Sages of the Ages: Stories that touch and teach

One generation plants the trees under whose shade future generations rest.
~Chinese Proverb

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Leader’s Guide

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Introduction and Goals

Throughout the life of individuals and families, there are tough times and tender times, times that try us and times that teach us. Getting through these times and coming out stable and strong is the key to enduring and thriving.

As older adults look back on their lives, with the benefit of the passage of time for perspective, they can recall many stories of such times. Embedded in those stories are lessons on life which can be shared with others—youths filled with energy and a seemingly unending future—adults filled with experience and a future coming to an end. These youths and adults can learn from each other and in so doing strengthen their individual lives and the life of society in general.

Gathering and sharing those stories is the intent of Sages of the Ages: Stories that Touch and Teach, a collaborative project of the Maryland Cooperative Extension Family Life Committee and the Maryland Family Community Education organization. Themes for the stories in Sages of the Ages are based on resiliency research, which tells us that individuals and families can develop protective and recovery factors that get them through the challenges of life.

To help you teach young people about life’s storms and rainbows through storytelling, a sample of stories from adults has been gathered and compiled into an interactive story collection. An activity guidebook and a leader’s guide for teachers and youth leaders can be used in your work with youth. Along the way, you will guide young people through hands-on activities and projects of their own design, helping them develop skills and knowledge they can use to grow personally and connect to their communities.

The goals of Sages of the Ages are

- To build resilience capacity through intergenerational storytelling
- To foster the development of important life skills
- To encourage community involvement and help teens make a difference in the lives of other people
- To promote interaction between teens and older adults
Benefits of Sages of the Ages

People of all ages face personal challenges. Sometimes, those challenges go beyond the personal to face us collectively as members of a neighborhood, community, nation, and world. Recent events such as terrorist and sniper attacks, effects of weather and downturns in the economy challenge us to cope with events beyond ourselves.

Sages of the Ages can benefit people in different stages of their lives, giving everyone incentives to participate. It is especially designed to help teens become resilient. The project intends to minimize the distance between generations through sharing, storytelling, teaching, and learning and to build resiliency—the capacity to overcome the tough times of life.

What can young people get out of Sages?

The teenage stage of life is the beginning of independent living, making one's own choices, and being responsible for one's self. The newness of these responsibilities brings rewards and challenges. Like anyone else, teens have difficult times that challenge and can overwhelm them. Unlike older adults, teens do not have extensive experience in dealing with the difficulties of life. Teens need guidance in how to handle the tough times of life so that they come out healthy and able to continue growing and developing into productive young adults.

Sharing the hopeful stories of others can help teens understand that everyone has life challenges, yet the ways people cope vary. Learning how people cope with tough times can help teens reduce negative outcomes. One way to learn is by reading or hearing the stories of others with a lifetime of experiences of getting through the challenges of life—of coming through or bouncing back. These resilient experiences of others can give teens hope for their own futures as they face new challenges.

Teens also face forming their own identities as individuals, taking on new roles, and finding their niche in their communities, their cultures, and their worlds. Sages of the Ages is based on stories and may help teens think about themselves in terms of others in their community, form strong personal values, and make good choices in agreement with their identity and their values. Young people who understand who they are will be better able to become productive, contributing citizens, to establish positive personal relationships, and to contribute to their communities.

What can people in the middle years get out of Sages?
With about half of life’s experiences behind them, middle-aged people have gotten through their share of tough times. They also have many years to which they look forward. They have a choice to contribute to future generations by sharing and teaching about the experiences they have had and wisdom they have to offer thus far1.

As facilitators and leaders of Sages of the Ages, middle-aged adults are helping prepare future generations with the tools they need to successfully handle life’s difficulties. They are in a position between generations where they can help to pass on the wisdom of older adults and bridge the generation gaps between each group.

What can older adults get out of Sages?

As adults age, they reach the stage of reflection. That is, they come to a time or times when they are reflecting on their lives, its purpose and meaning. A goal of this stage is to accept their choices and make peace for themselves with life as they have lived it. They must decide the worth of their life experiences and how they can use those experiences to help others making their way through life1.

With a relatively limited future, older adults can find ways to leave legacies that come from their lives. They can share their life stories with others who can use and appreciate their experiences and the wisdom they have gained. Storytelling helps older adults to think about their lives, relive some of their thoughts and feelings from an earlier time, and reflect positively on their experiences. Nostalgia sparks an older person’s memory of their family and friends and allows people to share themselves and their lives with future generations. This process of reflection and meaning making can bring comfort to older adults themselves. For those hearing the stories, and especially teens, the experiences of older adults can help put perspective to current challenges. Older adults survived both individual and collective challenges. They have lived to reflect and tell their stories. Their stories can be applied to the life experiences of today’s teens and help guide them through the challenges that are part of living.

So, who gains from Sages?

Everyone gains. Everyone who participates in Sages of the Ages has the opportunity to learn about themselves, about other people and about how others cope with life’s difficulties. Despite great stresses and tough times, knowing that life goes on and difficulties can be overcome helps people get through. Sharing one’s self with others helps bring families and communities closer. Through learning to understand others, people can better understand themselves and what is important to them. Through learning, we can find ways to make choices that improve the quality of our lives.
Developing Life Skills among Teens

Materials regarding the seven priority Maryland 4-H life skills will be inserted here.

Decision Making

Acquiring Knowledge

Taking Personal Responsibility

Creative Thinking

Communicating

Understanding Self

Getting Along with Others
How to Use This Guide

Teens and adults alike can learn a lot about problem solving, coping, and resilience as they participate in *Sages of the Ages*. *Sages* uses stories and storytelling to share the valuable experiences of older adults with young people in search of growth and understanding. Your role as a leader in this project is to:

1. Make sure that young people are willing to listen and to learn from the wealth of experiences and lessons older adults will have to offer.
2. Prepare teens for this fulfilling experience by encouraging them to reflect on their own challenges and accomplishments.
3. Help them understand the importance of forming relationships with older adults, as well as sharing themselves with others.
4. Encourage creativity and big ideas among teens.
5. Support ideas for the project that emerge from teens themselves.

Teens participating in *Sages of the Ages* have a chance to make a difference in their lives, in the lives of others, and in their community. Make sure they have all of the necessary opportunities to pursue their own ideas and interests.

One is reminded of Margaret Mead’s hypothesis that the best societal learning has always occurred when three generations come together in contexts of discovery and valuing— the child, the elder, and the middle adult.

~David Cooperrider
Sages of the Ages intends to foster independence and resourcefulness within its participants. Learning through experiences encourages participants to analyze their experiences, reflect upon their meaning, and connect the knowledge to new experiences.

Familiarize yourself with the collection of stories and the leader’s guidebook before beginning any of the projects and activities. The leader’s guidebook is designed to help you facilitate the activities by listing the key concepts, objectives, needed materials, and other helpful information for each activity. It will help you guide teens towards initiating their own experiences and independent learning. The guidebook contains many choices: as a leader, you will help teens choose among the options that are of most interest to them. Many of the projects and suggestions contained within the activity book are meant to spark the creativity and resourcefulness of the teens in the project. Instead of asking them to merely complete a series of activities, we invite them to:

- generate their own activities
- collect their own stories
- develop projects that suit their interests and the needs of those in their communities

Sages of the Ages asks participants to think about many abstract concepts and ideas, an appropriate task for teenagers. In addition to creating their own activities and projects, teens are encouraged to meet new people and to participate in intergenerational activities. Forming a partnership with an organization of older adults or a neighborhood senior center may help teens have better access to older adults. Many of the suggested activities involve collecting stories and information from older adults, organizing intergenerational community activities and events, and executing community service projects that benefit older adults. The interaction between teens and older adults, after all, is one of the goals of Sages of the Ages. The more partners involved in Sages of the Ages, the more opportunity there is for learning among people of all ages.
The Experiential Learning Process

Hands-on involvement is one of the best ways to learn. This project follows a model known as the experiential learning process. The steps are shown in sequence in the diagram below. The experiential learning process actively engages learners and encourages them to think more critically than traditional teaching methods. By teaching young people through experiential learning, we help them learn that they are capable, important individuals.

If parents, teachers, and leaders do the work and the thinking for young people, it can hurt their self-esteem and sense of worth. Sometimes leaders must sit back and watch while teens work through an activity. Allowing them the opportunity to learn by trial and error, practice skills, brainstorm their own projects, and make contributions on their terms, teens become more independent, creative, and able emerging adults.

Adapted from Walk in My Shoes, by Molly McEllean, a publication of University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.
Storytelling Activity

To introduce Sages of the Ages to teens, start a discussion about how they deal with difficult times. Ask them to address how a personal challenge differs from a community challenge. Ask them to address the ways in which they bounce back from challenges and the ways in which they help others bounce back. Have teens discuss how being a teenager helps or hinders their ability to deal with certain challenges. Introduce the idea of vicarious learning, or learning through exposure to others’ experiences. Teens can learn about resilience vicariously through the resilient stories of others. Learning lessons of resiliency through storytelling is the initiative of the Sages of the Ages program.

About the Activity
This activity points out many ways that we cope with difficulties and challenges. It also helps participants discover and understand values that are thematic in our stories. By sharing stories with each other, we can learn from the ways that other people cope with their challenges. We can identify the common themes and values in our stories and think of creative ways to solve problems. Although it is not necessary, leading this activity in a group setting is an ideal way to promote thorough thinking about how teens confront and bounce back from difficulties.

Objective
To get teens to begin thinking about how storytelling can teach important life lessons

Materials
Flipchart and markers (or chalkboard and chalk)

Helpful Hints
• To get ideas flowing and make people feel more comfortable sharing their stories, tell your own story of a difficult time.
• To provoke ideas about what common sources of stress are, how people cope, and what values our stories reveal, use an example from the list below.
  o Common sources of stress: School, family, peers, time management, relationship problems, worries about the future, failure to meet goals and expectations
  o How people cope: communicating and sharing with others about stresses, relying on close friends and family members, seeking help from a reliable source (tutors/teachers, professionals, community and social service organizations, etc.), taking steps to minimize or eliminate the stressor, resolving relationship problems, planning and organizing schedule, setting realistic goals
Values: importance of family and friends, freedom, self-worth, kindness, independence, achievement, upholding personal commitments, making moral decisions, honesty, compassion, economic sufficiency, respect for others, peace

**Storytelling Activity**

1. Have each member of the group share a brief story of a difficult or stressful situation, event, or time in his or her life. Have each address the ways he or she dealt with it, whether or not he or she was successful.

2. After everyone shares a story, have the group identify factors that help people get through difficult situations or times. Record factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Resiliency Factors in Stories’ section of the guidebook (Page 27).

3. Have the group identify barriers to cope ability (e.g., what stresses and crises preclude the ability to cope). Record factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Stressors and Crises in Stories’ section of the guidebook. (Page 28)

4. Have the group identify values revealed in the stories. Record values on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Values in Stories’ section of the guidebook. (Page 29)

5. To elicit discussion about and reflection on the activity, ask the group the following questions:
   - What is the importance of stories and storytelling in our families, communities, cultures, and world?
   - What can we learn from stories?
   - How do stories change or enlighten our thinking about others and ourselves?
   - How is learning about ourselves and others beneficial?

**Discussion**

Use ‘Discussing Stories as a Means of Coping’ to guide the discussion (page 25). Each page in this section can aid in the identification of resiliency factors, stressors, and values in the teens’ stories. Discussing the activity can help teens synthesize their ideas and the ideas of others with their experience and understanding of the activity.
Sages of the Ages Pilot Story Collection

Using the collection of stories gathered for Sages of the Ages to show teens a variety of stories and resiliency lessons. Each story is presented in an interactive form with an accompanying activity or storytelling suggestion. The pilot collection is another tool you can use to help teens identify and learn values, protective factors, stressors, and lessons of resiliency. It also serves as a sample of how teens can present the stories they collect on their own in fun, interesting ways.

About the Activity
This activity involves using a collection of stories as a stimulus for thinking about the ways people cope with difficult times. Older adults, who have a lifetime of experiences and wisdom to share, tell all of the stories. By reading and hearing their stories, teens can learn from the ways that other people cope with their challenges. They can identify the common themes and values in our stories and think of creative ways to solve problems.

Objectives
To identify resiliency factors, stressors, and values in previously collected stories.

To introduce multiple storytelling mediums and techniques.

Materials
CD player
8 ½” x 11” paper

For Discussion
Use ‘Discussing Stories as a Means of Coping’ to guide the activity and discussion (page 25). Each page in this section can aid in the identification of resiliency factors, stressors, and values in the teens’ stories.

Helpful Hints
Depending on the size of your activity group, you may want to consider giving each teen enough time to review the collection on his or her own before or after the group session. Independent review of the story collection after the group session helps reinforce the stories and their lessons.
Pilot Story Collection Activity
In sharing the pilot story collection with teens, allow teens to explore the collection, either as a group or individually. If you choose to share the stories in a group setting, have teens take turns sharing stories in the form in which they are presented. This may involve reading or acting out a story, leading and completing an activity associated with a story, or playing an audio recording of a story. Teens can do some of the storytelling activities during the group session, while other activities are suggestions for outside or future storytelling activities. If you choose to have teens review the collection on an individual basis, it is possible for them to do a majority of the activities.

Note the interactive forms in which the collection presents each of the stories. Storytelling comes in many forms, and people can record and retell stories in a variety of creative ways. This collection models the story collecting, compiling, presenting, and sharing teens will do on their own in the next section of Sages of the Ages.

Use the steps that follow to help teens identify resiliency factors, stressors, and values in the stories in the pilot collection. These steps are identical to steps 2-4 in the introductory activity. The last step includes discussion points exclusive to the story collection.

1. After everyone shares a story, have the group identify factors that help people get through difficult situations or times. Record factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Resiliency Factors in Stories’ section of the guidebook. (Page 27)

2. Have the group identify barriers to our ability to cope (e.g. what stresses and crises preclude the ability to cope). Record factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Stressors and Crises in Stories’ section of the guidebook. (Page 28)

3. Have the group values revealed in the stories. Record values on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Values in Stories’ section of the guidebook. (Page 29)

4. To elicit discussion about and reflection on the activity, ask the group the following questions:
   - How do the different formats in which people tell stories reach different audiences?
   - How can different storytelling techniques capture more about the storyteller than his or her words alone reveal?
Collecting Your Own Stories

About the Activity
This activity encourages teens to learn about the lives of older adults they personally interview. They can choose their own methods of collecting stories, ask the questions they are most interested in, and form relationships with older adults who they look up to and appreciate. Collecting their own stories helps teens seek important lessons from older adults with whom they make contact. It also enables teens to find the people and the stories that fit their interests and needs. Collecting stories is a hands-on opportunity for teens to learn through their own experiences. Once stories are collected, teens will repeat the storytelling activity using the stories they collect to find lessons of resiliency (page 20).

Objectives
To expand the resource base of stories so that more stories are gathered and more varying lessons can be learned

To reach out to and meet needs of the people who are telling the stories and the needs of those collecting them

To identify resiliency factors, stressors, and values in personally collected stories.

Materials
Story prompt and consent forms
Tape recorder and tapes
Other recording materials

Helpful Hints
Encourage teens to use as many creative ways of collecting stories and as many sources as they can. Also provide assistance with materials, equipment, and transportation as possible. Remind teens that they are looking for stories about overcoming challenges or tough times.

Discussion (after completion of activity)
1. How did collecting your own stories help you understand the experiences and lessons you heard about?
2. How can the interviews you conducted and the stories you collected help you in resolving some of your own challenges and difficulties?
3. How do you think the storytellers benefited from sharing their stories with you?

Special Instructions
Be sure to remind teens to use the enclosed prompt and consent form when collecting stories. Return a copy of every story collected to Bonnie Braun at the University of Maryland.

Note: The next three pages outline the necessary steps teens need to take to collect their own stories, suggestions for collection, and other important information. You may simply photocopy the information or share it with them as needed.
Before collecting stories …

Because **Sages of the Ages** is a research-based program of the University of Maryland, there are a few important requirements and conditions for story collecting. These requirements are meant to protect the storytellers and their contributions to **Sages of the Ages**.

| For important information regarding story-gathering requirements, see Appendix A. |

Using a number of contacts and sources, finding available and willing storytellers is simple. You may contact a community organization of older adults, such as the Lions Club, Knights of Columbus, or a senior citizens club or activity group. Attending a meeting or activity of such an organization can help teens recruit interested storytellers. You may consider contacting a senior center, an assisted living center, or a retirement community in search of storytellers. Teens can find storytellers among their own family members, teachers, neighbors, and family friends. Remember that sharing one’s stories is a personal decision: take steps to ensure that teens do not pressure older adults to share a story. All participation should be voluntary.

Once teens have located potential storytellers, they should set up a time and place to gather stories from volunteers. If they need special permission to enter a meeting or living space, make sure they have sought that permission and planned a meeting time well in advance. Have teens think about ways that they may want to record the stories and have them gather the necessary supplies.

By collecting stories themselves, teens can ask older adults to tell stories about certain struggles that they may have a particular interest in hearing. Teens should decide if they have any special interests or curiosities before collecting stories. These decisions may influence the topics they bring up in conversations, certain questions they ask, etc. However, be sure to emphasize the importance of letting volunteers tell the stories they want to tell, rather than the stories others may want them to tell.

Being a good listener is an essential part of collecting stories from others. Because of the sensitive nature of some events and stories, teens should expect emotional responses from storytellers. Be sure to:

- Maintain eye contact
- Be positive
- Be an active listener, check for understanding
- Ask open-ended, encouraging questions
- Allow the storyteller to talk freely without interruption
- Encourage conversation by asking ‘feeling’ questions
- Realize that there may be emotional pauses or tears in the conversation

Adapted from **Strengthening Families and Communities by Sharing Life Stories**, an Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet
When collecting stories …

In order to help you collect stories about resiliency, we have included an introductory letter about Sages of the Ages and a writing prompt to share with your storytellers. The introductory letter also contains a section for the storyteller to give his or her contact information, demographic information, and signature indicating voluntary participation in the project. Obtaining proper consent from each storyteller is mandatory.

For an introductory letter and prompt to share with the adults from whom you are collecting your own stories, see Appendix B.

If you wish to use any photographs or artifacts from storytellers or similar items given to you by the storytellers, seek permission from them to include those items.

For a permission form to use or reproduce photographs, artifacts, or other items of or belonging to storytellers, see Appendix C.

The main purpose of collecting your own stories is for you, other teens, and older adults to directly benefit from the storytelling process. In this process, your sharing and engagement with older adults may form valuable and special relationships. You will be able to experience the storytellers’ lives and lessons of resiliency from the source.

By spending some of your time collecting stories from older adults, you are sending the message that they are important and their stories and lessons are interesting and important to others. Moreover, adults who live alone may appreciate the chance to talk to and interact with others. Older adults often enjoy being nostalgic, reflecting on their lives, and sharing their stories with others.
Collecting additional stories also serves to expand the University of Maryland’s story collection to use in the Sages of the Ages program.

When you record a story, it is not necessary to prepare interview questions. Simply ask the storyteller to recall a time in his or her life when resilience was a factor. If you have questions during the story collection, feel free to ask, but remember to be sensitive to the storyteller.

Recording each story using a different method will make for an interesting collection of stories. Think about the different methods you may use to record a story. Suggest some of these methods to your storytellers, but make sure that you let them choose the recording format with which they are comfortable.

After you have recorded a story, be sure to thank your storytellers individually. Consider sending a note or a card, making a special visit, giving storytellers a copy of their stories and/or a copy of the collection you make, or telling them about what you learned and how you will share their stories with others.

Return copies of all stories collected, signed consent forms, copies of photos collected, and permission forms to your leader.

The world changes when large numbers of people change in the way they think a little bit. ~Willis Harmon, Co-Founder, Institute of Noetic Sciences
Personal Collection Storytelling Activity
Guide teens through the storytelling activity using the stories they have collected from older adults. This activity may be done using one teen’s collection of stories or stories collected by several teens. In addition to identifying resiliency factors in the stories they present, teens should also share their knowledge of the storyteller with the group. Because teens personally collected the stories they share, they may also want to discuss their interactions with the storytellers and share any photographs or artifacts they gathered.

Use the following steps to help teens identify resiliency factors, stressors, and values in the stories in the pilot collection. These steps are identical to steps 2-4 from the introductory activity and the pilot collection activity. The last step includes discussion points exclusive to the story collection.

1. After everyone shares a story, have the group identify factors that help people get through difficult situations or times. Record factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Resiliency Factors in Stories’ section of the guidebook (page 27).

2. Have the group identify barriers to ability to cope (e.g. what stresses and crises prevent us from coping?). Record these factors on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Stressors and Crises in Stories’ section of the guidebook (page 28).

3. Have the group identify values revealed in stories. Record values on the flipchart. If the group has difficulties, prompt them using the ‘Finding Values in Stories’ section of the guidebook (page 29).

4. Ask the group the following questions to elicit discussion about and reflection on the activity:
   - How is finding lessons in the stories you collected yourself different from finding the lessons in stories that others collected previously?
   - How does meeting and conversing with the storytellers help you understand the stories differently?
   - How did the storytellers help you understand the lessons in their stories?
   - What was the experience of collecting your own stories like? How did interviewing older adults and hearing their stories help you?

Refer to “Discussing Stories as a Means of Coping” (page 25) for additional prompts.
Important: Once teens have finished collecting stories, collect one copy of each story collected and the accompanying consent forms. Make sure you are able to match each story to a signed consent form. If photos or artifacts were taken or collected, collect copies and the accompanying permission forms. Make sure each storyteller from whom artifacts or photos were collected has signed a permission form.

Send copies of all stories, photographs, consent forms, and permission forms collected to:

Bonnie Braun, Ph.D.
Extension Family Life Specialist
1204 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 24072

For additional details, see “Story Gathering Requirements for Pilot Test on Page 38.

For mailing labels to use when returning copies of stories to the University of Maryland, see Appendix D.
Sharing Your Stories with Others

About this Activity
This activity helps a teens take their collections of stories, create their own ways of presenting the stories, and share them with others.

Objective
To make your collection and its lessons available for others to learn how to cope

To validate the life experiences of the storytellers and show appreciation for their contribution

Project Skill
This activity intends to shift the focus of the teens from themselves to expanding the experiences and resilience of others. Sharing the project and stories with the community allows teens create their own projects from beginning to end, encourage community engagement, help others learn about getting through tough times, and develop interpersonal relationships.

Materials
Determined by teens

Helpful Hints
Because teens’ ideas for compiling and sharing the stories they collect may require information or materials in addition to the stories, you may want to share this portion of the project with them before they begin collecting stories. Knowing about this activity early on in the program may encourage teens to think about the larger scope of the activities and projects as well.

Discussion
Ask teens to discuss the experience of sharing their story collection both with the storytellers and with others. Have them reflect on what they did, what meaning the experience has to them, how they applied what they learned to their lives, how they shared their knowledge, and why the experience is important.

Note: Simply copy pages 23 and 24 or share with teens the ideas for compiling the stories they collect. The ideas listed are mere suggestions. Teens should choose a format and project that is interesting, feasible, and appropriate for them. They can use the ideas listed to brainstorm any variation or any original project to compile their stories. This activity provides many rewards for teens, storytellers, and others with whom teens share their story collections. A copy of the story collections will give teens a special record of their work in Sages of the Ages and allow them to share with others.
Ideas for compiling your stories:

There are many fun and interesting ways to present your stories. You can take stories that are handwritten or typed (either by you or your storytellers) and put them together into a book, a newspaper article or report, an historical timeline, a journal, poems, or letters. You can use photographs and other artifacts collected from storytellers to create a scrapbook or photo album. If you have audio or visual recordings of stories or storytellers, consider making a documentary, a quick film, a CD, or a tape.

For interactive ways to put your stories together, make a game, write a script, or create a teaching program based on the stories. Creative teens could make a picture book, write a play, write a song, or create a painting, mural, or sculpture.

Sometimes food and meals play a role in stories. If you are collecting stories from older adults in your family or several members of another family, an annotated cookbook is an interesting project. Collect family histories and stories about resiliency and difficult times and the family recipes that relate to those stories.

For a story collection with a larger scope (perhaps a collaborative effort among teens), consider creating a teaching program, a panel or interactive display, an informal talk, or a presentation.

What additional materials and information might you need to compile your stories?

**Permission must be obtained from storytellers for any item collected or used.**

While you are collecting stories, you may want to ask for certain information or ideas from your storyteller so that you can compile the stories in the format of your choice. If you have a way to present your stories in mind before you collect them, ask the storytellers for needed information or items as you collect the stories.

You may want to collect (borrow) and use photographs of the storytellers, photographs of items or people relating to the stories, or photographs of special occasions. Family and personal journals, books, recipes, letters, and scrapbooks may also compliment a story.

To highlight the time period in which a story takes place, consider using newspaper clippings and articles from that time. Historic local, national, and world events can reveal a lot about the context of the stories. Use articles, cards, and other artifacts from relevant family events, like births, marriages, and deaths, to highlight the stories about those events.
A storyteller may think of an item or items that remind them of their story. You could collect personal mementos and keepsakes, such as clothing, jewelry, awards, drawings, and other items relevant to the story themes and characters. Because of the personal value of many of these items, you may only be able to borrow, photograph, or replicate them.

Where and with whom can you share your story collection?
Depending on the format of your story compilation, you may think of several events, locations, and groups of people with whom to share your work. You may start by sharing with your youth group, 4-H club, class, a group of 4-H leaders or teachers, and other community organizations and leaders. 4-H, school, and other youth and community events may also provide an opportunity to display your work or give a talk or workshop about the stories you collected. Many youth and community organizations may provide a good, flexible forum for you to present your work in any way you choose. Community centers, schools, public libraries, senior and assisted living centers, local museums, and historical societies may offer some space for a display or an opportunity to otherwise share your story collection.

What is the value in making and sharing your own collection of stories?
Sharing your story collection with others can provide lessons of resiliency similar to those you found during the activities in Sages of the Ages. The lessons you learn can be passed on to those with whom you share your experience. It can also reinforce the lessons among your fellow story collectors.

Sharing what you create with your storytellers reinforces that their willingness to tell you their stories had value for everyone involved. It also allows older adults to feel that a life of meaning was lived and that they should reflect positively on their life experiences.

Sharing or providing a copy of your compilation for storytellers is a nice way to thank them for their time and contribution to you. A copy of the compilation may also pass on family stories, memories, and lessons to other family members and friends. Your story collection provides storytellers with a keepsake of their life stories. For some adults in the final stages of their lives, remembering their past and the people in their lives can be difficult. Providing them with a pictorial or written collection of their stories may help them remember their past.

Note: If you plan to give copies of your story collection to storytellers and others, remember to consider a format that you can easily collect, copy or present, and reproduce. Don’t forget to send a copy of your compilation to Bonnie Braun.
Discussing Stories as a Means of Coping

About the Activity
This activity guides leaders in posing key questions to help teens apply the lessons in the stories to their own challenges. It may also provoke examination of how teens personally deal with difficulties.

Objectives
To synthesize the content of the stories with conclusions and implications on the lives of teens

Helpful Hints
Allow teens to introduce new topics in the discussion as they wish. Some teens may find the influence of social, cultural, and other contextual factors on values and value formation interesting and thought-provoking. Remember to help teens recognize the importance of making choices in accordance with their values.

Discussing Stories Activity
Read or listen to the collection of stories provided with this guidebook or collected by teens. Examine them for the values that may have influenced the characters in the story. To guide the examination consider these questions:

1. What goals or purposes of the character can you identify?
2. Are any desires or aspiration evident in the story? What values might they represent?
3. Did you hear/read any expression of attitudes that might be an indicator of values? What attitudes do you think you uncovered?
4. Can you find any interests among the characters? How might values tie in with...
those interests?

5. What feelings (stated or implied) can you identify that might reflect underlying values?

6. Do any of the characters or the storyteller state any beliefs or convictions? What might those say about values?

7. How can the actions described in the story be indicators of values?

Next, ask teens:

1. Do your values match those you have assigned to the story characters? Why or why not?

2. In what ways do understanding the values involved in the story help develop the ability to get through tough times?

3. How do differing values lead to differing decisions and actions? How can differences in values cause problems for teens?

Then remind teens to clarify what is important to them AND to others involved each time life gets tough. Emphasize the importance of making decisions based on those values.

Know thyself.
~Greek philosopher
Finding Resiliency Factors in Stories

Resiliency research sheds light on factors that seem to play important roles in helping people gain, maintain and regain ability to handle life's tough times—its stresses and crises. The following list is provided to help you guide teens as they analyze stories for factors that help protect people from stressors and help people recover from crises. The list is not exhaustive. It is provided as a research-based guide for discussion.

### Protective and Recovery Factors that Help Young People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Well Functioning Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Supervision and Vigilance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Parenting with Consistent Discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable and Safe Home Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing Relationships with Primary Caregivers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic View of Youth’s Future</td>
<td>(From parents and significant others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>(Positive relationships with relatives, friends, significant others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>(Acknowledgements of special occasions and events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Financial Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardiness</td>
<td>(Sense of control, commitment, and confidence in overcoming and enduring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and Routines</td>
<td>(Activities done with a degree of orderliness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>(Important experiences that carry across generations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>(Ability to adapt to circumstances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>(Physical and emotional well-being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding Stressors and Crises in Stories

Research identifies many of the events that cause life’s challenges, both large and small—its stresses and crises. The following list is provided to help you guide teens as they analyze stories for factors that cause stressful and crisis situations for people. The list is not exhaustive. It is provided as a research-based guide for discussion.

Stressors and Crises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Death of a spouse</th>
<th>Beginning or ending school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Change in living condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital separation</td>
<td>Change in personal habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention in jail or institution</td>
<td>Employment or school difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a close family member</td>
<td>Change in work hours or conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major personal injury or illness</td>
<td>Change in residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Change in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fired at work</td>
<td>Major change in recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital reconciliation</td>
<td>Making a large purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>Change in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in health of family member</td>
<td>Change in sleeping habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>Family gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual difficulty</td>
<td>Change in eating habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining a new family member</td>
<td>Vacation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in financial state</td>
<td>Holiday observances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a close friend</td>
<td>Minor law or traffic violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career change</td>
<td>Family problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship problems</td>
<td>Relationship problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in responsibilities</td>
<td>Domestic violence or abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-law troubles</td>
<td>Drug or alcohol abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding personal achievement</td>
<td>Trouble with friends or peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding Values in Stories

Change is a fact of life. Change affects our lives, especially those changes that put us under stress or in crises. The more skilled we are at living with or directing change, the more likely we are to bounce back from change that can negatively impact the quality of our lives.

Clarifying values of others, and knowing what values we hold, can help us make decisions about the worth of the lessons we can get from stories. Understanding those values helps to shape our thoughts and actions.

If looked at closely, most stories reveal a great deal about the storyteller, the situation in which the story occurred, and especially about the values held by those involved. Understanding what's valued by people is a means for better understanding ourselves, for knowing what's important to ourselves and others.

Values are the concepts of right, wrong, good, bad. They represent the qualities, situations, and things we prize and cherish. Values influence everything we say and do. Values are the product of our experiences; they can be clarified and acted upon.

Two people who studied values of people around the world, found that six are commonly held by people from various cultures. These universal values are: economic adequacy (adequate housing, clothing, health care, and other life essentials), peacefulness (absence of war and strife), freedom (absence of coercion and confinement), and justice (equality, access to work, education, and health care).
Building Resiliency: Beyond the Self to the Community

Learning to be resilient, to bounce back from tough times is not just a skill teens need. It is a skill that society needs. As a nation, we have come through tough times. Older adults have stories to tell about getting through the Great Depression and World War Two. Middle-aged adults can tell about the effects of the Vietnam War, of the Social Rights era of the 1960’s, of the assassinations of leaders of that time. Older immigrants can tell about challenges in other countries that often lead to a move to the United States.

After the events of September 11, New York City, the Pentagon, and all associated with those events are struggling to make sense of the crises that occurred and trying to find ways to recover. In states like Maryland where tornadoes destroyed homes and businesses, or where winter storms close daily life, communities wrestle with the aftermath and search for ways to recover. In cities, small towns and rural areas where businesses are going bankrupt or closing down, workers and other businesses search for ways to keep the economy strong.

People tell stories as a means of recovery. Stories can also be told as a means of building resiliency. *Sages of the Ages* goes beyond storytelling between teens and adults. *Sages* can be a way teens can take leadership in building strong, resilient communities. Where communities are strong, where they care and support members, teens
and adults stand a better chance of handling tough times. When communities are strong, they can contribute to the ability of their communities, states, and nation to recover from events that not only make headlines, but are lived out with daily consequences.

One way communities become and remain strong is to revisit their past and present searching for difficulties that affected the communities. Then, communities can get together to talk and begin to envision desired futures. They can do so through telling stories and reflecting on the messages of those stories. Through reflective story telling, resiliency capacity can be built for both individuals and the community as a whole.

 Teens can take the lead to get communities to tell stories of overcoming tough times. The telling of these stories can lead to questions about the future desired by members of the community. They can lead to ideas for preventing and recovering from tough times. They can lead to opportunities to help communities develop the capacity to bounce back from change--to be resilient well into the 21st Century.

 Teens can watch for stories in their local media about people in the community overcoming tough times. These news stories can be collected and serve as a resilience teaching tool.
Intergenerational Activities and Projects

About the Activities
These activities are ideas and examples of community events, activities, and projects that bring young people and older people together. The activities may benefit a particular need of older adults or may be purely for socialization and fun. Teens will learn to carry out an activity from its conception to its end.

Objective
To build reliability, maturity, and resourcefulness in teens
To build intergenerational relationships by helping enrich the lives of older adults and teens

Helpful Hints
There are many ideas for intergenerational activities, events, and service projects. If a teen or a group of teens is interested in pursuing one of the ideas in this activity, help them refine the idea to meet their interests, resources, and community needs. Also help them determine the number of people who need to be involved for the scope that they are considering.

Identify teens’ special talents and encourage them to think of ways to use those talents in community activities and projects. Experienced teens can serve as project/team leaders to help orient younger and new teens to their projects.

Note that teens can alter many of these activities to accommodate ideas of any scope or size. Help teens determine whether the activity should be a one-time event, a series of events, or a long-term project. Determine whether the activity should be planned and lead by an individual, by a group, or by a collaboration of agencies and organizations.

Take photographs and keep flyers and advertisements to document events.

Discussion
To help teens plan the activities, first help them decide what activities from which they would like to choose. Of those activities, discuss the resources and time necessary to plan and carry out the activity. Decide which activities carry the most benefit to everyone involved and are reasonable and cost-effective to carry out. Assign responsibilities, tasks, and deadlines. Allow the teens to carry out the activity from beginning to end, while providing necessary guidance and resources.
Intergenerational Activities

- Plan intergenerational storytelling events as a means of communicating individual or generational points of view, sharing and reflecting, encouraging discussion and interaction, and providing hope to younger generations. Meet to share stories occasionally at a local library, school, or community center.

- Taking part in a class or learning something new is rewarding and fun for older adults. Consider leading a class in arts and crafts, a language, exercise, music, gardening, photography, computer/internet skills, cooking, etc.

- Plan regular visits to nursing homes, home care agencies, and senior centers to visit with the residents and others. While you are there, lead a walking group, help to prepare and serve meals and snacks, play a game, and read to the visually impaired. These visits are also a good opportunity to seek the extra tutoring you may need in a certain subject or class.

- Plan to attend outside events such as concerts, festivals, book fairs, and plays with older adults.

- Share your special talent with others. This may help you refine your skills, teach others something new, and help an older adult refresh their talents.

- Go caroling around the holidays and bring small gifts or handmade cards, send valentines in February, and celebrate other holidays and occasions by making others feel remembered and special.

- Help older adults make cards, make gifts, and write letters to their friends and family members.

- Create a special day, week, or event honoring senior citizens, grandparents, veterans, or other group of older adults. Plan special activities or recognition in their honor to thank them for their contributions to your family, to the community, to the country, etc.

- Create a teaching program in which older adults teach young people a skill, etc. and young people teach older adults something comparable.

- Form a rap session with older adults to discuss current events and issues.

- Some older adults may need help with shopping or errands. Offer to escort them to their health care appointments, the bank, etc. or offer to deliver needed items or meals to homebound seniors.
Intergenerational Community Events

- **Senior-Senior Prom:** Teens and older adults plan an afternoon of dressing up, dancing, and dessert at the local community or assisted living center. Just invite the jazz band or combo from the local high school to play some popular swing and jazz tunes from long ago. Employ the involvement of a school or community organization to sponsor the event and guarantee participation.

- **Intergenerational Block Party:** Plan an outdoor gathering within a neighborhood. Get permission to block of the street. Invite people to bring food, arrange for music or other entertainment, decorations, games, activities, and storytelling.

- **Holiday parties:** Bring a small chorus from your school or youth group and some holiday cheer to a senior center or nursing home.

- **Plan a cultural fair that involves teens, middle adults, and older adults. Invite everyone to share the food, clothing, celebrations, traditions, faiths, and artifacts that represent their culture.**

- **Form an intergenerational group of individuals to start a community theatre project, a music ensemble, or other recreational community groups.**

Intergenerational Service Projects:

- **Plan a collection or drive of the items that older adults in nursing homes need but do not have.**

- **Volunteer to do yard work for older neighbors and friends.**

- **Form a joint community initiative of intergenerational groups working to fulfill the needs of and improve the community in an agreed upon way.**

- **Start a joint service project with youth programs and adult programs (i.e. Scouts & AARP, retirement home & day care, etc.)**

Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

~Margaret Meade, Anthropologist
Brainstorming Intergenerational Activities and Projects

About the Activities
Having teens brainstorm their own activities and projects teaches them to target the needs of their community and be civically active and responsible. By generating their own ideas, teens can take part in activities that are of most interest to them.

HelpfulHints
Have teens answer the questions below and address the considerations suggested in this guide to brainstorm a project of their own. Stress the importance of considering a project’s relevance to the teens’ interests and their particular community.

Discussion
1. What is the usefulness of community activities and projects that promote resiliency?
2. How can communities help individuals cope with difficulties?
3. How do communities manage collective difficulties?

• What is the intergenerational and/or community problem, concern, issue, need, or void you hope to address?

• What are some of the ways it can be addressed? Weight the costs and benefits of each of these possibilities.

• What special skills, experiences, or interests do you have that you can use in a community project?

• What is the scope of the project:
  o A one-time event or activity?
  o A series of events or activities?
  o A long term project?

• What are the goals of your project?

• Who is your target audience?

• What other people or organizations will be involved? How many people will you need to make the project a success?

• Are there any materials or resources you will need? How will you gain access to them?

• How will you evaluate whether or not your project is successful?
Reflection and Evaluation

An evaluation form will tie each of the main activities to the objectives of the activity and to the goals of the project. Evaluation data from each leader will be compiled to represent the outcome of the pilot. Evaluation criteria will reflect the national standards for 4-H curricula.

A checklist of the activities and projects completed will be included to collect data regarding the number of participants, dates of each activity, the nature and scope of each project, and the number of community members involved or affected by the program.

Leaders will be asked for written feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of the program design and the leader’s guide, emerging ideas for the program, and suggestions and recommendations for improvement.
How would you rate Sages of the Ages overall? Circle your response.

1  2  3  4  5
poor    fair    good    very good    excellent

What were the best things or your favorite things about Sages of the Ages?

What were the worst things or your least favorite things about it?

How could this program be improved to be more beneficial to you?

How could the materials have been more helpful to you?

What additional resources could you have used to help you lead this project?

What changes would you make to improve the project?
References


Story-Gathering Requirements for Pilot Test (Appendix A)

As you know, Sages of the Ages is conducted through the auspices of the University of Maryland. We are therefore required by law to follow certain policies and procedures to protect the human beings we interview to gather their stories. Approval for the story collection was granted by the university with the requirement that we only collect stories from persons age 18 and older & have each person who provides a story or stories sign a consent form. [The adult-only policy is an extra protection for youths.]

The form with the official stamp is provided in Appendix B (two pages). Please duplicate the form and give to each teen collecting the story. Please be sure that a consent form is read, completed, and signed by every storyteller.

To facilitate the mailing of the stories and forms, some mailing labels are provided in Appendix D. The completed consent form and the story should be sent to:

Bonnie Braun, Ph.D.
Extension Family Life Specialist
1204 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

For questions about the forms, stories, or any part of the Sages of the Ages project, please contact either Bonnie Braun or Stephanie Grutzmacher at:

301-405-3581 or BB157@umail.umd.edu or Stephanie_Grutzmacher@yahoo.com

Thank you for your cooperation in adhering to this requirement. I am sure you agree that we all want to be sensitive to the personal nature of the stories collected and to protecting those who provide them.

Sincerely,
Throughout the life of individuals and families, there are tough times and tender times, times that try us and times that teach us. Getting through these times and coming out stable and strong is the key to enduring and thriving.

As older adults look back on their lives, with the benefit of the passing of time for perspective, they can recall many stories of such times. Embedded in those stories are lessons on life which can be shared with others—youths filled with energy and a seemingly unending future—adults filled with experience and a future coming to an end. These youths and adults can learn from each other and in so doing strengthen their individual lives and the life of society in general.

Gathering and sharing those stories is the intent of Sages of the Ages, a collaborative project of the Maryland Cooperative Extension Family Life Committee (4-H and Family Consumer Sciences) and the Maryland Family Community Education organization. As the millennium dawns, we want to collect, compile and distribute those stories through oral, printed and electronic means. To do so, we need YOUR help.

Themes for these stories are based on resiliency research, which tells us that individuals and families can develop protective and recovery factors that get them through the challenges of life. Help us teach young people about life’s storms and rainbows through your story.

Tell us a story when you were tested, taught an important lesson, or successfully handled some of life’s challenges. Share your story so that your wisdom can help young people cope with their tough times today.

So, won’t you think back across your life span and remember times that young people may find inspirational, helpful, interesting, etc.

Next, write your story using the attached form. A few prompters are included to help you tell the story.

Finally, sign your story and consent form and send to Dr. Bonnie Braun at the address below for compilation and use with programming. Note: You may want to keep a copy for you and your family!

Send Copies of Stories to:
Bonnie Braun, Ph.D., Extension Family Life Specialist, University of Maryland, 1204 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742 or BB157@umail.umd.edu or Fax: 301-341-9161.
Thinking back on my life (or recalling an appropriate story of someone else), I remember a time when …

When?

Where?

Who were the key people?

What happened?

Why did this happen?

How was hope or resiliency involved?

What makes this story special to you?

Continue on the back if more space is needed.

The key lesson to be learned from this story is . . .

Signed*: ___________________________ Date: _____________________

Address: _____________________________________________________

Phone:_____________________________ Email:  ____________________

Check one:  ____FCE member  ___4-H Volunteer ___4-H Member ___Other

_____Below 50  ____50-59  ____60-69  ____70-79  ____80-89  ____90-100+

_____Male  __________ Female
Appendix C

Sages of the Ages: Stories that Touch and Teach

I give permission to the Department of Family Studies, University of Maryland, to use and publish my photograph for educational and promotional purposes without compensation.

Date: _______________________________________________________

Name: _______________________________________________________

Phone #: _____________________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________________
(If Minor, Signature of Parent or Guardian)

TEL: (301) 405-3581 ♦ FAX: (301) 314-9161
1204 Marie Mount, College Park, MD 20740 ♦ Equal Opportunity Programs
Appendix D
Mailing labels will be added here.