



Leading with Hope: A Research-Based Resource for School Leaders





The Alberta Teachers' Association

Leading with Hope: A Research-Based Resource for School Leaders is published by the ATA as a research publication in collaboration with Hope Studies Central at the University of Alberta. This resource is licensed for use by educators at no cost. For any use, in whole or in part, for research purposes, permission must be granted by the authors, Denise Larsen, Rebecca Hudson Breen or Chelsea Hobbs. Any further reproduction, in whole or in part, other than use by the authors, without the prior written consent of the ATA is prohibited.

Leading with Hope: A Research-Based Resource for School Leaders

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Preface

On behalf of the Alberta Teachers' Association, it is my pleasure to introduce *Leading with Hope: A Research-Based Resource for School Leaders*. This publication reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting school leaders in fostering well-being and a sense of possibility within their school communities. As public education responds to myriad challenges, the desire for hope is more than a fine sentiment—it is a guiding principle that shapes how we lead, inspire and sustain each other. This resource, developed in collaboration with Hope Studies Central at the University of Alberta, provides school leaders with evidence-based strategies to cultivate hope in themselves, their colleagues and their students.

Hope is not just an abstract concept; it is a practice that can be learned, nurtured and embedded into school culture. The research underpinning this resource demonstrates that hope contributes to engagement, resilience and well-being in educational settings. By offering practical activities and reflective exercises, this guide equips school leaders with the tools needed to integrate the development of hope into their daily work, consequently fostering positive relationships and a sense of purpose even in the face of adversity. As you explore the core activities and conversations outlined in this resource, I encourage you to consider how a hopeful perspective can transform not only individual experiences but also the collective spirit of your school community.

At the Alberta Teachers' Association, we recognize that leading with hope is an essential part of building and sustaining a thriving public education system. This resource is a testament to the dedication of researchers, teachers and school leaders who believe in the power of hope to create meaningful change. It is my hope that this publication serves as a source of inspiration and practical guidance for school leaders across Alberta. Thank you for your continuing commitment to fostering learning environments where hope flourishes.

Sincerely,
Dennis Theobald
Executive Secretary
Alberta Teachers' Association

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“On Choosing to be Hopeful” by Wendy Edey

Some days I am hopeful,
Others not so much.
It's the same world on any specific day
Regardless of how hopeful I am,
Only the possibilities for days ahead are different.
Being hopeful is not wishing.
Wishing is for Disneyland
And birthday candles
And the days when I buy a lottery ticket
Just because I have money.
Being hopeful is not goal-setting.
Goal-setting is for sales teams
And athletes
And fundraisers at the United Way.
Hopeful is a way of feeling
When I see the world,
With certain possibilities,
Of how good things could happen
But not quite enough of the picture
To lay out a detailed plan.
On days when I am not hopeful
There are still possibilities,
Only I don't see them
So I think they are not there.
And that is why,
On any given day
No matter what is happening
It is better to be hopeful
If I have a choice
Which sometimes I do.
And sometimes I don't
Which means I have to wait
Until I do.

Introduction

You might be wondering, why hope? This section aims to help you understand the importance of hope, specifically in educational contexts.

Hope Studies Central (HSC) is an applied research lab at the University of Alberta. For over 30 years, research at HSC has been focused on hope in various contexts. Hope is defined as the ability to envision a future in which we wish to participate (Edey and Jevne 2003). This simple, straightforward definition describes an active hope that tilts people toward a future they want to be a part of. We move towards things we hope for.

Hope is a word used in everyday language. People have a common understanding of what it means. Despite being familiar to most, hope can be seen as synonymous with optimism, leading to a misunderstanding about and underutilization of the concept. Through a deeper understanding of hope, individuals can effectively tap into its power.

Hope is a member of a family of positive emotions and psychological characteristics. Experiences of hope can be uniquely personal, or they can be shared—yours, mine or ours. Hope is often linked to our stories, personally meaningful symbols or actions. Stories can highlight hopeful memories to draw upon in the future. We use the word hope as a noun, verb or adjective. It is a multidimensional concept—making it a valuable tool for exploring possibilities—something we will discuss further later. A large body of research shows that paying attention to hope can make us more engaged and hopeful in the face of difficulty.

Research on hope demonstrates that it is beneficial in nearly every situation it has been studied in. Hope is essential to healthy living, is consistently related to life satisfaction, predicts subjective well-being, and is a defining attribute of resilience (Cheavens et al 2005; Ong et al 2006; Pleeing et al 2021). Hope is necessary and sustaining when working in stressful and challenging conditions (Flesaker and Larsen 2010; Snyder 2005), specifically in educational contexts (Nolan and Stitzlein 2011). Further, hope is a vital resource for adults working with young people, particularly in maintaining a hopeful perspective and a sense of purpose in their work (Murdoch and Larsen 2018). It has been shown to enhance performance across a broad spectrum of domains, including areas related to teaching and learning, such as physical health, academics, well-being and psychological functioning (Pedrotti 2018). Examining the role of hope across these contexts reveals that high levels of hope are associated with positive life outcomes (Cheavens et al 2005).

The World Health Organization (2023) describes health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.” This means that prioritizing physical health (eg, nutrition, activity, sleep), social health (eg, cultivating supportive and positive relationships, engaging in your



The gift we can offer others is so simple a thing as hope.

— Daniel Berrigan

community), and mental health (eg, mindfulness, emotional regulation) is important to your overall wellness. Attention to each of these areas of your health is important.

Mental health is described as our ability to adapt to life's challenges (mentalhealthliteracy.org 2023). As such, the mental health of students, teachers, staff and school leaders is important and must be supported at school. The Mental Health Literacy Pyramid highlights four distinct mental health states: 1) no distress, problem or disorder; 2) mental distress; 3) mental health problem; and 4) mental disorder or illness. Regardless of the state of an individual's mental health, hope can be an important and easily implemented tool to support mental health and well-being. In other words, hope is good for all of us and has demonstrated universal benefits.



The work kids are doing with hope changes the way they think about the future.

— Amy Badger,
elementary school
teacher

Overview of the SHARP-SMH Research Project

The Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness Program for School Mental Health (SHARP-SMH) was a key foundation for the development of this resource.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Hope Studies Central conducted a research project within both Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic schools. The project adapted the empirically supported psychoeducational group titled the Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness Program (SHARP; Edey et al 2016) within school contexts and led to the creation of the Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness Program for School Mental Health (SHARP-SMH).

The research team was composed of researchers and graduate students from the University of Alberta and teachers working within Edmonton schools. The project targeted teachers' and students' emotional well-being (eg, strengths), resourcefulness and hopefulness. The innovative collaboration resulted in an easily implemented and grade-level-appropriate SHARP-SMH program.

Teacher members of the SHARP-SMH team adapted core hope activities into lessons compatible with the Alberta Education curriculum. Partnering with teachers meant that information relevant to educators and students was *baked into* the materials created. Some examples that may be useful to you include

- [Hope and Health Skills for Teachers and Students](#) [infographic];
- [“Hope is an Overused Word, But the Real Thing Can be Powerful.”](#) [article from the University of Alberta's *New Trail* magazine]
- [“Searching for Hope in All the Right Places: Part 1 - Hope in Our Pedagogy”](#) featuring Amy Badger [*After the Bell: Extra Credit Podcast*]



Key Takeaways from SHARP-SMH

include the following (Larsen 2022):

1. Hope is closely associated with personal meaning.
2. Hope engages even the most hard-to-reach students.
3. Teacher hope is as important as student hope.
4. One way to foster teacher hope is to collect teacher hope stories.
5. Hope can be easily integrated across much of the curriculum.

Reflective Question: What is a story that is associated with hope from your personal or professional life? Write it down and, if you like, share it with a colleague or friend.

You can find a more detailed description of the project on page 36 of the Winter 2022 issue of the *ATA Magazine*.



To check out a fun video describing the SHARP-SMH project, or to learn more, visit the SHARP-SMH website.

An Example of Working with Hope with Teachers

Natalie Kuhn was an elementary school teacher and a teacher-researcher on the SHARP-SMH project. During the 2020/21 school year, she taught virtually, adapting to the many changes that had occurred that year. Deep into the winter, after teaching virtually for months, she lamented the chance to even see many of her students' faces. She disclosed how important being with her students was to her experience of hope as a teacher. The virtual classroom prevented her from seeing and interacting with her students in the ways that she was used to. She struggled. She missed the dozens of little interpersonal connections with students that filled her with hope. The pandemic experience offered insight as she began to realize that these little hopeful moments had helped support her in overcoming challenges as a teacher.

Natalie wondered aloud, "How do we maintain hope when things seem bleak and I don't know if I'm making a difference?"

Denise Larsen, a university research team member, responded by inviting Natalie and all the teachers in the research team to consider *a time when something seemed to be impossible but became possible*. Denise began by acknowledging what Natalie was experiencing—that not receiving the feedback from students was impacting Natalie's ability to sustain energy while teaching. Denise suggested that approaching the problem with the intention of hope can often be helpful.

Denise shared her own story as an elementary teacher—something from early in her career. A student in the class had been acting up. Even after being warned and describing the consequences, the behaviour continued. Disappointed, Denise called the student's parents for a conversation. Following the phone call, the behaviour stopped but the student remained aloof. Denise was troubled that no amount of effort taken to repair the relationship seemed to be working. She felt she had failed this

student. Weeks went by. At Christmas, as the students filed out of the room, Denise stood at the door sharing holiday greetings. The student was the last in line to leave. Denise dreaded the impending awkward goodbye as the line gradually shortened. As the student approached her—all other students now neatly out the door—he looked up at her and said quietly, “Happy holidays, Ms Larsen. Thank you for phoning my parents. It turned out good.” Something Denise thought was impossible had become possible.

Denise then invited all the teachers in the research team meeting to

Reflect on a time when something was going better than you thought, and you didn’t know it.

Combing through our memory banks, we can find many examples of things going better than we first assessed. Denise encouraged teachers to intentionally collect these hopeful stories. The teachers leapt on this idea, sharing personal stories not only in that moment but in future research meetings as well. Particularly for Natalie, using this idea was not only helpful then but continues to positively influence her life when times are tough. Just as they have for Natalie, these stories can help sustain us when we are short on information.

Research tells us that the past is one of our best resources for finding hope in the present.

Hope Framework in Schools: The Dimensions and Domains

Dimensions of Hope in School Leadership

Knowing the multiple dimensions of hope can be helpful as you consider where and how to engage with hope in school contexts. Understanding the five hope dimensions elaborated below means that you can become increasingly skilful at recognizing glimmers of hope. You will also learn that you have options for crafting hopeful communication and activities in your school community.

The Five Dimensions of Hope

Relational: Relationships are often the backbone of hope. Across thousands of research studies, individuals name personal and working relationships as important sources of hope. When relationships are difficult, they can also threaten hope.

Reflective Question: Who supports me to have hope?

Affective: The affective dimension of hope reflects a myriad of emotions that often accompany hope, including happiness, effervescence,



I came back to this idea multiple times throughout the SHARP-SMH project, it was a guiding idea for me. It is also something I still think about and a moment that still has impacts in my life.

— Natalie Kuhn,
elementary school
teacher

anticipation, uncertainty/unease, determination and sometimes even anger (often in relation to witnessing injustice).

Reflective Question: Where is the hope in this experience? What is the smallest thing that offers me hope right now?

Cognitive: Cognitive aspects of hope depend on the thoughts a person or members of a group hold. Cognitive hope is often forward-focused, experienced in the present and informed by the past. The associated thoughts are often wide-ranging and subject to both context and personal choice. Possibilities can be considered. Here, planning and goal setting can be allies of hope.

Reflective Question: Understandably, we often focus on avoiding risk in our planning. What would focusing on hopeful planning look like? What future good may be possible?

Behavioural: Hope is active. The behavioural dimension of hope encompasses personal and/or collective action. Individuals or groups look for ways in which they can take action and lean into making changes related to targeted concerns. Persistence can play a big role in hopeful behaviours.

Reflective Question: What would a hopeful person do?

Spiritual: Spiritual elements of hope usually connect to a purpose larger than one's self. For some, spiritual experiences of hope are linked to formal religion, while for others, they are not. Self-care is also often experienced as a spiritual element of hope.

Reflective Question: How can my involvement contribute to a good within or beyond myself in this situation?

Domains of Hope in School Leadership

School leaders work with hope across diverse domains in their work and personal lives. These domains include working with parents, students, other educators, senior school leaders, school boards and even government and society. Other domains include attending to one's own career, self-care, as well as friends and family. Any of these domains can be targets for hope based on the needs or interests determined by the school leader. The dimensions described in the previous section provide a framework for focusing on hope across each of the domains. Given that there are multiple dimensions of hope, there are various ways to foster hope within each domain in your school community.

For example, when working to foster hope with a teacher, you may choose to

- engage in a conversation about individuals in the teacher's life who support them (ie, relational dimension),

- encourage thinking that highlights possibilities or reminds the teacher of their strengths (ie, cognitive dimension) or
- suggest individual practices they can engage in to help them feel more hopeful or perhaps even discuss some change in school practices (ie, behavioural dimension).

How to Use This Resource

This resource compiles carefully selected hope activities derived from Hope Studies Central. Specifically, you will find adapted SHARP psychoeducational programming, highlighting several ways to work with hope in your school context, within this resource. These activities were chosen to support you in (a) working with hope at school and (b) sustaining hope through ongoing conversations at school.

Overview Section 1 – Five Core Activities for Working with Hope at School

This section contains descriptions of five core activities to support you in working with hope at school. You are invited to engage in completing each activity independently, with the goal of increasing your awareness of what you hope for, what challenges your hope, and where you find hope within your life. In other words, you will be *nurturing your own hope first*.

When working with hope, regardless of context, it is important to understand our own hope first. *We often operate with hope on autopilot.* That is, we have a tacit understanding of its importance, but we pay little attention to it and how we find it, especially in the face of difficulty. Research shows that activities such as the ones described in this resource help to make hope visible and more available in our own lives and as we help others.

After you have a deeper understanding of your own hope, you can take a hope-focused approach to working with others within your school community. Building on your individual experiences with hope-focused activities, you can lead hopefully by facilitating similar experiences with your school staff. Further, many of these activities have been adapted for use within classrooms, so there is an added benefit that these activities can be used with students. Each core activity comes with a one-page activity plan that can be easily reproduced and shared.

Overview Section 2 – Sustaining Hope Through Conversation: Across Domains and Throughout the Year

As a school leader, conversations are the conduit for so many aspects of the job. This section describes hope-focused ideas, strategies and language you can use during conversations with others. Indeed,



This resource was developed in tandem with work with students, and many of the activities have been adapted as lessons for teacher use within the classroom. If you would like access to these resources, please contact the SHARP-SMH research team (sharp-smh@ualberta.ca).

particularly challenging conversations can become problem-focused or even stuck. Learning the skills to acknowledge problems and challenges while also maintaining hope can help you support individuals within your school community more effectively.

Ideally, you will work through the resource from beginning to end. However, you can take any of the ideas you like or even modify them for your purpose. Be patient with yourself and others. While there is no doubt you have been supporting others' hope for years, working with hope directly and explicitly is new. It takes experimentation and practice.



This is not something extra on your plate—teachers are already doing this; school leaders are already doing this—the hope work is just making it more explicit.

— Amy Badger,
elementary school
teacher

Section 1 – Five Core Activities for Working with Hope at School

This section starts with some introductory hope practices, and then transitions into the five core activities for implementing hope at school. For each of the core activities, you will be first invited to experience the activity yourself, to nurture your own hope.

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Learning to infuse hope within leadership starts with understanding your own hope as the foundation for fostering hope in others. You need to ***nurture your own hope first***.

You will be invited to tap into hope through short, enjoyable practices. Chances are you already know how it feels to be hopeful or to have your hope dashed due to the behaviour of others or external circumstances. You also likely know how it feels to build hope in the life of another, particularly with a student or staff member. When you reflect on it, the opportunity to foster hopeful futures alongside others may have even led you to the teaching profession.

Using the activities highlighted and linked throughout this section can serve as great starting points for hope. They are also exercises to return to throughout the year. As hope becomes *more front of mind*, you will find that you become more familiar with naming the struggles for hope and also more practiced at finding hope in difficult times.

Leading Hopefully

Once you have familiarized yourself with your own hope, you can reflect on how to infuse hope-focused approaches at school by ***leading hopefully***. These activities can positively impact your staff's mental health and well-being.



The first task of a leader is to keep hope alive.

— Joe Batten

Each of the five core activities are described so you can implement them with school staff. The activities parallel the five activities you will complete on your own. In some cases, the activity you complete independently will be quite different from the activity designed for your school staff. In others, it will be quite similar. In either case, the experiences of having worked through the activities on your own will offer valuable practical information when leading others. Note also that if you are reading this resource in preparation for the beginning of the year, you can choose some of these activities to foster a hopeful tone for the school year ahead.

The table below outlines the core activities presented within this section of the resource.

	Nurturing Your Own Hope First	Leading Hopefully
Core Activity #1	Diversifying Your Hope Portfolio	Hope is...Poem
Core Activity #2	Hope Sit	Hope Walk
Core Activity #3	Hope Suckers and Hope Givers	
Core Activity #4	Internal and External Resources	
Core Activity #5	Hope Collage	

Introductory Hope Practices

Hopes for the School Year

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

To better understand your own hope, a good starting place can be to reflect upon and name your current hopes for the school year. You can use the sentence stems below. They are drawn from research at Hope Studies Central at the University of Alberta. With this practice, you begin to focus explicitly on hope. While there may be value in completing this practice at the beginning of the year, it can be done anytime. And, if you are having difficulty completing a certain sentence stem, don't worry. You can always return to the activity once you have read through more of the resource. Some educators even tell us they like to complete this activity at different times during the year to see if and how their hopes have changed.

Hopeful Sentence Stems

- This year I hope to learn _____
- I hope to feel _____
- I hope that we _____
- I hope that I _____
- I hope to try _____
- I hope to find out _____
- I hope to offer _____
- I hope _____

Leading Hopefully

While you can complete this activity independently, it can also be used within a group setting, such as a staff meeting or a classroom. When completing this activity with a group, let everyone know in advance that you will ask them to share one or two of their hopes for the school year in pairs, smaller groups or with the whole group. It can be fascinating to learn about others' hopes. This activity promises helpful, positively oriented information to the school leader from their staff members as the school year launches.

Starting Your Day with Hope

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

One simple way to foster your own hope is to start your day with hope. Finding a few minutes to reflect on hope can help orient you toward a day you want to see for yourself.

Some ways you might do this are as follows:

- Read a hopeful quote and ask yourself, how does this quote relate to my life right now? You may want to journal your thoughts.
- Read a passage from [*Finding Hope: Ways to See Life in a Brighter Light*](#) by Ronna Fay Jevne and James E. Miller and reflect on the questions asked in the book.
- Reflect on what you might be hoping for that day. Be sure to frame this in the positive—what are you hoping for, rather than what you are hoping doesn't happen. This helps to create a positive vision of the day ahead.



To hope is to give yourself to the future—and that commitment to the future is what makes the present inhabitable.

— Rebecca Solnit

Leading Hopefully

There are many ways to invite school community members to start the day with hope. Within the school, leaders could choose to share a hope quote with staff and/or students in a variety of ways. For example, on morning announcements, on TV screens that carry announcements for the school community, or on the back of bathroom stall doors. Invite students or staff to suggest hope quotes that can be featured in future days or weeks.

You might invite staff or students to reflect on what they hope for in the day ahead. In Natalie Kuhn's French Immersion classroom,



You could also start the day with hope using different media sources. One example is a [video of the poem "Hope is the thing with feathers"](#) by Emily Dickinson (read by Claire Danes, and signed by Rachel, age 9).

the sentence stem “aujourd’hui j’espère que...” (ie, “Today I hope that...”) became an opportunity to practice thinking hopefully while also learning new vocabulary.

Five Core Hope Activities

Core Activity #1 – Hope is...Poem

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Activity: Diversifying Your “Hope Portfolio”

We all hold many hopes. However, in certain circumstances, particularly when we have a pernicious problem, we can become psychologically “tethered” to a specific hope and outcome. It can be hard to see beyond the problem to the rest of life. Our sense of competence and personal welfare can feel threatened. A singular focus on hope can threaten our well-being, creativity and willingness to engage if a particular hoped-for outcome is not realized. When struggling, it can be important to reflect on our many hopes rather than remain focused on a single hoped-for outcome (Larsen and Stege 2010). This can help remind us that many possible futures hold meaning. We may hold a particular hope strongly, but it is not the only thing that matters to us.

The process of naming or bringing attention to multiple hopes is called *diversifying your hope portfolio*. Much like diversifying a financial portfolio, the aim is to recognize that we hold hope investments across many different life domains. Realistically, not *all* of our hopes will be realized, but *some of them* will be. This is normal.

Expanding our hope portfolio enables us to maintain some hope, even when facing uncertainty and disappointment. We may still feel discomfort or even pain, but we will *also* have explicit knowledge of the places in our lives where hope is possible.

Take a moment to create a list of your hopes. Challenge yourself to identify 10 hopes or more! Remember that hopes can be very big or very small. They can be quite serious, or they can be playful and fun. They can be quite likely or even a long shot.

For example, Denise remembers a woman she spoke with years ago who started with a list of very serious, difficult hopes but ended it with a little giggle and a plan to take belly dancing classes! Aim for a range of hopes from various parts of your life. Be sure to notice when some of your hopes materialize.

Leading Hopefully

Activity: Hope is...Poem

The Hope is...Poem is a very simple and yet central activity drawn from the research at Hope Studies. We have used this activity with hundreds of groups across diverse contexts. In fact, the Hope is...Poem is the only required hope activity done by teacher-researchers as part of the SHARP-SMH project. It is a great prompt to get a group thinking about hope.

The Hope is...Poem invites individuals to think about, feel and share their own understanding of hope. Through this process, they will also learn how others understand hope, which may help broaden and deepen their awareness of what hope is.

Read through the activity plan below and consider how you might implement this activity with your school staff (eg, staff meeting or new year orientation).

Core Activity #1 – Hope is... Poem Activity Plan	
Goal To bring attention to the many ways we can think about and understand hope: yours, mine and ours.	Duration 10–15 minutes
	Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipchart, whiteboard, virtual document (eg, Google Docs or Slides) • Markers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the top of your flipchart, whiteboard or projected/shared virtual document, write the words “Hope is ...” • Invite the group to call out words or phrases that they would use to finish the sentence stem, “Hope is...” Remind individuals that all responses are welcome. Record all responses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If appropriate or required, you may add your own suggestions to the list to encourage participation or ideas. For example, <i>Hope is... sometimes hard to find.</i> • When you are satisfied with your list, or the list is complete, read the list out to the group. This is your Hope Is ... Poem. • After you have read the poem out loud, engage the group in a discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What did they notice about each suggestion? What does this tell them about our own hope and others’ hope? ◦ Do you notice fascinating ideas or new thoughts? What do you notice more broadly? ◦ Save your final poem (either the flipchart paper, photo of the board or electronic document) to refer back to in future. 	
Extension and Facilitation Ideas	Repeat this activity near the end of the year. Engage the group in a discussion comparing the two poems. Invite the group to repeat the Hope Is ... Poem activity with their friends, family or students for homework and report back. Engage the group in a discussion about what they noticed. What is different about the ideas they shared? What is the same?

Links and Examples	<p>Below is an example of a Hope Is...Poem created by staff in a public school leadership gathering.</p> <p>Hope is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding that there is a bigger picture. • a bright future. • thinking with a positive mindset. • possibility. • something to look forward to. • feeling like tomorrow is another day, and there's something good coming. • never giving up, seeing the best. • moving forward. • waking up another day. • seeing something come true. • love. • sometimes hard to find. • good things are/will come! • a verb. • anticipation.
<p>This activity is adapted from Edey, W, R L King, D J Larsen and R Stege. 2016. "The 'Being Hopeful in the Face of Chronic Pain' Program: A Counselling Program for People Experiencing Chronic Pain." <i>The Journal for Specialists in Group Work</i> 41, no 2: 161–187.</p>	

Core Activity #2 – Hope Walk

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Activity: Hope Sit

While sitting in your office, scan your space for things that make you hopeful. Perhaps there is a photo of your family or pet on your desk. Perhaps there is a piece of artwork or a small gift a student has given you. Perhaps you see a book you love or a thank you card you received. Whatever it is, I would bet there are things you have chosen to surround yourself with that you associate with hope when you think about it.

Once your list is complete, reflect on the memories associated with your items. Notice what you find yourself thinking, feeling and/or being compelled to do.

Take a moment to notice the symbols of hope that surround you and write them down.

Reflective Question: How can I use the hopeful items and memories around me to remember hope? How do I find hope/maintain hope when faced with difficulty?

Hope Sit Modifications: If you are conducting this activity in a space that may not be personal to you, you can still participate in an activity that supports you in finding hope. Wherever you are, you are likely surrounded by items that can represent hope for you, when you think about it. For example,

- you can look for **symbols of hope**. This might be a piece of jewellery, something you are wearing, or an item in your bag or on your keychain.
- you can also look for **photos of hope** by going through the photos you have on your phone.

Keep an air of curiosity and openness. Hope is there for you to find when you look for it.



Leading Hopefully

Activity: Hope Walk

The hope walk activity encourages individuals to look for hope within their environment. Learning to look for hope is a skill that can become easier to use with time and practice. The activity plan for the hope walk can be found on the next page.



Natalie Kuhn, a teacher with Edmonton Catholic, reflects on intentionally listing or taking photos of items on her hope walk. She says this simple activity is one important way for her to *choose* hope explicitly and is an important part of the process of learning about her own sources of hope.

Core Activity #2 – Hope Walk Activity Plan	
Goal To teach and/or remind individuals that hope surrounds us in our physical environments if we choose to look for it.	Duration 30–45 minutes
	Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camera (on cell phone) • Pens/pencils/crayons or felts • Paper
Summary of Tasks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite individuals to go for a walk to search for hope. Walk inside or outside depending on your location and preference. The task is to identify at least three things that personally represent hope. • Inform individuals that they can take pictures of what they find on their hope walk or simply create a written list. Keep this written or photographic record to make hope more explicit. • Individuals can complete this activity in groups or on their own. Remind individuals that each group member is still required to find their own three things that represent hope (eg, a group of three people look for nine hopeful things). • The walk can be done silently, or group members may wish to quietly discuss what they are looking for, what they see and hear, and how they feel. • Set and share the time limit to complete the activity (eg, 15 minutes). Meet together to debrief the activity. • When everyone has returned from the hope walk, discuss the following questions in small groups or as a large group. You may choose to document the participant's answers on a flipchart or whiteboard. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "What did you find that reminded you of hope?" ◦ "Why did this remind you of hope?" ◦ "Are there similarities or differences between your choices and others?" 	
Extension and Facilitation Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try repeating the hope walk in different spaces: for example, a hope walk inside the school or outside, in the community surrounding your school. In sharing the sources of hope, invite participants to notice themes, either within the school or within the wider community. • Invite staff or students to consider taking someone else on a hope walk (eg, a friend or a family member).
Links and Examples	Hope can be found in all sorts of expected and unexpected places. Below are examples of photos that have been shared following previous hope walks.
	 
This activity is adapted from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edey, W E, D Larsen and L LeMay. 2005. <i>The Counsellor's Introduction to Hope Tools</i>. Hope Studies Central. • Lemay, L M, W Edey and D Larsen. 2008. <i>Nurturing Hopeful Souls: Practices and Activities for Working with Children and Youth</i>. Hope Foundation of Alberta. 	

Core Activity #3 – Hope Suckers and Hope Givers

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Activity: Hope Suckers and Hope Givers

At Hope Studies Central, we call things that take hope away *hope suckers* (LeMay et al 2008). First coined by Dr Lenora LeMay and some of her *hope students*, hope suckers are like vacuums. You can almost hear the sucking action! They come along and suck out our hope when we least expect it. In order to find hope in certain situations, it can be helpful to name common hope suckers. At Hope Studies, our one rule is that we name situations rather than specific people as hope suckers.

Conversely, we also all have things that give us hope, and we call these *hope givers*. During challenging times, hope givers often feel less prominent and may be less noticeable. Noticing and naming our hopes can be an important component of shifting our focus away from the things that threaten our hope, so that we remember to also attend to the things that offer hope. This simple activity does not minimize the experience of hope suckers but does remind us that we often have some choice about where to focus our attention, where to spend our time and how to channel our efforts.

Make two lists, one of your own hope suckers and one of your hope givers. How do you feel reading each of these lists?

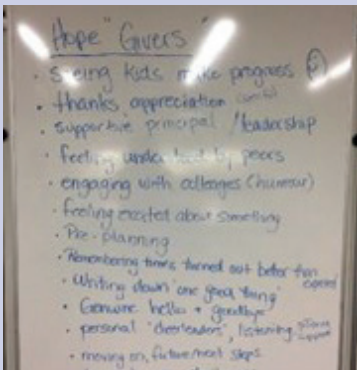
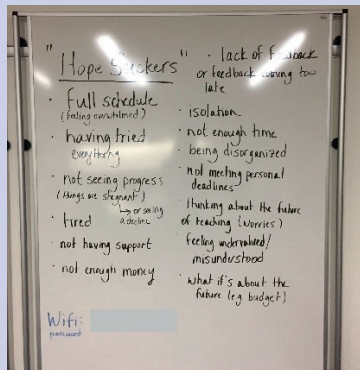
Leading Hopefully

This activity can be adapted quite easily for use in a group setting. Invite staff or students to share their lists of hope suckers and hope givers. It can feel hopeful to hear about others' sources of hope and to know that others also experience some of the same hope suckers.

Reflective Question: What strategies or tools do you already utilize at your school to learn about the hope suckers and hope givers of students and staff? How might this new language be helpful?



For many, one of today's greatest hope suckers is climate change. Check out the episode, [*"How to feel more hopeful"* by The Science of Happiness Podcast](#) to learn more about how to build a sense of hope when the future feels uncertain.

Core Activity #3 – Hope Suckers and Hope Givers	
Goal To identify the things, people and conditions that can take hope away, as well as give it back. Naming our threats to hope and our sources of hope allows us to be more intentional when seeking hope.	Duration 15 minutes Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipchart • Markers
Summary of Tasks	
Hope Suckers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a flipchart with the heading of "Hope Suckers." • Ask the following question and record all the answers given by individuals. The single limitation is to focus on situations and refrain from naming specific people. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "One of the things that sucks out my hope when I think of the responsibilities of my daily work is....." • You may choose to provide the first answer as an example. Hope Givers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a flipchart with the heading of "Hope Givers." • Ask the following question and record all the answers given by individuals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "One of the things that gives me hope when I think of the responsibilities of my daily work is....." • You may choose to provide the first answer. 	
Extension and Facilitation Ideas	You can facilitate this activity in various ways. For example, it could be set up as a carousel brainstorming cooperative learning strategy, where individuals share in small groups first, followed by the large group. Be creative and adapt the activity to the group size and context.
Links and Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of hope suckers and hope givers from a recent teacher professional development conference workshop: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>
This activity is adapted from Edey, W, R L King, D J Larsen and R Stege. 2016. "The 'Being Hopeful in the Face of Chronic Pain' Program: A Counselling Program for People Experiencing Chronic Pain." <i>The Journal for Specialists in Group Work</i> 41, no 2: 161–187.	

Core Activity #4 – Internal and External Resources

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Activity: Internal and External Resources


Reflecting on and naming our internal and external resources is important in helping us remain hopeful in the face of hope suckers. Listing these resources will also help identify what individuals can do to access resources, how they can leverage their internal resources and what external resources are available to them.

Read through the activity plan below. **Then take a moment to record your own internal and external resources. The resources may be at work, with settings or colleagues outside your school, or from part of your life beyond work.**

Reflective Question: What would a good friend or colleague say is one of your most important internal resources or strengths?

Leading Hopefully

Similar to the hope suckers and hope givers activity, mapping internal and external resources can be easily implemented in a group setting. Brainstorming resources together can spark hope by reminding people of resources that they also have access to.

Core Activity #4 – Internal and External Sources of Hope Activity Plan	
Goal The goal of this activity is to identify and discuss resources available to teachers. The discussion focuses on identifying resources, ie, naming and leveraging internal and available external resources.	Duration 15–30 minutes Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “On Choosing to be Hopeful” poem • Flipchart • Markers
Summary of Tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a flipchart with two circles, one within the other. Title the smaller circle “Internal Resources” and the bigger circle “External Resources” (see image below). • Start by reading the poem “Choosing to be Hopeful” (see poem below). Starting the activity with this poem can encourage individuals to discuss positive and negative teaching experiences, even as they recognize that they have choices when it comes to hope. • Ask individuals to identify internal resources that help them to carry out the responsibilities of their daily work (eg, identifying personal strengths in conversation with a colleague is a great idea here). • Record the internal resources that have been identified in the smaller circle. • Ask individuals to identify external resources that help them to carry out the responsibilities of their daily work. Encourage them to consider people, activities or other resources. • Record the external resources that have been identified within the larger circle. • Foster a discussion on external resources by prompting individuals to provide concrete examples of their experiences, including more challenging ones. 	
Extension and Facilitation Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If individuals are having difficulty naming their internal resources, you can invite them to reflect on their personal strengths and discuss how their strengths help them complete their daily responsibilities at work.
Links and Examples	
This activity is adapted from Edey, W, R L King, D J Larsen and R Stege. 2016. “The ‘Being Hopeful in the Face of Chronic Pain’ Program: A Counselling Program for People Experiencing Chronic Pain.” <i>The Journal for Specialists in Group Work</i> 41, no 2: 161–187.	

“On Choosing to be Hopeful” by Wendy Edey

Some days I am hopeful,
Others not so much.
It's the same world on any specific day
Regardless of how hopeful I am,
Only the possibilities for days ahead are different.
Being hopeful is not wishing.
Wishing is for Disneyland
And birthday candles
And the days when I buy a lottery ticket
Just because I have money.
Being hopeful is not goal-setting.
Goal-setting is for sales teams
And athletes
And fundraisers at the United Way.
Hopeful is a way of feeling
When I see the world,
With certain possibilities,
Of how good things could happen
But not quite enough of the picture
To lay out a detailed plan.
On days when I am not hopeful
There are still possibilities,
Only I don't see them
So I think they are not there.
And that is why,
On any given day
No matter what is happening
It is better to be hopeful
If I have a choice
Which sometimes I do.
And sometimes I don't
Which means I have to wait
Until I do.

Core Activity #5 – Hope Collage

(Larsen et al 2007; Larsen et al 2016)

Nurturing Your Own Hope First

Activity 5: Hope Collage



Where there is
creativity, there is
hope.

— Donna Karan

The hope collage is an art-based way of connecting with hope. Images can be a helpful way of connecting with hopeful memories or stories not always easily accessible through words. Tapping into a more creative access point, the hope collage allows people to learn about their own hope in new and often meaningful ways. In over 30 years of using this activity, even those not regularly engaging with arts consistently find the activity illuminating and gratifying after being encouraged to participate.


Create your own hope collage. Read through the directions below. Some preparations are needed for this activity, although these will be familiar to most teachers. Lean into the experience and ask yourself, when was the last time you completed a collage? Countless individuals have shared how much they have enjoyed completing this activity, and we encourage you to take the same opportunity.

If physical materials (ie, magazine, scissors and glue) are not available, consider completing the hope collage virtually. To find images online, we suggest using a [random image generator](#). While you can also Google search for images you find hopeful, the random image generator better simulates flipping through the pages of a magazine, as you never know what type of images you may find.

The activity plan also includes instructions on how to debrief the hope collage. This is an important component of the activity. If you complete the hope collage on your own, you can still share it with a colleague, family member or friend. You can also invite them to complete the collage with you. When describing each image on your collage, consider the prompt, “Share how each image relates to hope for you.” Focus on the hopeful feelings, memories, stories, experiences and relationships associated with the image. Doing so helps elaborate on experiences of hope in the past and things that make you hopeful in the present, and highlights things you hope for in the future.

Leading Hopefully

The hope collage is beneficial for mental health. It creates an opportunity for your school staff to take a break from the familiarity and routines of their regular day, engage with their creativity and connect with each other in new ways. By completing the hope collage activity together, you create a supportive environment for debriefing the experience. In sharing about the creation of their collage within a group, participants have the opportunity to elaborate on how the various images relate to hope for them. This creates a shared hopeful experience in learning about each other's symbols and sources of hope as participants listen to the narrative of each other's collages.

Core Activity #5 – Hope Collage Activity Plan	
Goal The goal of this activity is to connect with the thoughts and emotions of individuals as they construct a “hope collage.” The activity allows individuals to craft personally meaningful hope narratives they can share with others.	Duration 90–120 minutes Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazines or other pictorial media • File folders or large sheets of paper (one per individual) • Glue sticks • Scissors • Relaxing music (optional)
Summary of Tasks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass out materials and offer the following instructions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Use these magazines to find pictures that symbolize hope for you. It doesn’t matter how. Collect these images to create a collage. You can interact with others as little or as much as you would like. Each of you will create your own collage. When time is up, we will share and discuss our collages. ◦ Remind everyone that a variety of photos will make people feel, think about and experience hope and that everyone will likely have different images and ideas about hope in their collage. Encourage individuals to make a collage that is meaningful to them rather than the most “beautiful” or “perfect.” This is not a competition for artistry. Every collage is as good as the next. The focus is on participants’ experiences. • Allow everyone at least 45–60 minutes to work on their collage. The time goes by deceptively quickly. You can play relaxing music to facilitate reflection if you wish. • Following collage making, have each individual share and discuss their collages, ideally one image at a time. The debrief can be done later, but don’t let too much time pass between the activity and the debrief. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ It can be helpful for you to present your collage first, sharing the pictures you chose and the feelings, memories and/or experiences of hope associated with each image. This can take a few minutes. ◦ In small groups, or as a large group, ask individuals to share their collages in a similar way. 	
Extension and Facilitation Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accommodate remote work situations, consider making collages digitally. Random image generators can be especially helpful in getting the ideas flowing. • Simply copy and paste the images you find into a Word document, presentation or painting program (ie, MS Paint, Photoshop, Microsoft Fresh Paint, Artweaver Free etc). Alternatively, individuals can gather materials at home by seeking out magazines, going on nature walks or creating images.
Links and Examples	 <p>You can find additional samples of hope collages on different pages of the Hope Studies Central website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BHFCP: Being Hopeful in the Face of Chronic Pain • SHARP-PWP: Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness Program for People with Parkinson’s
This activity is adapted from Larsen, D J, R Stege, R King and N Egeli. 2016. “The Hope Collage Activity: An Arts-based Group Intervention for People with Chronic Pain.” <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling</i> 46, no 6: 722–737.	

Having explored several ways of implementing hope at school, both through nurturing our own hope and leading hopefully, we now turn to Section Two.

Section 2 – Sustaining Hope Through Conversation Across Domains and Throughout the Year

Knowing how to have hopeful conversations with school leaders, teachers, peers, parents, consultants and students is essential within an educational community. This section provides information to help you approach conversations in a hopeful way.



Hope will never be silent.

— Harvey Milk

Considerations Before Starting a Hopeful Conversation

Ronna Jevne and James Miller (2020) encourage people to open themselves to the possibility of hope, regardless of how hopeless they might feel. This idea is echoed by Joanne Wynn, principal at Avalon School in Edmonton, Alberta. She encourages school leaders to look inward and consider the work they need to do themselves before entering a conversation. She asserts that this is an important first step to help ensure the conversation remains hopeful. She believes that for a hopeful conversation to exist, we need to hold space for hope and believe hope is possible.

To start, we discourage becoming bogged down with thoughts of what is realistic, especially at the beginning. Edey and colleagues (2005) encourage you to be “hopeful first, and realistic second” (p 3), given a preoccupation with realism can unnecessarily restrict one’s view of what is possible. Natalie Kuhn, an elementary teacher within Edmonton Catholic, builds on this idea by sharing that when working with and learning about the hope of others, there are no wrong answers. She encourages school leaders to be genuinely accepting of any answer an individual might give about what provides them with hope. Reality and hope can coexist. You can return to reflecting on constraints after hopeful ideas have opportunities to appear.

Reflective Question: Think back to a time when you have had a hard or challenging conversation in the past, and it has worked. What did you do to help ensure this conversation went well?

Examining Problems Through a Hopeful Lens

Problems exist within every work environment. However, many people approach solving a problem by focusing on and discussing only the problem itself. Sometimes excavating all the details of a problem only digs a bigger hole. It is rare to explicitly examine the problem through a lens of hope. To begin thinking about problems, issues or concerns through a hopeful lens, consider some of the questions listed below.

Questions Linking Hope to Features of the Situation

(Edey et al 2005; Larsen et al 2007)

- What makes you even a little bit hopeful about the situation?
- When you think about the future, what is it that threatens your hope?
- How hopeful are you on a scale of zero to ten, where zero represents no hope? How do you explain the number you chose? Why isn't it higher? Why isn't it lower?
- Is there anyone whose presence or behaviour influences your hope?
- Do you notice any patterns when you think about how your hope goes up and down?

Consider how asking one or two of these questions might help to foster a more hopeful mindset by inviting curiosity about where hope might be found in your context.

Questions That Use Hope to Invite Speculation About Change

(Edey et al 2005; Larsen et al 2007)

- What would a hopeful person do in your situation?
- What is the smallest change that could increase your hope?

Questions can also aid in recruiting creativity through imagining what a hopeful person might do, or what small actions could create leverage, offering hopeful possibilities.

Questions That Develop Personal Hope Statements

(Edey et al 2005; Larsen et al 2007)

- What kind of person do you hope to be in this situation?
- What do you hope to do?
- How do you hope to feel?
- What do you hope will happen?

Questions that spark personal reflections on hope invite people to think about how they might begin to think, act, feel and relate differently in their daily lives. Approaching a problem in a hopeful way may be a new and appealing experience for students, teachers or staff. A hopeful approach allows an individual to examine the problem as it currently exists and invites them to see the situation in new ways. Individuals may begin to discuss how the problem could change and how they would like to view the situation in the future.

Reflective Questions: What questions do you particularly like from the list above? How can you see yourself using these questions within your work?

Activating Hope Through Sharing Stories

In working through this resource, you may very well have noticed your own hope sparked. You may have connected with memories or your surroundings in a way that has enabled you to feel hopeful in the present. Another way that you can create a hopeful feeling in others is through conversation. Some ideas for how you might do that (Edey et al 2005) are listed below.

Describe a time when

- something turned out better than you expected.
- something that was impossible became possible.
- you could not find a solution and then did.
- you learned that you had been helpful but did not know it.
- things did not go your way, but you were okay.
- you were utterly surprised, in a good way.
- something worked out but in a different way than you expected.
- something was unexpectedly humorous.
- things were going your way, but you did not know it.

Reflective Question: In what ways are you already activating hope in others through conversations? From the list above, what prompts could you use in future conversations? For example, what hopes do you hold for your teachers and staff members? Do they know? Holding hope for another can be a powerful communication of caring.



Amy Badger, a teacher in Edmonton Public Schools, has been working with hope in her classroom for the past 15 years. Each year she asks students to complete a hope-focused activity where they ask important people in their life to share the hopes they hold for the student. This year, she made a point to sit down with each student to debrief their experience of the activity, and a common question she asked is “What surprised you about the activity, in a good way?” One student told Amy that he had been quite surprised by the response of his older brother. When Amy inquired why, he elaborated, “I didn’t think my brother had hopes for me.” Amy shared that this had been a memorable moment for her, and she reflected on the impact this activity could have on the relationship between these two brothers, further demonstrating the impact hope-focused activities can have.

Language of Hope

Using hopeful language communicates confidence that hope is possible. You can use the following three tools (Edey et al 2005):

- Using the word “yet”
- Using the word “when”
- Starting sentences with “I believe”

For example, if you were working with a student who was struggling on a math problem, you could convey your hope that they can learn to solve the math problem through phrases like, “You haven’t mastered this math problem *yet*,” “*When* you are able to complete this math problem...,” or “*I believe* you will be able to master this math problem.” Using a specific language of hope will explicitly convey your confidence to the student that even though they cannot complete the math problem now, they will be able to in the future.

It is important to remember that to appear confident in your use of hopeful language, you must actually feel confident that hope is possible in the current situation, remembering that your focus is on possibility rather than probability. By leaning into those things that are possible, we often actually increase their probability! You can build your confidence by continuing to foster your own hope. By attuning to and nurturing hope you will foster hope. Returning to activities that activate your own hope can remind you that you hold multiple hopes, that many desired outcomes are possible, and that things can turn out better than expected. Many people return to these activities again and again, discovering that there is more to learn about hope and that practice makes hope easier to find!

Below are links to some additional handouts, developed by Wendy Edey, that may be helpful as you focus on infusing hope into how you talk to yourself, and how you talk to others:

- [Hopeful things others want to hear](#)
- [Hopeful things to say to yourself](#)
- [Hopeful things to say to a child](#)
- [How to find hope without having the solution to absolutely everything](#)

Conclusion

This resource was created by research team members at Hope Studies Central and the University of Alberta to support school leaders in leading hopefully. As you have worked your way through the resource, you will have completed a series of hope practices and activities that are designed to support school leaders in (a) connecting with their own hope, (b) working with hope at school, and (c) sustaining hope through conversations. In completing the core activities, you will have engaged with the material on an individual level first, becoming acquainted with and learning to nurture your own hope. While we have provided ideas for working with hope in schools, engaging with your own hope will help to give you ideas about how you might further adapt the content for use with teachers and staff.



Once you choose hope,
anything's possible.

— Christopher Reeve

Hope is an everyday word that people often have a personal understanding of, yet there is always more to learn about hope. Our hope is that in working through this resource, you will have gained a deeper understanding of the power of hope, and the many ways that hope can be nurtured in school contexts to positively support the well-being of staff, students and other community members. Hope can be personal or shared, linked to meaningful stories, symbols or actions, and an important resource in exploring possibilities. Choosing to look for hope in challenging circumstances is itself a hopeful act.

The hope-focused activities within the resource are designed to be an easily implemented tool to support the mental health and well-being of school community members, including school leaders themselves. This is particularly important because hope can be sustaining when experiencing stress and challenge at work (Flesaker and Larsen 2010; Nolan and Stitzlein 2011; Snyder 2005) and a key factor in maintaining a sense of purpose and hopeful perspective (Murdoch and Larsen 2018).

The activities included in the resource were purposefully selected to aid in this endeavour; however, countless additional activities and resources exist through Hope Studies Central. This includes hope practices, activities and lessons adapted for use with students in the classroom. If you are interested in learning more, would like a conversation or would like access to any of these additional activities, please reach out to the research team (sharpshm@ualberta.ca).

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