



My Basket

Social Emotional Skills Workbook

(High School-Transition Age Adult)

The Unfinished Basket

❖ *Introduction*

This workbook will help you describe your strengths and identify some goals. To help you in this process, we will use the **basket** as a metaphor of your current state-of-mind. We are not literally baskets, but we sure have a lot in common with them.

Depending on the type, baskets serve a purpose. They hold hot river stones and acorn meal to cook mush. Some are decorative and generate income. They trap eels, gather sea weed and basket materials themselves. Others hold medicine and are used in ceremony.

Just like baskets, we hold different roles in life. This role may develop and change over time. Young people are unfinished baskets. You are not done yet. But your sticks, roots, the beginnings of your design came from somewhere.

Activity #1: *Where do I come from?*

❖ *Family Interview*

The natural fibers that make us who we are come from various ecosystems, climates and soils. Just like bear grass of the high country intertwines with spruce roots from the damp coast to create a unique pattern, our “fibers” connect us to certain places, parents and ancestors. They give us a foundation of attributes and strength. Pick a time to sit down with a member of your family that knows about your family history. Ask your family member the following questions and take notes or audio record their answers.

- Where are some of the places my parents or grandparents lived? Did they live in one place or move around?
- What kinds of jobs did they do? What were they good at?
- What important qualities do you think I inherited from them? How do I currently use those traits in my life? How could I maybe use them in the future?
- Identify at least one plant that grew from the place my ancestors lived that was useful or important to them. How did they use this plant? Do you know who cared for the place that produced the plant? If so, what did they do?

❖ *Journal Entry*

Write 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the answers to your interview questions.

Activity #2: *What kind of basket am I?*

❖ *Discussion*

Pick a partner to share the strengths you identified in Activity #1. Take turns discussing the following:

- What are my strengths?
- What different kinds of jobs could I do with these strengths?
- Who do I know who does this type of job? What are their skill? What did they have to do to get that job?

❖ *Art*

Now turn your attention to a blank page. At the bottom of the page, list 3-5 of these strengths you discussed with your partner. Above this list, draw or paint a picture of an un-finished basket that represents your current stage in life. Do not worry if your basket looks realistic or not. Your basket represents your personal traits and personality. As you draw, you might consider the following:

- Does my basket have a special shape?
- Are my sticks thick or thin? Is there variation in their thickness or are they uniform?
- Have some sticks broke and been replaced with stronger sticks?
- Are there different types of plants overlaying my roots to create a design? What does this design look like? What color is it? Is this an old pattern that has been used by others or is it new? As you create your design, perhaps think about it as representing your path in life.

❖ *Journal Entry*

Reflect on the pattern you created in your basket and write a paragraph on the following

- Does the pattern represent something? Give a name to the pattern.
- What might the purpose of this basket be? Visualize how this basket may grow in size and pattern. What would it look like as it grew?
- Can you visualize a role you like to play in the future? What are some of the steps you would have to take to prepare for that role?

Activity #3: How do I Grow?

❖ *Journal Entry*

Weavers create beautiful work when their mind is clear and calm. We all have big thoughts and feelings that come and go, like messengers. Sometimes these thoughts and feelings can be overwhelming. Paying attention to our body by moving it in a purposeful way can help us release the stress.

- Name 2-3 physical activities you can do (sports, dance, stretching, hiking or crafting) that help your body calm down when stressed.
- Name at least 2 people you can talk to, who will listen, when you need help.
- Identify a source of spiritual direction in your life that helps your mind become clear and calm. Describe this spiritual source of help and how it helps you make decisions or move forward in life.

Relationship is the beginning of everything. Ancestors curated the land with fire to rid ecosystems of disease, pests and produce healthy strong plants. In this context, fire has a cleansing and life-promoting function. For the sake of this exercise, let's think of fire as **responsibility**, as a way to relate to our environment and care for it. Write some thoughts on the following:

- What are you responsible for in life? People or places?
- How do you relate to these people and places? Describe those actions.
- What are you trying to get rid of?
- What do you want to see grow?

❖ *Art and Reflection*

Now paint an abstract depiction of your "fire." What is your fire? Pay attention to color and shape. Who or what does the fire interact with?

Activity #4: What do I hold and how do I release?

❖ *Journal Entry*

Sometimes we have knowledge of our strengths and responsibilities but we get stuck. The stress of life can trap us in what feels like “glue.” The weaving of our basket is put on pause. As some weavers will say, you can’t weave very well if you’re having “bad” thoughts; our sticks and roots may break. Likewise, when our nervous system is stressed, we may zone-out, run away or partially shut down. We worry, find ourselves doing the same thing over and over or maybe we pick fights. Perhaps we are holding on to certain thoughts or feelings in our basket for too long, as they are meant to move, like water, like weather patterns.

Write the following reflection on your current state-of-mind. You will ultimately be answering the question, what is my relationship with myself? Select some or all of the following questions to write about:

- Am I using my basket for its intended purpose? Or do I have more weaving (growth) to do?
- Am I still gathering? Are the places where I gather safe from environmental toxins?
- Are my materials still soaking in water to become more flexible? What makes me flexible?
- Am I preoccupied with past mistakes, or irregular stitches? Am I patient with myself or do I growl at myself?
- Are my sticks old? Do I trust they will be strong enough? Do I accept what I am so far, mistakes and all?
- Can I visualize how the pattern in my basket develops? What will this look like? What will it mean for me?

❖ *Art*

On a blank page, draw a rough outline of your unfinished basket. Draw symbolic representations, emoji style, of what you hold in your basket. What should stay in your basket? Does anything inside need to be released?

❖ *Discussion*

Discuss the contents of your basket with a partner or group. What good things am I keeping in my basket? What no longer serves me? How do I release what is no longer helpful?

Activity #5: How do I mend?

❖ *Journal Entry*

Things happen in life that damage us. Repetitive stress can weaken sections of our basket. Parts of us may even get crushed by accidental or intentional aggression. But like humans, baskets are resilient and can be mended, re-woven and overcome places of weakness.

Identify 1 person and 1 local organization you can call when you feel hurt or unusually stressed and need help with “mending.”

❖ *Art*

Where do you tend to hold stress in your body? Draw a rough outline of your basket and identify that area of the basket that needs mending. Draw a picture of how you could mend that place. Pay attention to the color, texture and type of new fibers you are given to mend. Share this symbolism with a partner or group.

❖ *Guided Meditation*

Baskets need to be regularly cleaned as they gather dust. Just as we care for our baskets, we need to care for our mind. One way to do this is to pay attention to our breath and body.

(The following body scan type meditation should last about 2-3 minutes. The script can be read aloud by the group leader or silently read by the participant.)

Close your eyes, if you wish, and sit in a comfortable position. Turn your attention to the movement of your breath. The pace of the inhale and exhale. No judgment towards yourself, only curiosity. Take a minute to pay attention to your current breathing pattern. Notice it for a while. Turn your attention to how your body parts feel sitting in your current position. If you feel tension in any part of your body, observe that tension as you breathe. Inhale a little deeper and exhale a little slower as you observe that tension. After this brief breathing exercise, notice what feels different.

Activity #6: Where do I belong?

❖ *Journal Entry and Art*

Draw a picture of where your basket belongs. Where does it live? How do you take care of that place? What are your goals in this place? Name 3 things you’d like to accomplish in your place of belonging. For each goal, list 1-3 steps you can take toward reaching that goal.

Activity #7: Spoken Word Template

❖ Poetry and Spoken Word Performance

Fill in the blanks of the following template to create your own poem. Choose the words that represent you best. The words may contain feelings, ideas or images. This poem is the artistic culmination of all the work you have done reflecting on your attributes. Like baskets, poems are the result of a lot of learning and labor. Poems are meant to be shared, and when spoken, carry a power not present in the written word. This is why we are careful with what we say aloud. Poems have the potential to increase understanding of ourselves and others. Please share your poem aloud with a partner or a group.

My Basket

By: _____

My basket is made of _____, _____ and

_____ and

It isn't _____ nor _____.

It is _____.

My stiches are _____ and _____

making a pattern of _____

that moves like _____

and looks like _____.

My basket can _____

with _____, _____ and

I carry _____

in order to _____.

I release _____ when needed to _____,

My basket belongs

to _____.

References

This curriculum was developed by Rebecca Lowry, ASW, MSW, (Delaware Tribe of Indians) using principles of mindfulness in social work as taught by Dr. Michael Yellow Bird (Hidatsa, Arikara) at Humboldt State University (2011). Lowry also holds a CA State Teaching Credential in English. The “Unfinished Basket” art by Weshoyot Alvitre (2020) may be printed as a part of this curriculum guide but may not be used for any other purpose.

Instructional Note

This curriculum is a guide and may be adjusted to meet the developmental and educational level of participants.

Relevant California State Standards

This unit is designed for a therapeutic, cultural or recreational group in a community setting led by a trusted adult. However a teacher could easily use the spoken word template to meet CA state standards for developing language skills, creative writing and oral presentation skills.