

Setting the Elephant Free

Elephant Story and Activity Instructions

Objective/Purpose

This exercise reveals students' self-imposed false limits while concurrently bringing to light their talents and strengths. The term "false limits" refers to the fact that all of us have much more power and ability than we believe. Students learn how to see beyond their false limitations by honing in on their strengths and gifts. Youth also have the opportunity to discuss and conceptualize on how to leverage their inner strengths to accomplish their dreams, as well as, overcome obstacles such as: self-doubt, depression and adversity.

Estimated Time

- 45 Minutes

Materials Needed

- Student Handout #1: Picture of an Elephant
- Student Handout #2: The Story of the Elephant & Exercise Instructions
- Colored and Regular Pencils
- Flipchart or Dry Erase Board (if you chose to make a list of false limits and strengths)

The Story of the Elephant

If you've ever been around an elephant, you know that they are one of the strongest and most powerful animals on earth. But did you know how they keep the elephants under control at a circus?

When a baby elephant is born it weighs 400 lbs. Soon after it is born, they put a rope on its foot and tie it to a stake driven in the ground. At first it pulls on the rope, trying to get away, but after a while it stops tugging, because it doesn't have the strength to pull the stake up.

As the elephant gets bigger and bigger, the people at the circus continue to use the same size rope and stake. And even though an elephant can grow to 30 times the size it was as a baby, as it gets older, it stops pulling on the rope because it doesn't think it can break away.

Can you imagine? A 12,000-pound elephant being held down by a tiny rope and stake! Well, we are all like that elephant. We all have false limits or beliefs that we have put on ourselves—because long ago we were told, or made to believe, that we couldn't do what we wanted to do.

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On the Elephant Picture:

- **The rope and stake** represent the negative self-talk or the things that you've been told that hold you back, or tie you down. You can draw or write words that show the types of things that can hold you down. It could be, "my brother told me that I would never..." Or, "I felt I did poorly the first time I tried to read aloud in class..."
- **The elephant** represents your strengths. Again, draw or write words. It could be that the legs represent some sort of strength, the body, the ears or the trunk, or the head. Think about what your strengths are. If you can't think of any, ask people in your group or one of the mentors. You all have them!
- **The horizon** represents your future. On the horizon, draw what you want to have for yourself in your future or things you would like to work on. Keep this in mind, the strengths represented on your elephant will later become the power that gets you to your future.

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