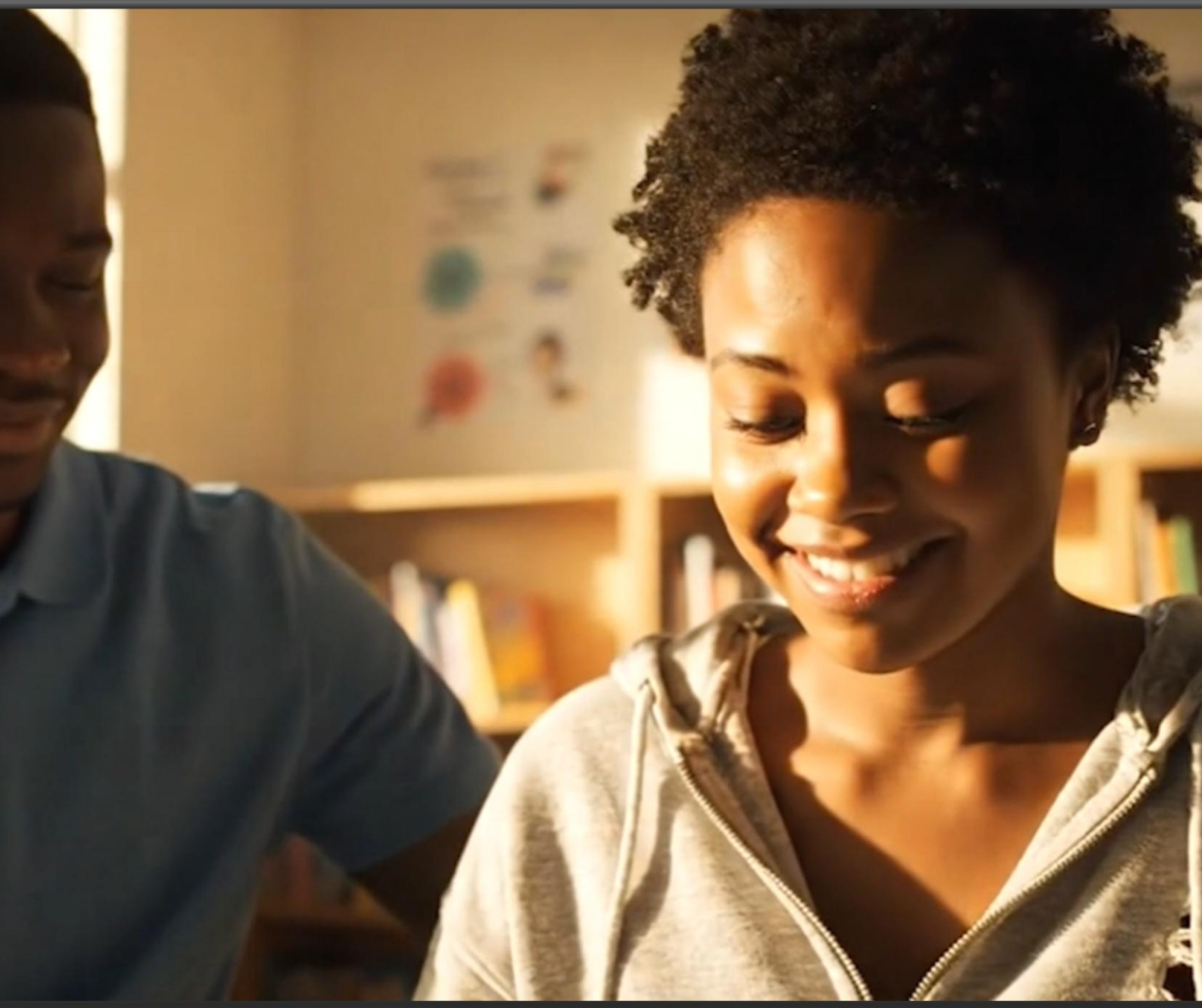


Life Happens,
WE CHOOSE HOW TO RESPOND



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WE CHOOSE HOW TO RESPOND

*“A tree does not fall because of the wind’s noise,
but because its roots are weak.”*



African Resource Center of West Michigan
Grand Rapids, Michigan



*Our elders say,
“A tree does not fall because of the wind’s noise,
but because its roots are weak.”*

*Sometimes we wish the wind would ease up,
its howl less fierce, its presence less unsettling.
But the trouble isn't in the wind; it's in the tree.
A tree with deep, resilient roots doesn't tremble
at the wind's whispers or roar.
It stands firm, grounded, unshaken.*



*You—yes, you—
you are like a tree planted deep in rich soil:
your family, your culture, your future,
your dreams.*





*But sometimes, the wind whispers lies.
It says, "Drink, and you'll feel better."
"Drink, and you'll be braver."
"Drink, and you'll forget all your troubles."
When you give ear to these falsehoods,
you invite decay and rot to take root deep within you.*



*Let me share some signs that indicate
decay and rot may be affecting your roots.*

Try to answer these questions as honestly as possible:

- 1. Do you drink to forget pain or feel better about yourself?.*

2. *Do you feel out of control when you drink?*
3. *Do you miss school, work,
or family time because of drinking?*
4. *Are you ashamed of your actions after drinking,
or hide this habit from others?*
5. *Have you tried to stop but feel like you can't?*
6. *Do you feel anxious, shaky, or angry when not drinking?*



*These are signs — not of weakness,
but of a more profound need.
Would you ignore a raccoon nibbling
at the carrots you are nurturing in your garden?*





So, ask yourself:

*Should I ignore a habit that is preventing me
from being the best I can be in life?*

*Is drinking, vaping, or drug use pulling me away
from family and friends, those who love me
and care about me the most?*

*Asking for help is not weakness; it is courage and wisdom.
Help might look like talking to someone you trust,
such as a mentor, family member, counselor,
or anyone who cares about you
and wants you to succeed in life.
It might mean joining a youth group
where you can share your story without judgment.
Or finding a place to heal and grow.*





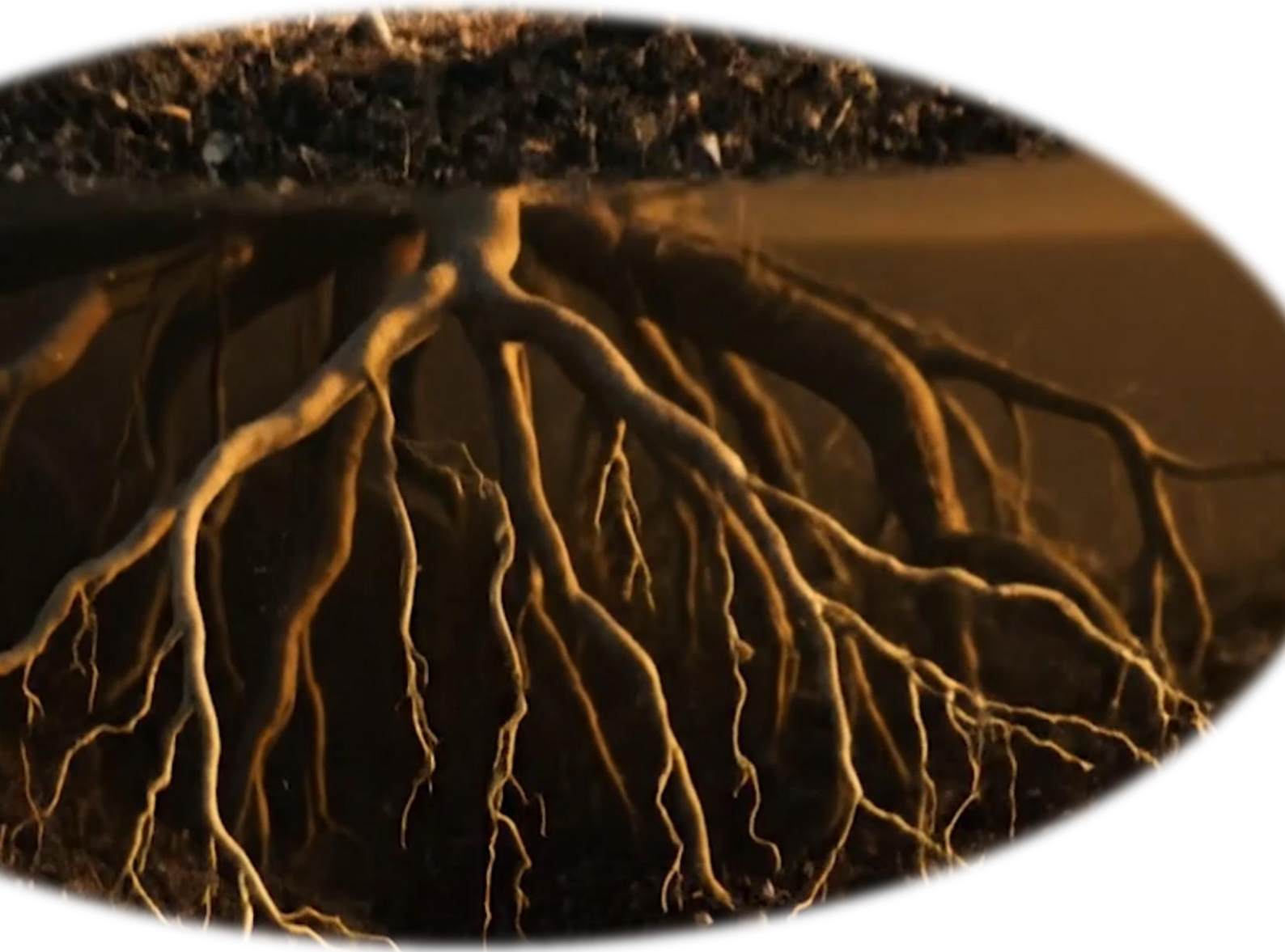
*You are not alone. Your story matters.
Your feelings matter. Your future is worth protecting.
Let your roots grow deep again.
Let your branches stretch toward the sun.*

*So if alcohol is taking more than it gives, speak up.
Reach out. Be strong enough to protect your dream,
your livelihood, your family. Live life to its fullest.*

Let the wind blow where it wants.

Let it roar, let it whisper.

But make sure your roots are strong.





*Guard yourself against rot and decay
—like alcohol and drugs—
that weaken your judgment when you need it most.
Only when you're in control can you stand firm
against the stress and storms of life.*

Reflection Questions for Activities and Discussion

1. Personal Connection

- What does the proverb, “A tree does not fall because of the wind’s noise, but because its roots are weak,” mean to you? What do you think the “roots” represent in your own life — family, culture, values, dreams?
- What kinds of “winds” do young people face today — pressures, lies, temptations, stress?
- Can you think of a time when your roots helped you stay strong during a difficult moment?
- What helps a tree grow deeper roots, and what enables you to grow stronger inside?

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Activity-Based Reflection Questions

A. Root Mapping Activity

Invite youth to draw a tree with roots, trunk, and branches.

- What are three things in your roots that make you strong?
- What winds are blowing against you right now?
- What fruits do you want your life to produce?

B. Circle Dialogue: “Winds and Roots”

- Share a moment when you felt shaken by something.
- Share a moment when you stood firm.
- What helped you stay grounded?

C. Story Rewrite

- If you rewrote this story in your own words, what would your version sound like?
- What metaphor would you use to describe your own journey?

Closing Reflection

- What is one message from the story that stays with you?
- What is one thing you want to protect in your life?
- What is one thing you want to grow?

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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.

The final message and all editing decisions reflect the lived experience, values, and creative guidance of the African Resource Center of West Michigan’s media team.

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We gratefully acknowledge the **Grand Rapids Community Foundation** for their generous support of the African Resource Center’s Health and Wellness Project. Their partnership strengthens our mission to promote culturally responsive care and community well-being. Thank you!

