategies to use. Then, members individually select and commit aloud to "One Thing" that they will do or practice in the next week to enhance a relationship. While the "One Thing" may be inspired by the WE RISE session, it does not have to be. Examples of such commitments could include plans to pray, to spend quality time with one's children, to reconnect with a friend, or to engage in deep breathing when dealing with interpersonal conflict.
- (5) ***Closing & Connecting*** (5-10 minutes): The fifth and final phase of WE RISE involves a brief closing mindfulness meditation. This aims to emphasize each members' connections to the experience, learning, and connection that took place throughout the group session.

Each session is intended to be culturally-adapted by the group facilitator to meet the unique needs of the group, a process that it explained further in the manual. For this reason, the session outlines included in this manual are meant to be a guide for facilitators, but are not intended to be a word-for-word script.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR RECRUITMENT

As there are many diverse settings in which WE RISE can be implemented (e.g., shelters, transitional living facilities, community mental health, places of worship, public and private service agencies, etc.), recruitment policies for group members will be varied. In most contexts, it is recommended that WE RISE be provided as an optional group for mothers to register for. In other contexts, the group may be a required aspect of a program helping mothers experiencing homelessness transition into independence. Advertising the group through posting and distributing flyers (such as that in Appendix F) and through word of mouth is highly recommended.

## SELECTION OF GROUP MEMBERS

Given that WE RISE is a group resource to build strengths and resilience for mothers experiencing homelessness, it is important to select group members that will promote optimal learning and sharing from all. Thus, individuals who are experiencing high levels of current distress or impairment, as bulleted below, are not appropriate for this group. Instead, they should be further assessed and referred to mental health treatment (psychotherapy and/or psychiatry) for aid. Such individuals can be reconsidered for WE RISE when exclusionary criteria are no longer met. A brief screening form is provided to support facilitators with group member selection (see Appendix H).

### Exclusionary Criteria:

- Active suicidality or homicidality (current intent, means, and/or plans to take their own life or someone else's)
  - *Note: Suicidal thoughts can be common within this population and are not necessarily exclusionary criteria, particularly when they are passive (for instance, "I wish I would go to bed and never wake up") rather than active (for example, "I'm going to overdose on pills").*
- Current engagement in non-suicidal self-injury (e.g., cutting, burning, scratching, biting, hair pulling, head-banging, or other actions meant to injure oneself, but not necessarily intended to end one's life).
- Severe psychosis that impedes an individual's ability to participate in group effectively, including:
  - Auditory or visual hallucinations
  - Paranoia or delusions
- Intoxication or active substance use (mothers in recovery from substance abuse can participate; however, coming to group intoxicated or high is not allowed)
- Anger, hostility, or other personality traits, characteristics, or behaviors that may negatively impact the group or impair the capacity to participate productively

## FACILITATORS

Two co-facilitators are recommended to run each group session to best help manage group dynamics, manage time, and effectively share the group information. For instance, one facilitator can lead the activities and share information from the manual, while the other monitors time, group member participation, and provides additional commentary as needed. Additional co-facilitators can be helpful depending on the size of the group (e.g., more than 12 people).

Additionally, the facilitators' stance is particularly important in WE RISE. It is highly suggested that facilitators "practice what we preach" while facilitating this group, such as by working actively towards considering the perspectives, utilizing the stress resilience strategies, and creating commitments towards improving ones' own relationships with self, others, and the world in the service of stress management. Further, using ones' own authentic voice and style in delivering this intervention is strongly suggested.

Below is a self-assessment checklist for potential facilitators to complete prior to running the group. All items must be answered in the affirmative (i.e., "yes") by the potential facilitator to be deemed qualified to run the group competently. Additionally, given the focus and protocol of WE RISE, at least one facilitator should be a licensed mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, LMFT, LCSW, LPCC) or a mental health trainee under close supervision of a licensed mental health professional who is highly familiar with the WE RISE group.

### Potential WE RISE Group Facilitator Self-Assessment

Please complete the following self-assessment to determine appropriateness to facilitate the WE RISE group. You must agree with all statements to be eligible as a facilitator.

- I have experience leading or facilitating groups.
- I can manage conflict and disagreement well.
- I am committed to engaging in ongoing self-awareness practices, open to how my biases and behaviors may impact others, and recognize that I have room for growth and continued learning.
- I am open to, and affirming of, alternative perspectives and lifestyles.
- I am knowledgeable about the lived experience and diversity characteristics of women experiencing homelessness, particularly of potential group members in my setting.
- I have the time available to dedicate to adapting and implementing this group effectively, including reading this manual in its entirety prior to running the group.
- I, or my co-facilitator, is a mental health professional (licensed or trainee under supervision).

## SESSION PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

WE RISE is not meant to be a “one-size-fits-all” approach and is meant to be as unique and adaptable as the mothers, and the services that aid them, are. While no WE RISE group will be exactly the same, the spirit and structure of the group is meant to remain consistent. Prior to the start of each session, the facilitators should prepare by reviewing this intervention manual and using the steps outlined in the section on “Cultural and Contextual Adaptation: Considerations and Suggestions” to adapt the intervention to their setting and the unique identities and needs of the mothers within each group. It is important to ensure each session prepared continues to align with the WE RISE structure. Additionally, it is advised for facilitators to review the below tips on running a trauma-informed group.

Regarding materials, WE RISE was developed with awareness that the settings in which the group will run may have limited access to resources. Suggested and optional materials for each session are indicated in tables within each session overview. While it is ideal that the group can be facilitated with at least paper (either printed handouts or blank paper) and writing implements (pens or pencils) to best support learning, it is possible to adapt the group to run without the use of any materials.

## BRIEF TIPS ON RUNNING A TRAUMA-INFORMED GROUP

Engaging in strengths-focused therapy groups, such as WE RISE, can be beneficial for to empowering mothers experiencing homelessness. Being part of a group can reduce isolation and stigma, and help individuals recognize that they are not alone – that there are others “in the same boat” as them (Knight, 2017). Additionally, as members share their experiences and wisdom, they also provide support to other group members (Knight, 2017). In establishing these supportive connections, group members can gain self-esteem and the relationships they need to continue strengthening their resilience (Knight, 2017).

Given the high rates of trauma in this population (and statistically, sometimes trauma experienced by group facilitators themselves), it is important to utilize a trauma-informed approach in WE RISE. This is particularly important, as often individuals who have histories of trauma may underestimate or not recognize the significant effects of trauma in their lives, particularly when under high levels of stress or continued trauma, such as that resulting from current homelessness (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). In facilitating the WE RISE group with mothers experiencing homelessness, the following trauma-informed and population-specific considerations are strongly suggested (Champine et al., 2018; Knight, 2017; Najavits, 2002; SAMHSA, 2014):

- *Meet Group Members Needs by Taking a Safe, Collaborative, Compassionate, and Nonjudgmental Attitude* – Mothers experiencing homelessness can have a lot of chaos and difficulty in their current lives and histories. Facilitators can best meet group

members' needs by taking a stance that is compassionate, collaborative, and non-judgmental, and emphasizes safety. At times, it may be helpful to look at situations from "the other person's shoes" to aid in this process.

- *Identify and Build on Group Members' Strengths* – Given that areas of difficulty and challenge can often be main emphases of focus for individuals, it is important to intentionally balance and promote discussion of group members' strengths, including areas of effective and healthy relationships and positive coping.
- *Balance Group Discussion of Past and Present* – Given that that majority of mothers experiencing homelessness have histories of trauma and instability, group members may desire to discuss past events, such as traumas, to gain needed validation, support, and understanding. However, too much emphasis on the past can re-traumatize individuals, leaving members vulnerable and slowing the growth process. It is advised to link conversations of past experiences to their present goals and strengths (e.g., "*You all can have countless past difficulties/traumas, and something still keeps you going. What is it?*").
- *Promote a Group Tone of Empowerment* – Given the difficult histories mothers experiencing homelessness have, and the incredibly challenging circumstances they are in, the tone of the group may at times shift to one of relative hopelessness or despair. During such times, facilitators can benefit the group by validating group members' difficulties and subsequently transitioning the focus to the session's resilience themes to orient to a more empowering, hopeful space.
- *Encourage the Group to Remain Interactive* – WE RISE is meant to be a collaborative group, rather than teaching- or didactic-based group, in which group members and facilitators learn from each other. There are no right or wrong answers and group members will get different things out of the group. Thus, it is suggested that as much dialogue take place between group members as time allows, with facilitators providing guiding prompts, questions, and summarizing statements. Additionally, insights can be more valuable and powerful when generated by group participants themselves.
- *Be Flexible and Provide Options* – Group facilitators with this population should remain flexible, ready to address the changing, and often unexpected, needs of the population. Additionally, it is important to provide group members with options in treatment. For many group members, especially those with trauma histories, they likely did not have options or choices for regarding their safety, preferences, or needs. Thus, it is important to invite group members to participate in activities (rather than directing them to do so) and providing opportunities for them to engage in ways that feel safe and authentic for them to avoid re-traumatization or distress (e.g., keeping their eyes open during meditations). Additionally, allowing space for group members to appropriately opt-out of particular activities or take breaks by leaving the session can also allow for them to feel safe and empowered in the treatment.
- *Relate Topics to the Group Members' Lives* – Group discussions and activities are most effective when they relate to the participants' lives. Use relevant examples and activities, adapting the manual appropriately to account for culture and context.

- *Use Limited, Appropriate, and Balanced Personal Sharing by Facilitators* – It is important for facilitators to be intentional and mindful of personal information that they share in the group. While facilitators sharing personal experiences can be helpful to inform the group, it is important that the information shared add to the experience and learning of group members. Oversharing by facilitators can lead to the group becoming less collaborative and more teaching-focused. Thus, group facilitators should use self-reflection to determine the appropriateness of their self-disclosures. Note that facilitators may engage and share in WE RISE activities and discussions, if appropriate to the group process.
- *Use Your Authentic Voice* – Facilitators are highly advised to be authentic in their style, which can strengthen trust and build relationships within the WE RISE group. Alternatively, being “phony,” “scripted,” or presenting oneself in inauthentic ways is not trauma-informed and can limit group members’ engagement. Sample dialogue is provided for each WE RISE session, but ideally will be tailored by the unique voice of the facilitators in ways that can be heard by the unique members of each group.
- *Recognize Existing Relationship Dynamics from Group Members Living Together* – If the group is held in a shelter or transitional living context, facilitators should remain aware that alliances, friendships, or even antagonistic relationships may exist between members based on their experiences together outside of group. Problematic relationships between group members may be addressed through brief application of the session theme and collaborative review and discussion of “The 3 Questions” handout as an in-the-moment example of using WE RISE skills (e.g., “*Something’s going on in the group that needs our attention. Let’s use our 3 questions to try and work this through. (1) How do people feel?/What do you notice?, (2) Who/What needs to be connected with?, (3) What needs to be done?. Are we ready to get back to our group agenda?*”). However, WE RISE is not a process group, and as such this should not be done to the detriment of the group as a whole. Overall, it is advised to promote a cohesive, supportive environment within WE RISE groups to support the learning of all group members.

Additionally, challenging situations may present themselves when facilitating the group. The following are some tips on effectively managing groups in the following situations:

- *Quiet or Reluctant Group Members* – Some group members may be reluctant to share or participate, especially in the beginning of a group. To promote the participation of all group members, it is often helpful to encourage all group members to say something, no matter how brief, within the first 20-30 minutes of group. By having their voice in the space early, such as with the Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation exercise, can encourage them to share later. Additionally, inviting group members by name to share aloud may be appropriate (e.g. “*I’m curious your thoughts on this quote, [name].*” or “*[Name], do you have any experiences with this, or anything you’d want to add?*”). As talking with large groups of people can also be intimidating, modifying activities or discussions to be completed in pairs or small groups of 3-4 can also be beneficial. However, it is important to allow individuals to participate, or not participate, in ways

that they feel most comfortable. Even if group members are not sharing aloud in discussions, they still may be able to learn and strengthen their resilience through actively listening and participating in exercises.

- Highly Verbal Group Members – On the other hand, some group members may be highly verbal, talking often and for long periods of time. These group members can take up much of the space and time in groups, which may lead others voices unheard. More often than not, it is the job of the facilitator to respond to such group members in ways that will help them make space for others to share; group members who tend to talk appropriate amounts or are quieter often will not interrupt highly verbal group members. Some helpful statements to consider using include “*That is such an important point. Does anyone else relate or have something to share?*”, “[*Name of quieter group member*], as [*Name of more verbal group member*] is sharing, I see you nodding your head. Can you relate?” or “*Thank you for sharing that. In the interest of time, let’s transition to the next activity.*” Such statements can be used when the group member is talking, or they can be interrupted. It is also suggested that highly verbal group members not always be called on to respond or share until others have spoken. Over time, the hope is that highly verbal group members learn to “share the floor” with other participants.
- Off Topic Group Members – Some group members, or what they share, may have a tendency to be off-topic to the discussion or activity at hand. For some individuals, this may relate to mental health, thought-related, or interpersonal issues. When this is the case, the aim is to redirect the conversation in as polite a way as possible so that the group time may be appropriately. It is recommended to interrupt or find an early pause in their statements to respond in ways such as the following: “*Thanks for sharing that. Does anyone else have ideas or experiences to share?*,” or “*Hmm. Yes, that does sound stressful. Coming back to our discussion of [topic], does anyone else have an example of using this in their relationships?*” These strategies can also be used when group members stray from the topic at hand.
- Disruptive Behaviors – There often can be group members who engage in disruptive behaviors, such as laughing, rolling their eyes, thinking activities are silly, etc. A few options are available for facilitators. Facilitators may make a brief observation regarding the specific behavior (e.g., “*I see a few people are laughing*”), as well as commending on recognizing that given diversity within the group, there are some aspects that will resonate for some group members, but not for others. In such cases, group participants may benefit from being reminded of the group rules that relate to respect, open-mindedness, and participation. Additionally, facilitators may politely ask the member whose behavior is particularly disrespectful to stop and allow others to participate fully without disruption. If a group member is engaging in particularly disruptive behavior, it can be appropriate to request that they leave the group session, either to return when they are able to stop engaging in that behavior or at a future session.
- Transitioning Between Activities in Talkative Groups - It can be difficult to transition between activities, particularly when groups are highly involved and invested in the activities and discussions. Thus, it is suggested to provide group members with the time allocated for each activity before it begins and prompts as the activity is about to end



(e.g., “You’ll have about 10 minutes to finish your design. I’ll give you a heads-up a few minutes before we’ll switch to sharing so you can add your last touches.”). Transition statements can also be helpful to move the group along (e.g., “Thank you everyone for sharing your thoughts and experiences related to this quote. Now, let’s shift to our next activity to see how this theme it might help you enhance your relationships.”). Use of a timer or chime also may be considered to help facilitate movement through the phases of WE RISE.

- ***Facilitator Burnout*** – It can be challenging to facilitate groups, particularly if you are experiencing burnout or having personal difficulties, either independent from work or that’s being triggered by the group or group members. To care for yourself and be most effective, it is important for facilitators to monitor their own emotional experiences when leading WE RISE. If facilitators come to realize they are becoming increasingly stressed or distressed, they are encouraged to engage in activities to support their health and well-being (e.g., engage in self-care activities, utilize stress resilience strategies from the WE RISE group, seek professional mental health care, etc.).

## **CULTURAL & CONTEXTUAL ADAPTATION: CONSIDERATIONS & SUGGESTIONS**

As mentioned previously, WE RISE was created to fit the unique needs and cultural factors of mothers experiencing homelessness and the facilities that serve them. This intervention is designed to be inclusive of mothers experiencing homelessness from all walks of life and across multiple dimensions of diversity (e.g., ethno racial group, religious affiliations, sexual orientation, immigration status, educational attainment, literacy levels, ability status, gender identity, and more). The group is also intended to be run in a variety of contexts serving this population—including homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, places of worship, and other private and public service agencies—and by facilitators from a variety of backgrounds and professions—including licensed and unlicensed therapists or psychologists, case managers, and chaplains). It is important to note that cultural adaptations to WE RISE should be done to increase participant connectedness to the interventions, which will increase its effectiveness. Research suggests that intentionally adapting treatments to individuals’ cultural backgrounds are approximately four times more effective in addressing mental health concerns (Hall et al., 2016). Thus, adaptation for culture and context is a crucial aspect of WE RISE. It is essential that the facilitators adapt the group sessions to the group participants needs and cultural backgrounds, with consideration for the resources available in their context.

The process of adapting WE RISE to fit the cultural and contextual needs of the population and setting can be varied. The following multi-step process is recommended to best modify the intervention. A planning worksheet to support in this adaptation process is also provided.

### ***Identifying Cultural Identities and Factors***

First, it is important to recognize that when adapting interventions based on cultural factors, each individual simultaneously fits within various societal categories, including ethnicity/race, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and more. Additionally, based on the intersection of these identities, mothers experiencing homelessness may have differing life experiences, belief systems, and worldviews. These overlapping identities (called “intersectional identities”) may also impact areas of relative advantage or disadvantage in society or their current experiences. For example, the life experiences, belief systems, and opportunities/resources to find empowerment from homelessness may be different for the following individuals: an African-American, Christian mother experiencing homelessness; an undocumented, Mexican mother experiencing homelessness who identifies as Catholic; and an atheist Caucasian mother experiencing homelessness.

Consideration of WE RISE group participants’ intersectionality across these cultural factors is highly recommended in planning cultural and contextual adaptation of the intervention. It is also strongly recommended that facilitators consider their own identity dimensions along these same lines. To aid in this process, it is suggested that facilitators use the ADDRESSING framework to become more aware of participants’ and their own multiple group memberships and cultural identities (Hays, 2001) (*Please see ADDRESSING worksheet at end of this section*). Additionally, it is important within this framework to use participants’ self-identifications across these dimensions of diversity, rather than assuming them.

After this process, facilitators should be able to answer the following questions (Harrell, 2020):

- What are the important cultural identities and factors within this group?
- Have I considered intersectionality issues with regards to relevant cultural diversity factors (e.g., ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status (developmental and physical ability), immigration status, educational attainment, literacy levels, housing/shelter status, etc.)?
- What are the facilitator’s important cultural identities and factors? How might that impact the group experience and adaptation of materials?
- Do I have enough knowledge and experience with the important cultural factors relevant to this group to make informed adaptations? If not, how can I increase my knowledge?

### ***Cultural and Contextual Components to Adapt***

Next, it is important to identify which aspects of the WE RISE intervention are best to adapt, and in what ways to modify them. For guidance, facilitators may benefit from using the ecological validity framework to best adapt WE RISE to their group and context (Bernal et al., 1995). This framework suggests that by considering the following eight components—language, persons (cultural attributes of participants), metaphors, content, concepts, goals, methods, and context of the intervention—and attempting to match them to the clients’ values, language, and worldviews,

interventions can be increasingly effective (Smith et al., 2011). These components are discussed below based on thematic groupings. Places where the WE RISE intervention manual offers suggestions for adaptation will be noted.

**Language and Metaphors:** The concept of *language* refers to use of a client’s preferred language (e.g., English, Spanish, etc.) and use of words that resonate with an individual’s cultural identities and backgrounds. *Metaphors* refers to utilizing culturally-congruent metaphors, cultural saying, and cultural symbols. Facilitators are encouraged to use language and metaphors that fit with participants’ cultural backgrounds. Synonyms for session themes can be used when a different word may be more relatable (e.g., “Truth” rather than “Authenticity”). Additionally, session phrases should be adapted to best fit the group (e.g., “Let Go and Let God” rather than “Let It Go” for a group of Christian-identified mothers). Some alternative session themes and phrases are offered within this manual. Additionally, the language, metaphors, and examples used in all aspects of the intervention, including within opening and closing mindfulness meditations, quote selections, activities, and discussions, should be adapted. For instance, words in selected quotations for the “Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion” activity may be modified and replaced within brackets to be better understood or resonate with the group. Such adaptations are offered within this manual. Further, if the facilitator shares a common language or cultural identity with many individuals in the group, the facilitator may include colloquialisms or proverbs that are a strong cultural match.

**Persons (Group Participant Attributes) and Content:** This concept of *persons* refers to considering the various intersectional identities and characteristics of the group participants. *Content* refers to the particular intervention materials that are presented. Facilitators should be strongly aware of ways to integrate content that is applicable to and resonates with the participants. This includes integrating aspects of the group participants’ cultural experiences, values, customs, or traditions. Working to ensure that group members’ cultural values are represented and respected within WE RISE will result in increased “buy in,” participation, and applicability of the intervention. For example, groups composed by women of color may benefit from intentional and ongoing discussions of the impact of racism and discrimination on stress and stress management. For groups of undocumented or immigrant women, discussions related to racism, immigration, and acculturative stress may be beneficial.

Another instance in which adaptation is important is within the “Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion” activity. Quotations selected for this activity could be chosen based on the match between group participants and the author of the quotation (e.g., quotes by African-American and Latina women in WE RISE groups of all African-American or Latina women; biblical quotes or those by female religious figures in groups in religious settings). The majority of the selected quotes offered within the WE RISE manual are by culturally-diverse women. Note that quotes from sacred religious texts should be chosen with care as they may be offensive to some group members.

Further, integrating conversations related to cultural differences between group members and facilitators can be highly important. Facilitators should be aware of how their cultural identities and backgrounds may interact with those of group members, such as regarding differences in socioeconomic status,

ethnicity, and age. Such conversations can allow for more open communication, and awareness and promotion of culture as an important element of therapy.

**Goals and Concepts:** These components refers to considering group members’ conceptualization of their difficulties, cultural identities, values, and personal goals within treatment. While WE RISE has specific goals of enhancing relational resilience within mothers experiencing homelessness to support their management of stress, facilitators may also consider ways to appropriately integrate group members’ goals, particularly as they related to relationships. Experiences, expressions, preferences, priorities, and values within relationships, including along dimensions such as belonging, independence, collectivism, love, authority, and respect, may present differently based on group members cultural identities. Care should be taken to respect diversity and cultural differences. Additionally, concepts relevant to relationships and stress management based on group members’ cultural identities and contexts should be included. For example, concepts of individual and collective oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia) and the role of stigma of various cultural identities or personal experiences (e.g. of homelessness, of LGBT identity, of mental health or substance use, etc.) may be beneficial to integrate and discuss.

**Methods:** The *method* component refers to considering appropriate presentation of interventions. Within WE RISE, facilitators should be intentional in considering which activities would most align with the group members throughout the five phases of the intervention. For example, if the group is held in a religiously-oriented shelter and group members identify with a particular faith, facilitators may consider ending each group session with prayer. Additionally, suggestions related to relationships may differ based on group members’ cultural contexts. For groups in which literacy is of concern, activities that focus on art, music, or discussion may be appropriate. Activities and discussions should also be adapted for group members who have developmental disabilities.

**Context of the Intervention and Services:** Finally, the *context* component relates to the broader issues impacting group members and the setting in which the WE RISE group is held. It is important for facilitators to be aware of the context in which the mothers experiencing homelessness in the group live. Issues including social, economic, and political realities—including chronic poverty; lack of access to childcare and healthcare; food insecurity; unemployment or underemployment; safety concerns related to domestic or community violence; immigration-related concerns; and access to social support (*for longer list, see manual section “Needs of Mothers Experiencing Homelessness”*)—are important factors to consider in implementing WE RISE. Ready or limited access to resources, including affordable housing, employment, health insurance, and social services, based on regional, cultural, and immigration/documentation considerations are also important to consider. The impact of larger societal and discriminatory issues, including racism, sexism, and social stigma, are also considerations for adaptations for the group.

The settings in which the WE RISE group is being facilitated is also important. Resources available, including materials, childcare availability, and space availability, may vary drastically. It is strongly advised that the timing, format, and activities of the group be designed and

facilitated in ways that promote group members’ consistent attendance and maximum learning. For instance, if available, on-site childcare is recommended so parents can focus during group sessions. However, in keeping with a trauma-informed approach, parents who are uncomfortable with separating with young children (ages 0-2 years) may benefit from bringing them to weekly sessions (Sheller et al., 2018). In settings with high rates of turnover or drop-in groups, spending time each week on introductions to the purpose of WE RISE and group rules/norms (as seen in Session 1: Relationship & Meaning) may be indicated. Context-specific issues related to session materials is discussed in the WE RISE manual section entitled “Session Preparation and Materials.”

After reviewing the cultural and contextual components to consider adapting, facilitators should be able to answer the following questions (Harrell, 2020):

- How can the group materials, intake/orientation process, and early sessions be modified to maximize group attendance, engagement, and retention with regards to these culture and contextual considerations?
- Have I addressed relevant issues of cultural match regarding elements of the WE RISE treatment, materials, and/or activities?
- Is the spirit and structure of WE RISE still present following these adaptations?
- Have I made sufficient adaptations to address the important cultural and contextual factors relevant to this group? If not, what else needs to be adapted to better fit their needs?

## **EVALUATION MEASURES**

Optional evaluations are included in the appendices to provide at the end of either each group session or at the end of the WE RISE group for feedback about the group and facilitators. This can be used to improve subsequent facilitation of future groups in your agency/clinic’s setting.

**Worksheet 2.7 Using the ADDRESSING Framework (Hayes, 2001) to Facilitate Understanding of Client Cultural Influences**

By using the ADDRESSING acronym as a guide, you can become more familiar with the multiple group memberships and cultural identities of your clients. Examination of this information can provide useful information regarding areas of client strength/resources and areas of weakness/deficits. Although you may not ask every client questions about all of the ADDRESSING categories, you are encouraged to at least consider the relevance of each dimension for each client and to follow-up on those influences and identities that appear to be highly valued by your clients (Hayes, 2001).

<b>Definitions of ADDRESSING framework</b>	<b>Client information Client name:</b>
Age and generational influences	
Disability status (developmental disability)	
Disability status (acquired physical/cognitive/psychological disabilities)	
Religion and spiritual orientation	
Ethnicity	
Socioeconomic status	
Sexual orientation	
Indigenous heritage	
National origin	
Gender	

*Chart reproduced with permission of the American Psychological Association.*

**Planning Sheet for Cultural and Contextual Adaptations**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Session # \_\_\_\_\_ Resilience Themes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Identities & Factors (ADDRESSING Characteristics):**

**Cultural and Contextual Components to Adapt:**

**Language & Metaphors:**

**Session Theme:**

**Session Phrase:**

**Other:**

**Persons and Content:**

**Goals and Concepts:**

**Methods:**

**Context of Intervention and Services:**

## **WE RISE CURRICULUM**



## **WE RISE GROUP CURRICULUM**

WE RISE is a 7-session psychoeducational group support program with sessions lasting 1.5 hours each. Each session follows the same general structure, following 5 phases that help to enhance relational resilience in contexts of homeless motherhood. A total of 14 resilience themes were selected from the 21 “optimal well-being themes and resilience qualities” (Harrell, 2020) based on their thematic fit to support homeless mothers in developing relational resilience. Within the general WE RISE structure, two themes become the topic focus for the week’s session, clustered by fit and similarity of topic. Additionally, to focus each group on the development of relational resilience, each group’s resilience themes after the orientation session are specifically organized around and focused on connection to self, others, or the world. Two sessions are allotted for each relational focus.

This intervention guide provides a session-by-session overview of the program, including meditation scripts, activity outlines, discussion points, and necessary handouts. Sample dialogue and discussion questions for group facilitators are also provided. To account for the various settings in which WE RISE may be facilitated, each session has optional activities that use a range of materials, including only paper and pencil/pen.

### **WE RISE Weekly Session Outline**

- 1. “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10-15 minutes)**
  - a. Opening Mindfulness Meditation
- 2. “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)**
  - a. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion
  - b. Brief Activity to Discuss and Experience the Group’s Weekly Theme
- 3. “Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 mins)**
  - a. Culturally-Syntonic Interactive Stress Resilience Activity or Tool
  - b. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Management
- 4. “Choosing to Commit” Phase (20 minutes)**
  - a. “3 Questions” Group or Partner Share
  - b. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Enhance Relational Resilience in Stress Management
- 5. “Closing and Connecting” Phase (5-10 minutes)**
  - a. Closing Mindfulness Meditation

### **WE RISE Group Format**

<b>Group Session</b>	<b>Resilience Theme</b>
<b>Session 1</b> Orientation	<b>Relationship &amp; Meaning</b> <i>“What Matters Most”</i>
<b>Session 2</b> Connection to Self	<b>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</b> <i>“All About Love”</i>
<b>Session 3</b> Connection to Self	<b>Authenticity &amp; Groundedness</b> <i>“Remember Who You Are”</i>
<b>Session 4</b> Connection to Others	<b>Patience &amp; Reflection</b> <i>“This Too Shall Pass”</i>
<b>Session 5</b> Connection to Others	<b>Attention &amp; Flexibility</b> <i>“Bend, Don’t Break”</i>
<b>Session 6</b> Connection to the World	<b>Clarity &amp; Release</b> <i>“Let It Go”</i>
<b>Session 7</b> Connection to the World	<b>Transcendence &amp; Wholeness</b> <i>“Still I Rise”</i>

## SESSION 1 – RELATIONSHIP & MEANING

**Theme:** Relationship & Meaning

**Focus:** Orientation

**Phrase:** “What Matters Most”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Relationship &amp; Meaning</i></b>	
<b>Relationship</b>	Belonging, Community, Inclusion, Togetherness, Support, Fellowship, Cooperation, Communication, Closeness
<b>Meaning</b>	Purpose, Calling, Inspiration
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Something Bigger than Myself” or “Remembering Who You Are” or “One Love” or “I Am Because We Are”

**SESSION 1 – RELATIONSHIP & MEANING**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Handout/Materials</b>
	<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>	
0-15 mins. (15 minutes)	1. Introduction to WE RISE, individual introductions and briefly review individual hopes and goals for the group  2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation  3. Establish group rules	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p.142)  [Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write group rules]  Session Handout
	<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>	
15-40 mins. (25 minutes)	4. Quote meditation and discussion  5. Brief Activity - Meaning in Relationships	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  [Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write discussion topics]
	<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>	
40 mins. – 1 hour, 5 mins. (25 minutes)	6. Stress Resilience Tool - Reconnecting with My Values  7. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	[Values in Relationships Handout]
	<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>	
1 hour, 5 mins – 1 hour, 25 mins (20 minutes)	8. Review “3 Questions”  9. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
	<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>	
1 hour, 25 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (5 minutes)	10. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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***Relationship & Meaning - “What Matters Most”***

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “One of the greatest barriers to connection is the [feeling that we need to ‘go at it alone.’] Somehow we’ve come to [see] success [as] not needing anyone. Many of us are willing to extend a helping hand, but we’re very [hesitant] to reach out for help when we need it ourselves. It’s as if we’ve divided the world into ‘those who offer help’ and ‘those who need help.’ The truth is that we are both.” ~Brené Brown
  
2. **Activity:** “Meaning in Relationships”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Reconnecting with My Values”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Relationship & Meaning - Session Format

### **“Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

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**1. Welcome group members and provide a brief overview of WE RISE:**

*“Hi ladies! Welcome to the first session of WE RISE, which is a strengths-based stress management group. We are the group facilitators [introduce facilitator’s name and positions]. We’re happy that you’re able to join us today. WE RISE is a 7-week group program designed specifically to help mothers who are experiencing homelessness enhance and grow in how they manage stress.*

*Today is the first of these seven group sessions, so we’ll be spending some time together talking about the group and what you can expect. Each week we’ll be together for 1.5 hours, engaging in activities and having different conversations to help learn from your own and each other’s wisdom in how to manage stress and difficulties in your lives. Also, this group will be focusing a lot on helping to improve and strengthen relationships in your lives, including your relationship with yourself, your relationship with others (such as with your children and friends or family), and even your relationship with the larger world or particular communities. More than just learning to manage stress and get by day-to-day, this program is meant to help you develop what we call “stress resilience,” or the ability to “rise above” your current and past challenges to build empowered lives for yourself and your families. By attending this group and developing this stress resilience, you’ll be stronger, more aware, better equipped, and more connected to handle whatever may come your way in the future. We’ll talk a bit more about what all this means later, but first we think it’d be helpful to get to know each other a bit.”*

**2. Encourage group members to introduce their name, some brief information about them [such as how many children they have, the length of time they’ve lived at the shelter, etc.], and share briefly on their hopes or goals for the group.**

*“To get us started, it would be great to learn a little bit about each other. Let’s go around and please share your name, how many children you have, and how long you’ve been staying here at the shelter. Also if you’d like, please also share just a brief sentence or two on something you’re hoping to get out of attending this group for the next few weeks. Who would like to get us started?”*

**3. Introduce and Lead Opening Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix C)**

*“Thank you! It’s good to meet all of you. So each week, we typically start group with an Opening Mindfulness Meditation, just to help us try and leave a bit of the stress from the day outside and get us centered in this space together. The meditation will also introduce our theme for group today, which is “Relationship & Meaning. So we’ll get started with our meditation.”*

*When reading script, insert today's group theme "Relationship & Meaning" and the related phrase (e.g., "What Matters Most") into the blank spaces.*

#### **4. Transition group to establish group rules**

Provide brief rationale for group rules and elicit responses from group members about group rules to help ensure safety and help members work together.

*"Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. Now, to help make sure this is a safe, respectful, and productive space together, let's take a little bit of time to set up guidelines and ground rules for the group. I'll write the group rules as we come up with them here. Does anyone have any ideas?"*

Suggestions for rules to include:

- **Attendance** (e.g., be on time, let facilitators know if you'll be late or absent, etc.)
- **Respect** (e.g., one person talks at a time, use "I" statements and speak for oneself rather than others or the group as a whole, no name calling, etc.)
- **Confidentiality** (e.g., what is said here stays here, you can share your own story but not that of another group member or person outside the group, limits of confidentiality related to danger to self/others or child/elder/dependent adult abuse reporting)
- **Participation** (e.g., engage in the activities and discussions as much as possible/feels comfortable, try new things, share thoughts and feelings)

#### **5. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements**

*"Excellent, those are great group rules for us. Now that we have our rules set, I'm passing out today's session handout and pens/pencils for anyone who needs them for group today. Each week we will have a handout and different activities and discussions about stress management and strengthening relationships. We also will have a theme and focus phrase for each week, which is always strengths and relationship focused. As we said in the meditation, today's group theme is "Relationship & Meaning," and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g., "What Matters Most")."*

### **"Sharing in Wisdom" Phase (25 minutes)**

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#### **1. Introduce and Engage in Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).**

*"So one of the first activities of each week is the Wisdom Quote activity. This is an activity where we read a quote together that relates to our theme of the day—today its "Relationship & Meaning"—and then we see what wisdom we learn or relate to help strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Today's theme, and the quote, can also be described by some other words, including \_\_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session*

themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].

*I'll read the quote aloud three times. Today's quote is by \_\_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections on your session handout. We'll spend time sharing afterwards."*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (*approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members*) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members.

Questions may include:

- *"What came up for you as the quote was read?"*
- *"What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?"*
- *"Were there any parts you disagreed with?"*
- *"How does this seem to relate to your experiences in relationships or in trying to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you're having difficulty with or wanting to improve?"*
- *"Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you're going through now?"*
- *"Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?"*

*"Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you're experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)]."*

*Now we're going to do today's activity to better help us connect with how Relationship & Meaning can help us enhance relationships to manage our stress."*



2. **Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Meaning in Relationships with Self, Others, and the World</b> <i>(10-15 minutes)</i>
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To collaboratively reflect on the importance of relationships (to self, others, and the world) in managing stress, including how it relates to personal or collective meaning or well-being</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b> None</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Instruct group members to reflect on their relationships across 3 levels (connection to self, connection to others, and connection to the world) and to share how relationships at each level can help with stress management. Provide examples as needed to support the discussion. If materials allow, facilitator can write “Connection to Self,” “Connection to Others,” and “Connection to the World” with space for group members’ responses for review by the group.</li></ol> <p><i>“As we’ve been talking about, you all as moms are highly resilient and resourceful and are doing the very best to can to manage stress and difficulty for yourself and your children. Now we’re going to spend some time discussing the meaning that your relationships can have for you. Relationships or connections can be seen in three ways—(1) our relationships or connection to ourselves, (2) our relationships or connections with others, including our children, our families, our friends, our romantic relationships, mentors, shelter staff, etc., and (3) our relationship or connection with the larger world, such as the community here at the shelter, or in a religious community, or even as an individual living in this nation (the U.S.). Now, I would argue that none of these relationships can be without difficulty or strain or stress at least some of the time. However, as we’ve been discussing today, our relationships can also help us in our lives, such as __ [reflect back topics/ideas from the quote meditation]. So let’s take some time to discuss the impact and meaning that each of these relationships can have for us.</i></p> <p><i>First, let’s talk about our Connection to Self – how is being connected to yourself helpful during times of stress? [Gather responses from group members].</i></p> <p><i>Great! And now, in what ways is being connected to others helpful during times of stress? Remember, this includes your children, families, friends, romantic relationships, mentors, shelter staff, and more. [Gather responses from group members].</i></p> <p><i>Thank you. And finally, how is being connected to the world—such as the shelter community here, a religious community, being a member of this nation, etc.—helpful during times of stress??</i></p>

The following examples of meaning/impact may be helpful to integrate or to help participants understand the exercise:

- Connection to Self – e.g., “Knowing oneself” (including thoughts, emotions, and behaviors) can inform what’s needed or wanted during stressful times; Helps with coping skills (problem solving, optimistic or hopeful outlook, etc.); Able to support others and their needs; Sense of responsibility; etc.
- Connection to Others – e.g., Being able to get support (including emotional support, advice, different perspective, financial support, support through other resources (housing, suggestions, transportation, etc.)); Sense of purpose or meaning in the relationship; Positive qualities, such as love, fun, or belonging; Quality time; Feel less alone; etc.
- Connection to the World – e.g., Sense of belonging and purpose, Support from Higher Power and community (emotional support, advice, different perspectives, financial support, other resource support (housing, suggestions, transportation, etc.)); Feeling a part of something bigger can make personal problems seem smaller or more manageable; Feel less alone; etc.

2. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:

- *“What is it like to look at these important factors in how relationships impact your life positively and can help with stress management? Were there any surprises?”*
- *“What do you think it would be like if we spent more time considering these aspects of relationships and all that they add to our lives – [reading off the list]—rather than focusing on the difficulties?”*
- *“Are there any areas within these three levels of relationships – to yourself, to others, or to the world—that you feel more disconnected from right now? What might be some things you can do to help be more connected to that part?”*
- *What are some ways that might be helpful for you to remember the importance of relationships at these three levels – to yourself, to others, and to the world—when you’re stressed out? How would that help you?”*

3. Reinforce these topics for group members, as this serves as a large foundation of the WE RISE group. Also spend time normalizing and validating unique differences across people for what resonates for them during times of stress. *“Excellent. Thank you everyone for sharing during this activity and taking some time for some deep reflection. Remembering these three aspects of relationships and how they are helpful to manage stress will be important throughout the WE RISE group. In fact, we’ll be looking at different ways that strengthening your connections to yourself, others, and the world even more can help in managing stress. Also, I want to point out that different strategies and areas will work differently for different people. In this group, we’ll be spending 2 weeks each on these levels of relationship – “Connection to Self,” “Connection to Others,” and “Connection to the World.” There will be different themes, topics, and activities for each of these to help with improving relationships and managing stress. Some*

*topics may resonate really well for some individuals, and not so much for others. I encourage you all to try everything and see what you think will work for you and your unique situations.”*

*“Now it’s time to shift to our stress management tool for today. In particular, we’re going to do an activity to help us connect with our values in relationships.”*

**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

**1. Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Reconnecting with My Values</b> <i>(15-20 minutes)</i>
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To identify and (re)connect with important values in relationships, and identify ways in which to live out those values in current relationships.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b>            -Values in Relationship Handout (<i>see below</i>)            -Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)</p> <p>*If these materials are not available, can complete this activity as a discussion.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <p>1. Pass out Values in Relationships handout. Share with participants the purpose of this activity, which is to identify and (re)connect with their top 5 values in relationships. Request that group members review the list and circle their top 5 values.</p> <p><i>“Now we’re going to spend some time connecting with your values and considering ways that they relate to your relationships. Who can share a definition of what a value is? [Gather responses from group]. Yes exactly! Values are beliefs that define what’s most important for you. They can serve as a sort of “guiding light” or “North Star” in making decisions or responding to difficult situations. Using this handout, titled “My Most Important Values in Relationships,” read through this list of common values and pick out your top 5. This may be easier for some and harder for others, especially in narrowing it down to just 5. If that’s the case for you, maybe mark the ones that seem important, and then re-review those to select the top 5. Take some time with this, and then we’ll spend some time in about 5 minutes sharing our top values. Does anyone have questions at this point? Please also ask questions anytime as you’re reviewing the list.”</i></p> <p>2. Encourage group members to share their top 5 values with the group. After sharing, lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“How was it to identify your top 5 values?”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Can anyone share an example or two of how they’re living out at least one of their values in their relationships with yourself, others, or the world?”</i></li> </ul>

- *“Are there any values that you feel you’re not living out or ‘strayed’ a bit from in your relationships with yourself, others, or the world? In what ways are you not living them out? What might be something you can do today, or this week, to better live out this value in your life and relationships?”*
- *“How might living out and being connected with your values help in managing stress?”*

2. **Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** (*remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes*)

- Continue debriefing from or discussing “Reconnecting with My Values” activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Relationship and Meaning can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships

*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply Relationship and Meaning to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

### My Most Important Values in Relationships

Your values are beliefs that define what is most important to you. They can guide each of your choices in life. For example, \_\_\_\_\_.  
Understanding your values can help you realize ways to respond in different areas of your life, including during times of stress.

Please circle the top 5 most important values from the below lists.

- |                |              |                 |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Ability        | Family       | Order           |
| Acceptance     | Forgiveness  | Passion         |
| Accuracy       | Friendship   | Power           |
| Achievement    | Fun          | Pleasure        |
| Attractiveness | Generosity   | Purpose         |
| Authority      | Genuineness  | Pride           |
| Beauty         | God's Will   | Responsibility  |
| Caring         | Growth       | Respect         |
| Challenge      | Hard Working | Risk            |
| Change         | Harmony      | Stability       |
| Comfort        | Health       | Safety          |
| Cooperation    | Helpfulness  | Self-Acceptance |
| Compassion     | Honesty      | Self-Control    |
| Commitment     | Hope         | Self-Esteem     |
| Connection     | Humble       | Service         |
| Creativity     | Humor        | Simplicity      |
| Disciplined    | Inner Peace  | Spirituality    |
| Dignity        | Independence | Tolerance       |
| Duty           | Justice      | Tradition       |
| Empathy        | Logic        | Uniqueness      |
| Excitement     | Love         | Wisdom          |
| Faithfulness   | Loyalty      | Other: _____    |
| Fame           | Openness     | Other: _____    |

(Adapted from Harrell (2020), Therapist Aid (2012), and Miller et al. (2001))

## **“Choosing to Commit” Phase (20 minutes)**

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### **1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share (15 minutes)**

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Relationship and Meaning as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to move on to another important activity that we’ll be doing every week in WE RISE, which is called “The 3 Questions.” In this activity, we’re going to spend some time answering 3 important questions to get an understanding of how you’re doing in regards to a stressful situation and ways that you might be able to make it better. This can be an important and helpful tool in identifying your needs and next steps to manage stress. First we’ll go through the handout together, and then you’ll respond to it based on your individual circumstances. Then, we’ll spend some time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

### **2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship (5 minutes)**

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group. Each week, you’ll be choosing and committing to just “One Thing” to do to help enhance a relationship to better manage your stress. This might be related to our topics or activities today on Relationship and meaning, or relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something completely different—maybe a strategy that you’ve used before. Please take a moment to think about it and what feels like it would be reasonable for you. Then, please write it on your handout if you would like. We’ll go around and share in a few minutes after everyone’s decided on their commitment.”*

## **“Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

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### **1. Introduce and Lead Closing Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix D)**

*“Thank you everyone. Now to close out the group, we’ll be ending with a mindfulness meditation.”*

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Relationship and Meaning” and the related phrase (e.g., “What Matters Most”) into the blank spaces.*

## 2. End session and thank participants.

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week! Take good care!”*

### Quotes for Relationship & Meaning

#### Suggested Quotes:

“One of the greatest barriers to connection is the [feeling that we need to ‘go at it alone.’] Somehow we’ve come to [see] success [as] not needing anyone. Many of us are willing to extend a helping hand, but we’re very [hesitant] to reach for help when we need it ourselves. It’s as if we’ve divided the world into “those who offer help” and “those who need help.” The truth is that we are both.” ~Brené Brown

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can’t survive.” ~Brené Brown

“Faith is knowing that there is a divine plan and purpose for everything in life.” ~Iyanla Vanzant

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” ~Maya Angelou

“Love is that condition in the human spirit so profound [great] that it allows me to survive, and better than that, to thrive with passion, compassion, and style.” ~Maya Angelou

“Just like a sunbeam can’t separate itself from the sun, and a wave can’t separate itself from the ocean, we can’t separate ourselves from each other.” ~Marianne Williamson

“There’s more than room for everyone; in fact, there’s a need for everyone.” ~Marianne Williamson

#### Additional Quotes:

“I trust that everything happens for a reason, even when we’re not wise enough to see it.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“Each time you fail, start all over again, and you will grow stronger until you have accomplished a purpose – not the one you began perhaps, but one you’ll be glad to remember.” ~Anne Sullivan

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” ~Maria Robinson

“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.” ~Marianne Williamson

“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” ~Brené Brown

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” ~Mother Teresa

“I am because we are and because we are I am.” ~South African Saying

“I ask you, can there be a community without sharing? To pass on and to share, that is how we are eternal.” ~Aymara Oral Tradition

“Power is the ability to do good things for others.” ~Brooke Astor

## SESSION 2 – COMPASSION & GRATITUDE

**Theme:** Compassion & Gratitude

**Focus:** Connection to Self

**Phrase:** “All About Love”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Compassion</b>	Love, Kindness, Shared Humanity, Empathy, Caring, Giving, Sharing, Helping, Encouraging, Goodwill
<b>Gratitude</b>	Blessings, Thankful, Honoring, Humility, Praise, Appreciation, Gratefulness, Respect, Awe, Cherishing
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Finding What Makes Us Thankful” or “Silver Lining” or “Love Conquers All” or “Make Lemonade” or “I Feel You” or “Love Makes the World Go ‘Round” or “We are All Human”



**SESSION 2 – COMPASSION & GRATITUDE**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Handout/Materials</b>
	<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>	
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142)  Session Handout
	<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>	
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activity - Lovingkindness Meditation	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  Lovingkindness Meditation Script
	<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>	
35 mins. – 1 hour (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - Communal Gratitude Board  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to create communal gratitude board]
	<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>	
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions” 7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
	<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>	
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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***Compassion & Gratitude – “All About Love”***

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “Gratitude turns what we have into enough.” – Maya Angelou
  
2. **Activity:** “Lovingkindness Meditation”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Group Gratitude Board – Possibilities for Transformation”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Compassion & Gratitude - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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**1. Welcome back group members**

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

**2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation** (see Appendix C)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Compassion and Gratitude” and the related phrase (e.g., “All About Love”) into the blank spaces.*

**3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements**

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Compassion and Gratitude,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g. “All About Love”). This session focuses on our “Connection to Self” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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**1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion** (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Compassion and Gratitude to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As we did before, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life, particularly your connection with yourself. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:

- *“What came up for you as the quote was read?”*
- *“What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”*
- *“Were there any parts you disagreed with?”*
- *“How does this seem to relate to our focus of “connection to self” to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you’re having difficulty with or wanting to improve?”*
- *“Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”*
- *“Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”*

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these two resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)].”*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Compassion & Gratitude can help us enhance our relationship with ourselves and others to manage our stress.”*

**2. Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Lovingkindness Meditation</b> <i>(10 minutes)</i>
<b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To strengthen feelings of kindness and connection towards others and the self
<b><u>Materials:</u></b> -Lovingkindness Script ( <i>Sample Below</i> )
<b><u>Instructions:</u></b> 1. Lead group members through a brief lovingkindness meditation.  <i style="text-align: center;"><u>Lovingkindness Meditation Script</u></i> <i>Inviting you to center yourselves again in the chairs, sitting with your feet on the floor, your back straight, but not rigid, and your arms comfortably on your sides or in your lap. Closing the eyes if you feel comfortable, or picking a spot in front of you to softly focus your gaze....</i>

*Now we're going to practice experiencing and sharing positive emotions. In this case, it's a feeling called lovingkindness. This is a soft and gentle feeling, like how you might handle a newborn child or touch and hold something fragile. It's not dependent on anything, it's just a natural opening of the heart to someone else or to yourself. In those moments, you open up and hold what you're given with the greatest care. You can do the same with anxious thoughts, worries, fears, and painful memories too. There is a great strength and power in kindness.*

*Take a moment to focus on your breathing. Take a deep, slow breath in.... and breathe out. Again, breathing in.....and out.*

*Now, let yourself bring to mind someone whom, the moment you think of them, you feel happy and loving. See if you can bring to mind that person. It could be a relative, a child or children, or a close friend... Someone with not too complicated a relationship. Just a general sense that when you think of them, you feel happy and loving. You can also choose a pet or animal... Any creature or person it's pretty easy to feel love for.*

*So let them come to mind and then imagine them being in front of you. You can feel them, sense them, see them.*

*And as you imagine them, notice how you're feeling inside. Maybe you feel some warmth or there's some heat to your face. A smile, maybe. This is the feeling of lovingkindness. This is a natural feeling that's always available to all of us.*

*So now having this loved one in front of you, in your mind you can begin to wish them well, sending all your love and warm wishes to that loved other. Imaging saying to them:*

*May you be safe and protected, from inner and outer dangers*

*May you be well in body, mind, heart, and soul*

*May you have relief from pain and suffering*

*May you find and feel your inner peace*

*May you know true happiness*

*May you love and be loved*

*May you know your worth and your value, your gifts and your strengths*

*May you rise up and be free*

*And as I say these words, you can use my words or your own words if others seem to fit better. And have a sense of letting this lovingkindness come from you and begin to touch this loved one. You might think in images, or have a sense of color or light. Or you might just have a feeling.*

*As you're sending out these words and the feelings of lovingkindness, also check into yourself and see how you're feeling inside.*

*And now, when you're ready, see if you can imagine this loved one wishing these same things for you. See if you can receive their loving kindness, the wishes for you to be well.*

*May you be safe and protected, from inner and outer dangers  
May you be well in body, mind, heart, and soul  
May you have relief from pain and suffering  
May you find and feel your inner peace  
May you know true happiness  
May you love and be loved  
May you know your worth and your value, your gifts and your strengths  
May you rise up and be free*

*Letting those feelings wash over you, let the feelings of love and safety grow in you, knowing there is nothing you have to do to deserve these feelings and wishes, that they are given freely. See if you can connect to the meaning of these words, even if you might not feel all the safety and warmth right now, knowing that it is their wish for you.*

*Now, if it's possible, see if you can send lovingkindness to yourself. You can maybe imagine it coming from your heart and extending throughout your body, all the way to your fingertips and toes. Saying to yourself:*

*May you be safe and protected, from inner and outer dangers  
May you be well in body, mind, heart, and soul  
May you have relief from pain and suffering  
May you find and feel your inner peace  
May you know true happiness  
May you love and be loved  
May you know your worth and your value, your gifts and your strengths  
May you rise up and be free*

*Notice what you're feeling inside as you share this lovingkindness with yourself. Whatever may be coming up for you, let it be there.*

*And now, as this loving kindness meditation comes to an end, take some time to appreciate and feel what you experienced. And even if there were difficult parts of this activity, know that it's not a problem. This is a practice that plants seeds.*

*So when you're ready, turn your focus to your breathing, taking a few deep breaths in and out... In and out...*

*Then, when you're ready, you may open your eyes and rejoin the group with the wish to extend lovingkindness to yourself and others each moment of today.*

2. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - “How was this experience for you?”
  - “What did you notice about sending lovingkindness to your loved one? What did you notice about them sending lovingkindness to you, or you sending lovingkindness to yourself? Were there differences? Why do you think that might be?”
  - “What do you think it would be like to have this attitude of compassion and lovingkindness in our relationships, particularly when we are stressed out?”
  - “What might be some ways to remember to take this attitude of compassion and lovingkindness in our daily lives?”
3. Encourage group members to strive towards taking a self-compassionate stance during times of stress and difficulty, in ways similar to that experienced during the meditation

“Thank you for doing this activity and sharing your experiences. Now it’s time to shift to our stress resilience tool for today. In particular, we’re going to do an activity to help us remember tap into aspects of gratitude in our lives. Like we talked about earlier, often when we’re stressed we lose sight of things we’re grateful for and forget things we can do or connect with to remind ourselves of these blessings.”

**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

1. **Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Communal Gratitude Board</b> (10-15 minutes)
<b>Purpose:</b> To collaboratively reflect on and share the people, places, and things that group members are grateful for to help them remember alternative ways to engage and focus when they feel stressed.
<b>Materials:</b> -White Board <i>or</i> Large Poster Paper* -White Board Markers <i>or</i> Poster Markers*  *If these materials are not available, can complete gratitude board aloud and group members can write on their session handout or on another piece of paper
<b>Instructions:</b> 1. Instruct group members to reflect on what they are grateful for, despite their current stress. 2. Invite group members to come up to the board (either one-by-one or in small groups, depending on space availability) and write, draw, or otherwise symbolize something they are grateful for, a blessing in their life, or something they appreciate.

3. Encourage group members to continue sharing things they are grateful for (e.g., continuing to come to the board themselves, sharing their ideas aloud with facilitator adding to the board) until the group is exhausted of ideas. Invite group members to write along with you on their handout, including areas of gratitude that they came up with and that others shared that fit for them as well.
4. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - “How was it to create this gratitude board?”
  - “How are you feeling now that we’ve focused on the relationships and things that make us thankful, and have come up with such a large list?”
  - “What do you think it would be like if we spend more time in our lives focusing on the things we’re thankful for – [reading off the list] our children, family, shelter, health, friends, supportive staff members, etc. – rather than focusing as much on the negative, stressful things?”
  - “What are some ways we could learn and remember to think about what we’re grateful for in our daily lives?”
4. Encourage group members to consider having a daily gratitude practice (e.g., reflecting on at least one thing in that day they were thankful for). This could also become a family practice, whereby each family member, including children, reflect on areas of gratitude daily.

**2. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** (*remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes*)

- Continue debriefing from or discussing “Communal Gratitude Board” activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Compassion and Gratitude can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships.

*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Compassion and Gratitude to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

**“Choosing to Commit” Phase** (*20 minutes*)

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**1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share** (*15 minutes*)

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Compassion and Gratitude as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our “3 Questions” to help center us. Like before, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current



stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.

- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

## 2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship (5 minutes)

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments for the week to enhance a relationship to help us better manage our stress. Take a moment to think about it and consider what would be reasonable for you. It can relate to our topics or activities today on Compassion and Gratitude, relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe from a different week or a strategy you’ve used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

### “Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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#### 1. Closing Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix D)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Compassion and Gratitude” and the related phrase (e.g., “All About Love”) into the blank spaces.*

#### 2. End session and thank participants.

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week! Take good care!”*

Quotes for Compassion & Gratitude
<b>Suggested Quotes:</b>
“Gratitude turns what we have into enough.” ~ Maya Angelou
“Gratitude...It turns problems into gifts, failures into success, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.” ~Melody Beattie
“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” ~Sharon Salzberg
“Compassion for others begins with kindness to ourselves.” ~Pema Chodron
“Feeling compassion for ourselves in no way releases us from responsibility for our actions. Rather, it releases us from the self-hatred that prevents us from responding to our life with clarity and balance.” ~Tara Brach
“Love is that condition in the human spirit so profound [great] that it allows me to survive, and better than that, to thrive with passion, compassion, and style.” ~Maya Angelou

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.” ~ Maya Angelou

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.” ~Mother Teresa

“We may run, walk, stumble, drive, or fly, but let us never lose sight of the reason for the journey, or miss a chance to see a rainbow along the way.” ~Gloria Gaither

### **Additional Quotes:**

“Having compassion starts and ends with having compassion for all those unwanted parts of ourselves, all those imperfections that we don’t even want to look at.” ~Pema Chodron

“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good.” ~ Maya Angelou

“Love stretches your heart and makes you big inside.” ~Margaret Walker

“When we’re looking for compassion, we need someone who is deeply rooted, is able to bend and, most of all, embraces us for our strengths and struggles.” ~Brené Brown

“Difficulty creates the opportunity for self-reflection and compassion.” ~Suzan-Lori Parks

“Compassion begins at home, and it is not how much we do but how much love we put in that action.” ~Mother Teresa

“Love is patient. Love is kind.” ~1 Corinthians

“Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.” ~Native American Saying

“While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God’s creation.” ~Maya Angelou

“The desire to reach for the stars is ambitious. The desire to reach hearts is wise.” ~Maya Angelou

“In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” ~Anne Frank

“If we make friends with ourselves, then there is no obstacle to opening our hearts and minds to others.” ~Pema Chodron

“I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver.” ~Maya Angelou

“Life isn’t a matter of milestones, but of moments.” ~Rose Kennedy

“Until you make peace with who you are, you’ll never be content with what you have.” ~Doris Mortman

“Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and celebrate the journey!” ~Barbara Hoffman

“The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.” ~Oprah Winfrey

### **SESSION 3 –AUTHENTICITY & GROUNDEDNESS**

**Theme:** Authenticity & Groundedness

**Focus:** Connection to Self

**Phrase:** “Remember Who You Are”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Authenticity</b>	Truth, Realness, Honesty, Sincerity, Genuineness, Principles, Integrity
<b>Groundedness</b>	Centered, Supported, Rootedness, Balanced, Firm Foundation, Planted, Sense of Safety/Stability/Security
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Stay True to Yourself” or “Be Real” or “Walking Your Talk” or “Living Your Truth” or “Keepin’ It Real” or “The Truth Will Set You Free” or “Don’t Drink the Koolaid” or “Something Bigger than Myself”

**SESSION 3 –AUTHENTICITY & GROUNDEDNESS**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Handout/Materials</b>
	<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>	
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142) Session Handout
	<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>	
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activity - WE RISE Name Activity <i>or</i> - What Keeps Me Grounded: Tree Art Therapy (Art Therapy or Discussion)	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  “WE RISE Name” Activity Handouts  [Blank Tree Printouts and writing/coloring implements for art]
	<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>	
35 mins. – 1 hour  (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - “Living Out My WE RISE Name” <i>or</i> - “Being My True Self” (Art/Journaling Activity or Discussion)  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	[Paper and writing/coloring implements]  [Paper and writing/coloring implements for art or journaling]
	<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>	
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins  (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions” 7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
	<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>	
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

***WE RISE Stress Management Group***

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***Authenticity & Groundedness - “Remember Who You Are”***

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.” – Brené Brown
  
2. **Activity:** “WE RISE Name Activity”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Living Out my WE RISE Name”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Authenticity & Groundedness - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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**1. Welcome back group members**

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

**2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation** (see Appendix C)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Authenticity and Groundedness” and the related phrase (e.g., “Remember Who You Are”) into the blank spaces.*

**3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements**

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Authenticity and Groundedness,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_\_ (e.g. “Remember Who You Are”). This is our second and last session focusing on our “Connection to Self” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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**1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion** (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Authenticity and Groundedness to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As usual, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life, including your relationship with yourself. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:

- *“What came up for you as the quote was read?”*
- *“What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”*
- *“Were there any parts you disagreed with?”*
- *“How does this seem to relate to our focus of “connection to self” to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you’re having difficulty with or wanting to improve?”*
- *“Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”*
- *“Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”*

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these two resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)].”*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Authenticity & Groundedness can help us enhance relationships to manage our stress.”*

**2. Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in one of the following experiential activities:

<p>Activity Option 1:  <b>“WE RISE Naming Activity”*</b>  <i>(10-15 minutes)</i></p>
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To have group members create a unique WE RISE “name” that personifies aspects of their authentic identity</p> <p>*Activity adapted from “What’s In A Name” activity, developed by Harrell (2020)</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b></p> <p>-“WE RISE Name” Handout (<i>see below</i>)          -Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)</p> <p>*Given the multiple steps involved in this activity, it can be hard to complete without the handout.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <p>1. Introduce the activity as you pass out the handout, and instruct group members to use the handout to create their name. It is recommended that the facilitator guides the group through each of the 4 steps.  <i>“Our activity today is going to be having each of you create your “WE RISE” Stress Management and Resilience name. This name is going to embody some of</i></p>

*the most important aspects of your authentic self, which is grounded in your strengths and your values. We'll all create a unique name, using this handout as a guide. We'll go through it step-by-step together as a group, and then introduce ourselves at the end. Any questions at this point?"*

2. Guide group members through steps 1-4 of the handout. Then, have group members create their full "WE RISE" name (including first, last, and hyphenated-last names), using the handout.
  - Notes:
    - It is important for the facilitator to go around the group and help members individually with ideas, prompts, suggestions, and encouragement
    - As group members are creating their final name, facilitators should encourage members to play around with word choices or word endings (e.g., if they selected "being nice or kind" initially, could change it to "kindness"). They also can select different action words (step 3) if it sounds better or makes more sense with their value.
3. Allow group members to introduce themselves to each other with their new name, saying "I am \_\_\_\_". The group should respond with "I see you \_\_\_\_."
  - Note: If also creating the WE RISE Name Design in this session, it is optional to leave this step to follow the design.
4. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as those that follow. Note that if also creating the WE RISE Name Design in this session, it is optional to wait until after completion of the design to engage in discussion.
  - *"What was your immediate first reaction/feeling to the name when you created it?"*
  - *"In what ways do you connect to the name? In what ways do you not connect with the name?"*
  - *"Can you think of a time in your life when you really felt or lived your name?"*
  - *"What in your life takes you away from or blocks you from manifesting your name in your relationships or daily life?"*
  - *"Think about some of your relationships in your life. How do you think things might be different if you more strongly lived out your name in that way?"*
    4. Encourage group members to think about ways in which they can approach relationships or life stressors in ways that they live out their WE RISE name.



## “WE RISE Name” ACTIVITY

**Instructions:** The purpose of this activity is to “rename” yourself by creating a name that authentically represents you. The name should capture and communicate who you are and how you would like to live. It should “ring true” for you. Feel free to come up with a few words at each step, and then choose the one that fits and resonates best for you.

1. **Your Strength:** Write one word to describe a *strength* (something you feel proud of or that people complement about your character or personality).

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Your Symbol:** Write one or two word(s) to describe something in the natural world with which you *feel strongly connected* or identified (e.g., color, flower, tree, animal, part of nature, a place etc.)

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Action Word:** Choose One of the following “action” words and write it on the line below

Learning	Living	Creating	Inspiring
Sharing	Realizing	Liberating	Embracing
Bringing	Growing	Being	Understanding
Appreciating	Thanking	Gathering	Supporting
Knowing	Shining	Awakening	Uplifting
Developing	Nurturing	Communicating	Expressing
Freeing	Building	Strengthening	Renewing
Lighting	Expressing	Energizing	Blessing

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Your Value or Vision:** Write one word that describes something really important to you (e.g., a value) that you want to see more of in yourself, your relationships, or the world.

(4) \_\_\_\_\_

Copy the words on lines (1), (2), (3), and (4) into the spaces below. Feel free to change the words slightly (e.g., “being nice or kind” to “kindness”) or pick a slightly different word (e.g., a different action word from Step #3) so your name flows and sounds best to you:

1. FIRST NAME:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (your strength)

2. MIDDLE NAME:

(2) \_\_\_\_\_ (your identification/connection)

3. LAST NAME (hyphenated):

(3) \_\_\_\_\_ (action word) –

(4) \_\_\_\_\_ (value/vision)

Create your name by writing the words in the same order on the lines below (1, 2, 3, 4), including adding a hyphen (-) between words 3 and 4.

My WE RISE name is:

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Activity Option 2:

**“What Keeps Me Grounded: Tree Art Therapy”**

*(10-15 minutes; split time for creating and sharing)*

**Purpose:** To have group members connect with the things that “ground” them (e.g., values, strengths, people, places, things, etc.) and identify “to where” they are growing (e.g., values, relationships, work, housing, etc.) through an art therapy activity

**Materials:**

- [Blank Tree Printouts *(see below)* or blank paper]
- [Writing/coloring implements for art]

\*If paper/pencil or other art materials are not available, consider having this activity be imaginal and/or discussion-based

**Instructions:**

1. Introduce the activity as you pass out the blank tree handout (or blank paper on which members will draw a tree with roots). Share with participants the purpose of the activity, which is to connect with the things that “ground” them (e.g., values, strengths, people, places, things, etc.) and the places and areas to which they’re growing (e.g., values, relationships, work, housing, etc.).

*“One of our activities today is having each of you get in touch with what keeps you grounded, which can be helpful in managing stress and improving relationships. When I hear the word “grounded” I often think of roots, like those in trees. Roots are necessary for trees to be nourished and grow, and to stand strong during storms. The type of roots that trees have can differ depending on the type of tree and what they need – some trees grow best in sandy soil with more shallow roots, and other trees prefer rich soil and have deep roots. Some other trees can have roots that interconnect and weave with the roots of other trees, forming a network that can make those trees even stronger in storms. In some ways, we can imagine ourselves like these different trees. We all have different things that ground us, perhaps values, strengths, people, places, or faith systems. Additionally, like the trees, we’re using these roots to help nourish us to grow where we would like to in our lives.”*

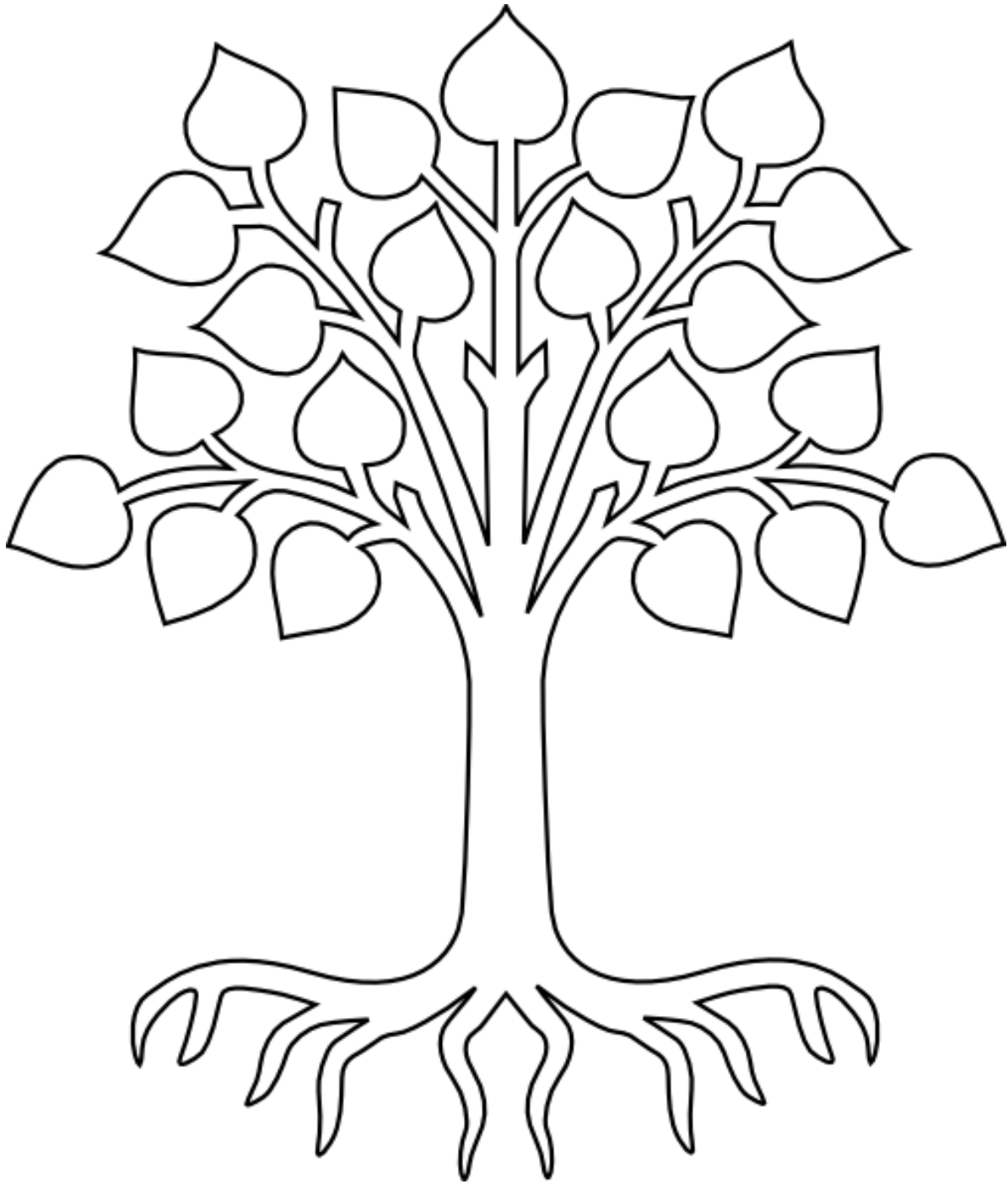
2. Instruct group members to use art materials, symbols, words, images, etc. to illustrate and decorate their trees, illustrating the things that ground them, and the “where” they are growing. Share with members that there will be optional space for sharing at the end of the activity. *(Approx. 10 minutes to complete tree).*

*“For this activity, I invite you all to be as creative as you like. Taking this picture of the tree with roots [or drawing a tree with roots], on the roots, write or draw the values or things that ground you, either now or in the past. For some, this might be values, or strengths, people, places, or things. Your roots might be some of the things that have helped you survive your own difficult storms. And then, where the leaves and branches are, write or draw the things that you’re growing towards.*

*We'll have about 10 minutes for the art, and then at the end will have some time to share for people who are interested in sharing."*

3. Encourage group members to share their trees, including their "roots" and "leaves and branches" with the group. After sharing, lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *"How was it to identify and design your roots and leaves/branches? Were any parts easier or harder? Did anything surprise you?"*
  - *"How might connecting, or reconnecting, with your roots and what grounds you help enhance relationships? How might it help you manage current stressors?"*
  - *"How was it to consider what you're moving towards?"*
  - *"What are some ways you could stay grounded in your selves and your relationships despite your current stressors? How might you remember to do this?"*

*"Wonderful! Thank you all for doing this activity and sharing your experiences about it. Now it's time to shift to our stress resilience tool for today."*



**What Keeps Me Grounded?**

**What am I Growing Towards?**

**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

1. **Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in one of the two following experiential activities:

<p>Activity Option 1: <b>“Living Out My WE RISE Name”*</b> (15-20 minutes)</p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> To have group members share and discuss ways that they can “live out” their WE RISE name, which personifies aspects of their authentic identity, to enhance their relationships and stress resilience.</p>
<p>*Activity adapted from “What’s In A Name” activity, developed by Harrell (2020)</p>
<p><b>Materials:</b> -Completed “WE RISE Name” Handout -[Blank paper] - optional -[Writing/Coloring Implements] – optional</p> <p>*This activity can be completed with art or journaling, or be mainly discussion based.</p>
<p><b>Instructions:</b></p> <p>1. Share with participants the purpose of the activity, which is to identify ways that they can “live out” their WE RISE name to enhance their relationships and stress resilience.</p> <p><i>“Now, we’re going to spend some time considering ways that you can “live out” your WE RISE name. This name, which really captures much of what is most important to each of you, can be a helpful guide in deciding how to act when faced with stressful situations. For example, if there’s a time when you’re having difficulty with how your children are behaving, or with another person or staff at the shelter, you might think “How might [insert WE RISE Name here (e.g., “Kindness Turquoise-Cat Embracing Love”)] handle this situation? What might I do keeping this name in my mind?” How might that be different from how you normally respond? [Gather some feedback from group members]. Exactly! Does that make sense? Any questions at this point?”</i></p> <p>2. Encourage group members to consider how they can “live out” their WE RISE name in relationship to themselves, others, and the world. If using paper for art or journaling for this activity, consider tri-folding the paper in landscape orientation and having a section for each “self,” “other,” and “the world.” Defining these particular sections is also helpful (e.g., “My Children” or “With My Case Manager” for “Others,” or “My Church” or “The Ladies in the Shelter” for “The World”). Note that group members may already be “living out” their name in some ways, and they may benefit from considering other ways to “live it out” as well. Facilitators should go around the room to encourage and offer suggestions, if needed. Share with members that there will be optional space for sharing at the end of the activity. (Approx. 10 minutes to complete their page).</p> <p><i>“Next, I invite you each to fold your paper into 3 parts like this (folded trifold across landscape oriented-paper, like a brochure). We’re going to spend time reflecting on</i></p>

ways you can “live out” your *We RISE* name across different circumstances—with yourself, with others, and with the word/your community. I invite you to write your *WE RISE* name across the entire top of the paper. Then, in the left folded side, write “Myself.” In for middle piece, consider some “Others” in which your relationship needs some *WE RISE* attention and love – perhaps with your children, or a close friend or family member, or someone else. Write that person(s) name across the middle section. Then, for the last section, consider some relationships that are in “Your World” that could also use some attention – such as a community, perhaps a faith community, or our community here at the shelter, in a 12-Step group, etc. Once you’ve selected that group, write that across the right-most side.

*Excellent. Now, I invite you to in each section, consider ways in which you would “live out” or “act out” your WE RISE name, especially in times of stress. You might do a brief art activity depicting what you might do, or write it out in words. Some of these might be things you already do, or things you’ve done in the past, or things you’ve never tried before. I encourage everyone to think of at least 4 or 5 things that might fit into each section – for yourself, others, and the world. We’ll come around the room if anyone needs help or suggestions as well. There also will be an opportunity at the end to share some of your findings if you would like.”*

3. Invite group members to share the ways they would “live out” their name. Encourage them to re-introduce themselves again before sharing the individual actions. Group members may also be inspired by others ways of “living out” their name, and may feel free to add to their page.
4. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as those that follow.
  - *“What was your experience of considering ways to “live out” your name? Were parts easier or harder? Did anything surprise you?”*
  - *“Have there been ways you’ve been “living out” your name? Any places or relationships where you could benefit from “living out” your name more?”*
  - *“In what ways do you connect to “living out” your name? Is there any ways in which you don’t connect? Is there anything that feels left out that feels important to consider or include as well?”*
  - *“Can you think of a time in your life when you really felt or lived out your name?”*
  - *“What in your life takes you away from or blocks you from manifesting your name in your relationships or daily life?”*
  - *“How do you think things might be different if you more strongly lived out your name in your relationships or daily life?”*
  - *“What might be an opportunity today to live out your WE RISE name?”*
5. Encourage group members to approach relationships and life stressors using their *WE RISE* name.

Activity Option 2  
“Being My True Self”

(15-20 minutes; split time for creating and sharing)

**Purpose:** To reflect and identify “true” and “false” aspects of their selves (identity, needs, thoughts, feelings, emotions, roles, etc.) and their needs through art or journaling to better inform things to engage in, share, or connect to when stressed.

**Materials:**

- Blank Mask Printouts (Double Sided)
- Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)
- Colored Markers, Colored Pencils, Crayons, etc.
- [Craft supplies, such as stickers or jewels, etc.] – optional
- [Soft background music] – optional

\*If these materials are not available, can complete this activity on their session handout or on another piece of paper.

**Instructions:**

1. Pass out mask handout. Share with participants the purpose of this activity, which is to reflect on our “true” and “false” selves (identity, needs, thoughts, feelings, emotions, roles, etc.), making a double-sided mask image.

*“Now we’re going to do an art or journaling-style activity related to authenticity. Using this mask handout, we’re going to get in touch with our “true selves” and our “false selves” that we share with ourselves and with others. These “selves” can include identities, needs, thoughts, feelings, emotions, life roles, or other things. Sometimes we can be not fully authentic with ourselves or others, particularly when we are stressed and strained, which can worsen the problems. For instance, for some people a false self can be saying “I don’t need anyone’s help – I can do this on my own.” They can tell this to themselves (internally), or out loud to others (externally). However, they may truly recognize that she could benefit from even one other persons’ help, or shifting to be open to God’s impact on her life. Can anyone think of another example that’s true for them? [Gather another example or 2 from the group]. Exactly! Thank you for sharing those instances.”*

2. Instruct group members to use art materials, symbols, words, images, etc. to decorate their masks, illustrating their “true” and “false” selves. Members can use the two sides of the mask, which is split in half, to show the inner and external impact of one’s “true” and “false” self. Around the mask, members can indicate what they need or could benefit from remembering during times of stress related to “being their true self.” Share with members that there will be optional space for sharing at the end of the activity. (Approx. 15 minutes to design mask).

*“We can experience our “true” and “false” selves both internally and externally. This is why the mask in front of us is double sided and split in half. Internally, our “truth” can be what we know to be true of ourselves and our needs or intentions. Alternatively*



*our “false” self can show up as what we trick ourselves into believing about ourselves, which is often negative. These internal false selves sometimes come about based on things others we’ve had negative experiences with have told us about ourselves, such as a critical parent or difficult romantic partner. Similarly, we can present our “true” selves to the world, while other times we share more of a “false” self. Now, as we said earlier, when we are not acting from our “true” self, especially when we are stressed or strained, things can become more complicated. So during times of stress, it’s important to consider “What would help me be more of my true self in this situation?” For example, for some mothers, this might be remembering people who are important to them, like their children, or considering their connection to a Higher Power. What are some examples that might be true for some of you? [Gather a few examples from group members]. Wonderful! Thank you for those great examples.*

*Now I’d like each of you to use these art and writing materials to design your masks, showcasing the different “true” and “false” selves that you can have inside and out. And on the outside of the mask, I’d like you to answer the question: “What would help me to be more of my true self?” For anyone who would like, you’ll have the option to share at the end of the activity.”*

3. Encourage group members to share their masks with their “true” and “false” selves with the group. After sharing, lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“How was it to identify and design these “true” and “false” selves? How about sharing them? Were any parts easier or harder? Did anything surprise you?”*
  - *“What in particular did you notice would help you be more of your true self?”*
  - *“How might recognizing these “true” and “false” selves impact your relationships? In what ways may being more authentic with your “true” selves help enhance relationships? In what ways may it get in the way?”*
  - *“How might recognizing these “true” and “false” selves help with managing your stress and struggles?”*
  - *“What are ways you can live out your “true” self more often?”*
  - *“What are some ways you could learn and remember to think about your authentic selves in your daily lives?”*

## **2. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** *(remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes)*

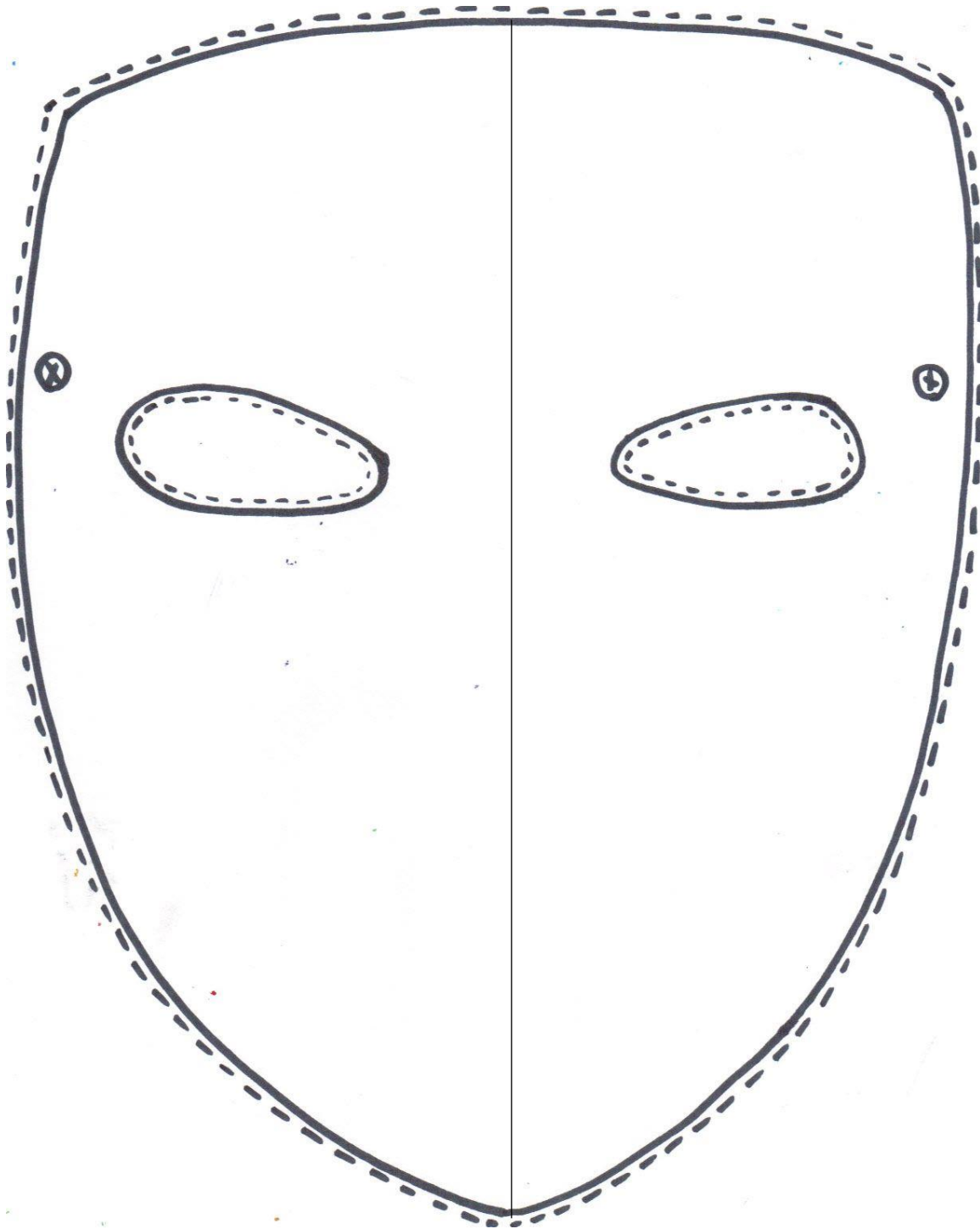
- Continue debriefing from earlier activities, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Authenticity and Groundedness can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships

*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Authenticity and Groundedness to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

*My Self - Inside*

*“True Self”*

*“False Self”*

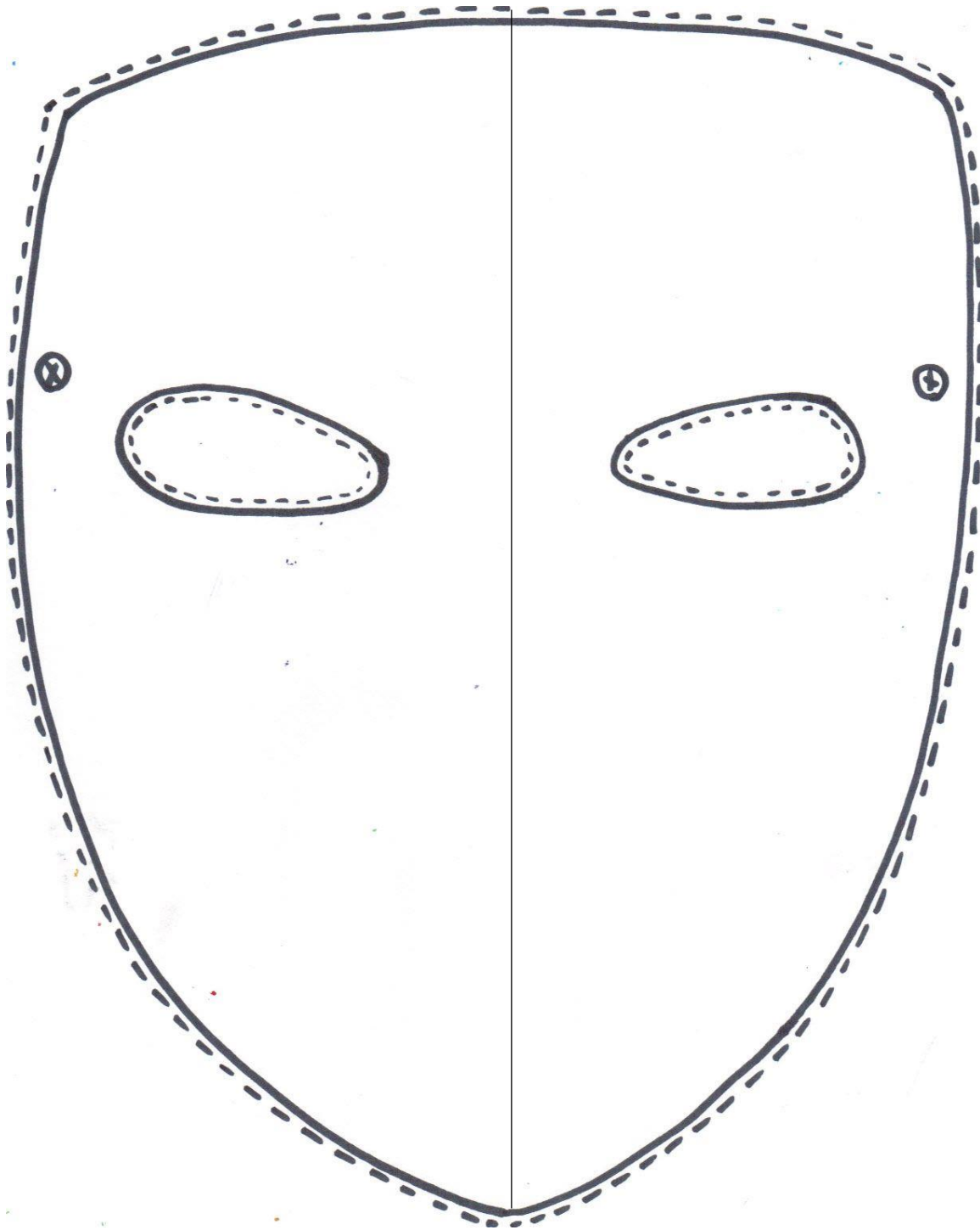


*What would help me to be more of my true self?*

*My Self - Outside*

*“True Self”*

*“False Self”*



*What would help me to be more of my true self?*

## **“Choosing to Commit” Phase (20 minutes)**

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### **1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share (15 minutes)**

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Authenticity and Groundedness as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our “3 Questions” to help center us. As usual, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

### **2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship (5 minutes)**

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments for the week to enhance a relationship to help us better manage our stress. Take a moment to think about it and consider what would be reasonable for you. It can relate to our topics or activities today on Authenticity and Groundedness, relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe from a different week or a strategy you’ve used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

## **“Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

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### **1. Closing Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix D)**

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Authenticity and Groundedness” and the related phrase (e.g., “Remember Who You Are”) into the blank spaces.*

### **2. End session and thank participants.**

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week! Take good care!”*

## Quotes for *Authenticity & Groundedness*

### Suggested Quotes:

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.” ~Brené Brown

“Nothing can dim the light that shines from within.” ~ Maya Angelou

“We need to find the courage to say NO to the things and people that are not serving [or helping] us if we want to rediscover ourselves and live our lives with authenticity” ~Barbara De Angelis

“I believe everyday your life speaks to you – through every experience, through the people you meet, and even through the pain, fear, and self-doubt.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“Strand for something or you will fall for anything. Today’s mighty oak is yesterday’s nut that held its ground.” ~Rosa Parks

“The purpose of our lives is to give birth to the best which is within us.” ~Marianne Williamson

“Instead of looking for answers outside of ourselves, the real work of your life is the continual work on yourself and self-discovery.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“One of the most powerful decisions you can make is to be authentic... people who choose to behave this way have a powerful healing vibration that commands respect and [creates] trust.” ~Sonia Choquette

“A tree with strong roots laughs at storms.” ~Malay Proverb

“I’ve learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision.” ~Maya Angelou

“It is our choices...that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” ~J. K. Rowling

“Go within every day and find the inner strength so that the world will not blow your candle out.” ~Katherine Dunham

### Additional Quotes:

“Learn to be quiet enough to hear the sound of the genuine within yourself so that you can hear it in others.” ~Marian Wright Edelman

“When your heart speaks, take good notes.” ~Judith Campbell

“The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself” ~Anna Quindlen

“Beauty is about being comfortable in your own skin. It’s about knowing and accepting who you are.” ~Ellen DeGeneres

“Wanting to be someone else is a waste of the person you are.” ~Marilyn Monroe

“You just have to be yourself and go full with confidence and be courageous!” ~Gabby Douglas

“Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.” ~Brené Brown

“There came a time when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” ~Anais Nin

“It took me a long time to not judge myself through someone else’s eyes.” ~Sally Field

“I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning.” ~Gloria E. Anzaldúa

“Do what you feel in your heart to be right, for you’ll be criticized anyway.” ~Eleanor Roosevelt

“You’ll never find yourself until you face truth.” ~Pearl Bailey

“Until you make peace with who you are, you’ll never be content with what you have.” ~Doris Mortman

“No one can do what you do exactly the way you do it.” ~Iyanla Vanzant

“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.” ~Maya Angelou

## **SESSION 4 –PATIENCE & REFLECTION**

**Theme:** Patience & Reflection

**Focus:** Connection to Others

**Phrase:** “This Too Shall Pass”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Patience</b>	Discipline, Perseverance, Waiting, Impulse Control, Endurance, Fortitude, Stamina
<b>Reflection</b>	Curiosity, Questioning, Discovery, Problem-Solving, Learning, Discernment, Understanding, Thinking, Processing, Accessing Inner Wisdom
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Calm and Centered” or “Know Thyself”

## SESSION 4 –PATIENCE & REFLECTION

Time	Activity	Handout/Materials
<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>		
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142)  Session Handout
<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>		
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activity - My Relationships at Their Best: Expressive Writing Activity <i>or</i> - Mindful Eating	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  [Paper and writing implements for journaling]  [Mindful Eating Script and craved food (e.g., small chocolates, salty snack, raisins, etc.)]
<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>		
35 mins. – 1 hour (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - Bite Size Goals  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	[Bite Size Goals Handout; Writing implements; Whiteboard or large paper & markers to review group example]
<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>		
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions”  7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>		
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials



**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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*Patience & Reflection - “This Too Shall Pass”*

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “Life’s challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they are supposed to help you discover who you are.” ~Bernice Johnson Reagan
  
2. **Activity:** “My Relationships at Their Best: Expressive Writing Activity”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Bite Size Goals”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. How do I feel? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Who/What do I need to connect with? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. What am I going to do? \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Patience & Reflection - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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#### 1. Welcome back group members

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

#### 2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix \_\_\_)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Patience and Reflection” and the related phrase (e.g., “This Too Shall Pass”) into the blank spaces.*

#### 3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Patience and Reflection,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g. “This Too Shall Pass”). This is our first session focusing on our “Connection to Others” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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#### 1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Patience and Reflection to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As usual, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:
  - “What came up for you as the quote was read?”
  - “What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”

- “Were there any parts you disagreed with?”
- “How does this seem to relate to our focus of “connection to others” to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you’re having difficulty with or wanting to improve?”
- “Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”
- “Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these two resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)].”*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Patience and Reflection can help us enhance relationships to manage our stress.”*

**2. Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in one of the following experiential activities:

Activity Option 1 My Relationships at Their Best: Expressive Writing Activity (10-15 minutes for writing)
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To take time for reflection about oneself and various relationships (e.g., with family, friends, romantic partners, etc.) when they are at “their best.” Then, taking time to identify the qualities/characteristics to work on to improve these relationships by fostering, often with patience, what’s “best” in these relationships.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b>            -My Relationships at Their Best Handout or Blank Paper            -Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)</p> <p>*If handouts or paper are unavailable, this activity can be discussion-based.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <p>1. Introduce group members to the activity while handing out the materials. Invite members to reflect on and write down the qualities and characteristics present in and across different relationships when the relationship has been at their “best.” Provide approximately 5 minutes of time to answer this question.</p> <p><i>“Now, we’re going to spend some time thinking about the qualities and characteristics in some of our important relationships when they’ve been at their absolute best. Take a</i></p>

*minute to think across several of your most important relationships—perhaps with your children, your family, friendships, romantic partners... maybe relationships with community members or people at church, or with a mentor or pastor, or good coworkers. These might be current or past relationships. We're just aiming to get a sense of the qualities that some of these relationships had when you would say they've been at their best.*

*So using the handout in front of you, I invite you to answer question #1 on the handout – “What qualities, characteristics, or behaviors are present in your relationships when they're at their absolute ‘best’?” These might be things that you or the other person in the relationship did or didn't do, or more general qualities that were present. You can write however you want – full sentences, or bullet points, or just descriptive words. Take some time reflecting on this – you'll have several minutes before we move on. Any questions for #1?”*

2. Invite members to now identify things that they can do now, or within the next 2 weeks at most, to foster these qualities or characteristics in important relationships currently. Provide approximately 5 minutes of time to answer this question.

*“Excellent. Thanks for taking the time to reflect on these relationships at their best. Now, I invite you to answer question #2 – “What are things you can do today, or at most 2 weeks from now, to invite and foster these qualities in your most important relationships?” I encourage you to pick only 1 or 2 of your most important relationships and to be specific. For example, if the quality in your relationships at their best was “being loving,” and one of your most important relationships is with your children, then something you can do is “give my children a hug and kiss every day before they go to bed” or “Tell my kids I love them every day before they go to school.” See how it's more specific, with both what you'd do and when you'd do it? Any questions?”*

3. Lead group in sharing some of their responses to questions 1 and 2. Then, lead a debriefing discussion, using the following question prompts as examples:

- *“What are some of the qualities and characteristics that are in your important relationships when they're at their best? Were any surprising?”*
- *“How was it to reflect on the things that are present in your relationships at their ‘best’?”*
- *“How are these aspects the same or different from what's happening in your current relationships?”*
- *“Does it feel like relationships are easier or harder when they're at their best? In what ways?”*
- *“How was it to identify things to do in your relationships today to improve them? What do you think it would be like if we spent more time reflecting on some of these aspects and bringing them more intentionally into our relationships?”*
- *“What are things that might get in the way of you practicing these things to improve your relationships? What can you do to address these possible barriers?”*

- *“Oftentimes we need to take some time to reflect on our situations to see things clearly before we can move forward and act, as we’ve been discussing. Additionally, this often can take patience before things shift and improve. What might be strategies to remember when you need to spend time reflecting on your relationships? Also, what are ways to remember the importance of patience in this process?”*

4. Encourage group members to do at least 1 or 2 of the things on their list in relationships this week, and ongoing as well. Also encourage them to borrow ideas that resonated with them from others.

**My Relationships At Their Best**

**Take a moment to think about the qualities and characteristics that have been in your relationships (e.g., with your children, family, friends, romantic partners, etc.) when the relationship is at its absolute *BEST*. Then, answer the following questions.**

- 1) What qualities, characteristics, or behaviors are present in my relationships when they are at their absolute best?**

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- 2) What are things you can do today, or at most 2 weeks from now, to invite and foster these same qualities in your most important relationships?**

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Activity Option 2  
Mindful Eating  
(10 minutes)

**Purpose:** To collaboratively reflect on and share the people, places, and things that group members are grateful for to help them remember alternative ways to engage and focus when they feel stressed.

**Materials:**

-Mindful Eating Script (for facilitator)  
-Small “craved” foods (e.g., small chocolates, raisins, salty snack, tangerine, strawberry, etc.) [have a couple of options in case of allergies]

**Instructions:**

1. Pass out 1 piece of craved food to each group member.
2. Read mindful eating script aloud to group members. Change script as needed for foods other than wrapped chocolates.
3. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“How was this different from your normal way of eating this food, or food in general?”*
  - *“What did you notice during the exercise? Were any parts easier or harder?”*
  - *“Do you have any thoughts about how these principles, particularly of patience, might apply to eating or any other areas of your life?”*

*“Awesome! Thank you for doing this activity and sharing your thoughts on it. Now it’s time to shift to our stress resilience tool for today. In particular, we’re going to do an activity to self-reflect and use patience by breaking big goals and tasks into “bite size goals” to help them happen!”*

## Mindful Eating

Try to keep quiet during the exercise and focus all of your attention on the chocolate. Approach the exercise with an open mind and a gentle curiosity.

- Pick up your wrapped chocolate but don't unwrap it yet.
- Place it in the palm of your hand and notice the colors and shapes on the package. Feel the weight of it in your hand.
- Pretend like you have never seen a wrapped chocolate bar before and examine it closely.
- Touch the packaging with your fingers and feel the texture. Pay attention to any sound the wrapper makes. Examine the wrapper noticing all of the colors. Look at the different sides of the chocolate wrapper and notice any place that the light reflects off the package, any shadows.
- If your mind starts to wander and think about other things, that's ok. Notice the thoughts and bring your attention back to the chocolate.
- Now begin to slowly open the wrapper. Listen for the sounds of the wrapper tearing. Notice the movement of your hand, fingers, and arm muscles as you open the chocolate.
- You may hear other people or other noises in the room. Notice the sounds and bring your attention back to the chocolate.
- Raise the chocolate to your nose and smell the chocolate. Slowly breathe in several times and focus on the different smells. Does smelling the chocolate trigger anything else in your body?
- Is your mouth watering? Are you having any thoughts, "Hurry up and let me eat the chocolate!" "What's taking so long?" If so, notice them and bring your attention back to smelling the chocolate.
- Now slowly take a small bite of the chocolate, but do not chew it or swallow it. Notice the feeling and taste of the chocolate in your mouth. How does it feel as it melts? Notice the taste and sensations of the chocolate on your tongue. Move the chocolate around in your mouth. Try to notice the moment where you feel like you want to swallow.
- Slowly swallow the chocolate, focusing on the sensations. Notice any lingering tastes or sensations.

How was this different from your normal way of eating chocolate?

What did you notice during the exercise?

Any thoughts about how these principles might apply to eating or other areas of your life?



**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

**1. Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Bite Size Goals</b> (15-20 minutes)
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To learn the tools to break large goals into “bite size” and measurable tasks. Also helps with planning realistic timelines for large goals.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Bite Size Goals Handouts</li><li>-Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)</li><li>- [Whiteboard or large paper &amp; markers to review example as a group]</li></ul> <p>*If copies of the handouts are not available, can complete this activity on the back of their session handout or on another piece of paper.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Pass out the “Bite Size Goals” handout and introduce the purpose of this activity. Also review the sections on the handout and consider including a relatable example (e.g., finding a new job). It can be helpful to write down the example on a board as a group, if possible.</li></ol> <p><i>“Now we’re going to learn a stress resilience tool to help us break down big goals into smaller, ‘bite size’ tasks. This is our “Bite Size Goals Action Plan” worksheet, which is helpful to use when you’re working towards a goal, particularly one that leaves you feeling highly stressed or overwhelmed at times. Today, we’ll plan to spend a good amount of time with each of you breaking down one big goal into the bite size tasks, identifying a timeline, and possibly checking off items you may have already started. But first, let’s all review the handout together and go through an example.</i></p> <p><i>So first we start with identifying a goal. For example, finding a new job. This can be a big, overwhelming task, and sometimes it can feel hard to know where to start. But breaking down into the smaller ‘bite size’ tasks can be helpful to know what to do, and feel accomplished as you’re doing them. What are some of the tasks that go into finding a new job? [Gather several tasks from the group]. Yes, exactly. So here we would write “Update resume,” “Search for job leads online or on the shelter job board,” “Talk with friend about openings at her new job,” “Apply to jobs weekly,” “Go on interviews,” and “Follow-up after interviewing.” You also can include some seemingly small, but still important steps, like “Update case manager on job search progress.” Then, it’s also important to have a timeline set, or you can lose momentum on your goals. What are “by when” dates we could use for these examples? [Gather examples from the group]. Excellent! Also, sometimes these smaller tasks can also have multiple steps. For example, “Update Resume” itself could be a bigger goal, with tasks including “Make list of prior experiences,” “Make appointment at shelter for resume support,” “Attend appointment,” and “Get digital and paper copies of resume.” Any questions?</i></p>

2. Encourage group members to complete handout sections for one goal, either task-focused (e.g., apply for a job, housing, or social benefits; staying in compliance at the shelter; maintaining sobriety; etc.) or relationship focused (e.g., improve relationship with children; mend relationship with a family member; etc.). It is advised that the facilitator be available to walk around, review people’s responses, and answer questions.

*“Now, I invite each of you to complete one line of your Action Plan for one goal that you’re currently in progress on, or one that you would like to start soon. This activity tends to be most beneficial for something that is at least moderately hard or stressful for you to do. It can be a task focused goal—such as applying for a job, looking for permanent housing, applying for benefits for your children or yourself, staying in compliance at the shelter, maintaining sobriety, etc.—or a relationship focused goal—like improving your relationship with your children or mending a relationship with a family member. After you identify one goal you’d like to work towards, identify the tasks and the timeline. Check off any tasks you’ve already completed too! I’ll be walking around in a few minutes to review as you go and answer any questions that you may have.”*


3. Encourage group members to share their goals and bite size tasks. After sharing, lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“What was it like to break down your goals into ‘bite size’ tasks with due dates? Were any parts easier or harder?”*
  - *“Does this feel beneficial to do for other tasks? Has anyone done something like this in the past?”*
  - *“Any helpful tips, observations, or additions that may be helpful for others to know?” [E.g. Building in self-care or other encouragement into the tasks; Sharing the plan with others to have an accountability buddy; Adding due dates into phone calendar]*
  - *“How about for when things can get in the way of completing the ‘bite size’ tasks? Does anyone have thoughts or solutions for when those situations might come up?”*

2. **Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** (*remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes*)






- Continue debriefing from or discussing the Bite Size Goals activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Patience and Reflection can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships

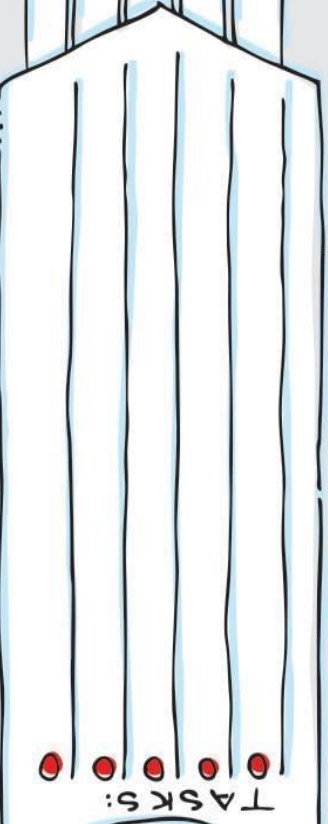


*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Patience and Reflection to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

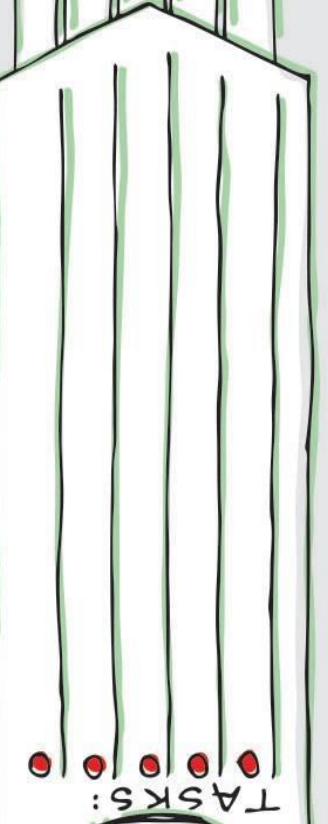


# BITE SIZE GOALS

**ACTION PLAN** 

by when?

GOAL 1:    TASKS:  

GOAL 2:   TASKS: 

GOAL 3:   TASKS: 

## **“Choosing to Commit” Phase (20 minutes)**

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### **1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share (15 minutes)**

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Patience and Reflection as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our “3 Questions” to help center us. As usual, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

### **2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship (5 minutes)**

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments for the week to enhance a relationship to help us better manage our stress. Take a moment to think about it and consider what would be reasonable for you. It can relate to our topics or activities today on Patience and Reflection, relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe from a different week or a strategy you’ve used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

## **“Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

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### **1. Closing Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix D)**

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Patience and Reflection” and the related phrase (e.g., “This Too Shall Pass”) into the blank spaces.*

### **2. End session and thank participants.**

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week! Take good care!”*

## Quotes for *Patience & Reflection*

### Suggested Quotes:

“Life’s challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they are supposed to help you discover who you are.” ~Bernice Johnson Reagan

“The person who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.” ~Chinese Proverb

“Instead of looking for answers outside of ourselves, the real work of your life is the continual work on yourself and self-discovery.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“Surrender to what is. Let go of what was. Have faith in what will be.” ~Sonia Ricotti

“If you really want something, and really work hard, and take advantage of opportunities, and never give up, you will find a way.” ~Jane Goodall

“So often we dwell on the things that seem impossible rather than on the things that are possible.”  
~Marian Wright Edleman

“We know not where our dreams will take us, but we can probably see quite clearly where we’ll go without them.” ~Marilyn Grey

“Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet.” ~Japanese Proverb

“Little by little the bird makes its nest.” ~Haitian Proverb

“If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.” ~Chinese Proverb

### Additional Quotes:

“Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.” ~Lorraine Hansberry

“Love is patient. Love is kind.” ~1 Corinthians

“Sit quietly, doing nothing, spring comes and the grass grows by itself.” ~Zen saying

“Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day.” ~A.A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh

“Let nothing upset you; let nothing frighten you. Everything is changing; God alone is changeless. Patience attains the goal. Who has God lacks nothing; God alone fills every need.” ~Saint Teresa of Avila

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” ~Ecclesiastes 3:1

“It may sometimes seem as if our baptisms are all of fire, but in the fire we forge new strengths.” ~Susan L. Taylor

## **SESSION 5 – ATTENTION & FLEXIBILITY**

**Theme:** Attention & Flexibility

**Focus:** Connection to Others

**Phrase:** “Bend, Don’t Break”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Attention</b>	Focus, Consciousness, Noticing, Awakened, Witnessing, “Woke,” “Dialed In,” Experiencing, Awareness, Presence
<b>Flexibility</b>	Adaptability, Openness, Receptivity, Perspective-Taking, Resourcefulness, Open-Mindedness, Problem-Solving, Compromise
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Make a Choice”

**SESSION 5 – ATTENTION & FLEXIBILITY**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Handout/Materials</b>
	<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>	
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142)  Session Handout
	<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>	
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activities - Clenched vs. Open Fist - Nondominant Hand Writing - “Tunnel Vision”	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  [Blank Paper and writing implements]
	<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>	
35 mins. – 1 hour (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - Reframing Skills  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	
	<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>	
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions” 7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
	<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>	
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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***Attention & Flexibility - “Bend, Don’t Break”***

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” –Maria Robinson
  
2. **Activity:** “Attention & Flexibility Exercises”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Reframing Skills”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Attention & Flexibility - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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#### 1. Welcome back group members

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

#### 2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix C)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Attention & Flexibility” and the related phrase (e.g., “Bend, Don’t Break”) into the blank spaces.*

#### 3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Attention & Flexibility,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g. “Bend, Don’t Break”). This is our second and last session focusing on our “Connection to Others” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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#### 1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Authenticity and Gratitude to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As usual, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:
  - “What came up for you as the quote was read?”

- *“What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”*
- *“Were there any parts you disagreed with?”*
- *“How does this seem to relate to our focus of “connection to others” to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you’re having difficulty with or wanting to improve?”*
- *“Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”*
- *“Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”*

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these two resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)].”*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Attention & Flexibility can help us enhance relationships to manage our stress.”*

**2. Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in one or two of the following experiential activities:

Activity Option 1 <b>Attention &amp; Flexibility Exercises: Clenched vs. Open Fist</b> (5-10 minutes)
<b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To encourage individuals to consider the role attention and flexibility plays in stress management and relationships, group members will participate in experiential activities related to attention and flexibility.
<b><u>Materials:</u></b> None needed
<b><u>Instructions:</u></b> 1. Request group members to engage in the following activity. Facilitator should participate as well. Providing the purpose is not recommended for this activity, as it is better experienced than explained. Each hand position should be maintained for at least 2-3 minutes.

*“For this activity, I invite everyone to close both of their hands into fists. Make the fists tight, but not too tight where you hurt yourself. Now, please keep holding them until I tell you to stop. So, what do you notice in your body with your fists clenched? [Gather or offer examples, such as feelings of tension, exhaustion, rigidity, etc.]. Excellent! And now how about if I asked you to interact with your environment? Maybe to write something down, or shake hands with your neighbor, or make a phone call? How would that go? [Gather examples from participants]. Yes! You could certainly work around it, but it would be harder. And how about in your relationships? For me, it would be harder to do the things I need to care for myself, let alone others, with my fists balled up. Like for example, changing clothes or changing a diaper. And with our hands in fists, if we got into an argument with someone, how do you think that might go down? [Get feedback from group members – perhaps increased tension makes it more likely to get into a physical fight]. And we’ve had our hands like this for a while now. How are you feeling? [Tense, tight, exhausted?] Where do you notice your attention is? [e.g., on pain in fists, on wanting to release hands] Where is it not? [e.g., on things that they value]*

*Excellent! And now, release your hands, just let them be open. Now what do you notice? [Gather feedback from group, such as feeling more relaxed, more options to engage and do things, etc.]. Going back to those questions, how do you think it would work to interact with your environment? To write something, shake hands, make a phone call? Or to care for yourself or your children? Or if a disagreement happened, what might be different? [Get feedback from group]. And now having had our hands released and open for this time, what do you notice in your body? [e.g., more relaxed, less pain, etc.] How is your attention, compared to when you had your fists clenched? [e.g., able to move attention towards things that need attending or are of value].”*

2. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“So what did you notice in the differences between having your hand clenched in a fist versus open?”*
  - *“Coming back to our resilience themes for today – attention and flexibility— where did you notice your attention with your fist closed versus open? How about flexibility – which position was more flexible?”*
  - *“How might this exercise relate to how you are during times of stress? What are steps you can take to increase your attention and flexibility at those times?”*

Activity Option 2  
**Attention & Flexibility Exercises: Nondominant Hand Writing**  
(5-10 minutes)

**Purpose:** To encourage individuals to consider the role attention and flexibility plays in stress management and relationships, group members will participate in experiential activities related to attention and flexibility.

**Materials:**  
-Paper and writing implements (pens/pencils)

**Instructions:**

1. Pass out materials and request group members to engage in the following activity. Facilitator should participate as well. Providing the purpose is not recommended for this activity, as it is better experienced than explained.  
*“For this activity, I invite everyone to take their pen or pencil in their non-dominant hand, and write “My name is \_\_\_\_” on the paper. Include your first and last name. And as you’re doing this, notice any thoughts or feelings you have.”*  
  
*“Excellent, and now, I invite you to take the pen or pencil in both of your hands, and write the same thing – “My name is \_\_\_\_”. And again, notice any thoughts or feelings you have.”*  
  
*“Thank you. And lastly, write the same sentence with your dominant hand, and notice what thoughts or feelings you have.”*
2. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“So what did you notice writing with your non-dominant hand, compared to with both your hands, and your dominant hand? What thoughts or feelings came up?”*
  - *“Coming back to our resilience themes for today – attention and flexibility – how do you see this relating? How was it to be flexible in writing in the different ways, where the task was completed, but maybe with different levels of ease or end quality? How about your attention – did you notice your attention being more focused or easily wandering during each activity?”*
  - *“Can you think of times where flexibility and attention can play a role in your relationships, particularly during times you’re stressed? Are there times when you might benefit from more flexibility? Or vice versa, when having more boundaries would be beneficial?”*
  - *“How does your attention look when you’re stressed? How does that impact your relationships, such as with your children or friends?”*
  - *“How might this exercise relate to how you are during times of stress? What are steps you can take to increase your attention and flexibility at those times?”*

Activity Option 3  
**Attention & Flexibility Exercises: Tunnel Vision**  
(5-10 minutes)

**Purpose:** To encourage individuals to consider the role attention and flexibility plays in stress management and relationships, group members will participate in experiential activities related to attention and flexibility.

**Materials:**  
None needed

**Instructions:**

1. Request group members to engage in the following activity. Facilitator should participate as well. Providing the purpose is not recommended for this activity, as it is better experienced than explained. The “tunnel vision” versus normal vision should be maintained for at least 2-3 minutes each.

*“For this activity, I invite everyone to give themselves “tunnel vision” for the next few minutes by cupping their hands against the sides of their eyes/temples. [Facilitator demonstrates with their hands, blocking their peripheral vision by holding their hands up to the outer sides of their eyes or temples]. OK great! Now, please keep your hands there until I tell you to stop. So, what do you notice? [Gather thoughts, feelings, or experiences, such as being unable to see, feeling uncomfortable, etc]. Exactly, me too. Now try and look around the room? How is that? [Gather feedback]. And let’s imagine that someone came into the room and was wanting your attention... Maybe your child came up to your side and wanted you to look at something. How would that go? [Gather examples, such as it would be hard to see, may not notice them coming in, would have to turn dramatically to see them, etc.]. And then if you needed to do something with your hands, like pick up your child or get something for them, you wouldn’t be able to, because they’re sort of glued to the sides of your head, huh? Anything else you notice that would be difficult? And we’ve had our hands like this for a while now. How are you feeling? [Tense, tight, exhausted?] Where do you notice your attention is? [e.g., directly in front of them, on pain in arms, on wanting to release hands] Where is it not? [e.g., on things to the sides, on that they value],*

*Excellent! And now, release your hands, and allow yourself to look around the room- having more “open vision” than “tunnel vision” now. What do you notice now? [Gather feedback from group, such as feeling more relaxed, able to see more things, etc.]. And going back to those questions I asked earlier, how is it to look around the room? And then imagining your child wanted your attention, how would it be different now? And if you needed to move something with your hands, like pick up your child or get something from them, it’d be a lot easier now? [Get feedback from group]. And we’ve been in this “open vision” place for a while now. What do you notice in your body or feelings? [e.g., more relaxed, less pain, etc.]. How is your attention now, compared to with the tunnel vision? [e.g., able to see and take in more information, able to interact with the environment, etc.]”*

2. Lead group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
- “So what did you notice in the differences between “tunnel vision” and “open vision”?”
  - “Can you think of times you’ve had “tunnel vision” because of stress? How did that impact you or the situation? How about any times you’ve had more “open” vision? How did that impact you or the situation?”
  - “Coming back to our resilience themes for today – attention and flexibility— where did you notice your attention was with “tunnel vision” versus “open vision”? How about flexibility – which position felt more flexible?”
  - “How might this exercise relate to how you are during times of stress? What are steps you can take to increase your attention and flexibility at those times?”

“Awesome! Thank you for doing this activity and sharing your thoughts on it. Now it’s time to shift to our stress resilience tool for today. In particular, we’re going to do an activity to help us think more flexibility when we’re stressed.”

**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

1. **Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Reframing Skills</b> (15-20 minutes)		
<b>Purpose:</b> To teach and practice reframing skills – a skill of looking at a situation, person, or relationship in a more balanced way to change its meaning, which can change the feelings and thoughts associated with it.		
<b>Materials:</b> None		
<p><b>Instructions:</b></p> <p>1. Introduce the concept of reframing – the skill of looking at a situation, person, or relationship in a more balanced way to change its meaning, which can change the feelings and thoughts associated with it. The following are suggested points to include. Some examples are provided, but it is advised that facilitators allow for a conversation amongst group members to provide examples and reframes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way we think about ourselves, others, or a situation can impact the way we feel about it. Often, especially when we’re stressed, we can think in ways that are more “off balanced” and only look at the negatives. However, it can be helpful to have more flexible, balanced thinking that can look at a mix of positives and negatives, or at least at opportunities.</li> </ul>		
Situation	Unbalanced, Unhelpful Thought	Balanced, Reframed Thought
Living in a homeless shelter	“This is terrible and a sign I have failed.”	“I’m not fully happy to be here, but this is an opportunity to get back on our feet and move forward.”

Having difficulties with others at the shelter	“This just shows how I can’t trust other people. We need to stay to ourselves.”	“This is a reminder of how important my good friends are.” <i>OR</i> “This is an opportunity to help teach my children how to tell the difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy people.”
Having an active child who breaks the rules	“They’re messed up and will never act right.”	“They’re still adjusting to living here, especially after all we’ve went through. They need extra support and love, and I can do my best to provide it to them.”
Feeling discouraged and being hard on themselves	“I’m a terrible mother and a failure.”	“This is hard and I’m doing the best I can.”

- Tips to know if it may be helpful to reframe something:
  - A thought or situation is causing significant stress or negative feelings (e.g., anger, sadness, despair, etc.)
  - A thought makes someone feel stuck, doesn’t offer alternative options, does not take in all the evidence, or is not helping someone move forward (e.g., “I’m a failure. I’m a bad mother. My child will never act right.”)
  - Asking self “Am I looking at the glass half-empty or half-full?”
- Reframing is not intended to ignore the negatives or difficulties, but to be more balanced about them. Lying to ourselves about a situation is not helpful either. Overall, reframing is not as much “positive thinking” as it is “balanced thinking.”
- There is no absolute “right” or “wrong” way to think about a situation or to reframe. However, the reframe should feel accurate, helpful, and balanced to the person.
- Sometimes imagining what you would say to a friend or family member who had that situation or thought can help us to think of a reframe. We’re often much kinder and more balanced in thinking for others than we are for ourselves.

2. Encourage group members to practice reframing thoughts to their current stressors, particularly around relationships with others. This can be done in pairs or as a large group.

3. Lead the group in debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:

- *“How was practicing reframing for you? Were any parts easier or harder? Did anything surprise you?”*

- *“Has anyone used this skill in the past, and found it either helpful or challenging? Any tips that the group can use to help have more balanced thinking?”*
- *“How do you think having balanced thinking would be helpful in your relationships (with your children, friends, family, other mothers/staff in the shelter, etc.), particularly with things that are stressful?”*
- *What are some ways you can try and remember to reframe and have balanced thinking? What may get in the way, and what can you do to manage that?”*

**2. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** (*remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes*)

- Continue debriefing from or discussing the reframing skills activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Attention and Flexibility can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships

*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Attention and Flexibility to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

**“Choosing to Commit” Phase** (*20 minutes*)

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**1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share** (*15 minutes*)

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Attention and Flexibility as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our “3 Questions” to help center us. As usual, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

**2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship** (*5 minutes*)

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments for the week to enhance a relationship to help us better manage our stress. Take a moment to*



*think about it and consider what would be reasonable for you. It can relate to our topics or activities today on Attention and Flexibility, relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe from a different week or a strategy you’ve used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

**“Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

**1. Closing Mindfulness Meditation** (see Appendix D)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Attention and Flexibility” and the related phrase (e.g., “Bend, Don’t Break”) into the blank spaces.*

**2. End session and thank participants.**

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week! Take good care!”*

<b>Quotes for Attention &amp; Flexibility</b>
<b>Suggested Quotes:</b>
“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” ~Maria Robinson
“There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.” ~Willa Cather
“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.” ~Dr. Seuss
“That was the day she made herself the promise to live more from intention and less from habit.” ~Anonymous
“There are many paths up the mountain, but the view of the moon from the top is the same.” ~Japanese Proverb
“Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.” ~Anonymous
“Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next.” ~Gilda Radner
“When...you’re able to keep your eyes open, your heart open, and your mind open, you begin to think of your life as offering endless opportunities to start to do things differently.” ~Pema Chodron
“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.” ~Maya Angelou
“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.” ~Maya Angelou
“The wind does not break a tree that bends.” ~African Proverb
“Watch yourself. Every minute we change. It is a great opportunity. At any point, we can step out of our frozen selves and our ideas and begin fresh.” ~Natalie Goldberg
“So often we dwell on the things that seem impossible rather than on the things that are possible.” ~Marian Wright Edleman

**Additional Quotes:**

“I find that it is not the circumstances in which we are placed, but the spirit in which we face them that constitutes our comfort.” ~Elizabeth T. King

“The biggest step that one has to take to open up new possibilities is namely to take the risk of going into the unknown.” ~Virginia Satir

“We can learn to be the catalysts [causes] for our own change.” ~Sarah Ban Breathnach

“If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teacher.” ~Pema Chodron

“What helps me go forward is that I stay receptive [open], I feel that anything can happen.” ~Anouk Aimee

“Life’s under no obligation to give us what we expect.” ~Margaret Mitchell

“New things cannot come when there is no room.” ~Marlo Morgan

“Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.” ~Karen Kaiser Clark

## SESSION 6 – CLARITY & RELEASE

**Theme:** Clarity & Release

**Focus:** Connection to the World

**Phrase:** “Let It Go”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Clarity</b>	Acceptance, Naming, Seeing Clearly, Realizing, Recognition, Non-Avoidance, Non-judgement, Not Struggling or Fighting Self, Facing what “Is”
<b>Release</b>	Forgiveness (of self and others), Loosen, Disentangle, Letting Go, Surrender, Unattach, Ungrip, Unhook, Exhale
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“The Struggle Is Real” or “Let Go and Let God” or “It Is What It Is” or “Free Your Mind” or “The Truth Will Set You Free”

**SESSION 6 – CLARITY & RELEASE**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Handout/Materials</b>
<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>		
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142)  Session Handout
<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>		
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activity - “I’m Releasing Myself From...”	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  [Paper strips, writing implements, small container]
<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>		
35 mins. – 1 hour (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - RAIN Meditation to Help Emotional Struggles and Stuck Places  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool	Meditation Script [RAIN Handout]
<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>		
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions”  7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>		
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 143)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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***Clarity & Release - "Let It Go"***

1. **Wisdom Quote:** "Some people believe holding on and hanging in there are signs of great strength. However, there are times when it takes much more strength to know when to let go and then do it." – Ann Landers
  
2. **Activity:** "I'm Releasing Myself From...."
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** "RAIN Meditation to Help Emotional Struggles and Stuck Places"
  
4. **Committing to Action:** "The 3 Questions"
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My "One Thing" to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

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## Clarity & Release - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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**1. Welcome back group members**

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

**2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation** (see Appendix C)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Clarity & Release” and the related phrase (e.g., “Let It Go”) into the blank spaces.*

**3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements**

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Clarity & Release,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g. “Let It Go”). This session also focuses on our “Connection to the World” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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**1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion** (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Clarity and Release to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As usual, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life and your connection with your world and the larger community. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:
  - “What came up for you as the quote was read?”

- *“What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”*
- *“Were there any parts you disagreed with?”*
- *“How might this relate to our focus of “connection to the world” to manage stress? How might this connect with any difficulties or relationships you’ve been having with people or things you deal with in life other than your close relationships? (e.g., communities, agencies, society issues such as racism or sexism, etc.).*
- *How might it relate to resources that are helpful to you in your community, groups you are a part of?”*
- *“Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”*
- *“Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”*

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now, based on your earlier experiences [provide some relevant examples (e.g., surviving domestic violence or child abuse, overcoming addiction, etc.)], or particular difficulties related to being a mom experiencing homelessness, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., holding resentment or grudges, blaming others, holding shame/guilt, etc.)]. As we touched on in our discussion, when feelings like blame, resentment, grudges, shame, or guilt are too strong, they can be obstacles in the way of our resilience. It is important to “see clearly” what we are carrying and how they might be impacting us so we can see what we might need to release. Self-forgiveness is particularly important. For example, holding tightly onto blaming ourselves, or shame, or guilt can become poison inside of us. However, when someone is able have more self- forgiveness they often feel a weight lifted and are able focus on what is really most important. It can be like getting free of something. Now, release, or forgiveness, or “letting go,” is often easier said than done. These topics also not “all or nothing,” but tend to come in waves, some easier and some harder. Sometimes we can release or forgive easier as time passes. It is a unique process for each individual. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)]. Clarity and Release can be particularly difficult, in my experience, but often are highly important to address.*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Clarity & Release can help us enhance relationships to be resilient from stress.”*

2. **Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>“I’m Releasing Myself From…”</b> <i>(10-15 minutes; split time for experiential activity and sharing)</i>
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To reflect with clarity on things that are holding group members back or down, and then engaging in an experiential activity in kindly and compassionately releasing themselves from these aspects.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Blank Paper Cut Into Strips (at least 2-3 slips per person, with extras available)</li> <li>-Writing Implements (Pens and pencils)</li> <li>-Small container to hold paper strips (e.g., basket, bag, etc.)</li> </ul> <p>*If materials are not available, can complete this activity without them (e.g., releasing silently or aloud to an imaginary “bucket” in the middle of the group or that is “passed around”).</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <p>1. While passing out materials, introduce the activity and its purpose. It is important to discuss how to select a topic at an appropriate level of emotional challenge and be mindful of how much distress each member is able to tolerate. Providing examples is strongly recommended.</p> <p><i>“For our activity today, we’re going to spend some time gaining clarity on what may be holding you back, and then together kindly and compassionately releasing them. We’ll start with a brief meditation to help get this clarity. Note that while there are likely external things that are holding you back [provide relevant examples, (e.g., the shelter, finances, other people, Child Protective Services, etc.)], there also are often internal things that can hold you back. This could be thoughts or feelings, or resentments or grudges, or fears or concerns, shame or guilt, or something else that’s difficult. Oftentimes we developed these things for a reason, perhaps based on personal experiences of difficulty, and sometimes there was a lesson to be learned in that experience. However, these things may no longer serve you, and you’re ready to let some of them go.</i></p> <p><i>Now, the things that are difficult and hold us back can be different for different people. In today’s activity, I’m going to be inviting everyone to look inside yourself and get a sense of clarity on something you may need to release yourself from. Then we’ll engage in an activity to help release the hold or power of that thing over you, in even a small way. Since this can be an emotionally heavy topic for some, particularly in this setting and knowing how much you ladies have going on, I’d like everyone to be very mindful, intentional, and honest in picking the topic based on how you’re doing and feeling today. For instance, we can think of how much things are distressing or bothersome on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the least distressing or bothersome, and a 10 is most distressing or bothersome. Remember we all get distressed about different things and how much they bother us can differ too. The key is to be honest with yourself about how much distress YOU feel. For example, one</i></p>



*person might rate an argument with someone at a 3 level of distress, and other person might rate an argument at a 6, and another person at a 10. It's really individual.*

*Now, for today's activity, based on how you are doing today and what stress is going on in your life, decide how much distress you can tolerate. Some people might find it better to pick a something that you want to release that distresses you at 2 or 3, for others closer to 4-5, and others might be in a place to try something more like a 7 or even 8. So, I invite everyone to take a moment to think about how well you think you'd be able to look at really hard things today, and if something feels like it is too much to deal with, please pick something less distressing or bothersome. This activity is meant to help you, not stress you out significantly.*

*Also, at the end, we will have some time for sharing but it is YOUR CHOICE what you share and what you don't. You will not be required to tell us the specifics so you can feel free to have anything in your mind that you want to release. Does anyone have any questions at this point?"*

2. Lead the following brief meditation to support group members in gaining clarity about some things they may need to release.

*"Now, I invite you to take a moment to center yourself in the chair, sitting with your feet on the floor.... Perhaps with your back straight, but not rigid... Taking a position that feels comfortable, but alert and reflective.... Taking a few deep breaths... Inhaling in.... and exhaling out... Centering into yourself and into your truth...."*

*Now, I invite you to look deep into yourself, searching for clarity on some things that you might need to release yourself from.... You may look into your heart-of-hearts, or into your spirit or soul... Into the deepest part of you that knows you and what you truly need for your wellbeing and healing.... Getting clarity on things that, while it may be hard, it would better serve you to let go of... This might be resentments or grudges.... Or a sense of blame.... Perhaps shame or guilt.... Fear or concerns.... Anything that might weigh heavy on your heart and soul that you recognize does not serve you, nor your highest purpose...."*

*So having taken this deep look inside yourself—searching for clarity—I invite you to select some of these things that you might want to release today... Some of these things that you might feel ready to release.... Selecting maybe 2 or 3 things that feel right to release.... And whenever you have those selected, opening your eyes at your own pace and preparing to continue this exercise...."*

3. Invite group members to write the things they selected to release on their slips of paper.

4. Provide the following instructions while passing around the small container.

*"Now, together we'll spend some time kindly and compassionately releasing these things that we have clarity on, that might no longer serve us. I'll pass around this*

*basket, and I invite everyone to release whatever is written on their paper slip – one at a time – into the basket while saying the following: “I am ready to let this go, to release the hold it has on me, or the power it has over me.” Remember that you don’t need to share what’s on the slip, but you are welcome to if you would like. Everyone seems to have at least 2-3 things they would like to release, so we’ll go around the room several times.*

*I also want to note that oftentimes letting go of something is easier said than done. So sometimes people might feel bad, as though they “can’t do it” because they want to let something go, but it still is really bothering them. However, letting go is a process that often happens a little at a time, one aspect at a time. This process can be a “loosening” of how tightly this thing is holding you, a little bit at a time, so that there is room to breathe and that thing is not so close or so loud... For many, this difficult thing might not, or will not, disappear entirely, now or in the future. It might resurface again. However, for all the reasons we’ve discussed together earlier, it is still important to begin the process. Does anyone have any questions?”*

5. Pass the container around the group at least 2-3 times, allowing all group members to place their paper slip in the basket while saying *“I am ready to let this go, to release the hold it has on me or the power it has over me...”*.
6. If time allows and/or it seems necessary for the group (e.g., only 1 thing was released per group member), consider repeating steps 2-5 to allow for continued deepening of clarity and additional rounds of releasing.
7. Encourage group members to share their experiences in this clarity and release activity. As they share, lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using question prompts such as:
  - *“How was it to engage in this activity on clarity and release? Did you notice anything different before, during or after? Were any parts easier or harder? Did anything surprise you?”*
  - *“In what ways do you think releasing yourself from areas of difficulty can help enhance your relationships, including your connection with the larger world (e.g., connection with groups or your community, with people close to you, with people you encounter in your daily life, etc.)?”*
  - *“As we discussed, for most people, the act of releasing or letting go is a slight “loosening” of the hold that something has on you, so it’s not quite so tight, or close or loud. Did anyone notice this experience in our activity? Did anyone notice a desire to have it be gone forever, or feeling badly that there was still a part that feels stuck? What might you be able to say to yourselves to help in such situations?”*
  - *Additionally, people also may need to continually gain clarity on what needs to be released? Do you think that’s the case for you? How might you recognize and go about releasing yourself from these difficulties?”*

“Thank you for participating in this activity and sharing your thoughts on it. Now it’s time to shift to our stress resilience tool for today. In particular, you’re going to write a letter to yourself declaring things that you are releasing yourself from.”

**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

**1. Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RAIN Meditation to Help Emotional Struggles and Stuck Places*</b> (15-20 minutes; 10-15 minutes minimum for meditation; remaining time to share experiences)</p> <p><i>*adapted based on the practice of RAIN as taught by Dr. Tara Brach (2020), modified by Dr. Shelly Harrell (2020)</i></p>
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To engage in a meditation practice to bring clarity to emotions, particularly to help emotional struggles or emotions when people feel stuck.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Mindfulness Script (see below)</li><li>-RAIN handout (pass out after completing the mindfulness activity, if materials allow, for later reference for group members; can also be used to help guide facilitators)</li></ul>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <p>1. Introduce the purpose of this activity and provide an overview.</p> <p><i>“In managing stress, it is important to have clarity about what we feel. This can be especially important with areas that we struggle in or feel stuck. Today, for our stress resilience tool we’re going to learn and practice the RAIN meditation to help us with our emotional struggles and stuck places. Now, the letters in RAIN stand for each of the steps in the meditation—Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture. This practice is about bringing loving attention to our struggles, stuck places, and things that are emotionally difficult for us.</i></p> <p><i>Now, the name of RAIN has been chosen for a specific reason. In the world, rain plays an important role in nature and in life, especially as it allows plants and animals to live. Through the rain water, plants can grow and bloom and animals and humans are able to live. Often, the rain also clears the air so we can see our environment and surroundings more clearly. Similarly, the following RAIN meditation helps us to clear out our mental and emotional fog so we can see and learn what we need to heal, grow, and thrive in our lives. Like the plants, to receive this growth, we must be willing to stand in the rain for a while. And we must be willing to get wet.</i></p> <p><i>So together we’re going to do the RAIN meditation and then share our experience. Like usual, there will be an optional space for sharing, but you don’t need to share anything you don’t want to. Any questions before we get started?</i></p> <p>2. Before the RAIN, guide group participants to select the emotional struggle or stuck place they will be using for the RAIN meditation. It is important to discuss how to select a topic at an appropriate level of emotional challenge and be mindful of how</p>

much distress each member is able to tolerate. Providing examples is strongly recommended. Also reinforce to group participants that they should take care of themselves throughout the meditation, including shifting away or “seeking shelter” if it becomes overwhelming.

*“Before we start the RAIN meditation, I invite everyone to first pick what emotional struggle or stuck place they would like to bring “RAIN” to. Inviting you to start by reflecting and looking inward on what has been challenging you lately, or what has been heavy on your heart. This might be a situation or circumstance where you find yourself repeatedly feeling a cycle of difficult emotions (such as anxiety, guilt, blame, sadness, rage, humiliation, or fear). Or it could be a situation where you have thoughts or worries that are distressing and hard to get out of your mind. It might be a current situation, or something from the past that haunts you in the present. It could be something related to a relationship, or your health, your living or work circumstances, a social injustice, or even an event in the world.*

*Now, when you’re picking this emotional struggle or stuck place, it is important for it to be emotionally challenging, but not overwhelming or traumatizing. The RAIN meditation works best when it’s more like a gentle shower that brings needed water and nourishment to your soil, enough to help you grow, but not so much that you are flooded. Again, since this can be an emotionally heavy activity, particularly in this setting and knowing everything that you all have going on, it is important to be very mindful, intentional, and honest in picking the topic based on how you’re doing and feeling today. For instance, we can think of our emotional struggles or stuck places on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the least distressing or bothersome, and a 10 is most distressing or bothersome. As we all have different emotional struggles or stuck places, they also can distress or bother us differently. It is important to be honest with yourself about how much distress YOU feel. For example, one person might rate the emotional struggle or stuckness they feel following an argument with someone at a 3 level of emotional struggle or stuckness, and other person might rate an argument at a 6, and another person at a 10. It’s really individual.*

*Now, for today’s RAIN meditation, it is important to select a difficulty that is in the mild to moderate range, and that also is based on how you are doing today and what stress is going on in your life, decide how much distress you can tolerate. So, for some people this mild to moderate emotional struggle or stuck place may be closer to a 2 or 3, and for others more like a 4, or 5, or even 6. So, I invite everyone to take a moment to think about how they feel to look at their emotional struggles or stuck places right now, and to select something that feels both challenging and manageable today. I’ll give everyone a few moments to select their struggle or stuck place.*

*I also want to highlight that this activity is meant to help you, not stress you out significantly. Just like in the real rain, you could try and seek shelter if it became a lot—like under a building awning or with an umbrella—you can do the same with the RAIN meditation. So, if at any point you feel too distressed or discomforted, where it becomes too intense, remember you can always seek shelter. So this might mean*

*seeking safety or calm in memories, images, or words that can help settle or calm you, opening your eyes or focusing on your breathing, or settling back into another place of ease or comfort in your body. Or even stopping the activity entirely and taking time to soothe yourself.”*

3. Lead group members through the following mindfulness meditation.

#### *RAIN Meditation*

*I invite you to sit upright in your chair with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor. Many people feel they feel more alert and awake sitting this way, so check it out and see if this is the case for you. Once you find a position that feels comfortable, perhaps closing the eyes, or fixing a soft gaze on a spot in front of you.*

*Beginning to think of the situation in your life that involves some stress, something that’s causing an emotional struggle or feels stuck. ... Or it could be a situation where you have thoughts or worries that are distressing and hard to get out of your mind. It might be a current situation, or something from the past that haunts you in the present. It could be something related to a relationship, or your health, your living or work circumstances, a social injustice, or even an event in the world. Please pick something that is at the mild to moderate range of distress...*

*And when you have this emotional struggle or stuckness in mind, take a moment to think about that situation more fully. Perhaps thinking about the people involved... the place or places it took place... maybe words that were said or could be said.... Really taking time to allow the thoughts and feelings associated with this problem to come up for you, in your body, mind, heart, and soul...*

*So this practice has several (5) parts. The first part of RAIN is Recognizing – “Waking Up” and Opening your eyes to Truth. What is coming up in your thoughts and feelings as you consider this situation?... What are you MOST aware of in this moment?... What needs your attention?... What primary feelings are being activated?... Is there anything within you asking to be seen or acknowledged?... Perhaps naming what you recognize. Saying in your mind: “I see you fear”... “Or “I recognize you, anger and blame.” Or perhaps “I see you shame... impatience...sadness... jealousy... regret... anxiety...” Recognizing and naming whatever is coming up for you, in whatever language feels right and fits for you....*

*The second part of this RAIN practice is Allowing – “Staying Woke” and Staying Present with Your Truth..... This is allowing and letting whatever it is to be exactly what it is. This is another layer of being with the truth of your life and with the truth of your soul. Allowing yourself to stay with and be with your experience without trying to change it, or distort it, or deny it, or dramatize it, or defend against it... One of the strongest ways we can show love to someone is by giving them our sustained attention and accepting them for who they are, meeting them where they are. This step of allowing is about doing this for yourself.... Recognizing is meeting yourself where you are... and allowing is*

*accepting the truth of what is going on with yourself. Difficult emotions and stuck points can't shift if we don't stay with them long enough to really see them clearly... Nothing can truly transform until it is brought to the light and understood... In allowing, you open up to what is already there in yourself and in your life, even if it's painful. You allow yourself to say "yes" to the truth of your experience, to truly SEE what it is. In fact, you invite and welcome it to the table. If you aren't at a table, then you have no say... So, invite what is present for you back to the table. Are you noticing yourself avoiding or shutting down?... Come back to the table... Running or escaping? .... Come back to the table.... Are you distorting or adding extra drama?.... Come back to the table.... Are you being defensive, or blaming, or lashing out?... Come back to the table.... Allowing ALL of the parts of yourself and your experience to be at the table...*

*Continuing to breathe.... And stay..... Breathing.... And Allowing what is, to be just what it is.... To meet what is, just where it is....*

*Now, the third part of the RAIN practice is Investigating – “Feeling What’s Real” and Feeling Your Way to Deeper Awareness and Truth. Now this is where it gets real. It’s time to get to know the guests at your table.... Investigation is about digging deeper into the struggle, into the stuckness so that it can be loosened... By putting your hands in the dirt and turning the soil over, you can get to the truth of where your experience might have been buried, allowing light and air to get in for the movement and growth to happen... To help this process, you’ll be investigating and deepening your attention to what this experience is like. Meeting the experience with curiosity and being truly interested in it...*

*Now, this investigation can happen in different ways. What’s key is that however you investigate, you use it as an entry to the deepest and most raw nature of your experience. Your feelings and sensations in the body are the main places to focus. Your thoughts and beliefs are also helpful to notice, but only as they take you deeper into your experience.....*

*What is the hardest part of this experience to stay with?.... What is the most difficult or painful part about this struggle or stuck place you identified? ....*

*What emotions are coming up as you allow yourself to experience this?.... Perhaps fear, or anger, or grief, or shame.... Or perhaps something different?*

*Where do you feel those emotions inside your body? Is there anything in your body that you can feel related to these emotions?... Perhaps any aching, or sense of emptiness, .... Or area that feels hot, or cold, or hard, or squeezed.....? Does the sensation have a color?.. How about a texture.....?*

*Do you notice a facial expression or body posture that feels that it reflects these feelings or emotions? What do you notice, if so?*

*When have you felt this feeling before?... Can you recall the first time you felt this?... What triggers this set of emotions and sensations for you?...*

*Is there anything you believe about this struggle...? Or about these triggers?... About these emotions?.... What thoughts are associated with them?.....*

*Now, if the most vulnerable, hurting part of you could communicate, what would it express? What would it share, either in words, feelings, images, movement...?*

*Continuing to breathe... Breathing... Meeting and investigating this experience as it is.....*

*Next, the fourth part of RAIN is Nurturing —“Healing with Love” and Bringing Love and Compassion to Truth. Nurturing is something you do on purpose, to direct love and care to ourselves. While we know that it is the truth that sets us free, the truth can be hard. Being true to ourselves and our experiences can be REALLY hard. We need to do our best to meet our struggles, our stuck places, and our courageous stepping into the truth of our experience with LOVE. To call upon an energy of love and wisdom from the depths of our heart and soul. You might be able to most easily reach this in the image or voice of a family member, of a friend, of a mentor, spiritual guide or teacher, an ancestor, or Higher Power... Bringing this loving and wise energy and voice to your struggle, to your pain....*

*What does the most vulnerable or hurt part of you need most right now, either from yourself or a larger source of love and wisdom?...*

*Can you offer yourself inwardly whatever you need most... Providing yourself a sense of love, or acceptance.. or forgiveness... or compassion... or protection... in whatever way feels best for you. Perhaps through caring words... .. Or a soft touch, like placing a hand on your heart or another soothing place on your body. Or giving yourself a hug in this moment... Or perhaps seeing a loving and caring image, h as your inner child embraced or surrounded with light.....*

*Is there a message or image I need to bring from my connection with this sense of love and wisdom that can help me with my struggles and in my daily life?.....*

*Continuing to breathe..... Offering and sharing whatever you need most to nurture and care for yourself in this moment....*

*And now, after the RAIN is the last part of this exercise.... After the rain, we can sometimes see a rainbow, or the sun begins to peak through the clouds.... The rainbow and sun are part of the core purpose of the RAIN process... to bring what has been in darkness to light, to bring to light our inner experiences and be freed from the struggle against them... To become more alive to yourself, your life, and your experiences....*

*So, having engaged in RAIN, I invite you to take a moment and consider if anything has shifted in how you're holding this struggle or difficulty from when we began the meditation?... Something big or very small may have shifted, or perhaps nothing at all... Whatever you notice is perfectly fine... Has anything shifted in how you experience yourself?.... What did you experience or learn about yourself that you might want to remember?*

*Now, at your own pace, allow your attention to come back to the group and opening your eyes and returning your attention to the room.”*

\*Text of this guided mediation adapted from Dr. Shelly Harrell's (2020) modification of Dr. Tara Brach's RAIN practice (2020).

4. Lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using question prompts as:
  - *“How was this experience for you? What did you notice in observing your emotional struggle or stuck place from the RAIN perspective?”*
  - *“What parts were easiest in the meditation? Were any parts harder? Did anything surprise you?”*
  - *“How did this experience relate to our earlier conversation about clarity and release?”*
  - *“What did you notice in each part of the RAIN meditation? While Recognizing? While Allowing? While Investigating? While Nurturing? “After the RAIN” was over, in regards to any shifts or changes, or things you wanted to remember?”*
  - *“Have you experienced anything like this before in your life—recognizing, allowing, investigating, and nurturing an emotional experience—rather than trying to fight or push away the emotion? If so, how was that for you? If not, how do you think it would impact your experience during times of stress?”*
  - *“Often it feels like emotions can hurt us, so we might try to push them away. However, even though they feel like it – they can't objectively harm us. How might this experience impact your having a clear perspective on your emotions in the future, especially during times of stress?”*
  - *“How might having clarity of your emotions, and allowing them to become clear in the RAIN, help your relationships? How might it impact your connection to the world in a way that helps you to be resilient in managing stress and relationships (e.g., connection with groups or your community, with people close to you, with people you encounter in your daily life, etc.)?”*



## **RAIN Meditation**

### *To Help with Emotional Struggles and Stuck Places*

The rain plays an important role in our world. The rain is incredibly important in nature for allowing plants and animals to live. Through the rain water, plants can grow and bloom and animals and humans are able to live. Often, the rain also clears the air so we can see our environment and surroundings more clearly.

Similarly, the following RAIN meditation helps us to clear out our mental and emotional fog so we can see and learn what we need to heal, grow, and thrive in our lives. Like the plants, to receive this growth, we must be willing to stand in the rain for awhile. And we must be willing to get wet.

**Before the RAIN:** Reflect on and select a place in your life where you feel an emotional struggle or stuck place.

### **Recognize** (“Wake Up” – Opening Your Eyes to Truth)

- Recognize and name the truth of what you are experiencing—in your body, in your mind, in your heart, and in your soul

### **Allow** (“Stay Woke” – Staying Present with Your Truth)

- Allow your experience to be “what it is” without trying to change it or deny it.
- Allow yourself to be with your experience and emotion, without trying to run or avoid or escape

### **Investigate** (“Feel What’s Real” – Feeling Your Way to Deeper Clarity and Truth)

- Investigate your experience deeply with a desire to really know and learn about yourself
- Pay close attention to what is present for you, including sensations in the body, mental images, things you remember that are connected to this experience, etc.

### **Nurture** (“Heal with Love” – Bringing Love and Compassion to Truth)

- Nurture and be kind to yourself and your experience by bringing care, love, and compassion to it
- Be kind to yourself and this experience. Value and welcome it as part of you and your continual growth and resilience

**After the RAIN:** Reflect if there is anything that has changed or grown, or anything you learned about yourself that you want to remember. Is there a “rainbow” or sun peeking from beyond the clouds that has come after the RAIN for you?

*\*adapted based on the practice of RAIN as taught by Dr. Tara Brach (2020), modified by Dr. Shelly Harrell (2020)*

**2. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool** (*remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes*)

- Continue debriefing from or discussing “I’m Releasing Myself From…” activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Clarity and Release can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships and connection to the world.

*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Clarity and Release to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you?”*

**“Choosing to Commit” Phase** (*20 minutes*)

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**1. “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share** (*15 minutes*)

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Clarity and Release as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our “3 Questions” to help center us. As usual, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *current* experience with stress. Note that for some group members, current stress may include anticipatory stress or continued stress related to ongoing or past stressors.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).

**2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” for the Week to Improve a Relationship** (*5 minutes*)

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up the group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments for the week to enhance a relationship to help us better manage our stress. Take a moment to think about it and consider what would be reasonable for you. It can relate to our topics or activities today on Clarity & Release, relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe from a different week or a strategy you’ve used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

**“Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)**

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**1. Closing Mindfulness Meditation** (see Appendix D)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Clarity & Release” and the related phrase (e.g., “Let It Go”) into the blank spaces.*

**2. End session and thank participants. Remind them that next session is the last session of this group.**

*“Thank you again everyone, for being here today and for participating. We look forward to seeing you again next week, which is our last session of this group. Take good care and see you then!”*

Quotes for Clarity & Release
<b>Suggested Quotes:</b>
“Some people believe holding on and hanging in there are signs of great strength. However, there are times when it takes much more strength to know when to let go and then do it.” – Ann Landers
“We’re not here to get over our humanness, but rather to accept and make peace with it.” ~Sonia Choquette
“You have to accept whatever comes and the only important thing is that you meet it with courage and with the best that you have to give.” ~Eleanor Roosevelt
“Some tension is necessary for the soul to grow, and we can put that tension to good use... to heal our wounds and the wounds of others, to forgive, and to serve.” ~Joan Z. Borysenko
“Just let the stone be what it wants to be. You can’t control everything, you know.” ~Danika Stone
“I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” ~Maya Angelou
“Mistakes are a fact of life... It is the response to the error that counts.” ~Nikki Giovanni
“The past is a prison for those who live in it.” ~Anonymous
“Forgive all who have offended you, not for them, but for yourself.” ~Harriet Nelson
“In forgiving ourselves, we make the journey from guilt for what we have done (or not done) to celebration of what we have become.” ~Joan Z. Borysenko
“And then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” ~Anais Nin
“Turn your wounds into wisdom.” ~Oprah Winfrey
“Every day is a fresh beginning, every morn[ing] is the world made new.” ~Sarah Chauncey Woolsey
<b>Additional Quotes:</b>
“Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery.” ~J.K. Rowling
“The hardest person to forgive may be you.... As human beings, our growth, learning, and healing are always at stake. Forgiveness fosters all three. “ ~Iyanla Vanzant

“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” ~bell hooks

“If we can recognize that change and uncertainty are basic principles [in life], we can greet the future and the transformation we are undergoing with the understanding that we do not know enough to be pessimistic [negative].” ~Hazel Henderson

“If you haven’t forgiven yourself something, how can you forgive others?” ~Delores Huerta

“The course of life is full of twistings, ups and downs, and zigzags.” ~African Proverb (Akan)

“So often we dwell on the things that seem impossible rather than on the things that are possible.”  
~Marian Wright Edleman

“There's release in knowing the truth no matter how anguishing it is. You come finally to the irreducible thing, and there's nothing left to do but pick it up and hold it. Then, at last, you can enter the severe mercy of acceptance.” ~Sue Monk Kidd

“Just let the stone be what it wants to be. You can’t control everything, you know.” ~ Danika Stone

**SESSION 7 (FINAL SESSION) – TRANSCENDENCE & WHOLENESS**

**Theme:** Transcendence & Wholeness

**Focus:** Connection to the World

**Phrase:** “Still I Rise”

<b>Synonyms and Alternative Phrases for <i>Compassion &amp; Gratitude</i></b>	
<b>Transcendence</b>	Spirituality, Sacredness, Enlightenment, Divinity, Overcoming, Ancestral Connection and Wisdom, Witnessing Miracles, Higher Calling, Rising Above
<b>Wholeness</b>	Unity, Fullness, Co-Existence, Oneness, Interconnectedness, Integration
<b>Alternative Phrases</b>	“Honor Your Journey” or “Rise Above” or “Purpose and Passion”

## SESSION 7 (FINAL SESSION) – TRANSCENDENCE & WHOLENESS

Time	Activity	Handout/Materials
<b>“Opening and Connecting” Phase</b>		
0-10 mins. (10 minutes)	1. Opening Mindfulness Meditation	Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 142)  Session Handout
<b>“Sharing in Wisdom” Phase</b>		
10-35 mins. (25 minutes)	2. Quote meditation and discussion  3. Brief Activity - Shield of Strength: What Makes Me Whole <i>Or</i> - My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra	[Whiteboard or large paper & markers to write quote for group review]  [Shield Image (or Blank Paper) and writing/art supplies]
<b>“Growing through Sharing” Phase</b>		
35 mins. – 1 hour (25 minutes)	4. Stress Resilience Tool - My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra <i>And</i> - Together WE RISE Resilience Poem  5. Sharing on the Stress Resilience Tool and Reflections on the Group as a Whole	[Small pieces of paper (index cards or post it notes); writing implements; Whiteboard or large paper & markers to create communal poem]
<b>“Choosing to Commit” Phase</b>		
1 hour – 1 hour, 20 mins (20 minutes)	6. Review “3 Questions”  7. Select and commit to “one thing” to improve a relationship in the coming week	[“3 Questions” Handout (p. 141)]
<b>“Closing and Connecting” Phase</b>		
1 hour, 20 mins – 1 hour, 30 mins (10 minutes)	8. Final Closing Mindfulness Meditation	Final Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script (p. 144)

[Brackets] indicate optional materials

**WE RISE Stress Management Group**

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*Transcendence & Wholeness - “Still I Rise”*

1. **Wisdom Quote:** “My prayer became ‘May I find peace... May I love this life no matter what.’ I was seeking an inner refuge, an experience of presence and wholeness that could carry me through whatever...might come.” –Tara Brach
  
2. **Activity:** “Shield of Strength: What Makes Me Whole”
  
3. **Stress Resilience Tool:** “Together WE RISE Resilience Poem”
  
4. **Committing to Action:** “The 3 Questions”
  1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship:**

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## Transcendence & Wholeness - Session Format

### “Opening and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

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#### 1. Welcome back group members

*“Hi ladies! Glad to have you all back today and hope things are going well. We’ll start today, as we usually do, with our opening meditation.”*

#### 2. Opening Mindfulness Meditation (see Appendix C)

*When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Transcendence & Wholeness” and the related phrase (e.g., “Still I Rise”) into the blank spaces.*

#### 3. Transition group while passing out session handout and writing implements

*“Great, thank you for doing the opening meditation with us. I’m now passing out today’s session handout and pencils/pens for anyone who needs them for group today. As we started with in the meditation, today’s group theme is “Transcendence & Wholeness,” and our focus phrase is \_\_\_ (e.g. “Still I Rise”). This is our last session of this group, which focuses on our “Connection to the World” to help improve relationships and manage stress.”*

### “Sharing in Wisdom” Phase (25 minutes)

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#### 1. Collective Wisdom Quote Meditation and Discussion (10-15 minutes) (select quote from list at end of this section).

*“Now it’s time to move onto our Wisdom Quote activity for today and see what wisdom we can gain from our topics of Transcendence & Wholeness to strengthen our relationships and manage stress. Some other words that describe our theme and focus today also include \_\_\_ [share several synonyms for the session themes that might resonate with group members. You might also write the theme words on a whiteboard, if available, as well as several synonyms].*

*As usual, I’ll read the quote aloud three times. Today’s quote is by \_\_\_ [name]. Focus on the words and what they mean to you, particularly as they may relate to relationships in your life. Think about how they may link to your stress, past or present. Also, feel free to disagree with the quote, or add or change it as you think fits your experiences. If you want, you can feel free to write down your reflections. We’ll spend time sharing afterwards.”*

- If materials allow, facilitator can write the quote on a whiteboard or large paper so all group members can see it during this activity.
- Facilitator should read the quote slowly three times, allowing brief pauses (approximately 30 seconds – 1 minute, depending on preference of facilitator and group members) between the readings to allow space for reflection.
- Lead the group in discussion regarding their insights, reflections, and reactions. Facilitators should also help in linking insights and comments between members. Questions may include:
  - “What came up for you as the quote was read?”



- “What parts of the quote did you agree or resonate with?”
- “Were there any parts you disagreed with?”
- “How does this seem to relate to our focus of “connection to the world” to manage stress? How might it relate to a relationship you’re having difficulty with or wanting to improve?”
- “Has doing something like this ever helped you with stress in the past, or seem applicable to something stressful you’re going through now?”
- “Do you have any thoughts to what another group member said?”

*“Thank you everyone for your thoughts on the quote. So now we have a pretty strong sense of what these two resilience themes mean, and how they might be able to help or relate to some of the stress you’re experiencing right now as a mom at this shelter, such as [provide some relevant examples (e.g., parenting difficulties in the shelter, addressing crowded conditions, searching for necessary resources, etc.)]. Additionally, these resilience themes are going to help you continue to build stress resilience personally and in your relationships, particularly as you move towards your goals [provide relevant examples (e.g., independent living, finding employment, improving parenting skills and relationships, etc.)].”*

*Now we’re going to do today’s activity to better help us connect with how Transcendence & Wholeness can help us enhance relationships to manage our stress.”*

**2. Brief Activity on Theme:** Lead the group in one of the following experiential activities:

Activity Option 1 <b>My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra</b> (10-15 minutes)
<b>Purpose:</b> An expressive activity to have participants create and share a brief personal saying, prayer, or mantra that summarizes their experiences and learnings from the WE RISE group
<b>Materials:</b> None *Note this activity can be combined with the “Shield of Strength: What Makes Me Whole” activity
<b>Instructions:</b> 1. Introduce the activity and its purpose. Guide group members through the following guided script to help facilitate group members’ reflection and connection to the experience of the group and all that they have learned. Adapt the script to include the activities and stress resilience tools used, as well as any adaptations to the themes or phrases.  <i>“For our activity today, I’m inviting everyone to make their own brief personal saying, or prayer, or mantra that speaks to their overall growth and learning</i>

*throughout this group. For some people, this statement can be something that's used during times of stress to help center them and move them forward in a resilient way. We'll take some time as a group to center and reflect on what this might be for you. As we're reflecting, you may want to write down thoughts or feelings, learning, or awareness that come up for you on your session handout. Any questions before we get started?*

*So I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position where you are sitting. Maybe with your feet flat on the floor, your back straight but not rigid, and your hands resting in your lap or your arms at your sides.... Closing your eyes if that's comfortable for you, or just focusing on the table in front of you....*

*Let's start by centering in on what you're feeling right now... Becoming more aware of what you're feeling emotionally and in your body..... Now inviting you to reflect back on all that we've learned together in the group... All of the resilience themes and activities and resilience tools we've learned together over these 7 weeks....The ways we have looked at our connection to ourselves, others, and the world to strengthen our resilience and our relationships...*

*We started the group with Relationship and Meaning and came to consider "What Matters Most." We did the \_\_\_\_\_ activity and learned the \_\_\_\_\_ tool...*

*Then we shared about Compassion and Gratitude with the phrase "All About Love." We engaged in an activity on \_\_\_\_\_ and practiced with \_\_\_\_\_ for stress resilience.*

*Third, we learned the importance of Authenticity and Groundedness – "Remembering Who You Are." We did the \_\_\_\_\_ activity and learned the \_\_\_\_\_ tool for stress resilience.*

*Then we sat with Patience and Reflection, considering ways that "This Too Shall Pass." We then did the \_\_\_\_\_ activity and practiced the \_\_\_\_\_ tool.*

*We noted the importance of Attention and Flexibility, and ways that we can "Bend, [Not] Break." We did the \_\_\_\_\_ activity and the \_\_\_\_\_ stress resilience tool.*

*Last week, we focused on the importance of Clarity and Release and ways we can "Let It Go." We participated in the activity on \_\_\_\_\_ and learned \_\_\_\_\_ as a tool for stress resilience.*

*And finally, today, to close out our group, we're exploring Transcendence and Wholeness with the theme "Still I Rise." Participating in \_\_\_\_\_ activity and using the \_\_\_\_\_ tool.*

*I invite you to think about all that you have learned and taken from the group. Knowing that some things may have resonated with you more than others, trust in*

*what you have learned, the relationships you have worked to strengthen, and the increase in wellbeing you may have developed.... Then, having reflected on your experience and learnings, consider what brief saying, or prayer, or mantra, might capture the most important parts of your experience. Something that—no matter how far into the future—might encourage you to remember all that you have learned in this group... This may be just a few words, or a statement or two... For some, this saying may come immediately, and others may not be able to think of anything or may need more time to develop it... Wherever you are is more than fine... Taking some time to choose the phrase, or even using the phrase “Still I Rise” from today’s closing topic.*

*I invite you, whenever you’re ready, to re-open your eyes and use space on your session handout to write your saying, or prayer, or mantra. Or, if you still need time to develop it, consider writing words or phrases of your experience down to create it. Take the time that you need to allow it to truly resonate with you and your experience of resilience in the face of stress. And then, whenever everyone is ready, we can take time to share our sayings.”*

Note: It is important to make space for people to use spiritual or religious phrases, prayers, or mantras. However, it is also important that group members *not* feel pressured for this saying to be overtly spiritual or religious. It’s crucial to emphasize diversity and encourage people to use what works for *them* individually.

2. Invite group members to share their saying, prayer, or mantra. Lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using questions prompts such as:
  - “How does it feel to say your saying, prayer, or mantra out loud? What does it resonate within you?”
  - “How might using this saying, prayer, or mantra help you in your relationships? How might it help you manage stress?”
  - “What are ways that this saying, prayer, or mantra can play a role in your life?”

Activity Option 2

**Shield of Strength: What Makes Me Whole**

*(10-15 minutes split between creating and sharing)*

**Purpose:** An art therapy activity to have participants recognize and connect with the things that make them whole (e.g., people, values, identities, etc.) that serve as their strength

**Materials:**

- Blank Shield Image (*see below*) or Blank Paper
- Writing and Art Supplies

\*If these materials are not available, can complete the activity on the back of their session handout

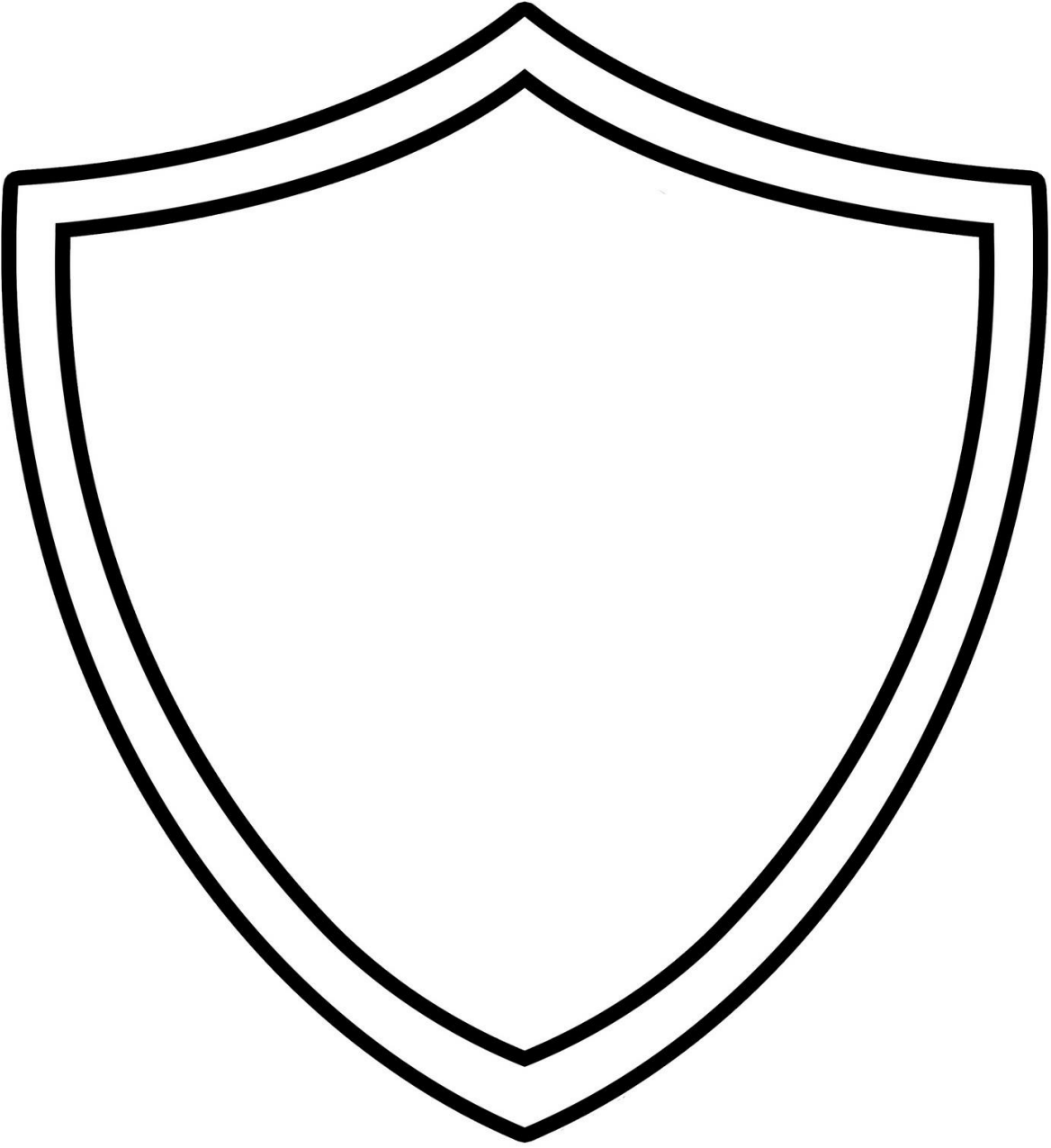
\*\*Note this activity can be combined with the “My Personal Saying, Mantra, or Prayer,” as indicated below in step 2.

**Instructions:**

1. While passing out materials, introduce the activity and its purpose.  
*“For our activity today, we’re going to be making and designing a ‘Shield of Strength,’ which is made up of things that you can identify that give you strength, that make you hold your head high, things that you feel proud of about the person you are. These might be people or relationships, or values you hold dear, or identities that you have, or other things that help you be strong. Let’s take a moment to brainstorm some ideas, to clarify what we mean for this activity. Can someone share some things that give them strength, or hold their head high, or that they feel proud of for being the person they are? [Allow group members to share some examples on each of the potential topics – such as relationships (e.g., with children, with God, etc.), values (e.g., compassion, justice, etc.), or identities (e.g., motherhood, sisterhood, etc.)]. Excellent, thank you for sharing those. Now, I invite everyone to take some time to think about the things that make you feel proud and bring you strength – maybe they were mentioned in our examples, or are something different—and then create your shield. As usual, we’ll have time at the end for optional sharing.”*
2. [Optional Step]: Follow instructions for “My Personal Saying, Mantra, or Prayer” for group members to add to the back of their shield.
3. Encourage group members to share their shields and the things that make them whole. Then, lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using questions prompts such as:
  - *“How was it to create your shield? What are the things that make you whole, that give you strength, and that help you hold your head high or feel proud?”*
  - *“How are you feeling looking at and sharing your shield? How is it to recognize your wholeness, knowing you don’t need to do or change anything?”*

- *“How may recognizing your wholeness impact your relationships, including those with your community or world? How do you think it can impact your relationship to stress or the things that cause you stress?”*

*“Wonderful! Thank you for doing this activity and sharing your thoughts on it. Now it’s time to begin to close out our work together and collectively come together to share what we learned. In particular, we’re going to make a “Together WE RISE Resilience Poem,” which will share all of the learning and growth we’ve had together.”*



**“Growing through Sharing” Phase (25 minutes)**

**1. Stress Resilience Tool:** Lead the group in the following experiential activity:

<b>Together WE RISE Resilience Poem</b> (15-20 minutes)
<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> An expressive activity to have participants create and share a brief personal saying, prayer, or mantra that summarizes their experiences and learnings from the WE RISE group. Then, that personal saying, prayer, or mantra will be combined with those of all participants to make a collective poem highlighting the learning and growth from the group.</p>
<p><b><u>Materials:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Paper, such as index cards or post-it notes*</li><li>-Writing implements (pens/pencils)</li><li>-[Whiteboard or large paper] – optional</li><li>-[Markers for whiteboard or large paper] – optional</li></ul> <p>*If these materials are not available, can complete this activity on their session handout or on another piece of paper. *If [bracketed] materials not available, poem can be created in a “call and response” style.</p> <p>**Note this stress resilience tool is advised to be built off of the “My Personal Saying, Mantra, or Prayer” from the earlier activity.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructions:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Introduce the activity and its purpose, while passing out the small pieces of paper. Note that if the “My Personal Saying, Prayer, or Mantra” activity was not used during “Sharing in Wisdom” phase, those instructions may be used to support group members in creating their statement. <i>“For one of our final activities as group, we’re going to create a shared poem, entitled “Together WE RISE.” This poem will have one line from each of us, which we’ll create momentarily and then bring together to organize into the poem.</i><p><i>To start, I invite everyone to create their own brief statement that speaks to their overall growth and learning throughout this group. This will be the line that you add to the poem. For some people, this could be the brief personal saying, prayer, or mantra that you created in our earlier activity. For others, they may want to modify the earlier phrase, or even come up with something completely different. Remember, this may be something that you could say to yourself in the future during times of stress, to help center and move forward in a resilient way, based on the total of your experiences from our group. Take some time to reflect on what this might be for you, and then write it down on the small paper. Any questions?”</i></p></li><li>2. Invite group members to read their statements one by one, and then pass them to the facilitator. Once all statements are received, collaboratively organize them on</li></ol>

the whiteboard or large paper into a poem. Once the poem is finalized, read the poem aloud.

3. Lead the group in a debriefing discussion, using questions prompts such as:
  - *“How was it to create and share your saying, prayer, or mantra out loud? What was the experience of creating and sharing the poem? What does it resonate within you?”*
  - *“How might this experience of making the poem or creating your saying, prayer, or mantra help you in your relationships? How might it help you manage stress?”*
  - *“What are ways that your experience and learnings from our WE RISE group play a role in your life? What are ways you can remember and enact these learnings regularly in the future?”*

## **2. Sharing Testimony and Bearing Witness regarding Stress Resilience Tool and Reflections on the Group as a Whole** *(remaining time – Approximately 10 minutes)*

- Continue debriefing from or discussing the Together WE RISE Resilience Poem activity, or open the group to discussing further how today’s topics of Transcendence and Wholeness, or the WE RISE group experience as a whole, can help them better manage stress, particularly as it relates to enhancing relationships  
*“We’ve spent some time now focusing deeply on Transcendence and Wholeness to help with stress resilience. I’m curious if any of you have any thoughts on how these topics can help you strengthen your relationships or manage the stress you’re experiencing now. Or, if anyone has used these ideas before in the past, how did they work for you? Additionally, this is our last WE RISE group session together. Does anyone have any other additional reflections on the group as a whole?”*

### **“Choosing to Commit” Phase** *(20 minutes)*

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#### **1. Final “The 3 Questions” Group and/or Partner Share** *(15 minutes)*

*“Thank you everyone for sharing and discussing different ways that we can manage our stress using Transcendence and Wholeness as our grounding anchors and commitments. Now we’re going to identify areas of our own stress and resilience using our final “3 Questions” handout of the group to help center us. As usual, we’ll spend time afterwards sharing.”*

- Facilitator should guide members through each of “The 3 Questions” (“How do I feel?” “Who/What do I need to connect with?” and “What am I going to do?”).
  - It is recommended to use “The 3 Questions” handout for this section.
  - Given that this is the final session, handout and/or discussion should be completed in reference to their *overall* experience with stress in the context of moving forward after the group.
- Encourage participants to share their responses to each of the 3 questions either with the group or in partner share (based on group size).



## 2. Committing to Engage in “One Thing” Moving Forward (5 minutes)

- Instruct everyone to complete their “One Thing” commitment and share it aloud with the group.

*“Thank you everyone for sharing where you are at with the “3 Questions.” Now we’re going to start to wrap up our final group by choosing our “One Thing” commitments to enhance relationships to help you remain resilient in managing stress. For our final group, I invite everyone to think of the “One Thing” they want to do in their relationships moving forward after the group. This might relate to our topics or activities today on Transcendence and Wholeness (e.g., mantra), relate to your “3 Questions” responses, or be something different—maybe a lesson that has stuck with you throughout the group or a strategy that has been further solidified that you used even before the group. Please take a moment to write it on your handout if you would like, and then we’ll go around and share.”*

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## “Closing and Connecting” Phase (10 minutes)

### 1. Final Session Closing Mindfulness Meditation

Given that this is the final closing meditation, several options are available to facilitators, which are described below:

- **Use Final Session Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script** (see Appendix E) – *The final session closing mindfulness is different from other weeks in efforts to synthesize learning, growth, and connection. When reading script, insert today’s group theme “Transcendence and Wholeness” and the related phrase (e.g., “Still I Rise”) into the blank spaces.*
- **Close session by reading (or re-reading) the Communal Poem from the earlier session activity entitled “Together WE RISE Resilience Poem.”**
- **Close session by reading lovingkindness statements, sharing that each statement is the facilitator’s wish for each group member, now and as they move forward in their lives.**
  - May you be safe and protected, from inner and outer dangers
  - May you be well in body, mind, heart, and soul
  - May you have relief from pain and suffering
  - May you find and feel your inner peace
  - May you know true happiness
  - May you love and be loved
  - May you know your worth and your value, your gifts and your strengths
  - May you rise up and be free
- **Close session by reading Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise.” If possible, provide a copy of the poem for each group member.**

### **Still I Rise**

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
 Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
 Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
 I rise  
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
 I rise  
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
 I rise  
 I rise  
 I rise.

**2. End session and thank participants.**

*“Thank you again everyone, for being a part of the group. It was lovely to work with and learn from you, and wishing you all the best as you continue to move forward! Take good care!”*

Quotes for <i>Transcendence &amp; Wholeness</i>
<b>Suggested Quotes:</b>
<p>“My prayer became ‘May I find peace... May I love this life no matter what.’ I was seeking an inner refuge, an experience of presence and wholeness that could carry me through whatever...might come.”          ~Tara Brach</p> <p>“Here’s what is truly at the heart of wholeheartedness: Worthy now, not if, now when, we’re worthy of love and belonging now. Right this minute. As is.” ~ Brené Brown</p> <p>“I trust in the ebb and flow of the universe. I trust that life is more than what I can see. I trust that there is a divine order beyond my control. And I trust that no matter what happens, I will be alright.” ~Oprah Winfrey</p> <p>“When you are able to contain both the light and dark together, it means you no longer have to choose one experience over another. You do not have to choose love OR hate, blame OR forgiveness, sadness OR joy, anger OR openheartedness. You are no longer polarized [split]: no particular feeling boxes you in and keeps you from the light of your true self. You then have access to the full range of human experiences you came into this life to embrace.” ~Marta Nelson</p> <p>“The purpose of our lives is to give birth to the best which is within us.” ~Marianne Williamson</p> <p>“The soul and spirit have resources that are astonishing.” ~Clarissa Pinkola Estes</p> <p>“What we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to God.” ~Eleanor Powell</p> <p>“Following your heart’s desire will lead you in the direction your spirit wants to go.” ~Oprah Winfrey</p> <p>“When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other.” ~Margaret J. Wheatley</p> <p>“My brokenness is a better bridge for people than my pretend wholeness ever was.” ~Sheila Walsh</p>

“The best lessons, the best sermons, are those that are lived.” ~Yolanda King

“Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear, I rise.” ~Maya Angelou

“Turn your wounds into wisdom.” ~Oprah Winfrey

### **Additional Quotes:**

“Without darkness, nothing comes to birth, as without light, nothing flowers.” ~May Sarton

“If you have a purpose in which you can believe, there’s no end to the amount of things you can accomplish.” ~Marian Anderson

“Rather than striving for perfection, we discover how to love ourselves into wholeness.” ~Tara Brach

“Life’s challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they are supposed to help you discover who you are.” ~Bernice Johnson Reagan

“You are all things. Denying, rejecting, judging, or hiding from any aspect of your total being creates pain and results in a lack of wholeness.” ~Joy Page

“Owning our story can be hard, but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.” ~ Brené Brown

“Wholeheartedness. There are many tenets of wholeheartedness, but at its very core is vulnerability and worthiness; facing uncertainty, exposure, and emotional risks, and knowing that I am enough.” ~ Brené Brown

“Healing restores to wholeness that which has been injured or fragmented. You are like an ocean: quietly ebbing and flowing to the rhythm of life, but wildly expansive and profoundly powerful. You are boundless. You are whole. Your quietness is your strength. Your depth is your advantage.” ~Aletheia Luna

“Every step you take, every breath, every conversation your calling is center stage. There is no longer a piece here and a piece there, but there is wholeness. The sound of your voice and the sound of your life have come together.” ~Suzette Hinton

“Peace requires everyone to be in the circle – wholeness, inclusion.” ~Isabelle Allende

“The moment you walk out of the way, you make room for the miracle to take place.” ~Dr. Barbara King

“You’ll never find yourself until you face truth.” ~Pearl Bailey

“The opportunity that God sends does not wake up him who is asleep.” ~Senegalese Proverb

“If you want to accomplish the goals of your life, you have to begin with the spirit.” ~Oprah Winfrey

“My concept of happiness is to be fulfilled in a spiritual sense.” ~Coretta Scott King

“Let us remember that within us there is a place of great magnificence” ~Teresa of Avila

“Reality is something you rise above.” ~Liza Minelli

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Blank Sample Session Handout**

***WE RISE* Stress Management Group**

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***Resilience Themes:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Resilience Phrase:*** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Wisdom Quote:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Activity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Stress Resilience Tool:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Committing to Action: “The 3 Questions”**

**1. How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**My “One Thing” to Practice or Remember to Improve a Relationship this Week:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: “The 3 Questions” Handout

### The 3 Questions

When dealing with stress, including that related to relationships, it is important to check in with yourself with the following 3 questions to get a better understanding of how you are doing and how you can begin to make it better. Please use the following bullet points as a guide to answer the questions. Use the bullet point prompts that best match your current situation; you likely will not answer all bullet point sections.

1. **How do I feel?** \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- What do I notice in my \_\_\_\_?
  - What is going on with me in my \_\_\_\_?
  - How is my stress showing up in my \_\_\_\_?
    - Body?
    - Mind and thoughts?
    - Heart and emotions?
    - Soul and spirit?
    - Relationships (with family, friends, partnerships, community, etc.)?
    - Spirituality and connection with God/Higher Power?
  - Is there anything I need to be aware of about myself and my situation?

2. **Who/What do I need to connect with?** \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- My people (family, friends, mentors, partners, community, ancestors, inspirational figures, etc.)
  - My Groups or Organizations
  - My Values, Spirituality, Beliefs, or Inner Wisdom
  - My Strengths, Skills, Talents, or Characteristics
  - My Places (Can be a physical space, an image or memory, or imagined place)

3. **What am I going to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- What will \_\_\_\_\_ be?
    - My attitude and energy
    - What I say
    - My coping behaviors
    - My responses to situations
    - Self-care activities
    - Habits or rituals

## Appendix C: Opening Mindfulness Meditation Script

“Let’s start by getting comfortable in our space... Putting your feet squarely on the floor and sitting up in the chair so that your back is straight, but not rigid.... Placing your arms in a comfortable position at your sides or resting gently on your legs. This posture helps to stay alert and focused.... If you feel comfortable doing so, you’re welcome to close your eyes or find a place on the table or floor in front of you on which to focus your gaze... Noting that it is completely normal for your attention to wander during the meditation, so just gently bring your attention back to my voice and to being present in our group when that happens for you.

Let’s take a moment reconnect to your reasons for being here, your inner wisdom and strengths, and our shared goal to build strength to rise above the things that are hard for us and to strengthen relationships.... Knowing that as you breathe in and breathe out, you are moving from being ‘stressed out’ to ‘motivated and strengthened within’....

Now, I invite you to gently move your attention to your breathing.... Inhaling deeply and as slowly, smoothly, and calmly as is possible for you today.... And exhaling deeply as well, allowing your breath out to also be as slow, smooth, and calm as is possible for you.... With each breath, allowing your lungs to fill with air... and then empty.... Noticing your belly expanding with air.... And then relaxing as you exhale....

Noticing that as you breathe, your mind has likely wandered away... That’s fine and to be expected.... It’s part of this practice... Just kindly bringing your attention back to your breath....

As you take these slow breaths, you might imagine a gentle breeze sweeping through and clearing space in your mind.... Sweeping away the extra thoughts that keep you from feeling peaceful... And as you continue breathing, you might be noticing areas of tightness or tension.... If you feel like it, you might rotate your head in a circle, or roll your shoulders.... Or stretch your fingers and toes..... Listening to your body in this moment and allowing yourself to give it whatever it needs right now...

As you continue breathing deeply and slowly, you’re continuing to clear mental and emotional space.... Allowing your heart and mind to open even more.... As you exhale, you might imagine breathing out your worries, your fears, or whatever usually stresses you out... Allowing yourself to feel closer with others in the group, knowing that even though the specifics of our stress might be different, we all have struggles that we share.....

Now, feel free to take the next few moments to focus completely on your breathing.... As you use this quiet space to breathe, you might open your heart and mind to today’s topics of \_\_\_\_\_... *[Pause for approximately 30 seconds of breathing and quiet reflection]*

Now taking a few more deep centering breaths..... And then when you feel ready, opening your eyes and re-entering our group, feeling more focused and centered for our group today.”

\*Text of this guided meditation is an adapted combination of Harrell (2020) and Walser & Westrup (2007)

## Appendix D: Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script

“Let’s center ourselves again in our chairs, sitting with our feet on the floor... our backs straight but not rigid, and our arms comfortably on our sides or in our laps.... Closing your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so, or picking a spot to focus on.....

Centering yourself and your attention by taking a deep, calm and slow breath in... and out..... Again, noticing the breath in your body as you breathe in.... and out.... Allowing each breath to help ground you... Focusing on the breath as much as you feel is possible right now..... With each breath, perhaps feeling your heart opening a little more... Feeling gratitude for all that you are thankful for, despite your stress.... Taking this moment to focus on and follow the breath...

Today’s stress management topics were \_\_\_\_\_.... I invite you to focus on these words, thinking about all they mean to you.... Reflecting on the activities we did today.... the experience we had together.... and your commitment to your “One Thing” to improve a relationship... Genuinely appreciating all that you brought to share with others, and all that they shared with you.... Choosing to allow yourself to be stronger, more aware, and better connected from all that the group offered today...

As you’re preparing to return to your daily life, you may choose to let go of what does not add to your relationships with yourself, others, and the world ... Deciding in this moment to connect to what is most important to you.... Still taking deep, centering breaths.... Trusting in your inner strength.... In your motivation to rise above stress.... Once you’ve connected with this inner strength, opening your eyes and rejoining the group, re-energized to handle things that may come your way in the spirit of \_\_\_\_\_.”

\*Text of this guided meditation is an adapted combination of Harrell (2020) and Walser & Westrup, (2007)

## Appendix E: Final Session Closing Mindfulness Meditation Script

“Let’s center ourselves again in our chairs, sitting with our feet on the floor... our backs straight but not rigid, and our arms comfortably on our sides or in our laps.... Closing your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so, or picking a spot to focus on.....

Centering yourself and your attention by taking a deep, calm and slow breath in... and out..... Again, noticing the breath in your body as you breathe in.... and out.... Allowing each breath to help ground you... Focusing on the breath as much as you feel is possible right now..... If you notice any thoughts or feelings coming up – perhaps a mix of thoughts and emotions – simply noticing them without judgement.... Allowing them to be there without trying to change them.... And with each breath, perhaps feeling your heart opening a little more... Feeling gratitude for all that you are thankful for, despite your stress....

Today, we close out our WE RISE group with the topics of Transcendence & Wholeness -- \_\_\_\_\_ [phrase]... I invite you to focus on these words, thinking about all they mean to you.... Reflecting on the activities we did today.... the experience we had together.... and your commitment to your “One Thing” to improve your relationships moving forward... Taking another moment to reflect on yourself and your growth in the group.... Remembering some of our experiences and activities.... Considering all that you have learned and practiced in your daily life.... Taking a moment to truly recognize and appreciate your growth, including all that you brought to share with others, and all that they shared with you.... Considering what the group has meant to you, and what you have meant to each and every one of us..... Perhaps, making a silent commitment to yourself to practice, use, and live out the values that you have learned and shared... Choosing to allow yourself to be stronger, more aware, and better connected from all that the group has offered, both now and well into the future.

As you’re preparing to return to your daily life, you may choose to let go of what does not add to your relationships with yourself, others, and the world ... Deciding in this moment to connect to what is most important to you.... Still taking deep, centering breaths.... Trusting in your inner strength.... In your motivation to rise above stress.... And once you’ve connected with this inner strength, opening your eyes and rejoining the group, re-energized to handle things that may come your way in the spirit of ever RISING.”

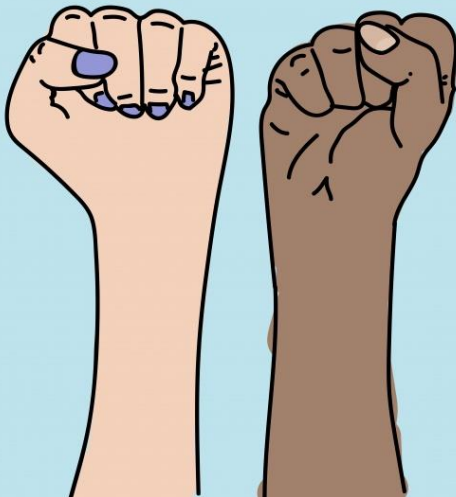
\*Text of this guided meditation is an adapted combination of Harrell (2020) & Walser & Westrup (2007)

# WE RISE

## Stress Management Group

Strengths-focused group for mothers to learn skills to improve relationships and manage stress

we  
**·R·I·S·E·**  
*together*



- 7 week group
- Meets once weekly starting 06/29/2020
- Tuesdays  
1:00-2:30PM

-----  
Ask your case manager  
before 06/01/2020 for  
details and referral

-----  
Women's Shelter for Hope &  
Transformation  
123 Avenue Street.  
City ABC, State 12345



## **Appendix G: *WE RISE* Group Evaluation**

Thank you for participating in the WE RISE group! We would like your feedback on your group experience to help improve our future services. This information is voluntary and will be kept confidential. We appreciate your honesty and ask that you do not include your name so your responses will remain anonymous. Please fill out the form and return it to the group leader.

**1. What have you enjoyed about the group? What parts have helped you with improving your relationships and with stress management?**

**2. What did you not like about this group? What parts did you find less helpful for improving your relationships and stress management?**

**3. How could the group be changed or improved?**

**4. How could the group leaders improve?**

**5. Any other Comments or Questions:**

Thank you for your time and feedback!

## Appendix H: WE RISE Screening Form

*[Note: It is advised that the screening is completed in a private space and does not take place in front of children.]*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*First, introduce the WE RISE group briefly, highlighting that it is a Stress Management group that focuses on increasing connection and relationships that's designed specifically for mothers experiencing homelessness. It aims to help mothers connect with their existing strengths and relationships, as well as building new ones, to overcome the stress in life that impacts them and their families, and empower them towards independence.*

*Then, share that completing this screener is important to decide if the WE RISE group is the best fit for them at this time, or if there are other additional resources that they could benefit from.*

1. How many children do you have? Are they with you currently (or working towards reunification)? How old are they?

2. Please share briefly what led you to being homeless. How long have you experienced homelessness? Have you experienced homelessness in the past?

3. What are some areas in which you're finding yourself "stressed out" now, that you hope the WE RISE group can help with?

Sometimes, significant stress leads people to have different or difficult thoughts, feelings, or experiences. To see if this group is the best fit for you, it is helpful to know if you are experiencing any of the following:

4. In the last month, have you wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up? Yes / No      Details: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Have you actually had any thoughts of killing yourself? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you been thinking about how you might kill yourself? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you had these thoughts and had some intention of acting on them? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you started to work out or worked out the details of how to kill yourself? Do you intend to carry out this plan? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

9. In the past month, have you engaged in any behaviors on purpose to hurt yourself, such as cutting, scratching, burning, biting, hair pulling, or banging your head? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you have thoughts of seriously injuring or killing another person? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you been thinking about how you might do so? Do you have intention to carry out this plan? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Sometimes when people are highly stressed, they can see or hear things that other people can't. Has this ever happened to you? When was the last time? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

[Any behavioral evidence of auditory or visual hallucinations?] Yes / No

13. Sometimes people also experience unusual things that other people may tend to not believe when you tell them. Has this ever happened to you? When was the last time?

Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

[Any behavioral evidence of paranoia or delusions?] Yes / No

14. Do you have any history of using alcohol or other drugs, including marijuana or prescription medication in ways other than prescribed? When did you last use? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

[Any behavioral evidence of intoxication?] Yes / No

15. [Any behavioral evidence of anger, hostility, or other personality traits, characteristics, or behaviors that may negatively impact group? Yes / No

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions!

*Based on the individual's responses, please either refer them to WE RISE (if appropriate) or begin with referrals or safety planning for those who are found ineligible.*