



# The Advisory Concept for Middle Schools

## Overview & Sample Experiences

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Adults in schools advise students in many ways, of course. By far the best known structure for that is the advisory group, or “advisory,” designed to be a small group of students meeting regularly with an adult who keeps a close eye on their social, emotional, and academic development.

Research suggests that schools that embrace advisory typically have specific, often overlapping, aims. Beginning with the most frequently stated, these include:

- 1) Developing interpersonal relationships among staff and students
- 2) Providing academic support to students
- 3) Enriching the curriculum
- 4) Building a school culture

**For our approach, the driver for advisory is supporting social and emotional learning—along with interpersonal relationships and transferable knowledge and skills—to the benefit of students personally and the school culture.**

This design, *Advisory: A Dynamic Approach for Middle Schools*, is based on a 40-60 minute weekly “sacred time” model with content for 18-26 sessions provided for each grade level to establish a meaningful, sustaining program.

### Core Elements

A robust advisory:

- Builds relationships peer-to-peer, teacher-to-student
- Provides opportunities for open and honest communication
- Strengthens health and wellbeing
- Develops awareness of social and emotional learning
- Reduces school and social pressures
- Supports academics through transferable knowledge and skills

For students, a successful advisory means:

- A safe space for interaction
- A teacher who knows me
- Trust that I speak with openness and honesty
- A group that appreciates and values me
- A greater understanding of my place in school, my family, with friends, and the world

For faculty, it means:

- At least one adult in the school is getting to know each student well
- Prosocial/healthy choices are being supported
- My work is valued by my peers and contributing value to the school as a whole

## Our Approach

Middle schools often require adaptations of our advisory model. We have created a flexible approach that can be targeted to the needs, mission, and vision of each school.

Our themes are: Building Foundations, Strengthening Relationships, and Meeting Challenges. In all cases we integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions through engaging teaching methods and processes we call *learning experiences*. Teachers and students benefit from the content and methods, both transferable to academics and co-curricular experiences. Additional supplements include *Service Learning through Growing Community* and *Community News* plus new learning experiences added each year.

Each grade level Advisor Guide offers articulated learning experiences in a sequenced and scaffolded approach, so students accumulate knowledge and skills year to year. Student pages are included as needed. Routines, unique and familiar, provide continuity while staying fresh.

Professional development is available to sustain the construct of the program and fidelity to the approach; still, we encourage teachers to bring and enhance the program with their unique skills.

The way a school community thinks about and values an advisory program influences what occurs in advisory. Our approach has several key components:

- High student engagement through varied approaches to teaching and learning
- Flexibility for open sessions and check-in sessions
- A call for advisors to “under-direct” leaving increased opportunities for engagement, differentiation, and personalized learning
- Room for student input, and voice and choice, viewing students as knowledge creators

## Organizational Learning

Any new program—including Advisory—is just that: *new*. Willingness for all to dive in and participate, especially advisors, will model the level of engagement that students will notice and emulate. Questions raised present important opportunities to determine ways to continually refine the program so it remains “dynamic” and relevant.

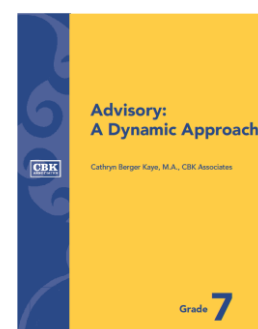
## Inquiries Welcome!

**For information about pricing, customization, and professional development, please contact:**

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# THE SCIENCE OF FRIENDSHIP

## Purpose

- To explore what experts and evidence says about friendships
- To expand our notions of friends and friendship
- To identify the key elements to developing supportive friendships

## Key Skills

- Open-minded
- Self-awareness
- Action research
- Expressing ideas

## Materials

- ✓ Four paper signs on which you've written "Strongly Agree," "Agree Somewhat," "Disagree Somewhat," and "Strongly Disagree" [Before class, post the pages in the corners of the room. Students will move to these corners so be sure there is access.]
- ✓ Easel paper, markers (one per student), sticky notes (about 10 per student)
- ✓ Organizers: "The Science of Friendship"; "About Friendship"

**Note:** For the section of conducting research, this works best if students have school-wide access to the full community. Alert the school when this is happening and to eagerly participate. If someone is not available in a classroom or office to be interrupted, they may place a sign on the door.

**Time** The excitement and variety of this learning experience, and the importance of the topic and process, requires two sessions.

## Context

"A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow," wrote William Shakespeare. Nourishing such supportive friendships, we all know, is not easy, most especially for adolescents building their identities. Teenage friendships can be as fragile as they are strong.

This advisory begins with a fast-paced experience of short conversations about friendships. Then they conduct research using the MISO method of action research—media, interview, survey, and observation. They summarize their conclusions, and examine signs of questionable friendships along with signs of valuable friendships.

## Opening

- Tell students that for the next 5-8 minutes, you would like them to sort themselves in relation to a set of responses regarding friendships. With each statement below (or create your own), students move to corners of the room, marked with signs that best express their views on the statement. As students take their places, write the statement on the board. Allow a few minutes for students to talk in groups about why they took this stance. If a student is alone, you may join them to listen. Then, ask at least one student in each group to share his or her reason.
  - I like being with my friends.
  - Sometimes, I choose to be on my own rather than with friends.
  - I make friends easily.
  - I usually let my friends make decisions of what we will do together.
  - I sometimes want to keep my friends to myself.
  - If someone wants to be my friend, I am open to that.
  - Friendships can be complicated.

- Take a minute or two to debrief, asking students what they learned from this short experience— what did they learn about themselves? about others?

## Process

- Let students know that today they get to research about friendships. Create four groups (randomly mix up the students). If you only have enough for three groups, that's doable and an adaptation is noted below. Provide each group an easel paper and markers. First, have them draw a frame on the page. They pair up (you may need one group of three) and conduct two-minute interviews to find out their partners interests, skills, and talents, and represent them in the frame—the large space stays blank. After two minutes, have one minute of silence to learn about their group members.

**Note:** The word “represent” is intentional so students can write or draw. Be sure to under-direct and not elaborate; they can figure this out for themselves. This important interchange allows for recognizing every person in the group as having value, and their challenge is to utilize these abilities when devising how to conduct the research.

- Have students make a circle about the size of a fist in the center of the easel paper, and then four lines to the frame—like a compass from the center—for north, east south, west. This makes four large spaces off the center circle.
- Distribute “The Science of Friendship.” Each group either selects or is given one topic to research so all four are covered (if you have three groups, students can choose which to eliminate). The topic is written in the center circle.
- Give out the sticky notes, and students write questions about their topic, one per sticky note, a minimum of two questions per person, *and* they write questions for each of the other tables. Allow 3-4 minutes of nonstop question writing.
- Review or introduce the MISO method of action research. The students write Media, Interview, Survey, and Observation, one in each of the four large sections on their paper. For each, ask what this could be; examples are provided:
  - Media: Using books, online information, newspapers, maps, TV, films, radio (what can they access in school in the library or the counselor’s office?)
  - Interview: Asking an expert (who has expertise on friendship? Could be adults or students, counselors, teachers, a psychologist)
  - Survey: Collecting a range of responses from people with or without knowledge on the subject (great to compare responses from different age groups)
  - Observation or Experience: What can be seen or drawn from our past (what can they learn from observing in this or in other school spaces?)

**Note:** The MISO method is to counter the exclusive use of the internet for research. Online platforms are for “search” and have research conducted by others. In school, we want students to add to the body of knowledge through action research, and the MISO method provides this framework useful in any subject.

- Now, students place their questions in one of the four quadrants that can best be a means of finding out. Being aware of their members interests, skills, and talents, determine how to engage everyone in answering the questions. Have they determined their priorities for which questions they will aim to answer? Let them know how much time they have and that they have full school access (with exceptions as needed). It is amazing what students can accomplish in 15 minutes, or

you can extend the research to the full session and continue this process in another advisory.  
Follow their lead!

- Students collaborate on assembling their findings on the easel paper. Let them know this will be viewed by their advisory group so everyone is learning together. Allow the necessary time for students to determine how to best represent their findings and then put them together.
- With their student organizer, "The Science of Friendship," students then walk around and collect information all the topics.
- Distribute "About Friendship," then allow for questions to groups and a general conversation of what was discovered and what this means. What was surprising? How did the various MISO approaches effect what they found out? Allow time for students to construct summaries on this second organizer.

**Note:** Ask students when this MISO method could prove helpful to assist them in transferring this concept to academic classes.

### Closing

- Signs for questionable and valuable friendships are provided on "About Friendship." Have them first read through and edit to be more accurate for them, or place a checkmark by each that indicates, "this is true for me." Discuss.
- Conclude with a paired or full advisory discuss of: What is helpful to know from this advisory? What will I continue to think about from this advisory?

### Extensions

- Posting or distributing a collection of quotes about friendship offers another discussion starter.
  - "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'" — *C.S. Lewis*, author
  - "I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light." — *Helen Keller*, author
  - "Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing." — *Elie Wiesel*, author
  - "Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything." — *Muhammad Ali*, boxer and activist
  - "Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you; spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life." — *Amy Poehler*, actress
  - "A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow." — *William Shakespeare*, playwright
- Once students know the MISO method of Action Research they can apply this to any study. Suggest it's use to other faculty, and keep it going!

# The Science of Friendship



Can you develop these ideas using the MISO method of Action Research? Be creative!  
Be collaborative!

Good friendships boost health because . . .

Media	Interview	Survey	Observation

Going along with the crowd has risks and benefits . . .

Media	Interview	Survey	Observation

Peer pressure is complicated because . . .

Media	Interview	Survey	Observation

Having friends who are just like you all the time has two sides . . .

Media	Interview	Survey	Observation



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Good friendships boost health because . . .

Going along with the crowd has risks and benefits . . .

Peer pressure is complicated because . . .

Having friends who are just like you all the time has two sides . . .

## 3 SIGNS OF A

### Questionable Friendship

- 1. You aren't thinking clearly about decisions when you're with them**  
If you end up in a bad situation, think about whether you allowed that person to have undue influence. You are responsible for your decisions.
- 2. Your friend is never there for you**  
When stuff happens and you feel down, is this friend absent?
- 3. What advice?**  
If the advice you're given isn't what you'd give to someone, think twice about the advice. Good friends want the best for you.

### Valuable Friendship

- 1. They push us to be better**  
They make us want to be better versions of ourselves. They inspire us to be better and achieve more in life, and competition doesn't exist.
- 2. They call us out if we're in the wrong**  
We're all human and we all have flaws. Good friends in life will guide you if you fall down the wrong path.
- 3. They have your back when life gets hard**  
There will be times when you're faced with tough situations – having someone there to pick you up when you're going through a hard time will help you overcome it.

**Can a questionable friendship become a valuable one? Communicate to improve your relationships!**

Questionable and Valuable friendships signs adapted from <http://www.healthforteens.co.uk/relationships/friendships/friendship/>  
July 28, 2017

## THREE QUESTION CONVERSATIONS

### Purpose

- To engage in conversations with open-mindedness and mutual respect
- To listen for key words, ideas, and concepts
- To examine opinions and feelings on diverse topics and see the connections

### Key Skills

- Listening
- Conversation
- Self-awareness
- Extending ideas

### Materials

- ✓ Easel paper for each table, markers for each student

### Context

Shared conversations are a critical component in learning, as is opening our minds to new ideas and perspectives. The process offered here creates an opportunity for both. It is based on the World Café, a model for meaningful conversations.

While there are numerous variations for the Café, it typically involves people sitting at tables of four with an easel paper page for the group to share and a marker for each person. The facilitator introduces a series of questions for conversation, with people noting in words and images key thoughts, ideas, questions, even doodles (anything really) on the paper. At a moment determined by the facilitator(s), the group stands—except one person who remains seated at each table and becomes the anchor. The “standers” move to different tables, forming new groups of four. The “anchor” begins by summarizing the previous table conversation and then the newcomers add to the topic. Sometimes the facilitator poses additional questions for continued dialogue. There can be several rounds of different length. (More on this process can be found at [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com).)

Here, we vary the protocol. Each table is given a different question (three in all) and students move through the questions, expanding the conversation with each table change. (If there are four tables, two tables can take up the same question, and so on.)

Ideally, students begin to make or see connections among the different topics. In our choices for questions, we selected topics that may not frequently be discussed but are important for adolescents to explore. Questions are always meant to be open to interpretation, and the conversation may go in many different directions. Once students have done this experience, they typically enjoy doing it again. Students may want to contribute their own ideas for questions.

### Opening

If possible, have the room set up with seating arrangements, with easel paper and markers for four at tables prior to students arriving so they enter and take seats. Otherwise, have students assist in transforming the space.

- Four students sit in each table arrangement. If needed, tables may have five.
- Explain that today is a World Café process for meaningful conversations. This World Café process has been used around the world by groups of all sizes, even 2000 people at a time, to discuss challenging topics, build consensus, set agendas, and create community. Explain that they will understand the process as they go through the process. However, there are several key guidelines:
  - Shared time
  - Everyone is responsible for including everyone
  - All ideas and comments are welcome



- The paper is used to capture words and images (and doodles)
- Respect for all
- Let students know that you will provide the topics for conversation in the form of questions.

## Process

- Have each table take a number: 1, 2, 3 (if there are more than three tables, duplicate numbers) and show (on easel paper or a slide) the question that goes with each number, reading it aloud.
  1. **Why does judging others seem so normal?** (Is being judgmental avoidable?)
  2. **How does being different shape our identity?** (Are we defined by what we have in common or what makes us unique?)
  3. **What happens to your body and your emotions when you see others being treated as “less”?** (How are people treated fairly or unfairly all the time, all around us?)
- Remind students to capture what is important and significant on the paper.
- Begin! As you monitor the process and time, alert students when they have about a minute to wrap up their conversations. Conversation times vary between 5-10 minutes.
- Ask one person at each table to stand. The first time, students are often hesitant to stand, thinking that this person will make a presentation. Instead, have this person SIT and the other students scatter to different tables. The sitter, as noted previously, becomes an “anchor.” At their new tables, the “anchor” provides an overview of what was discussed. And the discussion continues.
- As you circulate to observe, notice whether the conversation includes how the topics from the different tables are connected. This is not required. However, if they are not making this connection, it may be stimulating at some point to ask something like, “Are you finding a connection with the topics you brought to the table?”
- Repeat changing tables. One person remains, the rest move, the conversation continues.

## Closing

- Debrief by asking questions regarding the process:
  - What was the process like?
  - Was there anything particularly challenging, engaging, or surprising in the process?

Include questions about the content:

- What did you learn?
- What did you discover that was unexpected?
- Did you come to consensus about a topic or find different points of view?
- What might you think about as a result of this experience?
- Reaffirm that community growth and change occurs by people talking to each other, with one conversation leading to another. Share the World Café website if students want to learn more.

## Extensions

- Plan an experience with Three Conversations to lead with students and parents together.
- Deconstruct the experience with students, to look at the way the questions are constructed. Could they create their own set in a similar fashion?

# WHO LIVES HERE?

## Purpose

- To consider the myriad ways we are diverse
- To recognize how our diversity is supported at school
- To take initiative to improve our how our school environment appreciates, recognizes, and acknowledges our collective diversity

## Materials

- ✓ Easel paper, sticky notes and pens
- ✓ Organizer: "Our School: Who Lives Here?"; "Four Square Reflection Tool"

## Key Skills

- Observe the environment
- Examine concepts
- Heighten curiosity
- Recognize perspectives
- Extend ideas
- Recognize change as a necessity

**Terms** identity, inclusive

## Context

Schools are meant to be safe havens for children, their families and all who work and participate in the community. Safety goes beyond feeling protected. Students need to feel included and acknowledged to have a lasting sense of belonging. While true for all children, as noted in "Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms," (Shade, et.al. 1997, p.43), "For children of color and families of immigrants, their initial assessment of their acceptance depends on whether or not they perceive pictures, symbols, or other visual representations that remind them of their homes, communities, and values. An inviting classroom focuses on the use of color, physical arrangement of space, lighting, and sound to attract students to the learning process."

For this experience, students consider their sense of personal identity and what would acknowledge their presence in their school environment, "visual representations." Following discussion, they a "walkabout" in their school in searching for inclusive representation.

This learning experience is based on an idea and process developed by the Guilford County Schools Character Development Department in collaboration with the GCS Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Greensboro, N.C.

## Opening

- Write the word *identity* on the board vertically. Ask for words that come to mind to create an acrostic definition. Form eight groups with each taking a letter and have one minute to come up with their contribution. Record responses. What happened? Did you define "identity"?
- Many experts in child development think that a key purpose of adolescence is to secure our identity, a sense of self, and our role in the world. In pairs, discuss whether this seems true, why or why not. Request students support their point of views with specifics. Then discuss.
- What makes up an "identity"? Can they list the elements? Can identity be viewed and supported?

## Process

- Distribute "Our School: Who Lives Here?". Review how this document is looking at "identity" through the lens of race, cultures, and ethnic groups. The aim is to determine whether we have a school and classroom that is inclusive of the diverse identities present in the school. Clarify any terms needed.

- Prepare students for a walkabout experience, a chance to survey their school through observation. Review the information on the page. Note for students that forms with blank spaces are always asking questions and requesting you to do something to find out information. What questions are being asked, and what does this form expect you to do?
- Since there are several questions and 5-7 minutes for the walkabout, what suggestions do they have to get all the information requested? This is an opportunity to discuss strategy, and can draw upon their interests, skills, and talents to determine who will do what. Most importantly, students do the walkabout in groups of two or three so they can have conversations as they observe and take notes.
- After the walkabout, form small groups for students to discuss findings. Be sure you separate students who walked the halls together. This allows each student to represent their “team.” Encourage them to discuss:
  - What did they see specifically? Always cite evidence.
  - What common themes did they find, if any?
  - What, if anything, is missing from the school in any of these environments?
- Have an all-class conversation about what they perceived through this experience.

### **Closing**

- Use the Four Square Reflection Tool. Allow three minutes for students to think independently about what they observed (What happened?), any feelings (How I feel?), and to record any ideas for making classrooms and the school more inclusive of others. Any last minute questions? Invite students to share.
- Extend this idea with proposals to make changes in classrooms and throughout the school.

### **Extensions**

- Find out among the other teachers what students thought about and ideas for building a more inclusive environment. Bring findings back to the class and ask for students input on how to move forward collectively. Improving school culture and climate is an excellent way to engage students in service learning.
- Use the school newspaper as a forum for discussion of these topics and findings.

## Our School: Who Lives Here?



Which races, cultures, and ethnic groups are represented in the décor of:

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Hallways

Evidence

---

School Offices

Evidence

---

Classrooms

Evidence

---

Library

Evidence

---

Other Space:

Evidence

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What type of student work is displayed as a way of celebrating student effort, creativity, and expression? Be specific, with examples.

Are gender, culture, and racial equity represented in the arrangement of student seating in this classroom?

Yes  No Because . . .

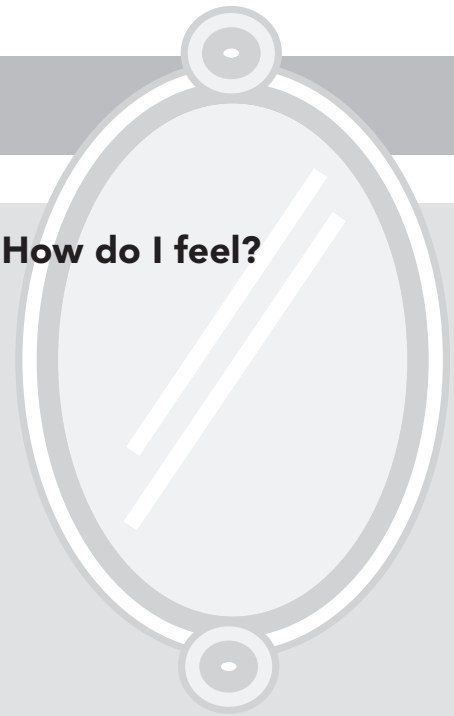
Are gender, culture, and racial equity represented in the class décor of this classroom?

Yes  No Because . . .

# Four Square Reflection Tool

**What happened?**

**How do I feel?**



**Ideas?**

**Questions?**