



Brokering Hope: A Quick-Start Guide to Building Hope with Youth

A quick-start framework for youth programs, clubs, libraries, faith groups, and others

When young people believe the future ahead of them could be brighter than today, they begin to awaken the conditions to thrive. This session will explore ways to help youth see these futures, understand what they can control to change them, and ultimately practice building hope. Hope is one of the strongest predictors of a young person's success, engagement, and well-being. Hope researcher Shane Lopez put it simply: hopeful kids see themselves as the hero of their own story. This session centers on participants telling their own stories to themselves and their peers, making them visible.

You'll know it worked when...

- Each youth will have told their own hope story out loud, to a peer who listened.
- The group will have turned those stories into a physical path, complete with obstacles, people supporters, and opportunities along the way.
- Each youth will have practiced "nexting," naming one small, doable next step with a plan for a caring adult to check in.

The Hope Cycle

Hope is a skill you can learn and practice. Researchers say it is a mix of three things: goals, pathways, and agency. Naming each of them, talking with youth about what they mean in general and specifically in their own lives, and practicing making a road map to the desired future is what can turn wishing into hope:

Goals: a future that matters to *them*, specific enough to picture.

Pathways: at least one real route to get there (and a backup route, since the first plan rarely survives contact with real life).

Agency: the belief "I can do this," and the self-talk that keeps it going when it gets hard.

What the Research Adds: Specific & Near

Two findings from developmental research on future-oriented thinking shape how this session is built:

Be specific. A concrete, repeatable action, like "study with a friend Tuesday nights," moves someone to act. This is why the Pathway Walk coaches for specific Route markers.

Stay near. Especially with adolescents, goals that are broken down into weeks or months can make the biggest impact and drive action. Revisit goals from this session in 30-60 days, check in on the 'nexting' step as well as longer term ambitions.

Guiding Principles

- **Youth-led & strengths-based:** Start with what youth want.
- **Youth tell their own story:** A peer draws it out through listening and good questions, while adults facilitate the room.
- **Relationships first:** Where you feel comfortable, share your own story of getting through something hard—hope is caught as much as taught.
- **Kids' futures first:** Build rules, goals, and habits around the future young people want.
- **Practice nexting:** Hope is a daily habit. Talking casually about "what's next" matters as much as any big goal-setting exercise.
- **Do no harm:** Normalize help-seeking; let youth choose what they share; offer opt-out options and private follow-up (see "Safety & Support").

- **Keep your promises:** If you ask young people what they're hoping for, value it and follow through—check in on the step they set.

Getting Ready

Materials:

Hope Interview Question Cards (template included)

One long strip of paper or a run of floor tape per pair, laid out as a "Pathway" from a NOW point to a FUTURE SELF point

Small marker cards or sticky icons for **Goal**, **Obstacle**,

Route, and **Helper** Noticing & Nexting Cards

(template included)

Markers, pens

Roles: 1 facilitator, 1 youth co-facilitator, 1 notetaker/connector

Space: Enough open floor or table length for each pair to lay out a path; quiet corner available for breaks
Local directory of supports (school counselor, 211 Wyoming, clinic, crisis lines) printed and posted

Run the Session

1. Welcome & frame it. Create a welcoming, respectful space and share why you're gathering: "Today we're each telling our own hope story to a partner and then walking it out."

2. Warmup with "nexting." Lopez calls it *nexting*, the everyday habit of talking about what's coming up. Go around and have each person share one "next" they're genuinely looking forward to. Use this moment to pair people up for the interview that follows.

3. Hope Interviews. In pairs, take turns interviewing each other using the Hope Interview Question Cards: one round of questions each for Goals, Pathways, Willpower, and People. Partner A asks, Partner B answers and tells the story; Partner A jots a few notes to remember it. Switch after 5–7 minutes. This is the heart of the session, the story comes from the youth being interviewed.

4. Walk the Pathway. Lay out each pair's Pathway strip (floor tape or paper) with a NOW point at one end and a FUTURE SELF point at the other. Using what they heard in the interview, each interviewer helps place markers along their partner's path: the **Goal** at the far end, **Obstacle** markers where their partner named something hard, **Route** markers where they named a plan, and **Helper** markers where they named a person. Coach for *specific* Route markers, like "study with a friend Tuesday nights"—specific plans move people to act. Then partners physically walk the path together, partner narrating their own story as they go.

5. Gallery walk (optional). If space and comfort allow, invite pairs to walk past a few other paths and notice what markers show up again and again — this often surfaces themes (caring adults, never giving up) naturally, as they walk.

6. Notice & Next. Each youth fills out a Noticing & Nexting Card: on the **Noticing** side, one thing that stood out from being interviewed or walking their path; on the **Nexting** side, one small next step for the next 30–60 days, and who can help. Post the cards and invite the group to place a dot next to the ones they're most excited about.

7. Commit & close. Adult participants share one commitment they'll model before the next check-in — and a reminder that a first plan can always be adjusted — Lopez calls this *regoaling*, and it's a normal, expected part of the process. Schedule a 30-day follow-up.

After the Session

Photograph the paths and log each youth's Noticing & Nexting Card in a simple tracker. Share a one-page recap with youth within a week (themes across paths, next steps, who's checking in). Broker connections: introduce youth to the mentors, programs, or opportunities that match their next step, where possible.

Track progress: 30- and 60-day check-ins using the Noticing & Nexting Cards. If a goal stalled, help them regoal. Celebrate a small success publicly.

Variations

Future Postcard Add-On: At the FUTURE SELF end of the path, have youth write a short postcard from their future self describing what already happened — then work backward to place the Route and Helper markers. **Video-Led Opening:** Open with a short clip of Shane Lopez discussing how young people already design and edit their futures, then move into pairing and interviews.

Short-on-Time Version: Skip the physical path; do the Hope Interview, then go straight to Noticing & Nexting Cards.

Returning Group / Regoaling Session: For a group that's done this before, skip new interviews — walk existing paths, update markers, and focus on regoaling any step that stalled.

Safety & Support

Normalize help-seeking: "Everyone needs help sometimes; it's a strength to ask."

Choice & privacy: Youth choose what they share and may pass on any interview question. Let pairs know they can keep parts of their story off the path.

Signal care: Post crisis/help info visibly; offer a private debrief after the session. Watch for signs of distress; if a youth requests help, follow your site's protocol and connect them to a trusted adult or professional support the same day.

Suggested language you can share:

"If anything today brings up heavy feelings, you can take a break or talk with [named adult] after. We've posted places to get help — some are text/online if that's easier."

Companion Tool: Hope Interview Questions

Question cards for pairs to use in the Hope Interview (Step 3)

Goals What's one thing you want to be true about your life in five years? What's your "next" — something you're genuinely looking forward to?

Pathways What's one specific, repeatable thing you could do to get there? What's a plan B, in case you need to regroup along the way?

Willpower (Self-Talk & Agency) What do you tell yourself when things get hard? What's something you've already gotten through?

People Who believes in you? Who could you ask for help along the way?

Story What's a story from your family or community about someone who kept going? Where are you the hero of your own story?

Supports Where do you go when things feel like too much? What confidential options exist? What feels approachable?

Tip: Interviewers — ask what feels natural, and follow what your partner lights up talking about.

Companion Tool: Noticing and Nexting Card

A companion template for the Brokering Hope session (Step 6: Notice & Next)

How to use: Print one card per youth. Cards are two-sided — Noticing on one side, Nexting on the other — sized to print two per page and cut down the middle. After filling both sides, youth post their card on the wall; the group places a dot next to the next steps they're most excited about.

OR

Grab one whenever, fill it in, keep it or post it. This works solo since noticing and nexting are habits youth can build on over time.

Side A: Noticing

Name (optional): _____

One thing I noticed about myself today *(a strength, a story, a person, something from my Pathway):*

Who or what helped me notice it:

Side B: Nexting

My next step *(something small I can do in the next 30–60 days):*

Who's in it with me:

When I'll check in: ☐ 30 days ☐ 60 days **Date:** _____

☆ *Dot goes here if this is a favorite pick*

Facilitator Notes

- Keep both prompts short: this card works best as a quick capture, not another worksheet.
- If a youth's plan changes later, that's regoaling, rather than failure: bring the same card back out and update the Nexting side.
- Pair with the local directory of supports when a youth's "who can help" points toward a formal service.

Need a prompt?

Pick one:

- Who believed in me this week?
- What's something I got through that felt hard at the time?
- What am I looking forward to this month?
- What's one small thing I could do about it this week?
- What's a story about someone in my life who kept going?

About this Exercise

This tool draws on Hope Theory (C.R. Snyder), Shane Lopez's research and writing on hope, including "Making Hope Happen" and "Making Hope Happen in the Classroom" (Phi Delta Kappan), and research on the specificity and immediacy of future-oriented goal-setting in adolescents.

It was adapted for the Time to Thrive campaign by the Wyoming Enrichment Network. For more information, please contact Program Associate Emily Vercoe, PhD, at wyen@wycf.org.