

Connecting With Ourselves and Others to Find Hope and Healing

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Building healthy relationships with trusted friends, adults, and mentors who support you for who you are is a key part of finding the help, hope, and healing you need to thrive. As a young person of color, my chosen family and growing social network created space for new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that were missing in important ways within my own family and within the shifting contexts of my childhood.

These missing elements were rooted in the intergenerational transmission of adversity, trauma, and cultural ways of being in my family, as well as the challenges of present-day societal biases that impacted my siblings and me deeply. Over time, I learned that we can all make intentional efforts to understand the challenges we face from structural discrimination, family matters, and our mental health.

Today, I firmly believe that we can each empower ourselves to become caretakers of our mental health and emotional well-being. Wherever you may be today – starting your journey, finding support with trusted family and friends, or meeting regularly with a mental health professional – you can find hope and healing through connecting with others and yourself each day.

Here are three ways that you can use to cultivate hope each day.

1. Challenge Negative Self-Talk.

Negative self-talk is common and can impact your mental health and well-being. This is particularly true when you experience discrimination, cultural oppression, and misunderstandings in our social networks. For many of us, negative self-talk can stem from experiences of marginalization in our communities, discrimination, and systemic barriers that have been ingrained in societal structures for generations. You may have internalized harmful narratives about your identity, abilities, and worth, which can lead to an internal cycle of self-criticism and low self-esteem – and this can impact your mental health and well-being.

What can you do?

- **Affirm who you are.** Use positive thoughts to support yourself every day. Daily affirmations of your value and reflective exercises can help you counteract negativity and promote your sense of self-worth and resilience.
- **Seek culturally relevant therapy and counseling services** that incorporate approaches to help you address the root causes of negative self-talk and develop coping strategies.
- **Find support with your community and peers** that enhances self-acceptance and empowerment. Support groups, mentorship programs, your school or workplace, and local organizations can offer valuable resources.

As we reframe our understanding of society and ourselves, we can each cultivate a more positive and empowering sense of self and navigate the challenges of life with resilience and confidence.



2. Understand and Confront Stereotypes.

Stereotypes can influence our self-perception and interactions. When we recognize and reject stereotypes, we can be more mindful of how we perceive ourselves, how we experience others, and how we cultivate a more hopeful and empowering outlook.

What can you do?

- **Understand stereotypes.** These false narratives about young people of color can affect your mental health and well-being and shape how you and your peers are perceived and treated.
- **Confront stereotypes.** As we each learn how stereotypes are used in the media and popularized in culture, we can reclaim our power and identity as we:
 - **Identify and deconstruct** biased representations and stereotypes in mainstream media
 - **Challenge** harmful narratives in daily life about our identity, culture, and experiences
 - **Develop** strategies for advocating for more accurate and inclusive representations
- **Tell your story!** The more you raise your voice, the more you can contribute to changing narratives, challenging stereotypes, and telling your story to promote empathy, understanding, and healing.

This process requires courage and a commitment to individual and collective action. Together with your peers and community, you can learn to resist internalized oppression and promote a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals are valued and respected for who they are.



3. Be Your Authentic Self.

Many of us feel tension between our personal goals and society's expectations, making us feel uncertain of our self-worth. By examining this tension and prioritizing our authentic selves, values, and goals, we can take action and cultivate hope for the future.

What can you do?

- **Prioritize Your True Self – and Your Mental Health.** As you prioritize your mental health alongside your goals, desires, and culture, you can make choices that align with your authentic self and cultivate self-awareness, resilience, and empowered action.
- **Clarify Your Values.** Articulating your core values and aspirations is a powerful way to compare your personal goals with societal expectations. You can develop a clear sense of purpose and direction by reflecting on what truly matters to you and what you hope to achieve in life.
 - Exercises like journaling, vision boarding, and guided reflection can help you explore your interests and values, and make informed values-based decision.
 - Freedom Dreaming can help clarify your values as you imagine a future where discrimination and oppression don't constrain your choices.
- **Set Healthy Boundaries.** Setting clear boundaries with family, friends, and society can protect your mental health, support your emotional well-being, and help ensure your needs and preferences are respected. Communicating your boundaries consistently also gives you time and space for self-expression, self-care, and personal growth without feeling guilty or ashamed. Taken together, healthy boundaries allow hope levels to rise in your life.

The Takeaway

Building a healthy, lasting, and rewarding relationship with yourself and others takes time and effort. But as you replace negative self-talk with positive affirmations, understand and deconstruct harmful stereotypes, and grow stronger in your true self and identity, you can build the hope, resilience, and practical tools you need to thrive at school, work, and in life.

About My Digital Sanctuary

My Digital Sanctuary brings information and creativity together to support soul care, a holistic approach to emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being from the Steve Fund. Created by mental health experts who specialize in serving young people of color and their families, My Digital Sanctuary shares the help, hope, and healing we need to not just survive but to thrive.



Build Your Hope Network

This activity will help you identify and cultivate a support network to foster hope, healing, and resilience in six steps. Recognizing individuals who know and understand you can create a network of trusted allies who uplift and empower you during challenging times. Why? Because they value your strengths, contribute to a hopeful, healthy mindset, and are available to support you. So grab a notebook or open a document, and let's get started!

1 Reflect on Your Support System

Take a moment to think about the people in your life who have been there for you during difficult times. Consider family members, friends, mentors, teachers, or anyone else who has provided support and encouragement.

2 Identify Key Individuals

Make a list of individuals in the categories listed here. Be specific about why each person fits into that category and how they've supported you.

- People who know and understand me
- People who value my strengths
- People who contribute to my hopeful mindset
- People I can confide in
- People available to support me

3 Evaluate Your Network

Take a step back and look at your list. What emotions or thoughts do the people you've listed bring forward within you? Are there any gaps or areas where you'd like additional support? Are there relationships that may need strengthening?

4 Reach Out and Connect

Take proactive steps to connect regularly with the individuals in your network. Call, text, email, or meet up to express your appreciation for their support and reaffirm your connection. Share the importance of their role in your life and how they contribute to your sense of hope.

6 Reflect and Adjust

Reflect on the effectiveness of your hope network periodically and make adjustments as needed. Are there certain relationships that are fulfilling your need for support? Are there new people you'd like to reach out to who align with your values and aspirations? Are there individuals whom you've outgrown?

5 Cultivate Relationships

Invest time and energy to nurture your relationships with the members of your hope network. Check in regularly, offer support when needed, and reciprocate acts of kindness. Building a solid support system is an ongoing process that requires mutual care and respect.

By intentionally building and nurturing your hope network, you can create a foundation of support that sustains you through life's challenges and empowers you to embrace your mental health and your future with hope, optimism, and resilience.



Building Healthy Relationships: A Colorful Meditation

Building healthy, rewarding relationships – with ourselves and others – requires time and effort. While you may already have these skills, other people may be navigating challenges shaped by their personalities, life experiences, or struggles with mental health.

Focusing on your relationship with yourself is a powerful way to strengthen your ability to build relationships with others. When you affirm who you are, and offer yourself grace, empathy, and nurturing, you become more able to extend these qualities to others. As you prioritize emotional well-being and mental health, you become better able to care for people you value, and cultivate hope, resilience, and a commitment to thriving in all areas of life – at school, work, and beyond.

As you color this sheet, take a moment to reflect on one of these themes:

- 1. Affirm yourself.** How can I replace negative social messages and self-talk with positive affirmations? What affirmations resonate with me today? Could it be: "I am worthy of love, kindness, and respect," "I let go of what I can't control and focus on what I can," "I am in charge of how I feel," or "Today, I choose hope"?
- 2. Confront stereotypes.** How do I work through harmful stereotypes that impact young people of color? How can I redefine how I see myself, push back against limiting beliefs, and cultivate a more hopeful, healthy, and empowering outlook?
- 3. Be your true self.** What brings me joy? What are the values I hold close? How can I set healthy boundaries that support my well-being and allow me to show up as my most authentic self?

