

A Summer of Renewal

*A Guide for Reflection for
New York City School Personnel*

Integrating the Events of September 11th

Written by Cheri Lovre, MS

This guide was conceived and coordinated by Linda Lantieri, Founding Director of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) of Educators for Social Responsibility National Center and New York Director of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Cheri Lovre, Director of Crisis Management Institute.



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Dedication

*This guide is dedicated to Shelly Harwayne, Superintendent,
Community School District 2,
Marjorie Robbins, Director of Pupil Personnel,
and all of the other courageous
New York City school staff
who were faithful to their calling
and left no child behind
on September 11, 2001.*

Our sincere thanks to the following:

Kinkos, who volunteered to cut their cost to a minimum so that “A Summer of Renewal” could be put into the hands of all school personnel in Community School District 2 for free before the school year ended.

The September 11th Fund for providing the additional resources to cover the remaining expenses.

Marjorie Robbins and Sheila Brown for their help with organization and distribution.

Robin Stern, Ph.D., Teachers College, Columbia University, for the generosity of her time and the expertise of her graduate students for making this guide available on the following web sites:

Community School District #2 at: <http://www.nycenet.edu/csd2/>

Educators for Social Responsibility National Center at: <http://www.esrnational.org>

Crisis Management Institute at: <http://www.cmionline.org>





“Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has magic, power and vision in it. Begin it now.” Goethe

June 26, 2002

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I, perhaps like many of you, have always considered it a blessing that my professional life has also been my “soul’s calling.” I have spent over three decades in public education, many of those years serving the New York City Public Schools.

In whatever role I found myself, I have always felt that the education of young people involved not only their intellectual development but their emotional, social and spiritual development as well.

When we in New York City were faced with terror in our own backyards on September 11th, it was of little help that any of us knew that Paris is the capitol of France. What did help us get through that day was our ability to create community instantaneously, lift ourselves and others up, take moral action and serve unconditionally. And that is what thousands of you did that day and the months following. You remained faithful to nurturing the hearts, minds and spirits of over one million New York City school children right through the school year.

The idea for writing and producing this guide was conceived in Figs Restaurant at LaGuardia Airport on June 16th, 2002. At the encouragement of Sheila Brown, Cheri Lovre and I answered an inner call to meet for the very first time, and two of our close friends joined us. I sensed an urgency about our encounter, because in the past six months, on three separate occasions, in three different parts of the country, I was asked if I knew Cheri and the wonderful work she was doing. To which I can *now* respond, I sure do!

When we met, our conversation quickly turned to the courageous and compassionate way New York City school personnel struggled to help our children regain a sense of optimism about the future, even as you struggled to do that same thing for yourselves. And then we both realized, with summer fast approaching, you would finally have a break from your ceaseless caring duties. We asked one another, “So, during the summer, who will nurture those who have served so faithfully?”

This guide is an attempt to provide you with a process to strengthen your own inner resources and reaffirm the best parts of who you are. When crisis hits, we often can't figure out how we can help others and also attend to ourselves in the process. However, when we fail to stop and reflect, we can lose our way and bypass the wisdom that comes from such reflection, making us less capable of cultivating what Buddhists call "right understanding, right action, right effort."

It is in this spirit that we offer this guide to you. May the summer be one that restores, renews, and uplifts you. And if this guide contributes to that, in some small way, we have done our job. May you be able to approach September feeling strong enough to feel what the Hopi nation elders have said -- "That we are the ones we've been waiting for." Please accept my deepest gratitude for keeping on.

Peace,

Linda Lantieri

Founding Director of Resolving Conflict Creatively Program of Educators of Social Responsibility National Center, and NY Director of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

Introduction

This project grew out of the awareness that, especially for school teachers, administrators and staff who were anywhere close to the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001, this has undoubtedly been the most difficult and challenging year in your professional careers. The entire nation has stood transfixed as they dare to even imagine what your lives have been like.

This guidebook is for those of you who survived that day and the weeks that followed. The journaling and exercises herein are both a tribute and a resource to those of you who ran with children and saved every single one of them that day. You are unsung heroes in our collective history. You did what had to be done, what no one else could do, rescuing defenseless children from out of harm's way, quickly, decisively and with courage.

And what about those of you who weren't in Manhattan that day, but have lived with the horror and sorrow of "the disappeared" in your communities surrounding New York City? Helping each other and helping those in dozens of communities sharing this plight has also been a heroic effort. For doing this largely unsung work with dignity, you all deserve our heartfelt appreciation and support. You, too, are heroes in our midst.

I have been privileged to be among those providing counseling and consultative services to many who work in school buildings that were directly impacted. Working with you, I am inspired and humbled. And it has added immense depth to my understanding of trauma and its predictable aftermath.

From past experience, I would expect that, in order to make it through the school year, many of you may not have had the luxury of being able to let yourselves take in the personal magnitude of September 11th. Although the school year seemed long and difficult, the demands of the classroom (or running the schools) provided a rhythm and focus that sustained you through the year.

Sometimes when that kind of rhythm stops, the vacuum or space that is created leaves us surprised as we realize how much has yet to surface. Time and again this spring I heard, "I'm afraid that, at some point this summer when I'm sitting in my garden or contemplating over a cup of tea, my pent up emotions will all come crashing in on me and I'll discover that I'm more overwhelmed than I realized. What will I do with myself at that moment?"

This guidebook is an attempt to address just that possibility. My hope is that this process may help us get in touch with just how NOT normal this year has been. I hope you find strength and affirmation, and that your experience will continue to allow you to lead, to teach, and to inspire others around you.

These activities grew out of the recognition that most of us who work in schools put our own grieving process on hold in order to meet the needs of students. And because it is common for reactions to traumatic events to surface later, this journaling guidebook is an attempt to provide you with a method of recalling and recording a few precious things.

It is:

- A gentle means of supporting you in your continuing journey from the disaster through your next phase of recovery.
- A common experience for all of you who will come back together in the fall.
- An opportunity to give meaning to experiences which might have eluded understanding until now.

Certainly, only do that which feels helpful. Set this booklet aside and wait to try a few of the activities later if this just isn't the right time. Your body will tell you when the right time is, and we are wise not to ignore such signs. The process won't be painless, but it will provide relief. If you feel significant stress or emotion with regard to the events of September 11th, we strongly urge that you talk with others who are supportive of you and that you consider seeking professional advice and support. This guide is designed to be used throughout the summer, to help you take advantage of all that this summer break has to offer, and to help you prepare for a fresh new year in the fall. Activities in this guidebook build on each other, so starting in the middle may not be as helpful as working chronologically.

Also, the design is such that you can approach a given activity in a variety of ways. Some of you may choose to write each week. Others may look at that week's ideas and draw instead of write. Or, you may find other forms of expression. Please take these ideas and do something even more creative and personal. (This is what makes our world rich and wonderful.) My heartfelt best wishes for a summer that provides you the time to journey within, and outward, too -- one of reflection, renewal, and rediscovery.

Cheri Lovre



Introduction to “The Process” or “The Journey”

Each week set aside a little time just for you, a time when you can read through the book’s suggested activities and ideas for that week and decide how you’d like to take some time to feed your soul.

Try to set aside the same time each week - or better yet, each day - and be thoughtful about what time might be the most beneficial.

Supplies you’ll need beyond this book:

- CDs with some of your favorite, most relaxing music
- Crayons or colored pencils, and (optional) a sketch pad for additional drawing
- Your favorite pen or writing utensil

The directions for each chapter (laid out by week) remind you to do certain things, like “think about this” or “write about that” or “draw something.” Please try to pause for that activity before moving on. The heart (♥) is your cue to stop reading and allow some time to reflect before going on.

While these activities are designed to do alone, it would also be valuable to spend some time with someone else who is also working through this process. At the end of the book there are questions for group or shared reflection. Perhaps meet someone for coffee and share your thoughts and feelings. Check out the last page.

Another thought... Some of your co-workers have become primary support people in your life. Before school lets out, consider selecting a few dates through the summer to meet up with some of the folks from your building for fun stuff... dinner out, a glass of wine, walks, whatever you would enjoy. Create a quick summer calendar of gatherings for your school community that are entirely voluntary. It might be great to have several different kinds of gathering times so people could pick and choose.

All good wishes!



Week of June 30th

Whew! Summer Break is Here!

For those of you who have time off in the summers, these are the days you've waited for all year. But even for those of you in administration or other jobs that keep you in the building most of the year, the shift into the summer tasks and summer schedule marks a time to catch your breath.

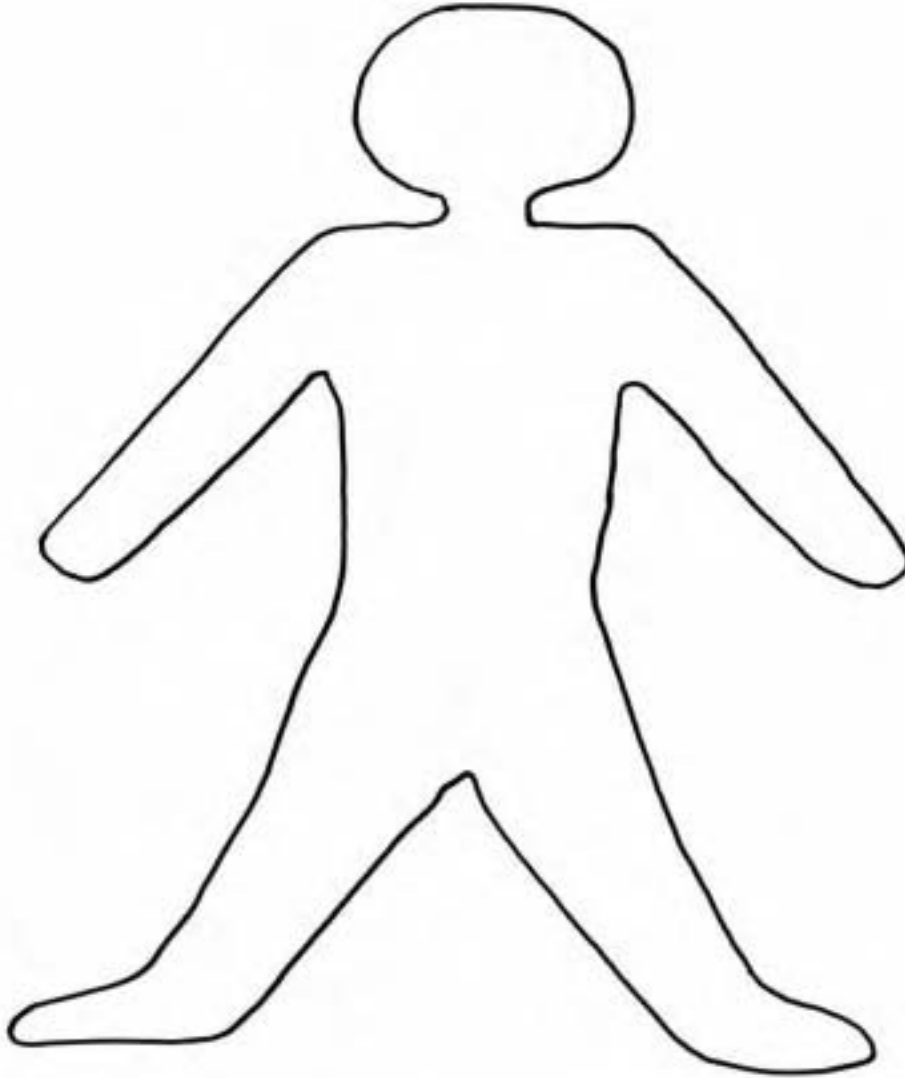
This week we're going to focus on acknowledging that the most important thing you can do is to take time now to rejuvenate and replenish yourselves. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross talked about each of us needing our own woodpile for keeping ourselves warm over the winter. If someone needs wood, we need to give to them from our surplus. In your case, relative to 9/11 and its aftermath, you probably didn't consider NOT giving, even if you felt at the time that you "didn't have extra" to give. Your ethics, the circumstance and your positions demanded it of you. You've been giving to others all year, and now it is time to take a deep breath and let yourself be in touch with how you will "replenish your woodpile."

First, take five minutes and listen to some really relaxing music. Close your eyes and find a place of stillness within, where thoughts drift away and awareness is amplified, but quiet. Some may call this meditation. Relax fully. Seek to connect with that inner place where peace and freedom from suffering reside. If you're antsy and your mind refuses you that place of rest, perhaps a walk or another kind of physical activity will help you become centered. Do that now. ♥

Great! Now, take a moment to become aware of how you hold stress in your body, how you held it during the year, and places you still hold some of that stress or traumatic memory. Close your eyes and let your awareness move from place to place in your body, being open to the messages you receive. What are some of the feelings or emotions that surface? Where are you still holding stress, fear or resistance? For some it will be in the stomach or in the head, some in the heart. You may experience tightness in the chest, or a clenched jaw; there is no "right" place.

On the following page, there is space to record a few of your most prominent feelings or emotions. Some may be positive and some may not be. Don't judge or try to categorize. Just choose six or eight feelings you have and write them on the lines provided. Do that now. Then, on the outline of an amorphous body, using colors that best represent those feelings, color in where you hold them in your body.

Feelings I have and where I hold them in my body.



Now, put that soothing music back on. Yes, please, do that now. ♥

Look at what you've drawn.

For the next several minutes, gaze at the colored areas representing these feelings. Let yourself look at just one at a time. Look at the first one for several seconds, allowing all of your focus to be on that feeling and that area of the body. Then, close your eyes, and, if it is a negative feeling, do something to lessen that feeling.

You might envision sunlight melting it away, or see it fading slowly, but consistently. You might see yourself looking at it with compassion and understanding and sending it away. You might breathe deeply and deliberately, envisioning some of it leaving your body each time you exhale.

If it is a positive feeling, take just as much time on it! If it is positive, close your eyes and let it shine forth, more and more brightly. Or celebrate it. Say thank you to it. Affirm its presence.

Move your way through all of the feelings you represented in your drawing, one at a time. Be kind to yourself. Some may still seem to have a terrific hold on you. Some you may feel attached to for a variety of reasons. Give yourself credit for taking the time to do the exercise. ♥

For the rest of this week, each day do something that addresses whatever you learned doing this activity. It may mean putting more exercise into your life to give you an outlet for the stress. It may mean doing the guided imagery of looking at the body coloring each day while listening to soothing music and continuing to melt away thoughts or feelings you wish to diminish.

Also for this week, choose a time each day when you will put on soothing music and really breathe slowly, deliberately, and relax. Ten minutes a day. When you first get up, before bed, before one meal consistently, whenever. Just give yourself ten minutes for true relaxation. Every day. Twice a day if you wish. All week long.

Additionally, ask yourself this question... "What is one thing I can do each day to help me feel better?" And do it! Is there something you could do for someone else that might make them feel better as well?



Questions for Reflection

How would my drawing have looked different before 9/11?

In the past, what are some constructive methods I've used to relieve stress?

If each of these colors on my body could speak to me, what would they say?

What aspects of my body, and its ability to "carry" me through the year, can I appreciate?

Week of July 7th

Concentric Circles of Support

Be sure to begin by doing your chosen means of relaxation and focus. Take at least five, and better yet, ten minutes, for this relaxation time. Pause for that now.

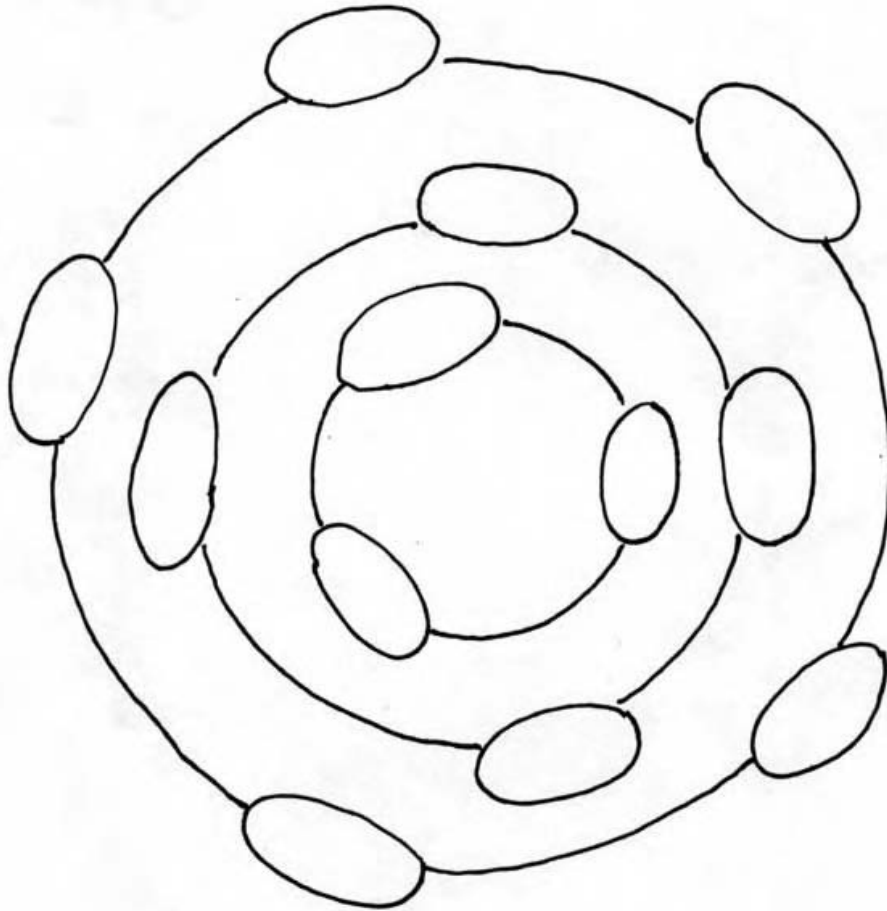


This week the journey is to acknowledge the people in your life who supported you through this past school year. On the next page, you'll find concentric circles with several "planets" on each "orb." Write your own name in the center of the circle. Then in the smaller circles that surround your name, write the names of those people who are your greatest support system. Those upon whom you most depend belong in the circles closest, so proximity indicates their importance in your world.

Take time to be thoughtful in this process.

An alternate method for more artistic folks would be to draw this concept in free form, however you would like to represent people who matter.

Go ahead and find some means to recognize and thank the people you identified. Further ideas will follow on the page after the exercise.



Put on your favorite soothing music. ♥

Take a moment to look at your representation.

How has the constellation of support changed for you since September 11th?

Look again at the array of people you've indicated. List some of the words that represent the myriad kinds of support they offer.

Now to finish this activity, take time to look at each name, one at a time, for several seconds. Close your eyes and see that person's face in front of you. Let yourself feel the warmth, caring, support, and love that this particular person has given. After a couple of minutes of simply basking in the appreciation for that person, see yourself giving them a single, clear sentence of your thanks. Perhaps write that sentence near their names. Then repeat this process for the others in your drawing. Take time to do that now. ♥

For the rest of this week, continue giving yourself that daily ten minutes of relaxation, meditation, reflection or silent mindful gratitude.

Also, choose at least a few of those people from your circle of support and somehow communicate your gratitude. Make a phone call, write a short note, or just mention to them that they've made a difference for you.

In this process, you might consider asking one of them to be supportive of you as you work through some of the activities to come. ♥

Week of July 14th

Looking at the Deep Side

This week we're going to embrace perhaps the most difficult part of the journey for this summer. This is the week we're going to work at getting specific about our unfinished grief, our unnamed or repressed traumatic memories, the overwhelming sadness or whatever it is that weighs most heavily. As with all of the exercises, feel free to use drawing instead of writing.

Begin by putting on some gentle music and taking a quiet five or ten minutes for yourself. Get calm and settled. ♥

On the difficult or challenging side:

What troubles you most now?

What image(s) most clearly represent the horror, sorrow and difficulty you have suffered in the past year? How does that mental picture express your pain?

Where in your body do you feel the impact of that visual image? Go to that place. If that wound could talk, if it could ask for release, in what words might it make that plea?

If you could ask your inner wisdom or source of inner strength to lift this burden from your heart, would you want to somehow hang onto some fragment of it as a keepsake? What would that part be and how could you hold it in the future so as not to allow it to have power to hurt you?

What are your three greatest fears for the future?

And for the positives:

What surprises you most about how you've coped better than you may have expected?

What were you able to give to students?

How has this helped you re-evaluate what you treasure and what matters?

What have you learned?

Use this blank space for drawing or writing whatever you'd like in response to these questions and your answers.

Reflective Questions

Which of my reactions are probably most similar to others with whom I work?

Which are likely to be different or unique?

What is my strength? Spiritually, on what do I depend?

How much do I reveal of this to others and how much do I carry alone?

What are some things that are still “normal” in life? What rhythms and patterns have I been able to maintain that give me some measure of comfort?



This week find time as often as you can to walk outdoors, looking for signs of hope. Listen to the wise spirit inside you as you reflect during your walk... listen for messages of affirmation. Walk through new areas of town. Head for places where nature speaks. Don't rush.



Week of July 21st

Putting This into Some Kind of Perspective

Begin by giving yourself ten minutes of true relaxation or connection to your source of wisdom and peace. As you relax, allow memories from your entire lifetime to come into view. Just watch them surface.



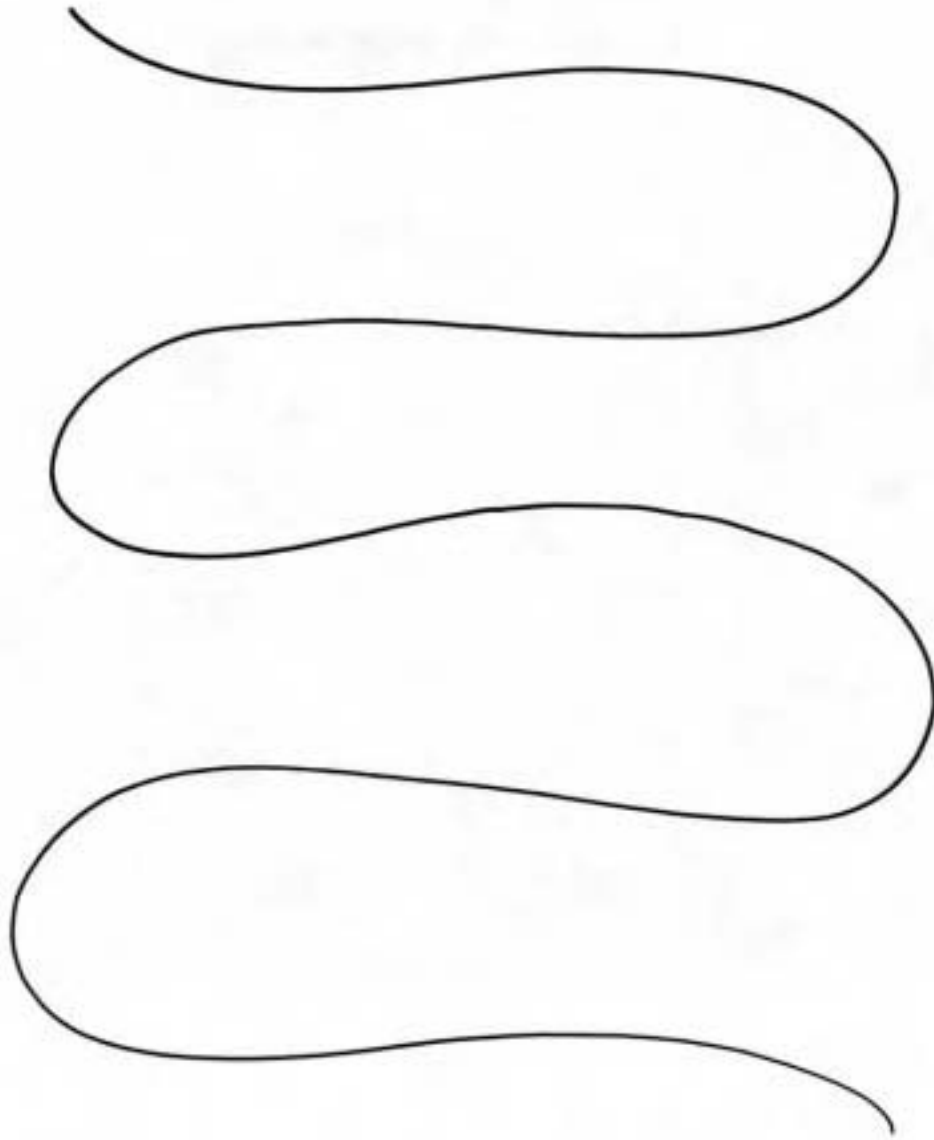
This week you are going to do a lifeline. Because the format of this book is small, it is a curved line that lets you start at one end with “birth” and continue through five years from now. The increments will depend upon your age, so there are no markers for years.

Take a moment to look at how long the whole line is, and make some small marks on it to give you an idea of how much to designate for each decade of your life. Be sure to leave enough space after the point that will represent today to give you five more years of length in your line. If you’d like, you can project your entire lifetime, or just since the beginning of your professional career. Choose whatever you’d like to represent. Directions will be as though you’re doing it from birth through 2006. You may use a larger piece of paper for this if you like.

Begin with the “birth” end of the line, and write in or draw symbols of important events in your life in correlation with the passage of time on your lifeline. Be sure to include September 11th either by date or by symbol. Continue on to include important events that have happened since then. When you’re up to the current day, stop for a moment and look at what you have.



Turn on your relaxation music once again. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Let yourself have a clear and open mind. Let ideas come to mind of what you’d like to experience, what you’d like to accomplish, and what you’d like to change over the next five years. When you’ve had time enough to feel finished with that imagery, add that to your lifeline.



Reflective Questions

What surprised you most in doing this activity?

What is one thing you can let go of, to some degree, in terms of it having a “hold” on you?

Of the things you wish to change, what is one thing you can begin today?

We gain strength from increasing our coping strategies and mechanisms. What is something that you will always claim for yourself, in terms of an earlier event in your life, that gave you some of the strength you’ve used to get through this year?

Call someone just to talk. Take some time to share this with someone. ♥

Put on some good dancing music -- something up-tempo, crank it up -- and dance your heart out, feeling your strength. “Jeremiah Was A Bullfrog” works! ♥

Week of July 28th

Go Have FUN!

This week is just all about pure joy and celebration.

Begin again with the ten minutes of meditation or relaxation. Do that now. ♥

On the next page is an exercise labeled “Twenty Things I Love to Do.”

As quickly as you can, list 20 things in life which you really, really love to do. There are no right or wrong answers about what you should like. So do that part first. ♥

When you finish listing activities and pleasures, go back to fill in the graph of how many times you’ve done that in the past week, month, year, and so on. ♥

Fill out the two questions at the bottom of the page. ♥

Then consider...What could you bring back into your life as a daily practice? Weekly practice? Your summer? Your life!



This week, play outrageous music every day. Look for some of the oldies but goodies that you haven’t had on in awhile.

Go hear some live music in the park or find a performance somewhere.

This is also a time to look at whether there is physical exercise that you’d like to add to your routine. Get it going now and it will be easier to sustain when school starts again.

TWENTY THINGS I LOVE TO DO

(Adapted from Simon et al, *Values Clarification*, NY: Hart Publishing Co., 1972)

Activities I Love:

How Often I've Done Them In the Last:

	1 wk.	1 mo.	6 mo.	1 yr.	5 yr.
1 _____					
2 _____					
3 _____					
4 _____					
5 _____					
6 _____					
7 _____					
8 _____					
9 _____					
10 _____					
11 _____					
12 _____					
13 _____					
14 _____					
15 _____					
16 _____					
17 _____					
18 _____					
19 _____					
20 _____					

I was surprised to find that _____

I was pleased to find that _____

Week of August 4th

Pumping Up Your Support Network

Last week we looked at things you love to do but have perhaps let slip by the wayside. This week we're going to look further at adding pleasure and delight to life.

But first, of course, take a moment to enjoy some quiet time with (or without) your favorite music. Do that now.



Now take time to go through these thoughts, filling in the blanks:

What could you bring back into your life as a daily practice? _____

Weekly practice? _____

Who could help you make that happen? _____

What weekly routines (for school and for yourself), could you build into the next school year to foster a greater sense of happiness?

What changes do you imagine will occur? _____

What vacation did you take this year? What do you want to plan for breaks during the next school year? _____

And this is a time to think about people who each bring different gifts or joys into your life.

List who they are:

Makes you laugh _____

Brings you back to your roots _____

Nurtures, understands, listens _____

Celebrates! _____

Does silly things _____

Will go to any movie with you _____

Shares your taste in foods _____

Does outdoor stuff you like _____

Is spontaneous and will meet you on short notice _____

Is unpredictable _____

People kids love to do stuff with _____

Are there a couple of people you haven't talked with this summer that you'd like to call?



This week do something artistic with someone -- look at your list above. Who would come up with a great idea? Maybe buy a sketch book or some art supplies. Maybe buy a face paint kit and decorate faces of your kids or others in the neighborhood. Buy some glitter for your cheeks and wear it all week, or share it with others. Go buy some helium balloons and give them away!

Week of August 11th

Looking Forward

Once again, put on perhaps a *different* wonderful CD. Do that first. ♥

Summer is fast fleeing and we're all beginning to recognize that before we know it, we'll be setting up our rooms, organizing files, or getting back to whatever our school year task is in the school district.

This segment is our first time to really begin to prepare for next year. No big rush to get back here, but just beginning to look at some of the positives.

Beginning to prepare for next year:

What do you look forward to teaching? (Or, what of your tasks do you enjoy?)

What is your favorite unit?

Who will be in your school building that you look forward to seeing?

What is one new thing you'll want to integrate into your classroom/job?

What are some things that you've enjoyed about your work in years gone by?

How have some of those changed in this past year?

What was one special ritual, or holiday event or celebration you might try again or change slightly?



This week, wander into some of the stores that have decorations, supplies or materials you enjoy. Perhaps just window-shop. But look for some things you'd like to add to your classroom or work space.



Take time to call someone with whom you planned a celebration or event. Help each other remember the details that made it great and brainstorm how you might do it again but with changes or additions.



Week of August 18th

The Coming Anniversary

This week for sure, even if you sometimes cut yourself short, take time to get out some wonderful music and give yourself lots of time to meditate, reflect or relax. Do that before reading on. ♥

This week we're going to address what will likely be the most difficult time once you return to school. How can we best get through the first anniversary of the events of September 11th?

In considering how to prepare for seeing yourself and your students through that day, it is obvious that you can't wait to plan for it until you're back at school, because the anniversary occurs so very quickly after the start of the school year. But you know, its quick passing has some inherent value.

If the anniversary were in October or November, you'd spend weeks or months dreading the day, and much valuable energy might be tied up in that worry. Although this will take place soon after the start-up of school, it also means that you'll get it over with sooner and, a couple of weeks later, you'll be much more on track and building successes.

This isn't to say that there won't still be times when you or your students or co-workers re-experience the trauma. In May, many were very surprised at how much the ceremony marking the end of recovery efforts brought up for them. Although there may be other stimuli that trigger latent grief (such as a plane crash somewhere or news coverage of another tragedy), no doubt the anniversary is going to be the biggest trigger we can predict.

So this week we're going to look at what might be difficult as well as what will help us all through that day. We will all take a collective sigh of relief on September 12th. Know that, no matter how difficult the 11th is, the 12th is, in some ways, a new beginning.

Cue up your music again, and listen to it as you quietly contemplate the questions on the next page. After you've had time to consider each, journal your thoughts on the following page. ♥

Remember, we don't learn coping skills when life is a breeze. We have all gained much of what makes us strong by surviving life's challenges. This is a time to remind ourselves of some of the coping strategies that have helped us in the past. What are some of the events you've survived in the past, prior to 9/11?

<i>Event</i>	<i>Coping Skills I Gained</i>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

As you move into the school year, there may be times that are a struggle. Who could be your mentor/check-in person for deeper level stuff... it is critical to feel and move through your emotions, and it is so helpful to create support ahead of time. Who could you ask now to "be there for you" during the school year?

And is there someone for whom you could "be there" in the same way?

This summer journal has given you opportunities for reflection. How might you continue this process of reflection?



This week take time to nurture your physical self and give space for spiritual awareness. Take warm baths, light candles, try a walking meditation, in which you walk for perhaps half an hour breathing in openness to insight.

Week of August 25th

Creating Unity and a Sense of Belonging in Your Classroom

You know the drill. Find ten or more minutes of quiet time, with or without music. Hopefully, this practice has become a daily one. This simple device for centering and connecting with your inner wisdom is one that will continue to serve you well, both in times of trouble and times of joy. ♥

More than ever, the new school year will be a time for helping students and staff to feel a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is a rich foundation for trust, compassion, understanding, and tolerance. These are some of the same attributes that help us get along throughout life.

Because the anniversary of 9/11 is happening so quickly after the beginning of the school year, think about ways to help children develop a sense of community, and a sense of identity as a class, even before they've had enough time to get to know each other well.

Consider the following:

What about ice-breakers or mixers -- what are some activities that help people in your profession, or students in your classroom, get to know each other quickly?

What are some of the elements you can use to help with this?

Music _____

Songs _____

Art _____

Drama _____

Group learning _____

Stories _____

Other ideas _____



Here are a few ideas to help youth develop a sense of identity as a class. Adapt them, change them, and make them your own.

In one school, the hallway walls were painted each summer. In the fall, a bucket of latex paint provided the means to “paint” each child’s hand, and they placed it carefully on the wall just outside the door of their classrooms. As new students enrolled all year long, they, too, put their handprint on the wall along with the others. Immediately they felt a sense of belonging. “This is my room. My hand print is right there.” OK, so perhaps the union won’t let the custodians do that extra work each summer. But is there some means of adapting that concept? In some schools, students’ photos line the stairways.

In one group, we invited each child to bring a white T-shirt from home. We supplied the fabric paint. Each child wrote one word on their peer’s T-shirt that best described something they respected or liked about that child. For this one, kids need to have gotten to know each other.

One classroom used clay to make a figure of some sort, which the students then painted and had fired. Then they glued a clasp-type pin onto the back of the figure, so each child had a pin that represented something about their school class.

Another teacher made all of her students beaded necklaces. Bracelets would also work. Just something that all students can wear and feel that sense of belonging.

There is something to be said both for students doing the work to create their own identity pieces, and for the wonderful experience of each child receiving a gift from a teacher. It is the shared experience that helps.

What are four ideas you have about creating that sense of place and belonging?



This week, go for a walk and just look at what children are wearing just for fun. What do they add to the basics of clothing to make statements about who they are?

Walk with a friend from work. Look for ideas.

Set time on your calendar to actually do something about creating unity:

What will you do?

What materials will you need?

When will you do it?!

Be sure to make one for yourself! And maybe for a friend.

Week of September 1st

Surround Yourself With Good Things and Goodies

Congratulations. If you're reading this page, you've done some good work over the summer. It will all pay off.

As you look toward the opening of the school year, remember the good news about 9/11 happening so soon after the beginning. You'll get it over with and get on track very soon. But also remember that there are important things to always remember about that date – symbolic things that remind us of our culture, our personal connections, our frailties, as well as our capabilities and our willingness to “be there” for each other. How can we use other holidays to reinforce those important personal and cultural lessons?

Make a commitment to yourself to take just 10 minutes a day to really focus on relaxing. Keep that going through the school year. When will you put that into your day? Morning? Evening?

What are three things you're going to do for yourself during the first two weeks of school?

What can you do on 9/11 to help get through the day? What will you wear or take in your pocket, or who will you call at the end of the day?



Questions for Group Gatherings

June 30th The school year provides a certain regimen and expectations around which you teach and sustain classroom activities. In addition to the relief of having time off for summer, many of you may have also had “space” in your psyche that allowed some of the discomfort of unresolved 9/11 issues to surface. How has that been for you? What has been surprising?

July 7th When you look at the people you chose to put in your inner circles, what do you notice? What surprises you about this activity? How have people changed in terms of where you would have placed them prior to 9/11 and since?

July 14th Just take an informal approach to sharing whatever you’d like about what surfaced for you during this activity. How is your week going now? What can you find as a means of letting go? Is there a ritual or some kind of action you can take with the group you’re meeting with to more formally let go of a piece of this?

July 21st Share your timelines with each other. What do you have in common? What are some of the unique experiences each of you has had? How do you see those experiences as having given you some strengths and coping mechanisms? How have they built character or helped define who you are in a positive way?

July 28th Don’t just sit around and talk. Go play! Have fun. Do it up and have a ball together. Enlarge the circle, play musical instruments and make it a party. Celebrate. Fly kites. Go to the museum. Buy balloons. Movies. Go bungee jumping. (OK, maybe don’t!) Rent rollerblades. Go to the country (if you’re not already there)... or go to the city for a play. Play golf, softball or volleyball together. Go to an amusement park. Surprise yourself!

August 4th What is it that sustains you? Think about what your spiritual practice is, or what you do that puts you in touch with your source of strength. Take a walk with your friend(s) and spend some time pondering how your spirit has grown and changed over your lifetimes. It will continue to grow and change.

August 11th This week, your conversation might be around what moved you to become a teacher or take a position in buildings that are filled with kids. Whatever your position, what were your aspirations? Expectations? How does this connect in some way to that which sustains you?

August 18th This is an especially good week to gather with colleagues and friends to look at what this segment brought up for each of you. Share your ideas about what you each plan to do for yourselves, your family members and each other. Most important, make a date to get together again immediately after getting through the anniversary. You might think about each giving the other something they can have in their pockets, on their desks or with them as they're getting through that day.

August 25th Besides sharing your ideas, consider going with a friend from work to get materials for your project. Share ideas about activities. Help each other make items.

September 1st This week, know that thousands of people from all around our country are thinking of you -- holding you in a very special place in our hearts. Not a single person working in a school will go through the anniversary of September 11th without somehow identifying with you, even as they know they will never really understand what you've been through... what you survived... the courageous and heroic efforts so many of you made. Let their supportive thoughts about you lift your spirits and help you through this time.



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