

Module Rationale:

Introduction to the Group

Module 1 is intended to establish a safe environment and orient youth to the purpose of the group. Adolescents coming from trauma-impacted backgrounds are often highly distrustful and hypersensitive to their environment; as such, trust and personal safety are major issues requiring careful consideration when planning the course. One way that safety cues are transmitted is through the physical characteristics of the meeting place. Although this is likely obvious to most facilitators, choose a well-lit room that is large enough to comfortably seat all the participants. Placing chairs in a circle ensures that everyone can easily see and be seen by everyone else. See more information on room setup in the Introduction to this Introductory Guide.

Creating a climate of warmth and acceptance is essential for this type of personal work to be optimally effective. We have found that adolescents respond positively to group leaders shaking each participant's hand and referring to them by name as they enter the room. Greeting youth this way conveys the message that they are expected, welcomed, and respected. It is surprising how far even small gestures of recognition and warmth will go in setting the tone of the group.

Risk-Taking

Although adolescence is a developmentally normative time for risk-taking, many of the adolescents who are enrolled in Power Source groups have been on a trajectory of increasingly oppositional and sometimes dangerous behavior from an early age (see Moffitt, 2018, and Fontaine, Carbonneau, Vitaro, Barker, & Tremblay, 2009 for reviews). Regardless of their age of onset, these negative acts often provide a sense of temporary control over an otherwise chaotic environment, satisfy an emotional or physiological need, or typically provide some other psychological "pay-off." For example, stealing momentarily satisfies a longing or provides a thrill; damaging property provides the release of pent-up aggression; belonging to a gang offers the benefit of identity, "safety," and affiliation; drugs and alcohol allow temporary escape from a negative mood. Risk-taking can be a buffer against deep and painful

feelings caused by trauma and gives many individuals, who are often accustomed to cutting-off from their feelings after years of abuse or neglect, a chance to feel alive. For many youth, becoming known as a high-risk taker can elicit esteem and respect from peers.

Part of reducing negative high-risk behaviors involves convincing adolescents of the real benefits of satisfying their needs and wants in alternative and prosocial ways; those that promote new experiences of aliveness and satisfaction while offering positive paths into adulthood (revisited in Module 15, but aptly termed, “a Life in the Middle”). Clearly this can be a high hurdle for youth with involvement in the criminal justice system or who are at-risk for involvement, particularly youth of color and/or youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds who almost always face greater structural and social barriers, discrimination, and oppression while on the path to adulthood. In the context of this reality, Power Source seeks to introduce young people to their intrinsic strength, wisdom, and dignity. It explicitly teaches and repeatedly reinforces the social and emotional skills that are needed to empower them to make positive choices. As youth directly experience the reinforcing benefits and aliveness that come from these newfound choices, a prosocial identity is able to form. Facilitators teach skills and create a context in which participants identify practical ways to feel good about themselves and their lives without high-risk behavior, acknowledging that each person will have a different experience. Youth discover that the cycle of high-risk behavior can be transformed into a pattern of behavior that builds self-esteem, a sense of integrity, and feelings of responsibility toward oneself and the community, whatever community that may be.

Trauma and the Survival Brain

Discussions about the impact of trauma exposure on high-risk, harmful, and offending behavior in youth are interwoven throughout multiple modules in Power Source. However, the word “trauma” is not explicitly introduced until Module 7, as it can be premature or overwhelming to invite a lot of discussion about trauma at the beginning of a group. Instead, the curriculum slowly invites participants to begin thinking about the impact of various hardships on their lives from this first module, beginning with the concept of **Survival Brain** (discussed in more detail below). This introduction both provides group participants with a language for their experiences (i.e., that there is a part of their brain that is trying to keep them safe in the face of danger, even if it may involve high-risk behavior), and to let them know they aren’t alone in going through these experiences.

We assume most Power Source facilitators have had at least an introduction to trauma and the ways it affects youth. However, in addition to the discussion on trauma in the Introductory Guide, for the purposes of Power Source, two main points are important to remember and hold in mind as backdrops to this module and the ones that follow:

1) Ongoing abuse, neglect, and exposure to trauma can change the way the brain develops and functions, which has an influence on behavior and personality patterns.

Chronic trauma exposure can physically change brain structure (mainly the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus) and can lead to chemical alterations in the way the brain and body deal with stress. Trauma can prime the brain to react automatically with what we call the *Survival Brain*, a part of the brain that evolved to keep us safe and alive (sometimes also called the “lizard” or “reptilian” brain). Survival Brain triggers *trauma reactions*, like fight, flight, or freeze, to turn on when we’re threatened or triggered. Everyone has a Survival Brain, and this response system has evolved over thousands of years to keep us safe. But problems arise when we operate solely under the influence of the Survival Brain, and the only options we see are to fight, flee, or freeze. This can happen in cases of chronic or prolonged trauma exposure, like many of the youth with whom we work, or in times when danger is current and widespread. If you are using Power Source in a correctional setting or some other persistently unsafe environment, the latter may be something you are contending with right now. As noted before, individuals who experience societal marginalization can also face issues of safety on a daily basis, which layer on top of personal traumas that may be in their history.

The Survival Brain is intelligent, and in cases of chronic or developmental trauma exposure, it becomes increasingly sensitive over time so that we don’t miss any signs of danger. What might this look like in real life? Some possibilities include seeing relatively benign situations as threatening, or reacting automatically with a trauma reaction when it’s not warranted (like punching someone for cutting in front of us in line). Sometimes, when the Survival Brain is chronically activated, we can live the majority of our day (or life) in “fight-mode” (or flight-mode, or freeze-mode, or all of them at different times), which can be exhausting to our bodies and minds. We never really experience what it’s like to breathe calmly or to settle down. Over the course of weeks, months, or years, our body tries to cope with this state of chronic hyperarousal, affecting change in our behavior and personality. For trauma-impacted youth, these **survival coping strategies** often manifest as high-risk behavior (e.g., fighting to release adrenaline, running away to escape the situation, or using substances to numb the emotional pain). Youth might see these as their only options,

having experienced limited choice or agency over their lives. The more a youth defaults to these behaviors to manage trauma, the more ingrained they become, and the more these reactive behaviors influence a youth's developmental trajectory.

Working with chronically traumatized youth, you might see them having difficulty with relationships and trust, hypersensitive to threat and danger, experiencing difficulty identifying and regulating their emotions, struggling with attention (e.g., basic orienting, sustaining, or shifting attention), demonstrating a need for structure/control over their environment, struggling with negative self-image, and engaging in increased risk-taking. All of these behaviors likely served a purpose for the youth, or in some way developed as ways to keep them safe in the face of some perceived danger. It is often important to acknowledge and reiterate that these behaviors were once **adaptive** to their situation, especially if youth experience shame around these behaviors (this can often be the case in cases of sexual abuse where youth feel shame around "freezing"). Which leads us to the next main idea:

2) Fortunately, the brain, especially during childhood and adolescence, is able to change and heal. This is called neural plasticity. In Power Source, we help youth learn to **change** and gain control over these automatic reactions through skills like "Stop, Breathe, and Choose" and Meditation (coming in the next module). We also provide youth with a framework to better understand themselves and their behavior, including how they think about themselves and their lives, which promotes **self-forgiveness, empathy, and healing**. As facilitators, we are validating and empathic when talking about these issues, which lets the youth know that **we see their Core Self beyond their trauma stories**. Many people will have given youth the message, directly or indirectly, that they're just "bad kids with bad behavior," failing to understand the reality: these high-risk behaviors usually developed as ways to cope with traumatic experiences or chronically unsafe environments. Seeing the behavior in context, as a result of many interacting factors, can go a long way to building empathy, a key trait of effective facilitators. For the youth with whom we work, there is almost nothing more healing than **being seen and being accepted**.

Exercises and Learning Objectives:

Exercise	Learning Objectives
1. Introduction to Power Source	Introduce participants to one another and to the facilitators, give a short introduction to the purpose and objectives of the group, and discuss basic rules and confidentiality.
2. Introduction to Risk Behavior: High-Risk Hot Potato Game	Discuss the topic of high-risk behavior and provide participants with a clear definition.
3. Cycle of Risk	Give participants a framework in which to view their patterns of risky behavior; use the Cycle of Risk to illustrate how events before, during, and after the risky behavior are related.
4. The Survival Brain	Discuss the ‘Survival Brain,’ fight/flight/freeze, and connections to high-risk behavior.
5. Risk Radar	Introduce Risk Radar. Examine and discuss the consequences of high-risk behavior, stressing how negative risk-taking leads to loss of control, power, freedom, and choices.
6. Closing	Briefly summarize the module and provide homework, as appropriate.

Materials Needed:

- *Power Source* book to give each participant
- Name Tags for each participant to wear
- Whiteboard, Chalkboard, or large poster paper
- Two Hacky Sacks, small bean bags, or other small, light, soft objects that can be used for the hot potato game
- Power Source Module 1 Handouts (listed below) – provide copies in a folder for each participant. It is suggested that you keep a folder for each participant that they have throughout the PS Program.
- Writing utensils for participants
- Markers (regular and white-board)
- Participant incentives (optional)
- Equipment to show media clips (optional)

Videos:

- Power Source video presentation: DVD #1, Risk-Taking: Life on the Edge, Segments 1-5:
 - “High-Risk Behaviors”
 - “Why Do Kids Take Risks?”
 - “What Are Some Situations That Can Trigger High-Risk Behaviors?”
 - “What Thoughts and Feelings Trigger High-Risk Behaviors?”
 - “What Are Some of the Consequences of High-Risk Behaviors?”

Corresponding Power Source Chapter:

- Chapter 1

Supplemental Workbook Activities:

- Risk-Taking:
 - “Risk-Taking Check-In”
 - “Risk-Taking: Life on the Edge”
 - “Are You on the Cycle of Risk?”
 - “It’s Never a Bad Choice to Back Out”
 - “What Triggers Me to Take Risks”
- Survival Brain:
 - “Survival Brain”
 - “The Three F’s”

Hand Outs/Worksheets:

- M1H1: Cycle of Risk
- M1H2: What Triggers Me to Take Risks

Exercise #1

Introduction to the PS Group

(10 minutes)

Objective:

Introduce participants to one another and to the co-leaders, as well as give a short introduction to the purpose and objectives of the group. Basic rules and confidentiality are also discussed.

Outline:

Facilitator Note: As participants enter the room, we suggest standing at the door and shaking each participant's hands as they come in. This can be accompanied by phrases such as, "Glad to have you here." Or, "Welcome to the Power Source group." This emphasizes that you see each member as a person, and value their attendance, participation, and contributions to group. As participants sit down, invite them to let their eyes wander a bit around the room and get oriented to the space.

Hello, and thank you for coming to the PS group. We are _____ and _____, but we'll get into introductions later. We're really excited about being here. Before we get started, let me take a moment to tell you a little about what this group is all about.

*Basically, it's a chance for you to learn some new skills and information to help you **keep your power and freedom** so you stop turning them over to others; skills that will **keep you from coming back to places like this** (adjust this to the needs of your population— e.g., 'having to be on probation').*

In the PS group, we will:

- *Help you figure out **who you really are** and how to not let your past define you.*
- *Talk about some of the **challenges all people face in life** and ways to deal with them without getting dragged into cycles of violence or drugs and alcohol.*
- *Take a close look at your relationships and **the people you want in your life**.*
- *Learn about the connection between **your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions so that you control them and not the other way around**.*
- *Talk about the things you can do **right now** to create the **kind of future** you want.*

*It's a chance to step back and **figure out who you are and where you're going.***

*We'll meet for ___ weeks, ____ time(s) a week. Groups will be about an hour long.
For each group module you attend you will receive _____.*

Facilitator Note: Make this part your own! Here you can describe in more detail the structure and time frame of the groups that you'll provide. No one agency or center structures groups in the same way, so how you present this information is determined by you and your agency. Giving youth an idea of how often and for how long they'll be meeting orients them to the group process. Feel free to add other things you think would help participants settle in (e.g., where groups will meet, staff that will be present, etc.). Also mention any incentives (e.g., points, snacks, privileges) that will be provided, and how often. Be creative! If you already use a positive behavior system, group participation, homework assignments, or readings can be incorporated.

*We won't spend a lot of time on rules, because you all probably know them by now. So, let's just keep it to **one person talking at a time** ("one mic" as in microphone) and **be respectful**. That should do it, but also understand that these rules apply to this space as a whole. When you come into this space, it is important that you are respectful of everyone and everything that's here.*

*Also, it's important for you to know that **what people say in here, stays in here**, unless we feel like someone might hurt you, you might hurt someone else, or you might hurt yourself. We call this **confidentiality**; you may have heard of it before. Can everyone agree to that? Does anyone have any questions so far?*

*As we go through the groups, we'll ask you to read from this book called **Power Source: Taking Charge of Your Life**. It's filled with stories written by young people just like you – people who have gone through tough things, but found ways to move on and live healthy, productive lives.*

We'll also ask you to try out new skills to help you keep your power and take control over your life. How much you get out of the group depends on how much you "show up." And we're not talking about just being in the room, but really putting yourself out there to try something new. It's a risk, we know, but that's what this group is all about.

This leads us to the next thing we'd like to ask you, and that is to make a real commitment to coming to group every time we meet. For a lot of people, going through a Power Source group has helped them change their lives in a really positive way. But it only works if you come. So, we ask you to commit to coming for all fifteen modules (or

three if you are doing the shortened version). *Can everyone agree to that? Great. And if there's ever a time when you feel like dropping out, we ask you to come to one more module. Ok?*

Before we really get started, let's take a few minutes to go around the room and say our names and, if you can, name a book or movie that you've read in the past that really spoke to you and then say something about it.

- Facilitators introduce themselves. Say the name of a book or movie that was important in your life and why/what it meant to you/etc. Choose something from a neutral, non-violent genre.

Facilitator Note: After participants introduces themselves, look at them, and thank them for participating. Examples:

- *Glad you're with us*
- *Thanks for being here*
- *We're really happy you could be in the group*
- *Thanks for coming*
- *Great having you here*

- ✋ It's also important that we honor, respect, and promote safety for all youth in our groups. If appropriate for your population or setting, you can ask youth to share what they'd like to be called (being mindful of any inappropriate language), their pronouns (e.g., he/she/they/ze/xe), or anything else you deem important based on the work of your agency or center. Note that whatever you ask youth to say, facilitators should always say first.

If you are able to provide Power Source books to all youth in your groups, do that now. Collect them at the end of the group if necessary. If youth are able to hold on to them in between groups, encourage youth to bring the book back to each group. You can also use this time to hand out their folders (youth can decorate these folders if you'd like).

At the end of each group we'll give you chapters to read. Please bring the PS books back for each group. Even if you've never read a book, we hope you give this book a try. Lots of youth write to the authors and say this is the only book they've read in their lives that had anything to do with them. Let's take a few minutes and look through the books.

 **Hand Out Books** (2 minutes)

Exercise #2

Introduction to Risk Behavior: High-Risk Hot Potato Game

(10 minutes)

Objective:

Introduce the topic of high-risk behavior and provide participants with a clear definition. Risk-taking is a central Power Source theme that recurs throughout the modules and provides a framework through which youth can analyze situations and make more prosocial and adaptive choices.

Outline:

Facilitator Note: This is the first PS exercise so it's really important to set a positive, enthusiastic, success-oriented tone. Welcome participants' responses with comments such as "Good answer," "Yes, exactly" and "Right, that's a great example of a high-risk behavior."

For every group, we'll start with a **Burning Question**, or questions that will get us thinking about the topics of the group. For today, our **Burning Question is:**

How has my high-risk behavior impacted my life?

*So, coming to this group is a risk, right? But, it's a positive risk. If you participate and try some new ways to deal with life, some really good things might come out of it. But, right now we're going to talk about **negative risk behaviors**.*

Flip to page 17 in your PS books and follow along as I read Doug's story:

"I been into so-called "high-risk" behavior since I can remember. When I was real little I started sneakin' money outta my mom's purse for candy and shit like that. After a while I would steal from stores if I didn't have the cash for what I wanted. By the time I was 13, I was buck wild and I'd be holdin' people up for their cash or jewelry. Now I'm serving a sentence for being an accomplice in armed robbery. Sometimes at night when I'm sittin' in my cell, I think, "How did I get here?" But when I look back to all the shit I done and startin' so young and all, I get my answer"—Doug, 18 years old

Just like Doug, everyone in the room has a history of risky behavior. Maybe you've been involved with risk behavior so long that it seems natural. Or maybe you find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time a lot.

*Just so we're all on the same page, I'm going to write the **definition of high-risk behavior** on the board.*

- Write on flip chart or dry erase board and read aloud:
Any negative behavior that can cause harm to you or others.
Any negative act that violates the rights of others even if you can't see the victim.

Okay. Now that we have the definition of high-risk behavior, we're ready to play what we call the High-Risk Hot Potato game.

Facilitator Note: As you move through Power Source, you'll notice options for games and role-plays. These offer effective options to lighten the tone of the group, encourage engagement, laughter, and prosocial behaviors, and mix up activities. However, it's up to you as facilitators to determine if these are appropriate for your group, based on the dynamics and how comfortable you feel with facilitating them. Refer to the Introduction sections on role-plays and games for more information. If you choose **not** to play the game, other options here include passing an object to signify who's speaking, calling out responses, or raising hands. Whatever you choose to do, be clear on the instructions and parameters for youth engagement.

- Break group up into two teams and line participants up into two rows with one team facing the other team. Decide which team will start the game. Hand the person at the beginning of the line for the team chosen to begin a hacky sack or small bean bag. Give the groups as much space away from one another as possible.

Starting with the first person in line, say a high-risk behavior – something that could cause harm to someone else or yourself or violates their rights. After you've named one, pass the bean bag to the person on the other team directly across from you. That person does the same thing and then throws it to the person next in line on the other team. You will have 3 seconds to say a high-risk behavior once you receive the bean bag. However, we should be able to understand what you are saying so you must say it clearly so everyone in the room knows the high-risk behavior you named. If you don't say something within three minutes, you have to pass the bean bag. Stop when you hear the bell. Go as fast as you can. The group that names the most high-risk behaviors wins.

We'll keep track of how many answers you give and we'll add the answers up for each group at the end of the game. Participants of the winning team get _____. Does everyone understand?

- Ring bell to begin. Allow 2 minutes for the game. Keep track of the answers given. After 2 minutes, ring the bell again and tally the number of responses for each team. Have participants return to their seats. Hand out prizes.

Okay, great work. So, let's go over some of the high-risk behaviors you came up with.

- Let participants brainstorm some of the answers as a group as a way to close the exercise. Write answers on the board. If necessary, prompt for:
 - Getting into fights
 - Robbing people or stealing
 - Using drugs or alcohol
 - Skipping school
 - Having unsafe sex
 - Carrying a weapon
 - Going somewhere (party/a certain block) that could be trouble
 - Driving drunk or with someone who's been drinking
 - Vandalism
 - Being in a gang
 - Dealing drugs

Great answers.

Facilitator Note: Throughout the PS manual, you'll see many opportunities for brainstorming. Typically, these exercises will include a list of prompts that can be used by the facilitator if the group provides limited responses or if they have missed key elements. We encourage you to have these prompts with you when you facilitate these brainstorming exercises. One way to present the responses in a natural way is by "checking in" with participants. For example, "What about being in a gang? Do people think that's a negative risk? Okay, why do you say that?"

Okay, so people take risks for a lot of different reasons. Why do you think most individuals get involved in risk behavior?

→ **Brainstorm (allow 1-2 minutes). If necessary, prompt for:**

- Escape a negative feeling (boredom, depression, anxiety)
- Obtain material possessions (get what you want)
- Achieve higher status with peers (fit in)
- Feel entitled to things they don't have (because of discrimination, poverty)
- Act impulsively (Poorly controlled emotional reactivity, e.g., reactive anger, low frustration tolerance)

Excellent answers. Any questions?

Facilitator Note: If you have the available resources and time, showing a segment from the Power Source DVD series can be useful here. For this exercise, show Segments 1 and 2 from DVD 1: "Risk-Taking: Life on the Edge" and "Why Do Kids Take Risks?"

Say, "Now let's take a look at a short video clip and see what other people have to say about why people take risks. All of the youth in the videos are real—everything they talk about, like being locked-up, having kids, or abusing drugs, they have done."

After the video, "So you can see from the list that they mentioned a lot of the same reasons people take risks that we came up with."

Exercise #3

Introduce Cycle of Risk

(15 minutes)

Objective:

Introduce and illustrate the Cycle of Risk. Keep the Cycle of Risk illustration that's generated here for the next session.

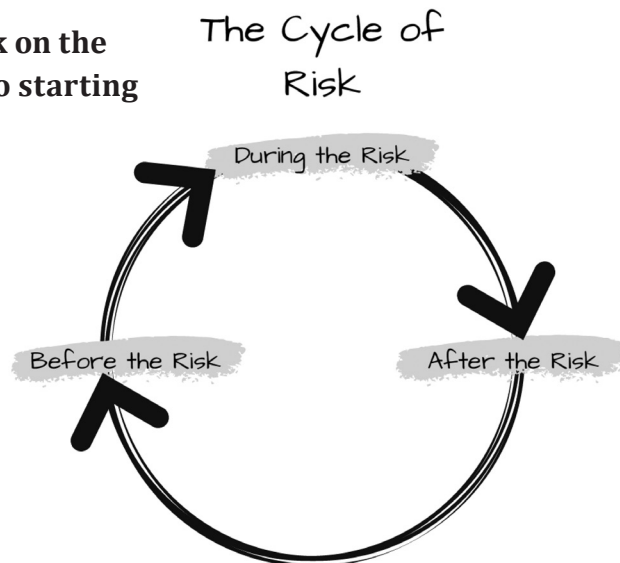
Facilitator Note: You may find it helpful to have two Cycles of Risk graphics present during this exercise:

1. A **“Full Cycle of Risk”** for reference throughout the module (and curriculum) that includes all of the prompts (e.g., thoughts/feelings before, during, and after the risk). This can be used as a reminder of the Cycle of Risk and all that goes within it. You'll find an example of this at the end of the module. (See M1H1 for an example.)
2. A **“Simple Cycle of Risk,”** similar to the one below, that you'll draw on the board for the purposes of this exercise. It will not include all of the prompts, as it's much simpler to draw and recreate. (See M1H2.)

In this module, the youth will get a handout that lists all of the prompts. We've provided both images at the end of this module so that you can use what you wish (some people prefer to make their own laminated posters from these images).

Outline:

- Draw a Simple Cycle of Risk on the board or newsprint prior to starting the group:



Okay, so now we're all on the same page about what types of behaviors we mean when we say high-risk. And we've talked about why individuals take risks. So, let's take a minute and look at the **Cycle of Risk**. We want to spend some time here because understanding this cycle is the first step to **keeping our power** and staying out of places like this. The better we understand our own risk-taking, our triggers, feelings, and thoughts, **the more power and control we have over our own lives**.



Hand out Cycle of Risk to each participant (M1H1). Note that this handout includes all of the prompts (e.g., thoughts/feelings).

Let's take a look at the Cycle of Risk we have right here. You may have noticed from your own life that risk behavior follows a pattern. First, something happens to trigger the risk behavior, or something happens that sets you off or triggers a strong emotion. On this Cycle of Risk that's the part that says **Before the Risk**. **We'll talk more about what triggers your risk behavior in a little while.**

Look at **During the Risk**. Once you take the risk, your body, thoughts and feelings react to that. What are some of the **feelings, thoughts, and body sensations** that happen **during** a risk behavior?

- Allow group to brainstorm for 2 – 3 minutes. Write these under the **During the Risk** section of the Simple Cycle of Risk that you have written on the board.

Good answers. I can tell this is going to be a great group. Okay, then the risk is over. And you start to come down from the high or the rush. If you are caught or if there are **natural consequences** for the action like getting injured or punished, you may have some strong negative thoughts, feelings, or body sensations. What are some of the possible things that might **follow** high-risk behavior?

- Allow group to brainstorm for 2 – 3 minutes. Write these under the **After the Risk** section of the Simple Cycle of Risk.

Great.

Facilitator Note: If you have the available resources and time, showing segment 5 from DVD 1, "What are Some Consequences of High-Risk Behavior?"

Exercise #4

Identifying Triggers

(10 minutes)

Objective:

Help participants identify the emotional, situational, cognitive, and body-based triggers associated with their risk-taking.

Outline:

So, the first step in getting control over our lives and our high-risk behavior is figuring out what our triggers are. Who can tell us what they think a trigger is? (allow time for brainstorming and write answers on board, acknowledging each answer).

*Great. So, triggers are people, situations, thoughts, body sensations, or feelings that might lead us to engage in high-risk behavior. These belong in the **Before the Risk** section on the cycle of risk. **Knowing our triggers helps us to both avoid them, or if we are triggered, to know what to do.***

Facilitator Note: If you have the available resources and time, showing a segment from the Power Source DVD series can be useful here. For this exercise, show Segments 3 and 4 from DVD 1, "What are Some Situations that Can Trigger High-Risk Behavior?" and "What are Some Thoughts that Can Trigger High-Risk Behavior?" Say, "Now let's take a look at a short video clip and see what other people have to say about their triggers."

*Ok, now take a look at the sheet I'm passing around. It's called **What Triggers Me to Take Risks**.*



Hand Out: 'What Triggers Me to Take Risks' Worksheet (M1H3)

*Think of some high-risk behaviors you've been involved in recently. It could be getting into fights, stealing, doing drugs or alcohol, or having sex in a way that's not safe. Circle all the **people, situations, thoughts, body sensations, and feelings** that trigger your risk behavior.*

- Ask for volunteers to report from each of the 5 categories: *People; Situations; Thoughts; Feelings; Body Sensations*
- Write down the triggers in the “**Before the Risk**” section of the Cycle of Risk and ask the group to see how these triggers start the Cycle of Risk for them. Ask them to *notice if a particular feeling like shame or disrespect triggers them most often, or if there is a person that triggers them most often?*

In looking at all of these triggers, how much control do you think you have over them? Why is it important to know what your high-risk triggers are? (Discuss while emphasizing the following points (2-4 minutes):

- *Knowing your triggers is the first step in avoiding them or handling them effectively.*
- *We have control over some of our triggers, some of the time—like who we’re with and where we are. Knowing what we have control over and what we don’t can help us to minimize risk where we can.*
- *We can’t always choose how we respond, but **we can increase the odds** of handling things in a good way.*
- *Knowing your triggers is a cue to **proceed with caution** (like a yellow traffic light).*
- *Knowing your triggers is a reminder to use your risk skills that we’ll talk about in the next few modules.*

Facilitator Note: Reinforce several times that once people become aware of their triggers, they have the **power to choose** how they respond to them. They also have a choice in how much they are exposed to some of their triggers (to varying degrees), which is important for them to recognize (i.e., situation selection and/or peer selection and modification). Keep in mind that for some youth, their reality comes with little control over many things (e.g., the neighborhood where they live, their family situation, etc.), and it becomes important for us as facilitators to honor and respect that, while also prompting them to think about any areas of their life in which they **do** have some control. In finding these areas, we assist them to gain personal agency and efficacy, feelings that, for many youth, only come when they are engaging in high-risk behavior.

Keep the Cycle of Risk that was generated for Module Two.

Exercise #5

The Survival Brain

(10 minutes)

Objective:

Discuss the 'Survival Brain,' fight/flight/freeze, and their connections to high-risk behavior.

Facilitator Note: Throughout this exercise and the rest of group, it's important that the facilitator(s) keep a close eye on the "tone" of the group. Even the mention of Survival Brain or some of the things that might come up can be triggering for some participants, so watch out for early warning signs—"spacing out," hyperactivity or shaking, tears, change in breathing patterns—and move on if topics appear to be overwhelming. Keeping the tempo and energy up can also be helpful here. As always, offer additional support to any group member who may need to step out or take five. The Introductory Guide offers some additional tips if youth appear triggered.

Outline:

Before we go any further, we want to take a step back and talk about what's happening when we get triggered in the first place. Some youth we've worked with have said that sometimes they don't understand why certain things are triggering for them, which can be confusing and disorienting. And when things are confusing, sometimes that can lead us to want to avoid those things, avoid thinking about them, or not pay attention to them altogether. But, we can see what happens when we don't pay attention to our triggers, right?

*So, at the heart of it, it comes down to survival. All people come into the world wired to survive. When your body senses a threat, a trigger, or something potentially dangerous that it knows it won't be able to manage, a part of our brain known as the **Survival Brain** kicks in. Everyone has a Survival Brain, and its only purpose is to keep you safe.*

You might think of the Survival Brain like a Guard Dog, that stands guard at the entrance of your house. Usually, the Guard Dog only defends us when we need it, like in specific situations that are unsafe or dangerous, situations that might be overwhelming or out of the ordinary of our usual experience. For example, someone tries to break into

*your house, or hurt you, and the dog comes out and bites. But, sometimes, if we've been through a lot of dangerous things or always feel like we're in danger, the Guard Dog has learned to stay alert for danger **at all times**. Instead of only biting a burglar, it bites the mailman, or your partner, or your teacher. The Guard Dog gets really sensitive and won't let anyone in.*

Sometimes it might feel like we can't control the Guard Dog, even when we know the situation doesn't call for him to bite anyone. What started as the Guard Dog just trying to help out has turned into something scary and exhausting. It takes a lot of energy for the Guard Dog to stay on high alert all the time. The Guard Dog isn't bad, it just gets us into trouble when the situation changes or when we can't tell him to stop. Can anyone relate to the things I've said?

Here's an example: if you grew up in a violent neighborhood, or a violent home, you were more likely to survive if your brain was really good at sensing risk and danger—if your Survival Brain was on high-alert most of the time. It was safer to assume lots of things posed a threat, that everything was a potential trigger, than to underestimate the risk around you and run the chance of being caught off guard. The threat could be a sound, a smell, or the look on someone's face – things that, in the past, were unsafe. You may feel disrespected or get startled by situations that might not trigger someone else, or you may not even know why something was triggering for you. Getting triggered happens fast, and it had to—to keep you safe. In this way, having lots of difficult experiences can make our Survival Brain really sensitive. Can anyone relate to this? (allow brief time for responses).

*So, what happens once Survival Brain has sensed a threat? It has three basic ways of dealing. Interestingly, you didn't have to learn these things, all humans and animals are hardwired to do them. They're automatic and happen on their own, like breathing, sweating, or sneezing. They're called **'fight, flight, or freeze.'***

➔ Write **Fight, Flight, Freeze** on the board or paper.

*Think of our Guard Dog again—it will **fight** if faced with another threatening creature like another dog. Can anyone think of an example of a fight response from your own lives that you've seen? (e.g., hitting someone, throwing something, yelling, crying, balling fists. Elicit examples from small to extreme).*

*The Guard Dog might also run away, or **flee** when it senses a threat, if confronted with something it knows it can't beat, like a huge lion. As humans, we sometimes physically run, but some of us also run away in our minds. Can you think of an example for this one? (e.g., running away, avoiding, anxiety, fidgeting, restlessness).*

*If the Guard Dog gets really scared or backed into a corner, where fighting or fleeing won't work, it will probably **freeze**, or play dead, and hope that the predator doesn't notice it. Humans do this too. Can anyone think of an example? (e.g., not doing anything, feeling stuck, numb, or trapped, can't move, holding breath, fainting).*

*It's important to mention here the Guard Dog can also **freeze** when situations have just been **too much for too long**— at some point, the Guard Dog just kind of shuts off or shuts down because it's too much to stay hyped up all the time. For example, if we've lived in a dangerous situation for a long time, it can feel normal to us, even though to an outsider it would seem really unsafe. That doesn't mean our Survival Brain has shut off—it just means it's really, really tired, which has its own consequences. Any questions?*

Facilitator Note: To go a little further in depth with regard to the Survival Brain and fight/flight/freeze, check out the Power Source Workbook. Survival Brain also appears in our modules on trauma and families.

*So, as we said earlier, problems happen when the Survival Brain is so hyper-alert, or is on so often, that it takes over our lives, and we're in fight, flight, or freeze all of the time. This doesn't work so well in a lot of situations, like your job, at school, or when you're in a relationship. Survival Brain can sometimes lead us to engage in high-risk behavior if we're not aware of it, and in lots of cases, our high-risk behavior **is directly related** to what our Survival Brain is wanting us to do.*

As we go through the next few modules, we're going to learn ways of helping the Survival Brain to relax, so that other parts of ourselves can step into the driver's seat and retake hold of our power.

Introduction to Risk Radar

(10 minutes)

Objective:

Introduce Risk Radar. Discuss with participants and examine the consequences of high-risk behavior, stressing how negative risk-taking leads to loss of control, power, freedom, and choices.

Outline:

Great job everyone. So, how do we know that our Survival Brain Guard Dog is turning on in the first place, or that something is triggering us?

*All of us, no matter what kind of risk behavior we've been into, have something called **Risk Radar**. Risk Radar is that feeling that tells you if you go ahead with an action, something bad could happen to you or someone else. Kind of like a warning sign.*

Sometimes it feels like butterflies in your stomach, a wise voice in your head telling you to watch out, a general sense of anxiety or nervousness, or even a memory of a parent telling you to do the right thing. Everybody experiences their Risk Radar differently, and sometimes it can be more than one thing.

*So, let's discuss, how do you notice your Risk Radar? Keep in mind that it might be a **body sensation, thought, memory, or emotion/feeling**.*

- Invite participants to share responses. If one facilitator is particularly artistic, drawing one large body on newsprint can be useful—while one writes participant responses, the other can moderate comments. Offer lots of praise for their responses. Allow 3-4 minutes.

Sometimes our Risk Radar is very soft, sort of like a cell phone with the ring volume turned way down. We might have to really listen hard to hear it, but it's still there. Another way you can think of Risk Radar is like when you're driving and the traffic light turns yellow. What's it telling you? Right. Slow down. Look around you. Pause. Risk Radar is a warning that something's coming. It's telling you that the Survival Brain Guard Dog is getting ready to react.

Let's stop for a second and discuss: can anyone think of a time when your Risk Radar went off and you listened to it? What happened? (Pause and allow for some responses). Now, think of a time when your Risk Radar went off and you ignored it. What happened? (Pause and allow for some responses).

In the coming groups, we'll figure out a way to recognize when our Risk Radar is going off and make an action plan to deal with the situation once we know it's risky.

Exercise #7

Closing

(5 minutes)

*Great work today. It was a pleasure to meet with all of you. Before you go, let's revisit our **Burning Question** for today:*

How has my high-risk behavior impacted my life?

(allow for any sharing of answers).

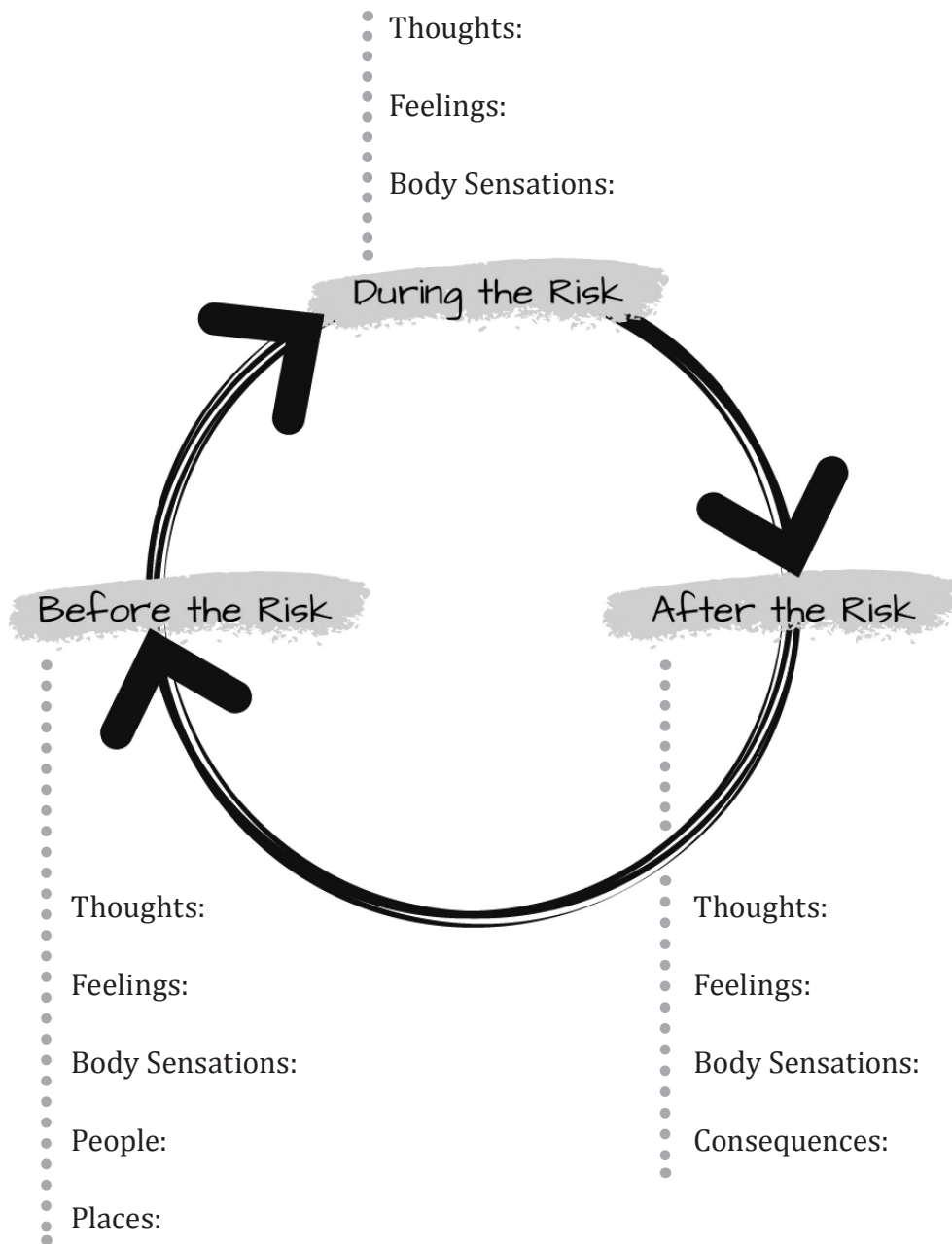
Thanks, everyone! Please read chapters one and fourteen in your Power Source books for the next module. We know that homework is usually something that people don't like to do, but we've found that people really like reading this book, so please give it a try.

Our next module will be _____ at _____. See you then.

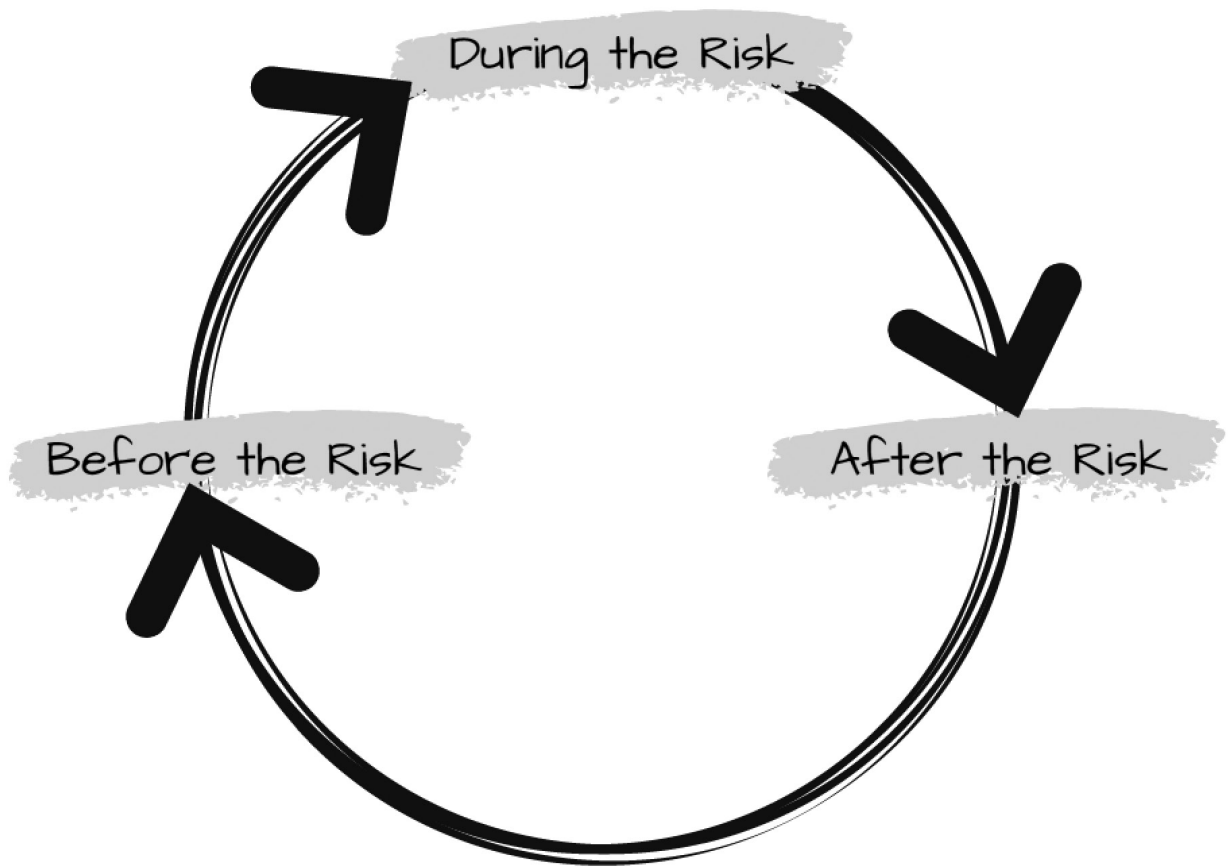
Facilitator Note: In the coming modules, the last exercise will always be a meditation. However, you have a choice as to whether you want to end group there, or to do something else of your choosing. Some people like to take this time to pass out snacks, assign any additional homework, highlight a group MVP, answer questions, or engage in some closing circle activity, like sharing one thing they learned from group that day. Whatever you choose, make sure that it's consistent and useful to your larger group goals.

Full Cycle of Risk

The Cycle of Risk



Simple Cycle of Risk



What Triggers Me to Take Risks

Think of a high-risk behavior that you have been involved in recently. It could be getting into fights, stealing, doing drugs or alcohol, or having sex in a way that's not safe for everyone. **Circle** all the people, places, situations, feelings, and body sensations that trigger that behavior.

People who trigger me:

People in my gang/crew

Older kids

Authority figures

Family members

Police

Boyfriends

People I want to impress

Girlfriends

Teachers

People who make me angry

People in rival gang/crew

People who seem weak or uncool

Others: _____

Situations that trigger me:

Going to school

Being accused of something I didn't do

Being drunk or high

Peer pressure—wanting to fit in

Being with gang members

Someone disrespecting me

When I feel like I have no choice

Someone telling me what to do

Wanting sex

Being provoked/threatened by someone

Being "on the street"

Being around drugs or alcohol

Racial/ethnic discrimination

Other types of discrimination

Others: _____

Thoughts that trigger me:

I deserve to take what I want	They deserves what they get
Nobody talks to me like that	I've got nothing to lose
I need to get revenge	They can't do that to me
I never get a fair shot	It doesn't matter what I do
People will think I'm soft if I don't do this	They've gotta learn
I don't care about anything/anyone	I want to disappear

Getting high is the only way to make me feel better

The system is only fair to rich white people

Others: _____

Feelings that trigger me:

Sad	Bored	Cheated	Angry
Afraid	Hopeless	Ashamed	Embarrassed
Lonely	Disrespected	Jealous	Frustrated
Scared	Vulnerable	Worthless	Abandoned
Invisible	Powerless	Disgusted	Fed up

Others: _____

Body Sensations that trigger me:

Hot/burning	Achy	Uneasy	Stomach clenched
Shaky	Blank/numb	Heavy	Suffocated
Pit in stomach	Alone	Tense	Frozen
Buzzy	Constricted	Nauseous	Dizzy
Knotted up	Disconnected	Blocked	Too much energy
Dry mouth	Adrenaline rush		

Others: _____