

Finding Your Personal Style



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To Marc William, as he makes his way through the maze of adolescence with wonder, joy, affection, a lot of heart, and a delightful spirit. May he recognize that his *true* gift to the world is his gentleness.

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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Every person has a story. The plot of that story is being written continually from day to day. Our story to date is about things we have done, events that have shaped us, dreams we have pursued, and people that have been part of our life. This story of our life is worth remembering and recording.

Each person also *is* a story. The story that we *are* has little to do with what has happened in our life. This story is made up of all the things that separate us as individuals from one another. It includes preferences, typical reactions, ways of interacting with others, thinking styles, and attitudes. The story that

we are is our way of responding to the world. It is a story that is worth learning about and learning from.

The story that we are can be summed up by the word *personality*. Webster's unabridged dictionary defines the word *personality* as "the quality or state of being a person and not an abstraction, thing, or lower being; the fact of being an individual person . . . capacity for the choices, experiences, and liabilities of an individual person . . . the complex of characteristics that distinguishes a particular individual or individualizes or characterizes [that person] in relationships with others" (Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, p. 1,687).



When asked to tell something about themselves, most people begin to list things that they do or relationships of which they are a part. They tell about their families, employment, hobbies, living situations, education, and group affiliations. We all know that what we *do* is not the same as who we *are*, but sometimes we get so caught up in the activity of life that we lose sight of those complex characteristics that distinguish us from everyone else. Even a short, uninterrupted period of time for self-exploration is often a luxury. We begin to think of ourselves as human *doings* instead of human *beings*.

Young people today are busier than their counterparts of twenty years ago. Often their lives are tightly scheduled and overprogrammed. They, like adults, get caught up in the activity of everyday life with little time for daydreaming and introspection. David Elkind, a sociologist, author, and popular speaker, calls today's young people "the Kodak generation: overexposed and underdeveloped." But though they may not be able to articulate their need, teenagers need and want to spend time finding out who they are and how they fit into the world.

A person encounters the following four fundamental questions through all ages and stages of life: Who am I? Who am I with others? What should I do? and What does it all mean? These are basic questions of identity, relationship, mission, and meaning. All our inner work and the resulting action are aimed at finding answers to these questions. A person must have genuine self-knowledge in order to answer these questions honestly, because one's approach to these questions, as well as to the answers, is influenced largely by personality characteristics. Self-discovery lays the groundwork for setting goals and making plans for life so that one may answer these questions in a satisfactory manner and thereby achieve happiness.

Helping young people discover who they are will help them discern who they want to become. Such discernment will enable them to answer the four basic questions of human existence for themselves. This is the fundamental rationale for including *Finding Your Personal Style* in the Horizons Program. The purpose of the course is to empower young people to make life decisions based on a true understanding of themselves as a loving Creator's holy gifts, capable of giving and receiving love and carrying out a mission to build the Reign of God. This course is not intended to be a clinical analysis of personality or character. The starting point is the

goodness and unique character of each person. We are like clay—most of our physical and mental attributes are fixed, but we are constantly being shaped and formed by God, the divine potter. We must be open to the potter's hands.

Finding Your Personal Style frequently uses tools known as personal style inventories (PSIs) to investigate different ways individuals approach and react to life situations. Some of the characteristics of personal style explored in the course include the predominance of left-brained or right-brained thinking, the tendency toward optimism or pessimism, and the qualities of introversion and extroversion. Young people generally respond enthusiastically to PSIs. Such inventories are a fun way for young people and adults to find out more about themselves and others.

This course uses the Scriptures to help the young people reflect on Jesus as a model of someone who achieved perfect balance as a person. Scripture activities also affirm the goodness and holiness of humanity and the profound depth of God's love for each of us and all of us.

The focus of the three sessions is on the non-judgmental exploration of various personality characteristics. Young people often resist any attempt to be categorized. It is human nature to view oneself as an individual and not as one representative of a classification. On the other hand, sometimes a person is tempted to take the easy way out, to defend some behaviors with the excuse "that's just the way I am" instead of stretching to grow beyond the narrow limitations of one's preferred style. By keeping the focus on exploration and growth instead of on evaluation and judgment, this course challenges young people to accept and value themselves and others, but also encourages them to work on developing all aspects of their personality in order to achieve balance.

Finding Your Personal Style logically follows from the core course on identity and relationships in level 1 of the Horizons Program. But this minicourse can stand on its own if it is used elsewhere in the program. In making decisions about the sequence of program courses, refer to the coordinator's manual.

Finding Your Personal Style is intended to be taught as three 2-hour sessions presented one a week for three consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. The activities are structured with a group of ten young people in mind. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may have to

make minor adjustments to the session plans. If you need assistance with this task, consult your program coordinator. It is also possible to use this course in different formats, such as in a retreat setting. Suggestions for using this course as a retreat appear later in this introduction.

The concept of personality and personal style is introduced in the first session, with an emphasis on individuality and its accompanying problems and possibilities. In the second session the young people explore the dualities and paradoxes that exist in everyone's personality. They are challenged to respect their dominant characteristics, but also to develop their "shadow" sides. The third session focuses on wholeness and holiness. The participants identify ways they need to grow, and also celebrate who they are and the gifts that others bring to their life.

Finding Your Personal Style can be a significant help to young people who are searching for their own answers to the four fundamental questions of human existence. The course calls each of them to explore who they are as human *beings* rather than human *doings*, and to make some decisions based on that knowledge. It also invites them to love and accept who they are, secure in the perfect love and acceptance of their Creator.

But now, thus says the LORD,
 who created you, O Jacob, and formed you,
 O Israel:
 Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name:
 you are mine. . . .
 Because you are precious in my eyes
 and glorious, and because I love you.
 (Isa. 43:1–4, NAB)

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

One of the primary needs of adolescents is the need to explore identity issues. As they grow through the teenage years and into young adulthood, they are constantly seeking to redefine who they are in light of changing relationships, more knowledge about themselves, and more advanced mental capabilities. The need to explore their emerging identity is accompanied by a precarious sense of self-esteem and

a desire for affirmation. Adolescents want to know and feel that the person they are is good and lovable. In that respect they are no different from people of any age.

Two developmental issues play a significant role in young people's search for an identity. One is known as the *imaginary audience*—the belief that everyone around them is watching and judging them. The second developmental issue is the belief in a *personal fable*, a kind of personal story that gives people a sense of invulnerability and an inflated opinion of their own importance. If the personal fable is negative, a young person may have a strong sense of powerlessness and insignificance. The imaginary audience and the personal fable are strongest among younger adolescents and frequently result in exaggerated self-consciousness and self-centeredness (Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, pp. 33–36).

The belief in one's uniqueness is rife with both problems and possibilities. Young people often feel isolated because they believe that they possess unique feelings and experiences. This comes from a belief in a personal fable. At the same time, young people may be reluctant to disclose any information that they feel sets them apart from their peers. Inside they are certain that everyone is watching, and they do not want to play to an audience that may reject them. This comes from a belief in an imaginary audience. In order to preserve a sense of value and self-importance, young people often victimize one another with put-downs, cruel jokes, and emotionally destructive behavior. Young people who have no sense of shared experiences or who feel victimized by their peers may feel deep loneliness.

Once young people realize that they share many of the same feelings and experiences with others as part of the universal human experience, the desire for exploration is strong. The imaginary audience can become a cast of thousands with a common bond of personhood, but with individual approaches to living out that personhood. The personal fable can become a belief in the reality that each young person has something unique to contribute to the world, and therefore, to the building of the Reign of God.

Finding Your Personal Style is designed to highlight common, universally shared personhood. It encourages young people to see the goodness in all personality traits and to strive for balance in themselves amid conflicting cultural messages about what today's young men and women should be like.



Ideally, an understanding of personality characteristics and an appreciation for the value of differences will lead the young people to an attitude of acceptance of themselves and others. It is hoped that this acceptance will translate into an attitude of kindness and compassion as the young people grow to maturity. This growth can set the stage for an adult commitment to live fully the challenge that Jesus posed to the Pharisees when they asked him which commandment of the law was the greatest: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You must love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39, NJB).

Cultural Connections

Young people receive conflicting, often confusing, and sometimes harmful messages from society about such topics as success, service, winning and losing, and even the meaning of holiness. The concept of personality is also subject to cultural interpretation. For example, a young person might hear a phrase like “She’s got personality” used to describe someone who is bubbly, effervescent, and outgoing. A person who is none of those things might have a difficult time achieving any reasonable degree of self-esteem if he or she uses cultural definitions as the measure of personal worth.

Our culture has defined what it means to be masculine or feminine, introverted or extroverted, right-brained or left-brained. Stereotypical images dominate, and one set of personality characteristics is commonly more valued than another. An extroverted, left-brained, athletically adept person is more likely to be viewed as successful than an introverted, nonathletic, right-brained person of the same degree of intelligence and level of accomplishment. Balance is not usually encouraged.

Ironically, the worst offenders in perpetuating unbalanced stereotypes are those cultural institutions that appeal particularly to young people—the sports world, magazine publishers, and the recording and music video industry. A young person who spends a lot of time reading teen magazines, watching music videos, or following sports is sure to come away with a distorted image of full personhood.

In order to be effective in today’s world, the church’s ministry to youth must include guidance in the critical evaluation of society’s messages. Once young people begin to understand the limitations

imposed by contemporary culture, and are able to recognize cultural elements that are positive and hopeful, they may be open to a different perspective and empowered by a new way of thinking about the issues of personhood. At that point, God’s message of unconditional love will be welcomed by those who have only experienced society’s conditional acceptance.

The Theology of This Course

The Scriptures are filled with references to the holiness of life and the sacredness of the individual. Isaiah tells us how precious we are in the eyes of God (Isa. 43:4) and the Psalmist speaks of how God created us a “little less than the angels” (Ps. 8:6, NAB). We are told of God’s complete knowledge of each of us and infinite love in Psalm 139. Jesus presents us with the dual challenge to love one another and to love ourselves in his discussion with the Pharisaic lawyer about the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34–40).

The ministry of Jesus modeled one basic principle for the world, one that serves as the standard for all human interaction: persons are of infinite worth. This principle is one of the fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith and is stated clearly in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. [The individual is] capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of . . . entering into communion with other persons” (no. 357).

There is a sense of humanity in the theology and Tradition of the church that overflows into a celebration of life, an appreciation of the body and the senses, an embrace of the “natural” and the “worldly” and a certain patience in the face of human sinfulness (Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity*, pp. 18–19).

The message in the Scriptures and in our Tradition is clear, but too often that message gets lost in developmental, cultural, and sociological realities. Theologian Rosemary Haughton states that “the Catholic enterprise has been the attempt to integrate the whole of human life in the search for the kingdom of God” (*The Catholic Thing*, pp. 15–16). We are called to value and serve one another as if we were serving God; the writer of Matthew’s Gospel tells us, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to

me” (25:40, NRSV). To truly love and serve another person, one must understand that person and appreciate our common humanity. The belief that people are of infinite worth is fundamental to living out the Gospel. Young people need to hear of their worth and of the value of others as often and from as many people as possible. They also need to know that our God is a compassionate God who loves us because of—not in spite of—our humanness.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry [NFCYM], p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to *be* “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

Judging by the popularity of “get to know yourself” tests in youth-oriented magazines, teenagers enjoy exploring their inner self. These explorations give young people insight into themselves and others, offering a rationale for their individual approaches to life as well as an understanding of people with whom they relate. Though occasionally helpful, these popular exercises make little attempt to connect the results to the ultimate meaning and origin of life. Exploring human nature within the context of a catechetical program allows us to make such crucial connections. Young people can not only come to know themselves better

through participation in *Finding Your Personal Style* but also be affirmed as children of God who are unique and precious creations, and assured of divine guidance and protection. Making such connections is the essence of evangelization.

Evangelization is the main aim of the church’s ministry to youth. All our efforts in youth ministry must be geared toward bringing young people closer to God. Young people need to hear of a God who cares for them and loves them individually and specifically. They also need to hear of a God who is already present within them and in others.

Finding Your Personal Style offers many opportunities for evangelization, particularly through one-on-one ministry to young people. Often attempts at self-exploration, no matter what age the searcher is, are accompanied by feelings of inadequacy and limitation. Sometimes people feel dehumanized by society’s categorizing and typecasting. Whether or not these or other negative feelings manifest themselves in the young people, adult leaders are encouraged to take every opportunity to spend time with individual participants, listen to them, affirm them, tell them of a God who loves them unconditionally, pray with them, and pray for them.

A group of young people who are on a journey of self-discovery can hear the voice of God through caring adult leaders. In the name of the Catholic church, we can offer young people a loving community that encourages them to explore who they are and who they want to become.

On Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Finding Your Personal Style*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.



Teenagers generally respond well to activities that allow them to focus on themselves and explore the workings of their mind. The bulk of material for *Finding Your Personal Style* consists of a series of PSIs with prayer and Scripture activities to support the inner work that the students will do. Your role as teacher is to be a facilitator for this series of self-disclosure activities.

Be prepared to explain the concepts presented in the course and describe the features of the various personal styles. Always present the strengths and challenges of each style and affirm the possibilities for complementarity that exist when people of different styles come together in a work or social relationship. If possible, try to relate each situation to something real in the experience of the young people. For example, you might discuss the gifts that a right-brained person and a left-brained person bring to a committee to plan a homecoming dance. You could identify the strengths and challenges that different personality styles present in a school or parish leadership group or in a religious education class. The session plans in *Finding Your Personal Style* often include suggestions for making such connections between the concepts and a young person's life.

As the leader and an adult role model, do not be afraid to share your own personal style with the students. Let them know some of your preferences and typical ways of responding to common situations. Also give the young people examples of complementarity in your own life. Tell them about your spouse, your best friend, or your coworker who is the opposite of you in many ways, but with whom you have a good relationship. Let them know how the two of you are able to bring different perspectives and gifts to the relationship or the work.

The goals for *Finding Your Personal Style* can be summed up in two statements: first, that young people accept themselves as they are with both their possibilities and limitations; and second, that they recognize ways they can grow and strive for balance whenever possible. As the teacher, it is important that you emphasize these dual tasks to the young people in your group, many of whom too quickly judge themselves or too easily become complacent toward their limits.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Finding Your Personal Style* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and community environment of the group. High school students are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for developing that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom arrangement is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. The concept of respect has many implications, and the young people must be clear about the expectations associated with it in this course. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities will require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint, to creating game pieces or finding pictures. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks to help you. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it, you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using the Scriptures

The Horizons Program relies heavily on the Scriptures as a source of wisdom and the starting point for prayer. In addition, *Finding Your Personal Style*, as the first course in the program, includes many scripturally based exercises to help the young people develop the skill of finding their way in the Bible, in the hope that they might eventually reach a point of comfortable familiarity with the text. The participants will also be called on to interpret certain texts and apply the message to their own life.

Each participant in *Finding Your Personal Style* will need a Bible. The same will be true for many other courses in the Horizons Program. If it is feasible, each person should have his or her own copy of the Scriptures. This allows for the possibility of marking the pages, highlighting passages, and personalizing the book in a way that is meaningful to each individual.

If the young people do not already own their own Bibles, consider giving each participant a copy as a gift from the parish, if you have the means to do so. You could present a Bible to each participant as part of the closing prayer service in the first session, as they present their stone as a sign of commitment to the course. It would be a gift that they would use throughout the program and, it is hoped, for the rest of their life.

A Note About Handouts

The topic and format of *Finding Your Personal Style* requires the use of many supplementary handouts, particularly for the PSIs. Some groups will respond well to the handouts; others will tire of them easily, and you may encounter an occasional complaint. The continual shuffling of papers can become disorganized and disorienting. Though the handouts have valuable personal information, some young people may not know what to do with them after the activity is done. They might leave them behind after class, throw them in the trash, or otherwise dispose of them.

If you think the participants will react negatively to the profusion of loose pieces of paper, consider organizing the handouts into a folder before class begins. Include extra sheets of blank paper if you are using the journal exercises (on the next page). This can be done all at once or session by session. At the end of the session or the course, each person



will have a profile of himself or herself to take home and occasionally reflect on. Having the PSIs readily available in one spot may also foster communication within the young person's family or peer group. The individual may try the exercises at home or with friends.

One drawback to this approach is that the young people may be tempted to look ahead and complete other PSIs before you reach the appropriate point in the course. If you see this happening, emphasize the importance of doing the exercises with the rest of the group.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Finding Your Personal Style* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

A couple of reasons exist for seriously considering the inclusion of journal-keeping exercises in this course. First, for those young people who have not already participated in the level 1 minicourse *Keeping a Journal*, doing such exercises is a good way to introduce them to the concept of journal keeping and to help them develop some basic skills. For those who have already experienced that minicourse, incorporating the journal options in *Finding Your Personal Style* will help them further explore the personal benefits of this activity.

Second, journal activities present an opportunity for one-to-one ministry to young people. A young person might write something in a journal that she or he would not feel comfortable sharing in a group or even talking about at all. If you do assign journal activities, take the time to read the young people's responses—with their permission—and then write in comments or words of encouragement or affirmation. Your personal attention might make a big difference to a young person who is struggling, searching, or just growing up.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Finding Your Personal Style*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given for *not* including the journal component.

First, if *every* teacher of *every* course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of the activity. Second, the process of journal keeping is time consuming and energy consuming for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Finding Your Personal Style* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music, or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ, and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. The circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of class participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week, this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unfamiliar to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Creating a Safe Environment

Self-discovery activities can be fun and insightful at any age, but they require honesty and self-disclosure. A young person whose self-image is insecure may feel exposed and vulnerable at times in the process. Be careful to maintain an emotionally safe environment where the young people can be open and honest about their personal preferences and styles without fear of ridicule from others. In the first session set expectations for maintaining an affirming environment. You may repeat this at the beginning of each session if you feel a need to do so. Suggestions for presenting this information will be found in the plan for the first session.

Affirming Young People

For most people, it is easier to focus on the negative aspects of their personality than the positive. Like many adults, your young people will be well aware of their limitations, but not necessarily appreciative of their giftedness. Some people in your group will tend to judge themselves harshly. Encourage every-

one to continually look for the positive qualities associated with each style in themselves and others, and affirm those qualities in one another. Every young person should leave this course with a sense that he or she has something special to offer to the world.

Your *personal* affirmation of each individual is also important. As an adult role model, your attention and approval can go a long way in building a young person's self-esteem. Do whatever you can to contribute to the participants' sense of personal giftedness. Here are some suggestions:

- Engage in "1-minute ministry." Take a moment to write short notes to the young people. Call them on the phone. Say something positive about someone in front of the group. At the end of class or at break time, make it a point to affirm something a young person said.
- At the end of the course, write a letter to everyone, outlining what you see as their positive qualities and suggesting ways in which they might use their gifts.
- Invite individuals to meet you after school at a local fast-food restaurant for a snack. Find out what is going on in their life. Interest is another form of affirmation.
- Write notes to individual young people in their journals if you are using that option.

Finally—or perhaps first of all—never pass up an opportunity to speak of God's gentle care and passionate love for each of us. Without preaching, share your own faith story with the group as well as one-on-one. Your witness to the power of God in your life in spite of your human limitations might make a difference to a young person who is struggling to believe that the God who created her or him is a compassionate God.

Following Up

The PSIs included in this course are fun to do and generally nonthreatening. But anytime one deals with the inner self, there are bound to be discoveries and revelations, some of which may be unpleasant. Pay attention to young people who might be having difficulty with a certain concept or exercise. Perhaps the results of the exercise were not in keeping with their perceptions of themselves. Maybe someone is struggling with self-esteem. Occasionally, young people come to a realization that their personality style is not well suited to a certain career or lifestyle; they may experience the loss of a dream.



Whatever the difficulty, your personal attention, listening ear, and word of encouragement can make a difference.

As always, if you feel that a young person's struggle goes beyond what you are capable of handling as a catechist or youth minister, connect the student and his or her family with a mental health professional. If you are not certain of the procedure for doing this, talk with your program coordinator or your pastor.

Prayer

The major advantage of exploring one's personal style within a religious education program is that it is natural to frame the topic within a context of spirituality. The profile of an individual young person becomes the profile of a particular child of God—one who is loved and cherished; one who was created by God for a purpose. Personal prayer is a vital ingredient in this exploration. The young people discover who they are as individuals in a society and as part of all creation. Communal prayer is also essential. It is a means of celebrating the power of life and the gift that each person is and brings to the world.

Each session in *Finding Your Personal Style* offers opportunities for personal reflection and group prayer. As the leader, do not be tempted to shorten or eliminate prayer times in favor of extending a group discussion or substituting an optional activity. Through private reflection, a young person in your group might come to know God more intimately, even for a moment. Through group prayer, a member of your group might experience—maybe for the first time since childhood—a sense of being accepted for who he or she is, and not rejected for who he or she is not.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Finding Your Personal Style is one of the minicourses in the Horizons Program that can be recast as a day-long program or combined with other topics to create a longer retreat. Its success depends on a number of factors: the leaders, the timing, the format, and the young people themselves. If you are considering using this entire course or some of the activities as part of a broader retreat, consider the following options:

- This material could be used as part of a retreat on relationships, dating, parent-teen communication, identity, or spirituality.
- This material works well as part of a community-building retreat. Getting to know oneself and others in the group is the first step in building community. Combine the material with time for personal storytelling, group builders, and extended affirmation experiences.
- Some of the activities would be helpful in a leadership training retreat for young people and even adults as a way of leading into the exploration of personal leadership styles and theories of situational leadership.

Consider this one drawback when planning a retreat on personality, particularly for younger teenagers: It may be too much introspection in an intense format and environment for them to handle. To make it effective, you might have to include a lot of physical activity and lighter periods to balance the intensity.

Special Preparation Needs

For the Young People

Read through the sections A Note About Handouts and Using Journals and decide how you will handle these two elements of the course. You may need to acquire blank paper and folders or something else to hold the handouts and paper for journal writing.

For You

Read through the entire course to get a sense of its plan and progression. Do some of the personal style inventories yourself. Be prepared to share some of the results with the young people if it is appropriate.

Think about your own personality profile. Does your personality reflect a sense of balance? Do you have shadow sides that need work? Do other people in your life complement you?

Each session plan contains prayer and reflection suggestions for you as the teacher. They can be a helpful way to center yourself before meeting with your group. Consider how you will make time in your schedule to allow for this personal preparation.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Finding Your Personal Style* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Profile different young people as a way of making them visible to the parish community. Put up a poster in the back of the church, use the church bulletin or newsletter, or create a bulletin board in a visible place. Make sure to present a balanced picture of each person. Highlight some of their personality traits, things they are good at, as well as their school and parish activities.
- Based on their personality profiles, ask individuals to take responsibility for different planning or maintenance tasks in your group or in the youth program. For example, if you are doing a canned food drive, someone who is not very good at organizing things might be very good at speaking to different groups in the parish to get them to participate.

- Use some of the PSIs as part of a community-building or leadership retreat.
- Invite parish leaders to do some of the PSIs themselves or with the group. It will help the young people see their parish leaders in a very human light. It might also give them some insight about why people lead the way they do. Consider inviting some of their public school teachers or school principals to do the same, particularly if these people are members of the parish.
- Sponsor a program on evaluating media and their messages. Talk about society's images of personal styles, gender differences, success, happiness, or other intangibles. Have high school students run such a program for a junior high or middle school group. The high school leaders will have to do a lot of preparation—and learning—in order to present it to the younger teens. Because younger teens look up to older teens as role models, the message has a better chance of being heard than if it comes from adults.
- Have your group plan an activity day and prayer service for young children on the theme of being a unique creation of God. Your program coordinator may be able to direct you to age-appropriate resources.

Family Connections

- Encourage the young people to try some of the PSIs with members of their families. The exercises can spark some good family discussion. Have extra handouts available if possible. Make sure the young people are equipped with an explanation of the results to share with their families.
- Sponsor an event for parents and teenagers with an opportunity to do some of the PSIs and share the results. It will be fun to find out how much they know—and do not know—about each other. It may also help foster a new understanding of each other.

Each session plan also contains specific suggestions for family connections in the Alternative Approaches section.



Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Finding Your Personal Style*

Goals

The three goals for this course are as follows:

- That the young people understand personality as the expression of a neutral set of God-given characteristics that are shaped by forces within and outside of themselves

- That they explore their own personality characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses
- That they accept and celebrate who they are and grow in the conviction that they have the power to determine who they will become

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the three course goals. The objectives of *Finding Your Personal Style* follow:

Session 1: “I Am an Individual Person”

- To introduce the young people to the concept of personality and personal style
- To help them explore and celebrate some of the characteristics that make them unique as individual creations of God and understand some of the problems and possibilities that come with uniqueness
- To discuss with them the importance of valuing differences

Session 2: “I Am a Balanced Person”

- To introduce the young people to various personality types and help them understand dominant styles and shadow sides
- To reflect on Jesus as a model of a fully integrated person
- To discuss the need to strive for growth and balance while acknowledging and accepting human limitations

Session 3: “I Am a Whole and Holy Person”

- To help the young people recognize that needs, feelings, and emotions are part of the universal human experience and important to growth
- To enable them to see how they are dependent on one another and on God
- To help them recognize the existence of cultural roadblocks such as stereotypes, rumors, and prescribed roles and evaluate the impact of such roadblocks on their own life
- To help them define ways they need to grow



Suggested Resources

The following books were used as resources for *Finding Your Personal Style* and can be helpful in preparing to teach the course or in developing follow-up activities:

Elkind, David. *All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1984.

Kaufman, Gershen, and Lev Raphael. *Stick Up for Yourself!* Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1990.

Keirse, David, and Marilyn Bates. *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*. Gnosology Books, 1984.

Kincher, Jonni L. *Psychology for Kids: 40 Fun Tests That Help You Learn About Yourself*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1990. This book can be a valuable resource, providing additional material for follow-up sessions or as a recommendation for those young people who want to go further.

McElmurry, Mary Anne, and Judy Bisignano. *My Journal of Personal Growth* and *My Relationships with Others*. The Changing Years series. Carthage, IL: Good Apple, 1987.

101 Affirmations for Teenagers. Compiled by the editors of Group Publishing. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1993.

Peterson, Jean Sunde. *Talk with Teens About Self and Stress*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1993.

Shelley, Marshall, Brian Dill, and Eric Potter. *Living with Yourself and Liking It*. Pathfinder series. Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing, 1991.

SESSION 1

I Am an Individual Person



Objectives

- To introduce the young people to the concept of personality and personal style
- To help them explore and celebrate some of the characteristics that make them unique as individual creations of God and understand some of the problems and possibilities that come with uniqueness
- To discuss with them the importance of valuing differences

Session Steps

- A. a drawing exercise and a discussion (15 minutes)
- B. ground rules and an introduction to the course (15 minutes)
- C. personal introductions (10 minutes)
- D. an exercise on individual and group characteristics (15 minutes)
- E. a break (10 minutes)
- F. an introduction to personal style inventories (5 minutes)
- G. an exercise on personas (20 minutes)
- H. an exercise on personal characteristics (10 minutes)
- I. a closing prayer (20 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

Ask a group of people of any age what they think of when they hear the word *personality* and you are likely to get a wide variety of responses. Some people will think of a famous person. Others will mention qualities like “exuberant,” “a people person,” or “outgoing and friendly.” Still others will start to list personal style characteristics. Varied understandings of the word exist, and all of them carry a part of its meaning. One of the tasks for this first session is to come to a common understanding of the word *personality* that is broad enough to allow for navigation and exploration during the rest of the course.

The young people may be reluctant to talk openly in front of their peers if they do not know one another well, or if their only experiences of being together are in emotionally neutral situations or in groups where personal sharing is risky. Besides introducing the topic, an important task in this first session is to build a comfortable community among the young people so that they are able to share personal insights with one another through the rest of the course. The first half of the session consists of activities designed to build such a comfort level among the participants.

The session then briefly introduces personal style inventories (PSIs) as self-discovery tools. The remainder of the session includes activities that help the participants identify different roles they play and different masks they wear, depending on where they are and who they are with. The closing prayer invites the young people to consider ways they all differ from one another, but at the same time share common characteristics. It is important right from the beginning to affirm the individuality of each person as well as the common bond among people as children of the one God who created them.

Preparation



Materials Needed

- pens or pencils
- a variety of other writing utensils, such as crayons or markers
- blank sheets of paper

- scrap material or construction paper and rubber bands for making blindfolds
- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- a small garbage can, pail, or other deep container
- a mirror
- slips of paper and a container to put them in
- a copy of handout 1-A, “The Different Faces of Me,” for each participant
- a copy of handout 1-B, “My Three Selves,” for each participant
- a tape or CD player and meditative music (optional)
- journals, if you are using them
- a large candle and matches
- modeling clay
- common stick candles and a variety of small candles, such as votive candles, tapers, tea lights, and vigil lights
- a Bible



Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead the session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- Decide how you will distribute the handouts to the participants—gathered into one folder or singly as they are needed. Also decide if you are using the optional journal suggestions and make appropriate preparations.
- For step A.* Make blindfolds out of scrap material. Another way to create blindfolds is to use construction paper and rubber bands. For directions on making paper blindfolds, see step A.
- For step B.* Put a mirror in the bottom of a deep container like a pail or a small garbage can, as directed in step B.
- For step C.* Prepare slips of paper for the grouping activity, as directed in step C.
- For step G.* On a piece of newsprint, list the words and phrases specified in step G.
- For step H.* Divide the modeling clay so that each person gets an equal portion.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.



Opening Teacher Prayer

1. Find a comfortable space where you can spend a few minutes alone if possible. Relax yourself in God's presence. Breathe deeply and slowly. When you are ready, read the following passage aloud or in silence.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name: you are mine.

 Because you are precious in my eyes
 and glorious, and because I love you.

 Bring back my sons from afar,
 and my daughters from the ends
 of the earth:
 Everyone who is named as mine,
 whom I created for my glory,
 whom I formed and made.

(Isa. 43:1–7, NAB)

Read the passage a second time. Does any word or line seem to attract you? Repeat the word or line slowly, over and over again. Let the significance of that word or line unfold in your mind and in your heart.

2. Reflect on the following questions. You may want to just think about them quietly, use them as journal starters, or talk about them with others who share your ministry.

- How does this word or line touch my life at this moment?
- What is my response to God?
- What prayer do I pray for myself right now?
- What prayer do I pray for my ministry as this course begins?

3. Read the passage once more. Close with a fervent, confident, and faith-filled "Amen."

Procedure

A Drawing Exercise and Discussion: In Your Mind's Eye (15 minutes)

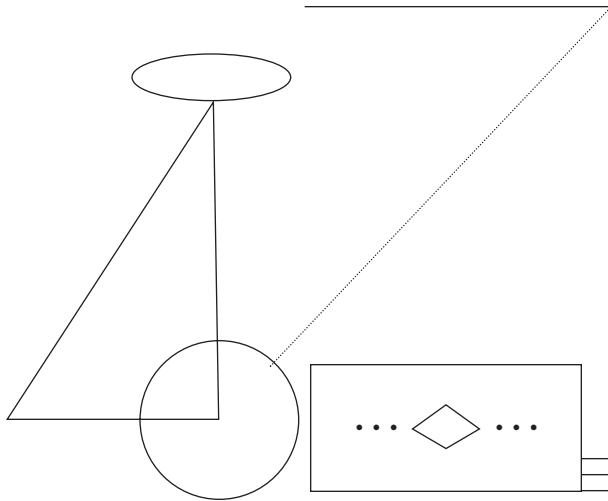
Before the session. Each young person needs a blindfold. If you do not have access to scraps of material to make cloth blindfolds, you can easily make them from paper. Use the darker colors of construction paper. Cut strips that are about 9 inches long and 4 inches wide. In the middle of the long edge of each strip, cut a triangle to allow the blindfold to fit over a nose. Try one on yourself. Fit the strip of paper over your eyes and secure it around your head with a rubber band.

1. Begin the session by welcoming the group. If the young people do not know you, introduce yourself and tell them a little bit about yourself, your family, your work, your hobbies, and other things that are important to you. If you do not know the young people or if they are completely new to one another, ask them to tell their name, school, and grade, if appropriate. If they all go to the same school or they are all in the same grade, this information is unnecessary. For reasons of time and group comfort level, ask them to share only a few facts. Tell them that they will get a chance to find out a little more about one another later in the session.

2. Distribute a blank piece of paper to each person. If you have already included paper in a folder with other handouts, instruct the young people to open to a blank page. Pass around a variety of writing utensils and ask each person to choose one. These might include pens, pencils, crayons, bold and thin-line markers, highlighter pens, and so on. Then distribute a blindfold to everyone and ask them to put it over their eyes securely. They may need to help one another do this. When they all have their blindfolds securely fastened, proceed to the next step.

3. Announce that you will describe to them a picture that is a collection of lines and geometric shapes. They are to listen carefully and reproduce the drawing on the blank sheet. They can be drawing while you are describing the picture. But they cannot ask questions or make comments to you or to one another.

Although the students may ask for more direction, do not give any other details. When you are confident that they understand the task, begin describing the picture below. Do it slowly so that they have adequate time to draw, but do not drag it out too long. Take no more than 2 or 3 minutes. Do not make comments about individual efforts while they are drawing.



4. Instruct the young people to take their blindfolds off and compare their drawings. Show them the picture you were describing. Some of their drawings may bear a close resemblance to the original. Others will be radically different. Ask the young people to report some of their observations. Some possibilities include the following, but the students are likely to come up with more:

- Some drawings were small, others filled the page.
- Some people chose to draw on the vertical page, others on the horizontal page.
- People chose different utensils to write with. Some drawings are in simple pencil lines. Others are in bold colors.

Close the activity and introduce the topic of the course by combining these points with your own thoughts:

- Everyone heard the same description but had a different approach to drawing the picture. No one's picture is better than anyone else's, but they are all different.
- Everyone has a different approach to life, even though we all deal with the same issues and questions. Each person looks at things in a unique way.

5. Ask the young people for a definition of the word *personality*. If they have trouble coming up with a definition on their own, offer a sentence starter like "When I hear the word *personality*, I think of . . ." or "My personality is my way of . . ." After a few minutes, sum up the discussion by combining your own thoughts with these points:

- Our personality is our way of living in the world and interacting with other people. It includes all the things that make us individuals.
- Personality includes things like personal preferences, typical reactions, learning styles, and thinking patterns.
- An individual's personality is determined by a number of factors. Among these factors are family history, genetics, and culture.
- Each of us is an individual. But we also have a lot of things in common.
- It all boils down to one fact: We are unique persons created by God for a specific purpose. That purpose is as individual as we are. But the one thing we have in common is that we were all created in God's image and likeness and are all children of God.

B Ground Rules and Introduction to the Course (15 minutes)

Before the session. Move the container with the mirror off to the side of the room where the young people are not likely to notice it. Cover it up with a cloth if you need to. The mirror should be large enough so that it does not slide around and people can easily see their image in it.

1. Gather the group members in a circle if they are not already arranged that way. Recruit a volunteer to write on a piece of newsprint or plan to do so yourself. Ask the group to brainstorm some ground rules and expectations for your time together. Young people are more likely to follow rules that they create for themselves. Note all the suggestions on the newsprint. Add the following points to the list if the group does not identify them:

- Respect one another. Put-downs, sarcastic comments, and ridicule are unacceptable in this group. Listen to one another and treat everyone else the way you want to be treated.



- Be as open and honest as you can be in the group, but be assured that no one will be forced to share anything.
- Respect one another's privacy. Do not read what other group members write in their handouts or journals.
- Leave at home prejudices, labels, and anything else that hurts other people.

Post the list of rules in a place where it will be visible to the group. If you are in a space that is used by other groups between sessions and you cannot leave things behind, make sure to post these rules before each session.

2. Next, hold the container with the mirror in it in such a way that the participants cannot see inside. Tell them that you are going to pass the container around the group. They are to take a private look inside and, without saying a word, pass it to the next person. Heighten their interest by saying things like this:

- In this container you will see a wonderful gift created by God.
- Even though this creation has some flaws, God *almost* reached perfection with this particular creation.
- Every day, God looks at this work of art and smiles.

When all the participants have looked in the container, conclude the introduction to the course with these thoughts:

- God considers every human being to be a precious creation.
- This course invites the young people to explore who they are as creations of a loving God.
- They will get a chance to learn about themselves and their personal style.
- No matter who they are or what their personal style is, they can contribute something to the world in a way that no one else can. Every person in the room has something good to offer everyone else. The young people should try to find the good qualities in every person in the group—including themselves.
- Finding out who they are, how they react to life, and how they interact with other people will help them decide what kind of person they want to become.

- The challenge for them is to try to get to know others in the group for who they really are, not who everyone *thinks* they are. They will probably be surprised at the similarities between people as well as the differences.

C Exercise: **Personal Introductions** **(10 minutes)**

This exercise offers a nonthreatening way to divide your group into pairs because it does not involve choosing or being chosen by someone else. This eliminates what can be an awkward moment for many young people. It works well with large or small groups.

Before the session. Prepare a list of famous pairs. These might include cartoon characters (Calvin and Hobbes, Snoopy and Woodstock), Bible figures (Adam and Eve, David and Goliath), historical figures (Lewis and Clark, Wilbur and Orville Wright), television personalities (Cliff and Claire Huxtable, Siskel and Ebert), or any other combinations that will be familiar to the group. Use only as many personalities as there are people in your group. Write the name of each member of the pair on a slip of paper. Fold the papers and put them in a container.

1. At the appropriate time in the session, pass the container with the slips of paper around the group and ask each person to choose one, but to hold it until everyone else has chosen theirs. When the papers have been distributed, tell the group members to read their slip and find the second half of the pair. When they have found their match, they are both to sit down and wait for your instructions.

2. Ask the young people to introduce themselves to their partner if it is necessary to do so. Then explain to them that they are going to tell their partner about themselves using only the phrase "I am a . . ." and one or two words to complete the sentence. Give them examples such as these: "I am a basketball player," "I am a daughter," "I am a baby-sitter," "I am a best friend," "I am a dog lover," "I am a cartoon watcher," "I am a French horn player." Limit the time to 2 minutes for each person. You might want to suggest a minimum number of statements. Ten statements is not an unreasonable expectation.

Acknowledgments (continued)

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