One (Leader): Even though my life may be full of challenges,
All: I am loved and experience God’s amazing grace.
One: Even though there are dangers that youth face in today’s world,
All: I am loved and experience God’s amazing grace.
One: Even though it seems that people put us down and do not understand us,
All: I am loved and experience God’s amazing grace.
All: Even though we are still going and growing, we are loved and have God’s amazing grace!

Next, ask youth to think about their emotions right now. Remind them that emotions are a key part of who we are as God has made us. Remind them of the scene at the temple. Jesus’ display of anger and frustration was also an expression of love—that God’s people would not be taken advantage of but could come to worship as God intended.

Invite the youth into a time of prayer and reflection through their bodies. Ask them to close their eyes, if they are comfortable doing so. Then, ask members to cross their arms in front of them, with their right hand resting on their left shoulder and their left hand resting on their right shoulder. Ask them to pat themselves on the back for being fully alive.

Ask them to open their eyes and do the following: rock gently from side to side, roll their shoulders up and back a few times. Ask them to raise their heels from the floor. Ask them to drop their arms to their side and take a deep breath through the nose and blow out forcefully through the mouth a few times.

Thank them for coming and invite them to give “high fives” to a couple of people if they are able.

Extend the Session
The following activities are for sessions lasting longer than two hours. See also the Project Idea and Mindfulness Exercise in the Resources section that follows.

Breathing Exercises
If time permits, also lead the group in these deep breathing exercises. Research says that when we are stressed, we tend to take shorter breaths. The two exercises described below help improve breathing and may reduce stress and anxiety. Consider leading the group in the straw-breathing exercise; you will need one straw for each participant. After the exercise, invite youth to reflect on how they felt about doing it (i.e., felt weird doing it, but feeling more relaxed after). Say that therapists working with youth experiencing anxiety have found this to be calming for them.

For more information about these breathing techniques visit: takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/explore-healing-practices/mind-body-therapies/how-can-i-choose-best-mind-body-therapy-me#.

Breathing Deeply
Sit up straight in a chair, feet flat on the floor if possible. Imagine a spot just below your navel (belly button). Inhale through your nose (mouth closed) and breathe into that spot, filling your abdomen with air. Try to inhale for two to four seconds. Then, exhale through your mouth (with lips pursed as if you are whistling); imagine that you are releasing air from a balloon. Try to exhale for four to eight seconds (twice the amount of time it takes to inhale).

Straw-Breathing Exercise
Have a drinking straw in your hand. Inhale normally and naturally. Then exhale fully through the straw; be sure to exhale all the air out of your lungs. Repeat this exercise for one minute (this can be done for up to five minutes).