As students begin work on their projects, they may encounter situations where they face sensitive issues with peers and community members. For example, while visiting a local food bank, students may run into a friend from school they did not know struggled with a need for food at home. Or, students who face bullying in their daily lives may become uncomfortable during a related class discussion. To help you deal with these issues and help students process the associated emotions, this guide may be used as a valuable resource.

ALWAYS WORK TO CREATE A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SPACE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

You may already have class expectations that you set at the beginning of the school year, but it may be necessary to set further ground rules for times when you are discussing issues that may be sensitive for some students. If your classroom rules do not include them, consider including some of these guidelines for group discussions:

- No name-calling
- No interrupting
- Listen, but do not judge
- Everyone may share, but not everyone has to share
- Use respect when referring to groups of people, avoid stereotypes

Most importantly, make sure that at all times you are modeling how to share with respect by being open and honest. You can also be a model of how to respond to differences of opinion and sensitive topics with compassion, understanding and an open mind.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE PREPARED

Before you begin the Lead4Change project with your students, take the time to learn more about issues in the local community, your school and your own classroom. The best way to equip yourself to manage a discussion about an issue is to make sure you are well versed in the selected topic yourself. Before students begin their own research, do your research and learn about how the issue affects people in your community and individual students in your class. This allows you to be aware of students that may deal with these issues at home so that you can keep a watchful eye on them as you move through different components of the project.

If you notice that certain students are struggling with these issues as they work on their project, consider having private conversations with those individuals to help them process any emotions or concerns they may be experiencing.

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR FIELD TRIPS AND OTHER EVENTS

Before you leave for a field trip or any events associated with the project, take some time to review general guidelines for respectful behavior with students. Consider using the following points to guide the discussion:

- **How to respond if you see someone you know.** Just because you see someone you know at a food bank or a soup kitchen does not mean that they have changed in any way. They are still the same person you have known as a classmate, peer or friend. Be sure to speak to them and treat them the same way you always have.

- **Taking pictures.** There are appropriate times and situations for taking pictures and sharing them. Always be sensitive to the situation and "think before taking a pic!" Always think about how the people in your picture might feel if they knew others were going to see them in this particular setting. If you think they might want to keep this moment private, then put the camera away and focus on being present in the moment to learn more about the individuals you are meeting.

- **Privacy matters.** After you come home from a field trip or event, you may have things you want to share with friends and family about your experience. Just remember that the people you met there have a right to privacy. It is easy to start rumors or even to hurt someone just by sharing private information in casual conversations. So, if you see someone you know or you witness a sensitive moment, be very careful who you share that information with and how you share it. If you aren't sure what to do, ask your teacher, a parent or other adult for advice on how best to share your experiences.

ALLOW TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS TO PROCESS EVENTS.

Your students may be exposed to many new and different situations as they work through their project, and these experiences may raise many questions for them. Make sure you allow time to address these questions or concerns as they arise. One great strategy to use is to allow students to submit questions anonymously before a visit to a food bank, a homeless shelter or another new venue. Preview the questions and then take some class time to answer the questions. And always keep in mind that you do not have to be the one with all the answers. If you are not sure how to answer a question, feel free to call on other staff at your school such as counselors, social workers or administrators to assist. Students will feel much more comfortable and approach situations with more poise and confidence once their questions have been addressed.

Question and answer time is also important after returning from a new experience where students may have been exposed to sensitive topics or information. Even if you address questions before the trip, students may still be experiencing strong emotions as a result of their experience. It can be easy to avoid what may potentially be a challenging conversation, but it is always best to give students the opportunity to process their feelings. Just be sure that you are always guiding the discussion and reminding students to preserve the safe and respectful place you have created in your classroom.

RESPOND WITH ACTION.

When students encounter people in need, especially people they know, they often want to do something to help. The very nature of the Lead4Change program is about providing the framework for continued success in helping people. Reassure your students that even though they have witnessed people in challenging situations, they are a vital part of making a difference in those lives. Remind students that their Lead4Change project enables them to take action to help individuals in their community, their school and maybe even their classroom!