



## SESSION 4: DEVELOP A SENSE OF MASTERY

The purpose of this group is to learn more about how youth, families, and your community are impacted by trauma and violence and what you can do to help. Each week we will review a new topic or theme. Our sessions will begin with a brief check-in and video about the session. We will then have a discussion and activity connected to the theme for the week. There will also be some activities that you can work on at home to practice the skills learned in the session or to prepare for the following week's topic.

There are a few important rules and reminders for the group! Important things to remember are that no one has to share if they do not want to, be generous to others in the group and active listeners, do not share information heard here with others outside of the group, and that group facilitators are mandated reporters.

Today's session *Develop A Sense of Mastery* is about learning ways to build mastery and helping our children and youth transition from dependence to interdependence by working on our parenting strategies and communication style.

Mastery is about the ability to develop a sense of control over our world, feel like we can influence what happens around us, and believe that we can change outcomes for ourselves, and then for others. Often-times children and youth who have experienced trauma believe that they are powerless to create change. Even during the difficult times, children who feel that they can act independently and have the ability to change outcomes will have an easier time setting goals, accomplishing tasks, and maintaining relationships.



Each week you will be encouraged to take time to reflect on what has been discussed in the group and examine how it relates to your current situation or experiences. Today's session focuses on the different types of parenting styles that we have and whether or not our parenting may help or hinder our child's sense of mastery. Do you think it is possible to have more than one parenting style? Are there certain situations that require a different type of parenting? If you have more than one child, is your parenting style the same for all of your children?

Sometimes the way that we were raised may influence the type of parent that we choose to be toward our own children. What type of parenting style was used by your own parent? How did it influence your current style of parenting?

### **At-Home Activity**

- Review the handout *Fight, Flight, or Freeze: Our Body's Response to Danger*
- Find an activity (such as a puzzle, cooking, etc.) to do with your child for 15-30 minutes. Afterwards think about the parenting and communication style that you used throughout the activity.
- Upcoming session: *A Sense of Safety-Promoting a safe environment in the community*

## BEST PRACTICE 3: A SENSE OF MASTERY

*Develop life skills in children and adolescents.*

### Youth Action Statement

Build and practice skills to reach your goals.

### Caregiver Action Statement

Be willing to learn from mistakes. Make room for practice, routine, responsibility, and pride.

Early traumatic experiences may cause children and adolescents to develop low self-esteem, poor self-mastery, and the belief that they are unable to accomplish tasks or develop new skills. It is important to work with youth on building new skills and developing a sense of mastery. In addition to improving social skills, developing a sense of mastery and becoming involved in different activities can help to strengthen feelings of self-worth.

Mastery is about the ability to develop a sense of control over our world-it is feeling like we can influence what happens around us and that we can change outcomes for ourselves, and then for others. Often-times children and youth who have experienced trauma believe that they are powerless to create change and have meaningful relationships. The challenge is that our brain develops in the context of relationships. A child who does not believe they can impact their world is often labeled as lazy, difficult, unmotivated etc. Children who develop a sense of agency (ability to act independently) and then mastery (ability to change outcomes) will have an easier time setting goals, having dreams and maintaining the relationships through the difficult times. Repeated experiences of mastery allow for the development of pride and intrinsic motivation.

### How would you describe your parenting style? Does it help or hinder your child's sense of mastery?



**Helicopter Parent** micro-manages everything the child does, questions everything, constantly make observations and judgments, and point out the child's mistakes.



**Cell Phone Parent** is so busy with other things that it is hard to notice what their child needs or what their child is doing. This parent is usually focused on something else or thinking about other things instead of paying attention to the child.



**Ping Pong Parent** is responsive to their child. This parent notices what the child needs and wants before making suggestions or recommendations, and the comments are to help with the problem instead of focusing on what the child is doing right or wrong.

## FIGHT—FLIGHT—FREEZE: OUR BODY'S RESPONSE TO DANGER



Our body's are prepared to respond physically to threat and danger. When we experience threat or danger, automatic and biological reactions are set in motion. Adrenaline and cortisol are released to give the body a burst of energy and strength, and we can do "super human" things. The fight, flight or freeze response happens automatically. Our brain determines if we can take on the threat, will need to run, or will have to "check out" or play dead. Any of these responses is possible and our brain decides in a split second which response is going to maximize our survival. If the brain determines we can take on the threat, we go into "fight mode". If the brain decides we can't, then we may have to run away, or freeze...wait it out, check out and hope to be alive when it's over.

When fight, flight or freeze reactions are set in motion, the body prepares to respond to threat by sending more resources (e.g., blood and oxygen) to vital organs and conserving resources in others. When exposed to dangerous or threatening situations, the mental mechanisms that help us make everyday decisions temporarily shut down. This response enables us to make more primitive responses and take quick action rather than to think carefully about the situation at hand.

**What physical sensations do we experience when our body senses danger?**



**Heart pounding, palpitations, fast pulse**  
**Nausea or knot in stomach**  
**Dry mouth and throat**  
**Feeling detached from self or surroundings**  
**Feeling frozen or immobile**  
**Difficulty swallowing**  
**Sweating, clammy feeling or cold hands**  
**Pale face and skin**  
**Blurred vision, light seems brighter**  
**Feeling spaced out or in another world**