

# Setting the Tone: Creating a Theme for the Year

## This Activity Focuses On

- Developing a group project
- The power of words
- Vision and values

## Setting the Stage

The things you do and say at the start of an event or activity set the tone and have a strong influence on the mood of the participants and the effectiveness of what follows. In short, the tone you set shapes what outcomes are possible. This project is an engaging way to involve your youth in setting the tone of your program for the whole year. Remember: start with Spirit.

In the Science of the Positive, this activity clearly falls under the domain of Spirit. This activity also relates to *Core Principle #1 — Be Positive*.

The Positive is our natural state. It is who we truly are underneath the layers of defenses and protections we've created due to painful life experiences. These protections are real, but they were created under past conditions that no longer reflect our reality. To be Positive, then, is to shed our protections in the now and live our truth — to identify and claim who we really are. Through discovering our own personal Spirit, or our Why — we can approach leadership and changemaking with confidence.

## Duration

Two to three youth group meetings



## Goals

Participants will:

- Think creatively about the purpose of their program
- Create a powerful message for the year
- Start with Spirit

## Materials

- Paper or Post-it notes
- Pens or markers
- Data from your youth, parent or community survey
- Science of the Positive (SOTP) Cycle of Transformation poster

## Getting Ready

- Display SOTP Cycle of Transformation poster where participants can see it.
- Distribute paper, pens and markers.
- Lead the group through the activity using your version of the bold text that follows.

## Activity

This project will help the youth group discover what is most important to them and what messages they want to share with the community. They will develop a theme that will give the group direction for the school year much like a compass would orient a hiker.

We call this a *project* because it will take more time than a usual youth group activity. You may want to run this project during several meetings in the fall or as a daytime program during a summer retreat. Either way, the project should be completed by November so you can use your new theme throughout the school year. You might want to include your theme on all your communications, including posters, billboards, and T-shirts.

***Every program or group has an identity or a personality to it. For example, what do you think of when you think of the Girl Scouts, the YMCA or FFA?***

***What do you think community members or students think of when they hear the name of our group? Over the next few meetings we will establish a theme for our year and our group activities. This theme will help establish the identity and personality of our group.***

SPIRIT:

The first part of this project should take 20 minutes. Begin by talking about the Spirit of the program — the “why” or purpose of it — and discovering what your youth group

wants the community to know about what they do. Stress the importance of story, as in, “What is the story you want your community to hear about us?”

Begin by asking some questions. Note that this part of the activity usually works best when the questions below are asked one at a time, and the youth are given an opportunity to talk about them. You can have a volunteer write everyone’s response on a board or screen that everyone can see.

***What is our main purpose or goal for the year?***

Examples:

To reduce alcohol use by teens  
To get more adults involved in prevention

***Who are we as a group?***

Your mission statement could go here.

***What do we want our community to know about us?***

Examples:

Most youth choose not to use alcohol, marijuana or nicotine.  
Most adults care about youth.

***Thank you everyone for sharing. All of these ideas could be our theme for the year, but we need to pick one to focus on. Next, we’re going to go through all your responses and narrow them down. We want this theme to encapsulate the Spirit of our group this year.***

Once you have narrowed down the list, have the group discuss which one to choose. If you have several really good options, put it to a vote!

***Now that we have a theme, let’s look at the Science section in our Science of the Positive Framework.***

SCIENCE:

The next part of this activity will include conversations about your local surveys. For example, if your Theme is “adults care about youth,” look at local community surveys that ask adults what they think about youth. If your theme is around youth substance misuse, look at your youth survey data.

***What does our data say about our theme?***

Example: Our data says 85% of our youth choose not to use alcohol monthly. Or, 90% of adults in our community say they care about the youth in our area.

## ACTION:

Now that you have a theme or a tone, there are a few more steps that make this project really come together. Start by explaining to your youth you are moving to the Action piece of the Science of the Positive Cycle of Transformation.

***Thank you everyone. We have a great theme and tone for the year to share with everyone. So how do we make it stand out? How do we get people to notice it? First, we need to come up with a tagline or catchphrase to go with our new theme.***

- ***Are there existing hashtags that fit our theme?***
- ***Should we create our own?***
- ***Is there a popular song or a trendy word or phrase we can make our own?***
- ***What about a movie, show or commercial?***
- ***Is there a national message we can use as a starting point, perhaps by giving it a local angle?***

***When should we launch our new theme? This is critical to its success. We could let the lifespan of the theme coincide with the school year (ending in June). Another option is to launch it in January with the start of the calendar year, and let it continue into December of the next school year.***

- ***What big events are happening at school that we could join up with? One example could be at a band or choir concert, or a Homecoming event in the fall.***
- ***Would someone be willing to ask the high school office what's coming up this year?***
- ***We should also look at our school and community calendar of events.***

It's important to collaborate with other events for several reasons. Collaboration can help you reach a wider or more diverse audience than might usually see your group in action. Also, when two groups combine their efforts, they can create larger events more easily. These events should include both adults and youth, if possible, and be open to all grade levels at the school.

Giveaways at a large event are one of the best ways to get people to see your theme and start a conversation with students. For example, if your theme is "Youth choosing not to use alcohol" and your tagline is #WeWouldRather, you could give out free T-shirts with your theme or message on the front and some of your youth's reasons why they would rather not use alcohol on the back.

## Variation

You may choose two themes for the year. You could use one theme for the school and youth and another theme for the community. However it is probably best to use just one tagline or catchphrase for both themes, to keep things simple.

## **Talk About It**

Bring the full group together, assembling in a circle if possible. Start the conversation with questions like:

- ***What excites you most about our theme?***
- ***Do you feel like you understand the Spirit of our group better?***
- ***Will the theme make it easier to explain our program to a stranger?***

## **The Big Next**

This is just the beginning! The next step is to find ways to keep sharing your theme throughout the year. This should be a regular topic of discussion during future meetings.