



Peer Leaders Programming Guide





Peer Leaders Overview

We know that the more connected our students are to our school, the better they will do in the ways we track success: grades, attendance, discipline and test scores. How can we work to create authentic student connections – student to student and between students and our faculty?

It is our goal that our student Peer Leaders will help to create those bridges in regular GWC Advisories. Advisory sessions provide the opportunity to create a caring community that can explore together issues and decisions that impact personal responsibility, integrity, and positive decision-making for today and the future. It is our goal that our GWC Peer Leaders will serve as positive role models at each grade level, helping to facilitate discussion, encourage participation, engage their peers, and assist Advisory teachers.

To that end, the following Peer Leader Program elements provide a roadmap to help develop a positive leadership tool kit: listening and communication skills; problem solving techniques; ways to manage conflict; and strategies to build trust. You will find discussion questions, activities and video segments that provide structure and direction for each Peer Leader session. Video segments stream on the Peer Leaders page of GWC.ConnectwithKids.com website.



Session One: Mission Control

Activity: The Spider Web

Supplies: Nylon clothes-line or rope that provides 8 to 10 feet for person in the Peer Leaders group.

Begin this session by reading aloud the mission statement for the George Washington Carver High School for The Sciences mission statement:

To provide students with an in-depth, well-rounded education with an emphasis on science and mathematics. Classroom teaching and learning are complemented with authentic, inquiry-based research experiences... to prepare students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers.... The physical, emotional and social well-being of our student populace is nurtured through Advisories and service in a small and personalized learning community.

Next, ask students to keep that mission statement in the back of their minds as they complete the Spider Web activity, which can demonstrate the value of having a team work together.

Divide the Peer Leaders into two groups of 10 to 15 people. Have the group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. As the advisor/facilitator, hold the ball of rope and keep one end in your hands. Ask for someone who shares a characteristics with you (such as shares your birthday month, likes sushi, has seen a certain movie) – and throw the rope to that person who says he or she shares your characteristic. As each person gets the rope, he/she thinks of a characteristic and throws the rope to another who shares whatever he/she said.

Little by little, the group will be forming a web that should be strong enough for to lie on like a hammock. Ask for a volunteer to lie on rope web (held low to the ground), to demonstrate the support that the group was able to weave together.

Discussion Questions

- Could we have done this with only two people? With three people?
- How many people would it have taken to make a web strong enough for someone to lie on?
- What is the message that this activity sends about the power of working as a group?
- Think about our school mission statement that was read at the beginning of class. How do you think our weekly advisory can impact that mission?
- What could we do to make our Advisories support that mission?

Conclude this session by watching the video segment **Peer Mentoring**, to hear first-hand from Jeisson Santana from New Design High School about the ways that positive peer mentoring changed his life.



Session Two: Asking and Listening

Open Ended Communication

Begin this session by exploring the art of asking open-ended questions. Begin by asking a series of yes/no questions:

- Do you feel stressed at school? Do you think Advisory is the best part of the day?
- Is there too much homework at GWC?
- Do you think that your last essay in English was graded fairly?

Ask the Peer Leaders whether the answers led to much dialogue or thought-provoking conversation? Was it interesting or easy to react to? Using open-ended communication, using questions that require more than one word answers, can help. Think about using the words what or how. Think about keeping the conversation going by asking follow-up questions and open-ended responses.

Work as a group to create a list of open-ended questions that could lead to a worthwhile discussion. Some examples might include:

- What five words best describe you?
- How would you describe the culture at GWC? What would you like to change?
- Do you think that Advisory can have an impact on life at GWC?

Ask the group how did that discussion compare to the first round of questions?

Non-Judgmental Communication: Empathetic Listening

Next, explore with your Peer Leaders the concept of empathetic listening, sometimes called active listening or reflective listening. By definition, it is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding, trust and respect, and creates an environment of sharing – all key aspects to an effective and functional advisory experience for all.

What is empathy? It's the ability to project oneself into the personality of another person in order to better understand that person's emotions or feelings. Through empathic listening the listener lets the speaker know, "I understand your problem and how you feel about it, I am interested in what you are saying and I am not judging you."

Experts offer these guidelines for empathic listening:



1. Be attentive. Be interested. Be alert and not distracted. Create a positive atmosphere through nonverbal behavior. Indicate you are listening by providing brief non-committal responses like "uh-huh" and "I see." Non-verbal acknowledgements include head nodding, an open and relaxed body expression and maintaining eye contact.
2. Offer invitations to say more, like, "Tell me about it," or "I'd like to hear more about that."
3. Don't ask a lot of questions. They can give the impression you are "grilling" the speaker.
4. Act like a mirror -- reflect back what you think the speaker is saying and feeling.
5. Don't discount the speaker's feelings by using stock phrases like "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow."

Student Activity: Sharing My Truth

Imagine being able to share your dreams, your concerns and your hopes without worrying about being judged or laughed at. Ask yourself the questions below (they go from easy-to-share to more personal topics.) Circle or write down your answers. When you imagine sharing your truth with someone you trust, how do you feel? Relieved? Connected? Shy? There are no wrong feelings; everything we feel helps us to learn about ourselves.

- Which do you like better: a pen, pencil or computer keyboard?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Do you have a brother or sister, or are you an only child? Are you the oldest, youngest or in between? Would you change that if you could?
- If you could spend a day with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?
- What's the most adventurous thing you have ever done?
- Name one thing about yourself that people would be surprised to learn.
- What job would you have if you knew that you could not fail?
- What is one inner quality about yourself that you would like to change?
- What is your biggest fear in life? How could you overcome it?
- What is your happiest memory?
- With whom could you share these answers and know that you would not be judged?



Session Three: Learning Leadership

Begin this session by watching the video **Helping Your Brothers**. In the video, Rashard Boyd and Tyler Babb talk about the ESI programs at their school, Bedford Academy, and how the programs helped them want to achieve more academically. They also explain how the programs inspired them beyond grades and test scores. Rashard says he has a new perspective about being a role model and “being there for his brothers.” Tyler says that people at his school are “like a big family.”

Consider these **self-reflection** and **discussion questions**:

- Tyler Babb says he learned that “you can’t just slack off and expect for things to come to you. You have to take them.” He goes on to say that the principal of his school is always saying, “**Closed mouths don’t get fed.**” What do you think this quote means?
- Rashard says he is striving to be a “model male in society.” How would you define “a model male?” How would you define “a model female?” What qualities would such a role model have? Which of those qualities do you think you have? What qualities, if any, do you wish you had or plan to develop as you grow?

Student Activity: Learning Leadership

Some people think that leaders are born, not made. However, most experts agree that leadership skills can be taught. Use the following hand out, listing several key characteristics that the most effective leaders share, based upon dozens of studies conducted by leading researchers, to help your Dream Leaders explore their current and desired leadership skills.



Learning Leadership

Some people think that leaders are born, not made.” However, most experts agree that leadership skills can be taught. Below is a list of several key characteristics that the most effective leaders share, based upon dozens of studies conducted by leading researchers. The most effective leaders are:

- Inspirational/Motivational
- Optimistic
- Honest
- Excellent communicators
- Positive role models
- Creative
- Decisive
- Visionary
- Ethical
- Self-confident
- Empowering of their followers
- Excellent at critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Organized and able to set priorities
- Team players/collaborators; gathering input and ideas from their team

Use the following handout to encourage your Peer Leaders to explore their leadership potential.



Learning Leadership

Which of the following leadership characteristics would you like to develop? Circle those that apply.

- Inspirational/Motivational
- Optimistic
- Honest
- Excellent communicators
- Positive role models
- Creative
- Decisive
- Visionary
- Ethical
- Self-confident
- Empowering of their followers
- Excellent at critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Organized and able to set priorities

Team players/collaborators; gathering input and ideas from their team Choose the three qualities that you feel are MOST important for effective leadership. Write them below. Next to each quality, put the name of a leader whom you feel best displays that quality. You can choose from public leaders such as presidents, military leaders and/or CEOs of companies, as well as leaders you know personally such as team captain, school principals or class leaders.

Leadership Quality:

What Leader Has This Quality

Describe a time when the leader displayed the quality you associated with him or her. You can describe an instance in which you actually witnessed the leadership, or a situation you read or heard about in the media.



Session Four: The Power of Mentoring

Begin this session by watching the video **The Power of Mentoring**. In the video, students from Explorations Academy talk about the support they received from their school's peer mentoring program, and how the program has helped motivate them to achieve as well as to help others.

Consider these self-reflection and discussion questions:

- William Seda says that at first, he did not open up to his mentor because he didn't know him. What would it take for you to open up and receive support from a peer mentor?
- Desmond Bryan explains that the program "backs you up when you have fallen." Can you think of a time when you (or a friend) have gone off track? Who has been there for you? What type of person would you want to help you when you face challenges?

Student Activity: Mentors and Mentees

Read with your Peer Leaders the following excerpt about the origination of the term "mentor." (Or make copies and use the following page as a hand out.) Then discuss and/or answer these questions as a group or individually.

- What characteristics and adjectives describe an ideal mentor? Some examples might include trustworthy, responsible, good listener.
- What are some of the ways in which a "mentee" benefits from being mentored? (Some examples might be more confidence, more motivation, getting help with academics.)
- What are some of the ways in which a mentor benefits from his or her role? (Better social skills, feeling good about helping others, learning to better understand others).
- Now ask your Peer Leaders to consider and list their skills and talents. How can they best help someone else?



The Origination of "Mentor"

by Gordon Shea, author of *Mentor*

The story of Mentor comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus, king of Ithaca, fights in the Trojan War and entrusts the care of his household to Mentor, who serves as teacher and overseer of Odysseus' son, Telemachus.

After the war, Odysseus is condemned to wander vainly for ten years in his attempt to return home. In time, Telemachus, now grown, ventures in search of his father. Athena, Goddess of War and patroness of the arts and industry, assumes the form of Mentor and accompanies Telemachus on his quest. Father and son reunite and cast down would-be usurpers of Odysseus' throne and Telemachus's birthright.

The word *Mentor* evolved to mean trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person ... Mentoring is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy and personal know-how in assisting the growth and ability of another person.

History and legend record the deeds of princes and kings, **but each of us has a birthright to actualize our potential.** Through their deeds and work, mentors help us to move toward that actualization.

Source: Shea, Gordon F. (1997) *Mentoring (Rev. Ed.)*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications



Session Five: Managing Conflict

Begin this session by watching the video **Building Self-Confidence**. In

the video, Aaron Caesar talks about Central Park East High School's program, *Peer Group Connections (PGC)* and how it has helped him learn more about himself, build confidence, and respond in healthier ways to other people's racist judgments.

Consider these self-reflection questions:

- Aaron talks about being the subject of racism all of his young life. He reacted by “closing down” and keeping to himself. Have you or someone you know faced racism in your life? How did you react? Looking back on that experience, would you react differently today? Why or why not?
- After being part of Peer Group Connections at his school, Aaron says he “grew a spine.” What does this mean to you?
- Aaron gives advice about speaking up and gaining confidence. What helps *you* gain more self-confidence?
- Write down or call out words or phrases that people have said about you or your friends or family that affected you negatively. Now write down or call out words or phrases that describe your positive qualities. Are one set of words more powerful to you than the other? Why or why not?

Student Activity: My Monumental Moment

Look in books, magazines or search online to find images of several U.S. monuments and memorials (see suggested list below). What do you think of the way the monuments look? What is inscribed on the statues/buildings? What do these words mean to you?

Now, ask your Peer Leaders to create a monument to increase awareness about racism, acceptance or a special topic of concern to GWCHSS students. What words or phrases would they inscribe? Are there meaningful lyrics or poetry to include? The group can work together to create a sketch the design. If time permits, create posters for the GWCHSS hallways.



Monument Websites for More Information

- New York City's 911 Memorial and Museum --
<http://www.911memorial.org/>
- Washington Monument -- http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/wamo/stones.pdf
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial -- <http://www.nps.gov/mlkm/historyculture/places.htm>
- Statue of Liberty -- <http://www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm>
- Lincoln Memorial -- <http://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>