



## Learning to Hold Lightly

This lesson helps youth to see how playfulness can help to ease the burdens that they bear.

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## ENHANCER OF JOY

Playfulness

## DURATION

60 minutes

## LESSON DEVELOPED BY

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## TIPS TO PREPARE

Before facilitating this module with youth take a moment to recall when you were a young person. Remember a time when you were in transition and needed someone to hold you with respect and gentleness, someone to not pre-determine or misuse you but rather help you grow. If you did experience being held lightly, you might have experienced it as something God-given. Record your thoughts and feelings about this experience in whatever form you prefer. Now shift to thinking about what your group of young people might be experiencing in their lives. How might you hold them lightly and aid them in holding others and themselves lightly? Take note of your discoveries, ideas, and concerns. *While we believe this module will aid young people in holding lightly, we also encourage adjusting the module according to the cultural, physical, and communal needs of your adolescent community.*

## MATERIALS CHECKLIST

### **Items needed:**

- Chair and desk or writing surface for each participant
- Empty medium-sized, cardboard containers or boxes (e.g. a shoe box)
- Materials for decorating boxes (markers, gel pens, glitter, glue sticks, pipe cleaner, stickers, newspaper, scissors, yarn, etc.)
- Space to get messy
- Large sack of potatoes (or rocks—anything with some weight to it)
- Carrying bag for each participant (or tell youth to bring a backpack or bag of their own)
- Small pieces of paper or index cards
- Rubber bands
- Writing utensils
- Music and device for playing music

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## SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

**Set up:** Prepare a table for boxes and containers, a table for decorating materials, a table for potatoes and carrying bags. Arrange a chair, writing utensil, and writing surface for each person.

### **Warm Up:** *Carrying Your Burdens*

*When to Use:* This exercise can be used when youth are feeling mentally and/or emotionally burdened. Young people often feel the heaviness, for example, of final exams, a break-up, the college application process, a change in family structure (e.g., divorce, marriage, new child) or relocation.

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Matthew 18:1-5

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## Purpose

Holding lightly is a spiritual practice that is based in love, from which hope and faith flow. Being held lightly is an experience we all need, but especially youth.

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## Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Understand and discuss what “holding lightly” means.
  - Name and be more aware of the various burdens they carry on a daily basis.
  - Recall the experience of holding lightly the burdens, hopes, and dreams they carry and helping others to do the same as a basis for possibly doing so in the future.
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## Introduction for Leaders

As we mention in our chapter, young people are like molting lobsters.<sup>[1]</sup> Periodically they need to wiggle and struggle out of their shell, turning what was inside out in order to grow and thrive. They push, pull, and strain against the internal and external pressures of adolescence, undergoing multiple, dynamic transitions in order to be and become their future selves. They wiggle as they deal with parental fears and need for control. They feel the squeeze of dealing with educational and governmental policies that cater to standardized testing. They struggle

to cope with their own fears about life, grades, friends, God, bullying, and sexuality. These “lobsters” shed truths of their younger selves, making discoveries about themselves and the world that challenge what they’ve known, which is both scary and exciting. Even as young people experience maturation (the hardening of their shell) in some aspects of their lives, there are always other parts in transition (molting) with the necessity for making more developmental shifts on the horizon, which provokes a multitude of feelings.

Because young people molt regardless of what we do or don’t do, a key question is how to provide them with nurturing environments during their transformation. We want to protect them, love them, and promote their flourishing, which we see as our God-given responsibility. However, knowing how to “handle” young people at any given moment is difficult since they are in multiple transitional states. Hold them too tightly and the lobsters are bound to rebel, resenting the feeling of being constrained, over-protected, and/or pre-determined. Hold them too loosely and they are liable to feel unseen or untended, as if they are alone. Caring adults are challenged not only to learn better ways of being with young people but also to teach them better ways of being with themselves to negotiate the strain of molting and gain hope in the midst of transitions. We believe that adults must provide conducive environments in which to molt by holding them lightly as they live a full range of experiences. If they experience being held in the midst of transitions, young people can practice playfulness, holding lightly all of life’s emotions and experiences associated with anxiety as well as joy.

<sup>[1]</sup> This metaphor is a variation on Kenda Creasy Dean’s theme of molting lobsters when discussing churches, denominations, and theological schools. Kenda Creasy Dean, *How Youth Ministry Can Change Theological Education – If We Let it*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 28-9.

## Gather

### **Gather (5 minutes)**

#### **Introduction:**

This exercise is designed to help youth become aware of the various burdens they bear daily. Often youth experience heavy thoughts, feelings, and/or memories that they do not or cannot acknowledge to themselves, let alone receive affirmation that their concerns are important and valid. The session is intended to give them support to name what troubles them, ideally

without being questioned, demeaned, or belittled. The activities and discussion help to remind youth that even in the midst of these burdens they can still hold lightly what they carry and help to hold others lightly so they may do the same. This module can also aid in community building among the youth as they realize that some of them experience the same concerns.

## Directions:

Invite participants to think about the burdens that weigh upon them today. Give them a few moments to actually think about this. Instruct them to take a potato to represent each emotion (e.g., anxiety, frustration, stress, and fear). They can take as many as they need. Tell them to write a word or phrase naming each emotion on a piece of paper then use a rubber band to secure it to the potato. Explain that they need not share what they have written unless they wish to do so later. Invite them to place their burdens in their carrying bag. Once they finish, ask them to walk around the building seven times with the bag on their back or shoulder. (Depending on weather and distance, feel free to adjust this number.)

## Engage

### **Engage (30 minutes)**

#### **Discussion:**

- Once they return, ask them about what they have been carrying and what they experienced while walking. Let them discuss and hear what others were carrying as well. This is an important opportunity for all present to practice **deep listening** to one another.

**Reading:** *Matthew 18:1-5* “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” NRSV

#### **Discussion:**

- Discuss what it means to come to God as a child. What does a child do when (s)he is feeling protected and loved? How and to what extent did they experience play as a child? Give

them a moment to remember. Ask if anyone can remember experiencing a difficult time when they were a child and were able to be playful in the midst of what was hard. What made being playful possible even then? Introduce the notion of playfulness as holding lightly.

## Transition:

- As a transition, you might observe that human beings not only carry burdens but hopes and dreams. The next exercise is an opportunity be playful with all that is in their hearts and minds.

## Activity 1: Cajita Sagrada (*Spanish for "sacred box"*)

### When to Use:

This exercise can be used for youth or adults to think about their dreams and future goals or to make a vision board. Making *cajitas* can also work well in intergenerational teams. For example, teams of ministers, adults, and youth can make sacred boxes that represent their congregation—what the community *says* it values, what the community *actually does* (or does not do) in practice, and what the community ignores or overlooks.

### Introduction:

*Cajita sagrada* is a Spanish term for a sacred box. These boxes are for the youth to decorate and fill as they feel moved. In this exercise they are symbolizing hopes and dreams, while working creatively with representations of what weighs on them.

### Directions:

- Explain that each of them will make a *cajita sagrada*, which is a Spanish term for a sacred box.
- Show them the containers and materials for decorating, inviting them to make a sacred box filled with their hopes, dreams, anxieties and future plans.
- Encourage youth is to incorporate the potato(es) into their box in some way.
- Explain that although burdens do not go away easily, we can learn to hold them lightly and find ways of creatively holding what we carry with the help of others. Present the definition of holding lightly.
- Acknowledge that they will no doubt feel the weight of cares and concerns, but if they focus on them too much or grip them too tightly, they won't be able to create with them very freely.
- Give participants time to create.
- Play music during the process.

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## Reflect

### **Reflect (20 minutes)**

- Invite them, if they would like, to share their boxes and their experiences of holding lightly their hopes, dreams, and anxieties.
- Did their burdens affect how they created their box?
- How were they able to not focus solely on their concerns or anxieties?
- How were they able to incorporate their burdens into their box?
- For those that had some of the same anxieties, did they create in different or similar ways?
- Ask them how they experienced creatively carrying what they carry and what difference it made being with others who were doing the same.
- Ask them how could they apply this in other areas of their lives.

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## Send Forth

### **Send Forth (5 minutes)**

- Display the boxes side-by-side and invite participants to take a tour in silence, appreciating what they made.
- Tell them to take their boxes home and to let them be both a challenge and a reminder about creative ways in which they might hold themselves lightly in all areas of their lives.
- Also invite them to share this box and its creation story with one or two other people.
- Closing Prayer