**NOTE:** If you can add 30–45 minutes more to the schedule, divide the group into two teams. Have them study the scripture and then create and present a dramatization of the action in the temple. Encourage use of the supplied arts and crafts materials.

**Throw It in the Bucket (20 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to help youth distinguish between various emotions; everything is not about anxiety—some things may be anger or fear.

Give each participant several 3”x 5” index cards. Ask them to think about various experiences in their lives and jot down a few words describing them. Write about one experience per card. Give a couple of examples to help them get started, such as a breakup with a friend or breaking an arm and not being able to play sports. In the center of the group, place the six baskets or small plastic tubs that are labeled with the following feelings: frustration; anger; sadness; grief; impatience; anxiety. Ask them to look at the labels and place their cards in the bins where they think the thoughts they wrote down belong. After everyone is finished, randomly pull a few of the cards out of the bins and read them so participants have a sense of how their classmates categorized various experiences. Also, remind them that what may first seem like anxiety has another place all of its own. Managing anxiety is certainly important along with acknowledging and managing other emotions.

**You Did What? How Those Teenage Brains Work (30 minutes)**

Many parents sometimes are puzzled about the behavior and choices their teens make. Let the youth know that their brains actually work in a way that is different from children and most adults. Share the information below about the teenage brain. As a leader, you can print out the article or summarize the information based on your reading.

**The Teenage Brain**

Sometimes adults wonder about the choices teens make and the reasons why risky things happen in their lives. A colleague’s middle school daughter joined peers in crawling under a parked bus while waiting for transportation from a specialized academy to their home schools. Her mom asked, “What? Why would she even consider doing something so risky?” Or, a parent wonders why their child would follow another student into a store and take something without paying, especially when it was something that they already owned. Or, perhaps, their child cheated on a test. The parent is surprised because their child has been taught to act differently than this.

Researcher B.J. Casey of Cornell University works to understand why adolescents seem to be so inclined to “go with the flow” and be “led by the pack,” despite their family values and teaching. Along with her research team, Casey has identified a few factors in the brain that may account for this dilemma.

First, the team believes the release of a brain chemical known as dopamine contributes to this. When something makes us feel good or excited, dopamine gives an elated feeling, which could be described as a “rush,” prompting impulsive behaviors. Dopamine levels are at their peak during the teen years. Secondly, the team noticed increased activity in an area of the brain called the ventral striatum, which affects one’s level of motivation. The ventral striatum also affects adequate decision-making abilities. This area of the brain loves being rewarded. The team’s third point shows the dilemma. The ventral striatum creates a “tug of war” between the brain’s organizer—the prefrontal cortex—and itself. The organizer cannot control the desire for reward, or decision-making abilities, of an adolescent at the peak of dopamine levels. The desire to feel good overrides.

As an adolescent matures in a loving, protective, and guiding environment of family, friends, and the church, the prefrontal cortex becomes stronger and sends clearer messages about dangers and consequences of decisions and opportunities. As teens get older, each can weigh the risks and benefits—not just respond to the lure of the “feel good reward”—and make better decisions.
**REFLECTION:** Invite youth to work and think individually about this information. Ask each participant to create a response by coming up with a story to share (could be from a movie, book, or personal experience involving someone far removed from this group) by using the template “I ALWAYS wondered why she or he did THAT.” Recruit two or three volunteers to share.

In sharing, remind the group of the 3C Covenant that guides the study session and that we honor confidentiality, especially outside the classroom.

Share key points outlined in the mind-body connection article by Cornell University (link below), including activities that can help manage emotions: deep breathing, laughter, listening to music, meditation, and body movement such as play, yoga, and Tai Chi. You can read the “Mind-Body Connection” online here: [health.cornell.edu/sites/health/files/pdf-library/mind-body-connection.pdf](http://health.cornell.edu/sites/health/files/pdf-library/mind-body-connection.pdf).

Introduce the Daily Energy Routine by saying that these exercises are a series of body movements and poses designed to wake up the brain and encourage the brain to help keep the body in a healing mode. Also, let youth know that what they see may feel different or uncomfortable. Ask them to focus on the process of caring for themselves and bringing healing to their bodies.


**NOTE:** The eight steps to the routine include the Four Thumps, Cross Crawl, Crown Pull, and Zip-Up, among others.

Before you begin, ask each participant to move to a chair with enough space around it so they can stand up and sit easily. Encourage them to follow the steps in the video and to only do what is most comfortable for them. Allow for a quiet and centering time after viewing the video. Invite youth to share if anything from this experience stands out for them (be prepared to point out some key points that you have noticed).


**Look Closely at Our Brains** (10 minutes)
Pass out copies of the brain diagram handout. Point out the areas of the brain and their accompanying emotional responses (i.e., amygdala—fight or flight). Ask the young people to identify the areas they believe are most active for them on the unlabeled brain illustration.

**Screenshot of Emotions** (10 minutes)
Give each participant a sheet of paper. Show them a list of the following emotions (written on newsprint or projected): happiness, anger, fear, frustration, resentment, love, and anticipation. Feel free to add additional emotions you think will be helpful.

Ask youth to check in with themselves by identifying at least five emotions that they are currently experiencing or have experienced on a recent day by creating a “screenshot” of their emotions at a particular point in time. Then, ask them to assign a percentage beside each emotion. For example, someone may be 50 percent happy, 10 percent fearful, etc. You may wish to share or post the screenshot of your emotions that you prepared in advance.

**Gather for Closing** (10 minutes)
Ask group members to sit in a circle. Remind them that we are deeply loved by God, created in God’s image, and connected with people who also serve God. Take their attention back to the cross they created earlier in the session where they identified emotions. Remind them that the cross is not just a symbol of hurt and pain, but also of hope and healing. Have them think of the group as they share in the following litany. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group in the litany “I Am Loved.”