

Stay Alert

WHEN THINGS DON'T SEEM RIGHT



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“When vultures hover, don’t fall asleep.”



African Resource Center of West Michigan
Grand Rapids, Michigan



*Our elders say,
“When vultures hover, don’t fall asleep.”*

*Vultures are opportunists.
They prey on the weak and vulnerable.
Patient and tenacious, vultures watch closely,
waiting for a moment of weakness to strike.*



*Some animals know the vulture's cunning.
The wise sharpen their alertness when vultures circle overhead,
for their hovering is a warning
that danger is near and cannot be ignored.*





*In the same way, we experience warning signs
that tell us we are emotionally vulnerable
and that our well-being is at risk
unless we take steps to protect it.*

Here are some signs of emotional vulnerability we must not ignore:

1) *Extreme mood swings:*

Sudden shifts from calm to anger, sadness, or detachment.

*A person may laugh with friends one moment
and erupt in fierce anger the next.*

*Left unchecked, mood swings can lead to persistent
sadness, guilt, or feelings of worthlessness.*



2) ***Social withdrawal:***

*Pulling away from friends, family members,
hobbies, or activities you once enjoyed.*

*Sometimes this reflects your fear of being hurt again,
or deeper struggles such as anxiety, depression,
low self-esteem, trauma, or difficult life transitions.*



3) *Changes in sleep patterns:*

Nightmares, insomnia, or oversleeping may signal distress.

*Stress and mental health challenges
often disrupt the body's natural rhythms,
whether short-term or chronic.*





4) *Changes in eating habits:*

*Overeating, undereating, or craving “comfort foods”
can be signs of emotional distress,
as food becomes a way to cope
with overwhelming feelings.*

5) ***Physical discomfort:***

Emotional struggles often show up in the body, headaches, stomach problems, fatigue, muscle tension, or unexplained aches and pains.

These are the body's way of speaking when the heart is heavy.



6) *Finally, there are harmful coping habits.*

Risky behaviors, substance use, or self-harm may numb pain for a moment, but they never heal its root.

Some try to drown their sorrow in alcohol or drugs, hoping their troubles will vanish.

Others feel so overwhelmed that they begin to believe they are “broken” beyond repair.





Yet challenges are part of life.

Actual failure comes only when we stop striving to grow.

If you notice these signs in yourself or others,

don't carry the weight alone—reach out for support.

Family, mentors, and health professionals can help you

build resilience and find healthier paths forward.

Talk with trusted friends, mentors, or family members.

*Share what you're going through
and stay open to the help they offer.*

*Seek out supportive communities—clubs, faith groups,
or counseling circles, where you can express your feelings
freely, without fear of judgment.*





*Remember: emotional challenges are like vultures,
circling overhead, waiting for a moment of carelessness.*

Stay alert. Stand firm.

*Take charge—and turn your struggles into strength,
your pain into healing,
and every setback into an opportunity for growth.*

7. Practical Awareness and Action

- What are some early signs that tell you it’s time to slow down and check in with yourself?
- What steps can you take when you notice emotional “vultures” circling?
- How can you build habits that keep you emotionally alert and safe?
- What is one thing you can do this week to protect your emotional well-being?

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8. Call-and-Response Circle Prompts

- **Leader:** When vultures hover...
Youth: We stay awake.
- **Leader:** When warning signs appear...
Youth: We pay attention.
- **Leader:** When emotions get heavy...
Youth: We reach out.
- **Leader:** When life gets hard...
Youth: We stand firm

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Portions of this handbook and its accompanying video—including draft text, images, and narration—were generated with the assistance of AI tools.

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