

Reimagining Digital Well-Being With and For Youth

Co-Design Process Report
Youth Voice Cohort: Project Zero

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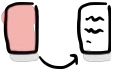

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

At the outset of our design work, we had the following aims:

- **Primary aim** → Co-design with teens a "digital well-being toolkit." More specifically, we wanted to work with teens to develop a by teens/for teens resource keyed to supporting digital well-being (DWB). We sought to a) surface strategies that help with DWB challenges, and b) identify a prototype form for the toolkit (e.g., infographic, collection of memes, 1-pager with strategies, or something else).
- **Secondary aim** → Co-develop ideas for a dissemination strategy (e.g., an influencer campaign, partnerships with youth-focused organizations). We recognized that potential dissemination ideas would be shaped by the direction of our co-design work on a "toolkit," but we wanted to begin envisioning together how we would share insights more broadly.

We planned for all of our design work to take place over Zoom.

- **Structure** → Six intensive co-design sessions, 1.5 hours each, run via Zoom during July/August 2021. All sessions took place across a 3-week period; time between sessions ranged from 48 hours to 5 days.
- **Tech** → We met via Zoom and conducted most of our design work in [MURAL](#). We had a new MURAL board that we created for each session, carrying forward key ideas from prior meetings and presenting new design invitations based on what we heard and learned as we worked with teens.
- **Participants** → Our design team included six teens, all of whom participated in [our prior teen advisory board research](#). This meant that every participant was familiar with our research, experienced at participating in group sessions over Zoom, and knowledgeable about the content area (digital challenges and DWB). We also had four researchers who participated in design sessions and two researcher advisors with expertise in participatory design research who provided instrumental support, prototype design, and feedback on session plans and protocols. Between sessions, one of our researchers generated the sketches that our team shared with teens throughout the design process.

We committed to improvisation as a guiding principle.

- **Principle in practice** → Improvisation is a principle of participatory design ([Lee et al., 2021](#)). Though we had study aims and goals defined at the outset, we agreed that the specific direction our design work took would be shaped by our co-design process with participants.

For example, we were unsure how many strategies we would come up with for the toolkit (our target end product), how simple or complex those strategies would be, and what specific topics they would cover (e.g., sleep, focused attention, comparison, and/or something else teens see as relevant to DWB).

We also left open decisions about format. We wondered if the final form might be a one-pager with a set of key strategies; as the outline below reveals, our teen co-designers ultimately felt strongly that the toolkit should not be a static document and instead a participatory, maker-centered resource that provides an opportunity for teens to self-reflect, connect, share, and learn from each other.

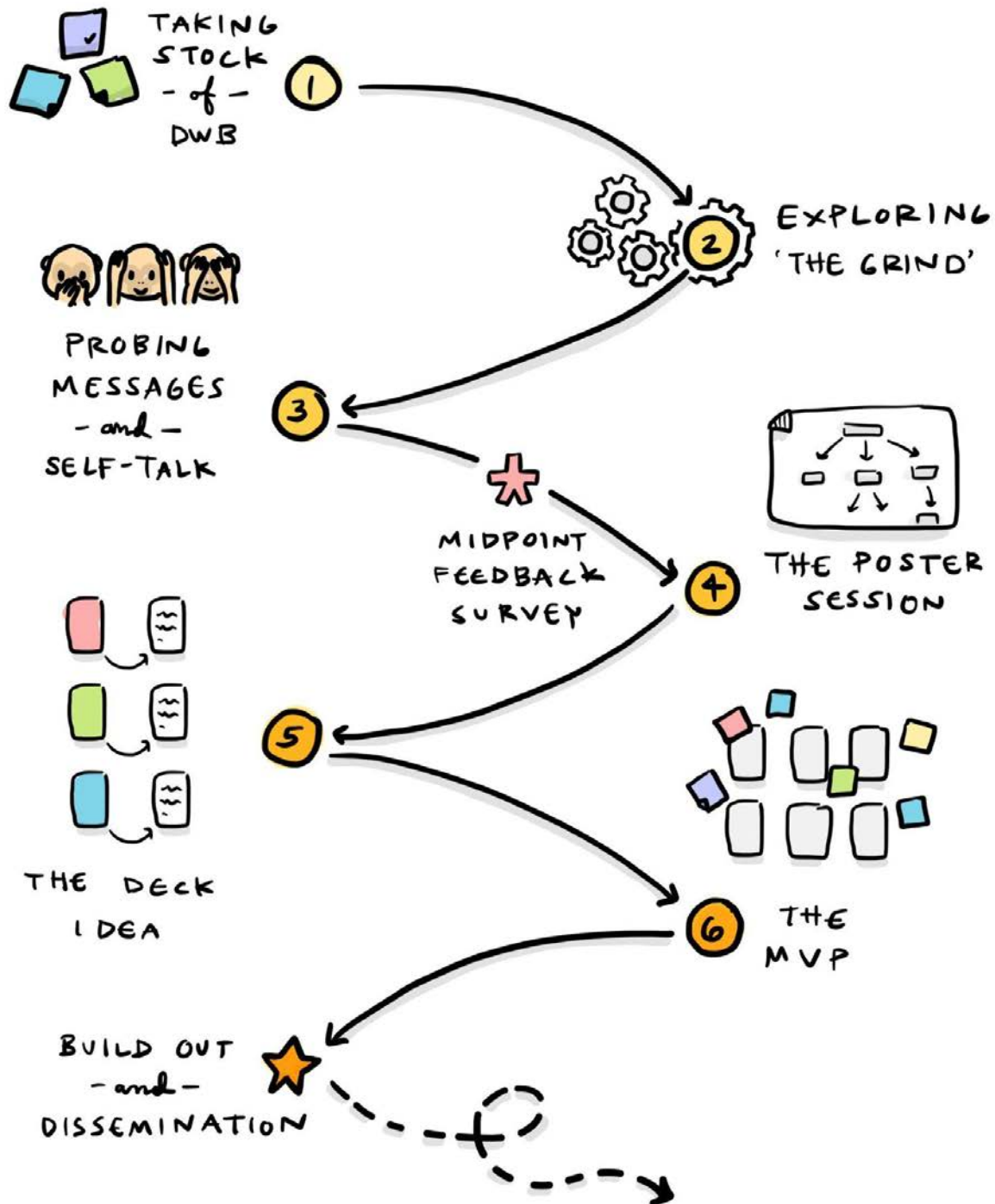
- **Our role** → In participatory design, youth participatory design, and co-design processes, conveners adopt different roles. In this case, we strove to be design partners: rather than trying to remove ourselves from the process (or instead adopt a facilitator-only role), we designed alongside teens, working to uplift their ideas and integrate suggestions based on what we heard and could bring from our research, skill sets, and the literature. In short, we viewed every participant - teen and adult - as holding valuable expertise.

Each session was loosely structured with a few building blocks.

- **Opening up** → similar to an extended icebreaker, we spent ~15-20 minutes checking in and connecting
- **Building on** → we shared design invitation based on ideas that surfaced during the prior session and invited their reactions/feedback
- **Diving in** → we carved out time for creative work, points of connection, "doing," making
- **Standing back** → we took a step back to consider where we were heading, assessed our feelings about the direction of our design work, and took stock of fit with our broader aims.

CO-DESIGN SESSION EVOLUTION

Created after the sessions as a visual summary of our journey.



CO-DESIGN SESSION 1: TAKING STOCK OF DWB

In Session 1, we began to work toward a shared understanding of the key topics and issues relevant to teens' digital well-being (DWB). We intentionally focused on both the positive ways that tech can support well-being and the challenges teens face. We also wanted to start exploring visions for what a valuable toolkit might contain.



AIMS

Our key aims were to understand the contours of DWB including supportive aspects of digital life and key challenges. We explored:

- What kinds of experiences support DWB? What experiences undercut DWB?
- What should a "by teens/for teens" DWB toolkit address?
- Would it be most helpful to focus on reducing/addressing negatives or increasing positives?

OPENING UP



ACTIVITY

We began the session with a photo-based Show and Tell. We aimed to provide an open-ended invitation to everyone to share anything they wanted about their summer. Ahead of the session, we invited everyone to come ready to share any photo of their choosing.

To facilitate relationship building, we then went into break out rooms in pairs and had five minutes to **identify a non-obvious point of connection** (real ones that came up included: we both broke a bone playing softball; as kids, we both couldn't watch certain shows because our parents said they made us "sassy").



ACTIVITY

DIVING IN

We first oriented everyone to MURAL, a collaborative workspace/design app that we planned to use across our design sessions. We created an exploratory MURAL play space, allowing everyone to mess around with its features and develop some comfort using the platform.

We then dove into our first DWB MURAL workspace to invite reflections on experiences that a) support and b) undercut digital well-being. We used the overarching prompt:

- **When you're using tech, when do you feel most...**

We seeded thinking with different descriptors for DWB-relevant feelings. We started with positives, inviting everyone to add to the MURAL individually. We had music playing as we worked, adding digital sticky notes to whichever prompts spoke to us.

- POSITIVE prompts included: **When you're using tech, when do you feel most...Connected, In Control, Seen/Valued, Inspired, Able to Unwind/Decompress, Other Positives?**

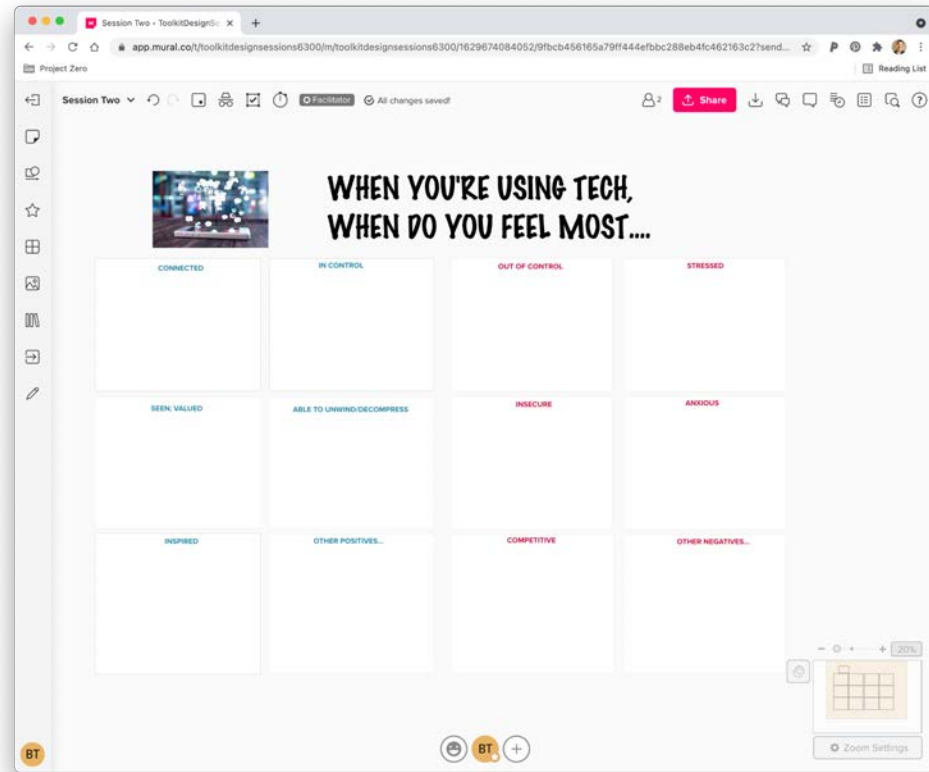
We then paused, looked through the collective "positive" examples and discussed points of connection and resonance to others' digital sticky notes, as well as anything else that stood out to us. After our discussion, we invited everyone to add anything further to the board. Then, we shifted to challenges.

- CHALLENGE prompts include: **When you're using tech, when do you feel most...Out of control; Stressed; Insecure; Anxious; Competitive; Other Negatives?**

The "challenge" prompts were hidden while we worked on "positives"; we then revealed them on the MURAL and repeated the process of independent reflection, time to read others' contributions, discussion, and additions.



ACTIVITY



INSIGHTS

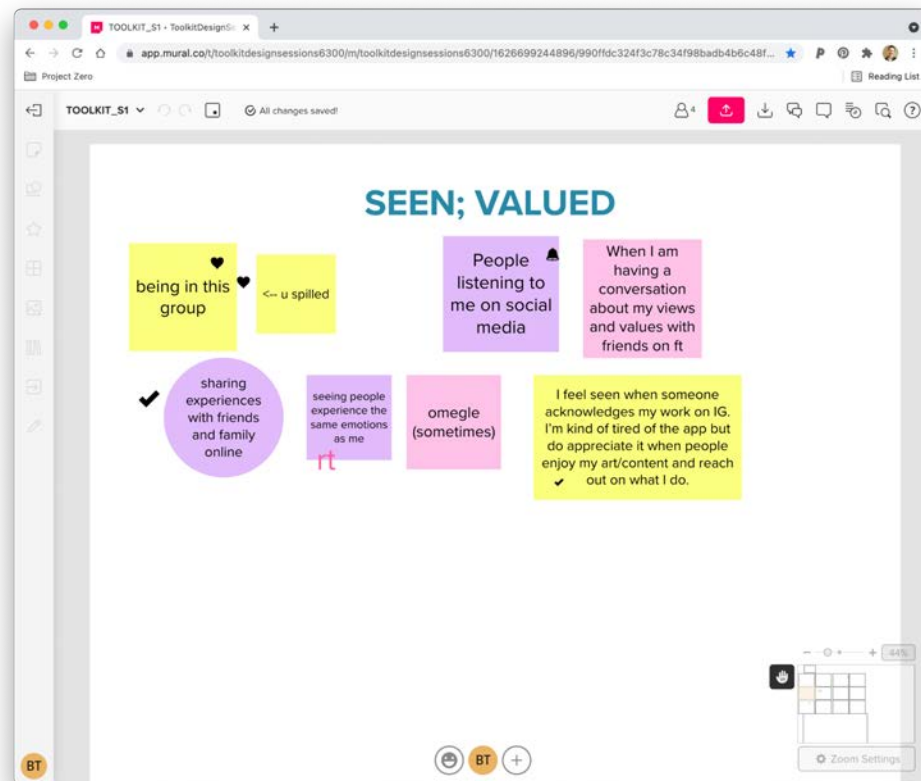
Naming positives was an important starting point, and a reminder that even though there are true challenges and ways digital life can undercut DWB, teens identify myriad benefits and upsides.

Among the positives participants named were: using platforms to mobilize support for donations and campaigns; having “*actually constructive conversations*”; hanging out in Discord with friends or keeping in touch through group chats; feeling connected when sharing stories and then reposting and replying to replies; “*speaking about things I believe in*”; unwinding with apps like TikTok, YouTube, and with guided meditation apps; and using digital calendars and digital tools for school work and projects.

One digital sticky note that proved prescient to a throughline of our work together was in response to the prompt **Seen; Valued**, where someone wrote: “*seeing people experience the same emotions as*

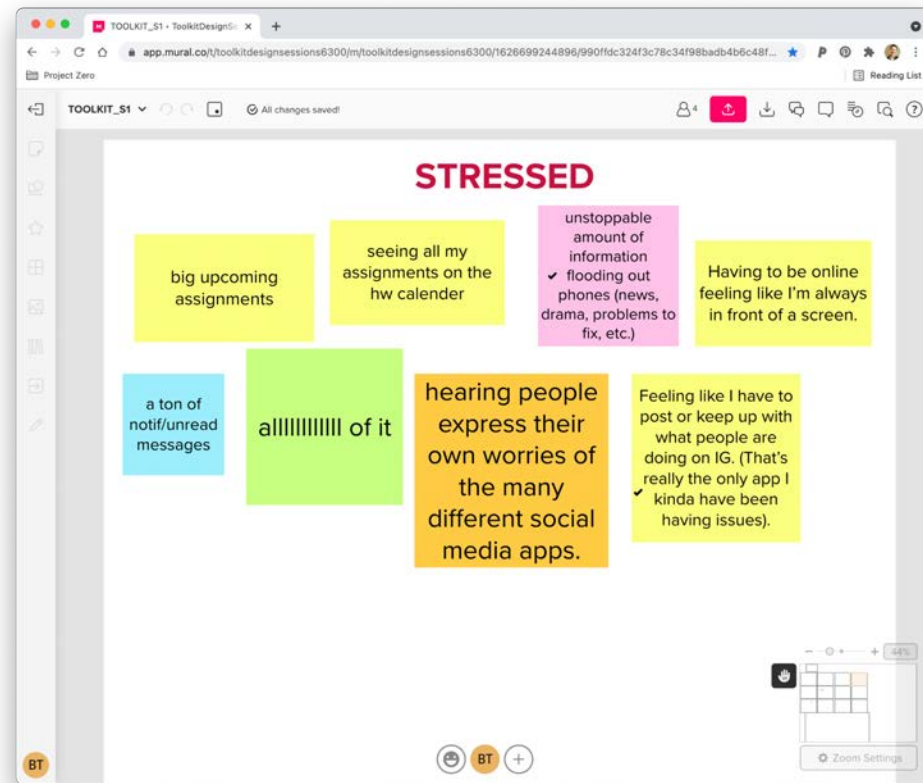
me,” and another person added “rt” (aka retweet, or signaling a desire to uplift and repeat the comment).

Here is an example of a snippet from the board that emerged around the positive prompts, **Seen; Valued**:



For challenges, teens’ comments tapped into both specific and general challenges. In response to when you feel “*stressed*,” one teen noted, “*alllllllllllll of it.*” Quantity of information emerged as a relevant source of stress, including both news and quantity of notifications/unread personal messages. Teens spontaneously added checkmarks, bells, hearts, “rt” (retweet), and other symbols to post-its that resonated with them.

Here is an example of the board with digital sticky notes that emerged for one of the challenges prompts, **Stressed**:



School-related stresses were a repeated theme, too (e.g., “*seeing all of my assignments on the hw calendar*”). Binging shows and watching TikTok represented times when teens feel out of control. With respect to feeling insecure and/or anxious, a few comments had “bells” added to them, including: “*diet culture/work out culture. Feeling like im not doing enough*” and “*work out routines on tiktok*” and “*getting a low amount of likes on Instagram.*” A related challenge – “*Watching people be productive*” – was another source of anxiety. Comments tapped on personal expression and on relational issues (“*wanting to not come off weird/awkward over texts or on posts*”; seeing others posting their relationships; “*when a guy says wyd*”).

Competitiveness was relevant in seeing people announce where they are going to college (another indication of the interplay between DWB and academics). It also came up more generally (“*sometimes it feels like every positive in someone else's life is just another*

opportunity to compare yourself to them"). Other challenges teens named included fear of stolen info, eyesight, "*cancel culture getting out of hand*," finding out you weren't invited, and several specific accounts/influencers.

STANDING BACK

Next, we "stood back" from our MURAL and started to talk about what teens might want the toolkit to be. We asked: **Looking across the positives and the challenges, what do you see here that feels important to consider as we work on our DWB toolkit? What's missing that we may want to include? What feels especially important to address?**

We also asked: **Going forward, do you think it is more helpful to think about addressing negatives or increasing positives as we think about the toolkit?**



In "Standing Back," at least four important insights came up.

1. The "*majority of teens know social media has positives; but while doing that, experience negatives.*"
2. There is a shared feeling that social media reinforces "*a culture of needing to be productive all the time.*" The term "*the grind*" was introduced by one teen and then quickly taken up by others in discussion.
3. Body image and workout videos felt to teens like an important issue to address (possibility connected, our research team noted, to "the grind" and the idea of needing to always be self-improving).
4. Teens' visions were shaped by impression management concerns related to adults who might see the toolkit. They wondered if the toolkit should include "*positive*

enhancers” to avoid perpetuating a sense that social media is just negatives.



NEXT
STEPS

After the session, our team reflected on the enthusiasm and connections people felt to the idea of social media fueling a "grind" and reinforcing a sense of needing to always be productive. We thought this might be worth exploring further, especially since it seemed like it might connect or extend broader existing literature about social media and social comparison. We created a template of gears grinding together that we used as a design invitation in Session 2.

CO-DESIGN SESSION 2: EXPLORING The Grind

In Session 2, we created space to further explore a key idea that emerged in Session 1: teens feeling like they need to always be productive, and social media driving or amplifying a culture of toxic productivity. In Session 1, we had heard our teen design partners refer to "the grind" and wanted to explore the mechanics, so to speak, of "grinds" that cause pressure and stress. We weren't sure whether or how this would feed into our toolkit work, but our impulse was to see where a deeper discussion might lead.



Our key aims were to further unpack ways media undercuts DWB and steps teens can take to support it. We explored:

- How does social media contribute to the feelings of toxic productivity and "the grind" teens described in Session 1? What does this look and feel like?
- What concrete steps can teens identify that help slow down or lessen "the grind" feeling?

OPENING UP



ACTIVITY

We began the session with an activity that we created called "Where we are." We individually explored the [Window Swap](#) interactive and then we started the session by posing two questions:

- 1) **Where are you physically — what is one thing you see out a window?**
- 2) **Where are you in your thinking about this project — what is one thing on your mind based on Session 1?**

This activity was chosen because we wanted to invite participants to share something meaningful that was beyond what we could see in

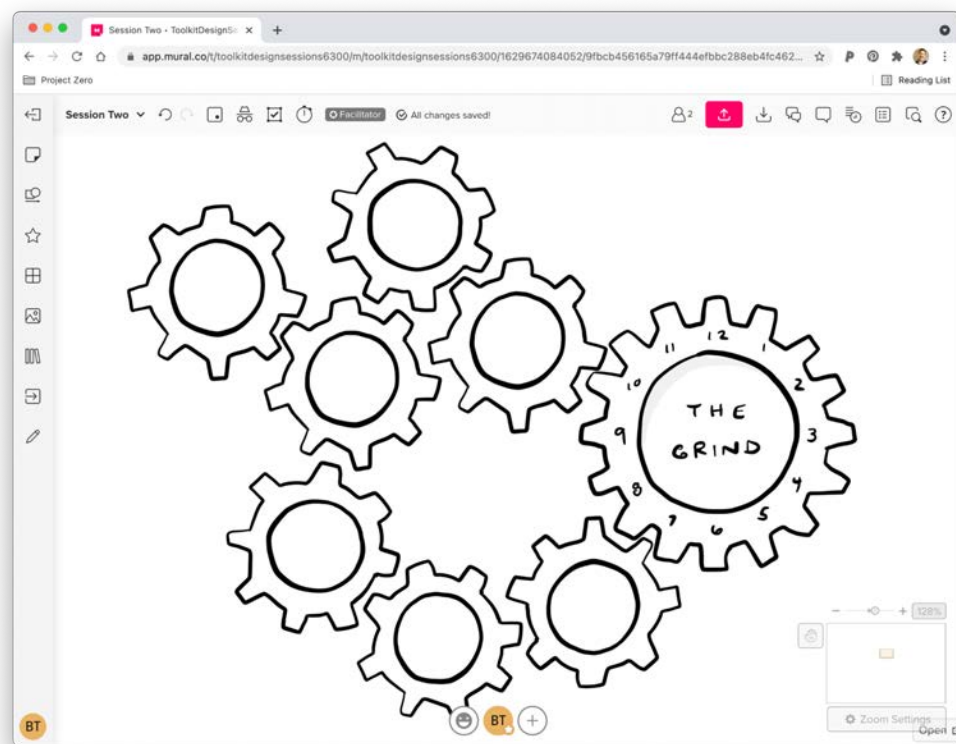
their Zoom backgrounds, and we wanted to create space for open-ended reflections on Session 1 ideas ahead of our design work.

BUILDING ON

We brought back to the group the idea of The Grind, with a visual we created as a design invitation. We noted that we heard a lot of resonance last week with the notion of "the grind" and toxic productivity as a key challenge related to DWB. We wondered if this idea could be a promising direction to explore more deeply. What does "the grind" actually look and feel like?



PROTOTYPE



DIVING IN



ACTIVITY

We deepened our exploration of The Grind by inviting everyone to consider how they might depict their own feelings of The Grind, and the ways that social media contributes. Everyone completed their own visual representations of The Grind guided by the following prompts:

What is your grind? In what ways do you feel like you hustle or should hustle?



INSIGHT

The Grind template proved revealing and generative. We saw in real-time how the template facilitated fluid self-reflection and peer-to-peer connection. We also learned more about what the social media-fueled grind looks and feels like to teens. Reflections included: *"hustling,"* needing to *"be the best in all aspects of life,"* *"needing to be busy all the time so I feel productive,"* *"pressure to do the most and spread myself thin,"* *"always be socializing, and be posting about it so people know,"* *"get perfect grades,"* *"know what you want to do/be in the future and begin working towards that (internships, etc.),"* and *"do all this while looking good."*

Though there were overlaps in themes teens shared as they populated their gears, the activity also underscored how their intersectional identities shape their experiences. This came through in comments like, *"being an immigrant sort of forces a grind on me. It's either my parents and the expectations I have set with others"* and there's a *"'right' way to be gay - assumptions about the way I dress and present."*



ACTIVITY

Then, we broke into pairs and used a version of the [TRIZ design thinking protocol](#) to start thinking in a more detailed way about what it might look like to "slow the gears" (i.e., reduce our grinds) and redesign the current reality for teens. Our hope was to use this process as a way to start surfacing potential strategies and ideas for the toolkit. After we briefly oriented a partner to our gears from The Grind activity, we worked in pairs through three steps:

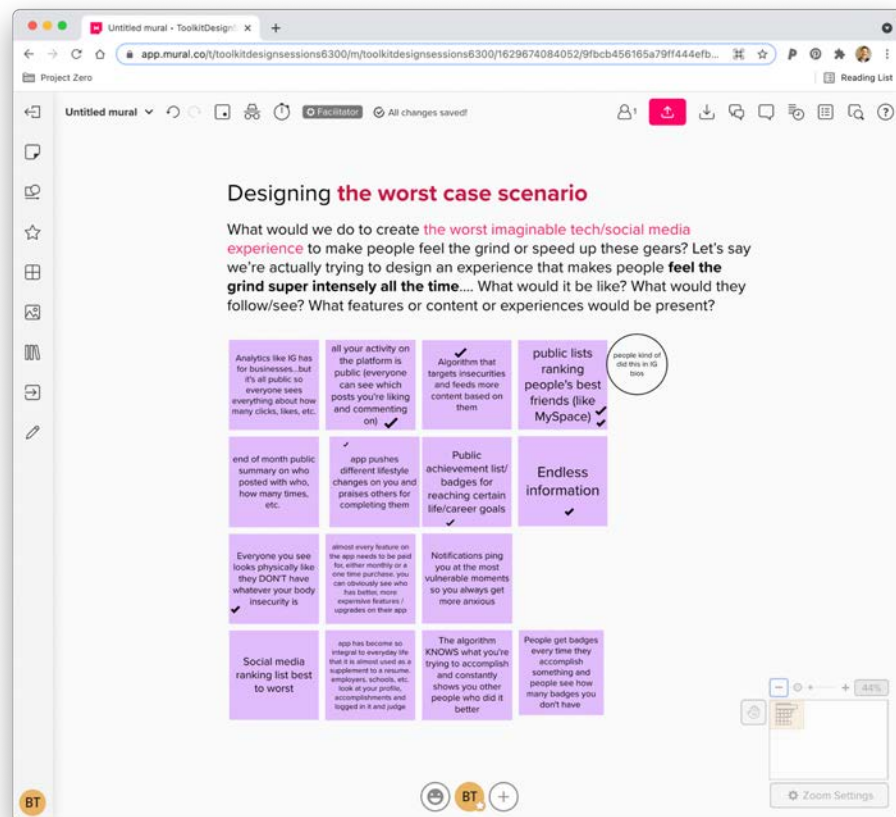
- Step 1, Designing the worst case scenario: **What would we do to create the worst imaginable tech/social media experience to**

make people feel The Grind or to speed up the gears? What features or content or experiences would be present?

- Step 2, Reality check: **Which of these "worst case" things already exist?** (adding check marks)
- Step 3, Redesigning for DWB: **What first steps could help slow down the gears or slow The Grind feeling?**

When we shifted into the TRIZ activity, teens identified "worst case scenarios," for amplifying The Grind, which ultimately revealed stress related to features like metrics, judgmental audiences, endless information, algorithms and content that plays to personal vulnerabilities, and reputational concerns.

Example from one pair of teens' TRIZ exercise, Steps 1 and 2:





The final step of the TRIZ protocol, “Redesign,” asked: **What first steps could help slow down the gears or slow The Grind feeling? What concrete ideas/things could we do?**

Our discussion of Step 3 surfaced a combination of different paths forward to supporting DWB and slowing The Grind(s), including:

- **Strategies** people can use to personally help themselves in various ways: turning off post notifications and other notifications, unfollowing accounts and being intentional about which accounts and influencers you follow, promoting/following people who defy eurocentric and fatphobic norms, using ghost mode on Snapchat, diverting your eyes to break away from the pull of endless scrolling, using an app like Dispo or having a personal rule about not looking at/posting pics during an event, taking a break from an app, etc.
- Normalizing **detoxes and breaks** from apps
- **Self-talk**, "turning inward," and using positive/self-protective mentalizing strategies
- Desire for **UX/design** that prioritizes agency and supports the efficacy of strategies

STANDING BACK

We then regrouped and stood back to debrief the big idea of The Grind. We discussed what felt promising about it, and what might be missing if we went in this direction for our toolkit work.

Overall, The Grind idea continued to resonate with teens and clearly offered a helpful jumping off point. At the same time, some



INSIGHT

DWB-relevant challenges like digital habits and feeling left out weren't necessarily covered by this framework. Our teen design partners wanted to stick with what "worked" about The Grind concept, but also didn't want to omit from our toolkit challenges that didn't fit neatly into this frame.



NEXT STEPS

After the co-design session, we wondered if rather than centering The Grind we might pivot toward a more expansive framework that showcases all different kinds of messages teens "hear" or interpret through social media that undercut DWB (including but not limited to The Grind). We also noticed that self-talk seemed like it was emerging as a promising category of strategies whereby teens re-interpret or flip a narrative toward supporting their well-being. We decided to explore these ideas further in the next session. In preparation for Session 3, we created a visual that collected a range of toxic/harmful messages surfaced in Sessions 1 and 2, and we put together an activity to explore helpful self-talk.

CO-DESIGN SESSION 3: PROBING MESSAGES AND SELF-TALK

In Session 3, we built on the ideas from Session 2 and discussed a potential direction for the toolkit. We focused specifically on the toxic / unhelpful messages teens reportedly hear or interpret on social media, and teens brainstormed self-talk strategies that help reframe, reinterpret, or counter those messages.



Our key aims were to explore messages teens hear that fuel The Grind and the viability of self-talk as a promising way to help. We explored:

- Can we make DWB challenges explicit through mapping "messages we hear" via social media?
- What does helpful self-talk look and sound like? Does self-talk offer a viable way to reinterpret messages that threaten DWB? Is this kind of lever a) useful and b) readily sharable?

OPENING UP



We began the session with a check-in using a "Mind-Body-Heart" protocol. **Everyone shared in the chat three numbers, rating on a 1 (low) to 10 (high) scale how they feel in terms of mind (e.g., thinking, focus, presence), body (physically), and heart (emotionally, spiritually).** We then went around and invited everyone to elaborate on one or more of their numbers. We also each shared one thing we did for self-care in the prior days. We wrapped up the opening activity with one of our facilitators taking the group through a brief breathing exercise.

BUILDING ON

In Sessions 1 and 2, we collectively surfaced a number of different ways social media can perpetuate or amplify The Grind, add stress, and/or decrease well-being. Ahead of Session 3, our research team reimagined the issues teens named these as a collection of messages teens might "hear" or interpret that perpetuate The Grind. We started Session 3 by sharing this set of messages and inviting annotations (these annotations are in the white speech bubbles in the image below): check marks near messages we had (re)captured accurately and annotations with revisions, strikethroughs, or additions. This activity offered a way to both share back and confirm what we thought we were hearing from teens.

DIVING IN

EXPLORING MESSAGES

Teens' reactions and check-mark annotations signaled that the messages were largely on point. At the same time, one concern was with the overall framing of "*messages we hear*." For one, teens clarified that these messages aren't really what people hear directly, but rather what they *interpret*. Yet "messages we interpret" didn't feel right to all participants either. As "J" pointed out, focusing on what teens interpret seems like it puts the blame on the individual (as in: "*oh that's just what you're interpreting*" vs. acknowledging the systemic forces behind how those messages are produced and reinforced).



INSIGHT



needed to make sure all notes accurately captured their ideas.

We learned that self-talk held a lot of value and resonance for some but not all of our participants. Notably, two participants struggled with the limitations of self-talk for certain challenges like social comparison or activism stress: “*There are some things that you can't just self-talk your way out of.*” Overall, teens’ perspectives suggested a need for different kinds of strategies — including self-talk but also going beyond it.

STANDING BACK

There were two big ideas we explored in this session:

- 1) Messages we hear;
- 2) Changing the narrative around those messages through self-talk.

In both cases, teens’ reactions signaled that the ideas resonated in some ways, yet also needed a more capacious framing that provided space for other kinds of insights and strategies.



After Session 3, we spent time as a research team reflecting on:

- 1) How to invite expansive, creative thinking about the format and framing of the toolkit
- 2) How we could hold onto what seemed to “work” in the messages/self-talk concept but also design for other kinds of insights and strategies.

We appreciated, too, that it might not make sense to frame issues and responses/strategies as two separate components. As we talked

through what worked and what didn't, we wondered whether using a broader frame of "Conversations with the Self" could create space for all of this. What if the toolkit was organized as conversations we have with ourselves that puts the messages we hear or interpret in conversation with self-talk or with actionable strategies we want to offer ourselves as advice? This felt like one possibility– and yet, we were feeling hesitant about imposing it as a direction. We wanted to be sure our approach to Session 4 would continue to invite divergent thinking regarding format].

We decided to structure Session 4 with an open invitation for teens to think individually and expansively about their visions for the toolkit direction, framing, and format, and to share the idea of "Conversations with the Self" as a sacrificial idea.

MIDPOINT FEEDBACK SURVEY

After Session 3, we used Qualtrics to send out a midpoint feedback survey, which could be completed anonymously. We asked our participants the following key questions. (Sample response excerpts are italicized in bullets below each question.)



FEEDBACK

How are you feeling with the sessions? What's really working for you and/or not working for you in our sessions?

- *I love working and collaborating with all the other teens;*
- *The sessions go by so fast! I really enjoy the flow of conversation as well as the time we get to silently work on the mural.*
- *I am feeling great because I'm learning new perspectives on issues relating to teens and social media. I like discussing in pairs and then coming back to compare in a big group. However, sometimes, I feel like some issues are too complex to include in the toolkit.*

What ideas do you want to make sure we cover in our next three sessions?

- *Just as we've been working on, perhaps more problem solving to the issues with social media we've brought up.*
- *I think it would be beneficial to discuss how to get a teen to trust the toolkit and make it approachable for them.*
- *I want to make sure we talk more about diet culture and the emphasis on Eurocentric looks. I also want to talk more about grind culture!*

Any other feedback or ideas you want to share?

- *Nope!*
- *None at all you're doing a wonderful job!!!*
- *The way this is being run feels really smooth and organized so not much feedback on my end.*

CO-DESIGN SESSION 4: THE POSTER SESSION

In Session 4, we created space for participants to work independently and elaborate their own visions of what the toolkit could be. We shared “Conversations with Self” as one sacrificial idea for how the toolkit could be structured; we invited teens to either flesh out this idea or come up with an alternative idea that better captured their vision. We each created a poster or sketch to showcase our visions and presented them to the group. This poster session concretized principles, aims, and elements of the toolkit vision.



AIMS

Our key aim for this session was to decide on priorities for the toolkit format and content. We explored:

- What form should the toolkit take?
- What is most important to teens in terms of how strategies are shared?



ACTIVITY

OPENING UP

We opened up with another “**Mind-Body-Heart**” **check-in** since our use of the protocol in Session 3 was generative. Again, the structure effectively created space for an engaging, personalized opening.

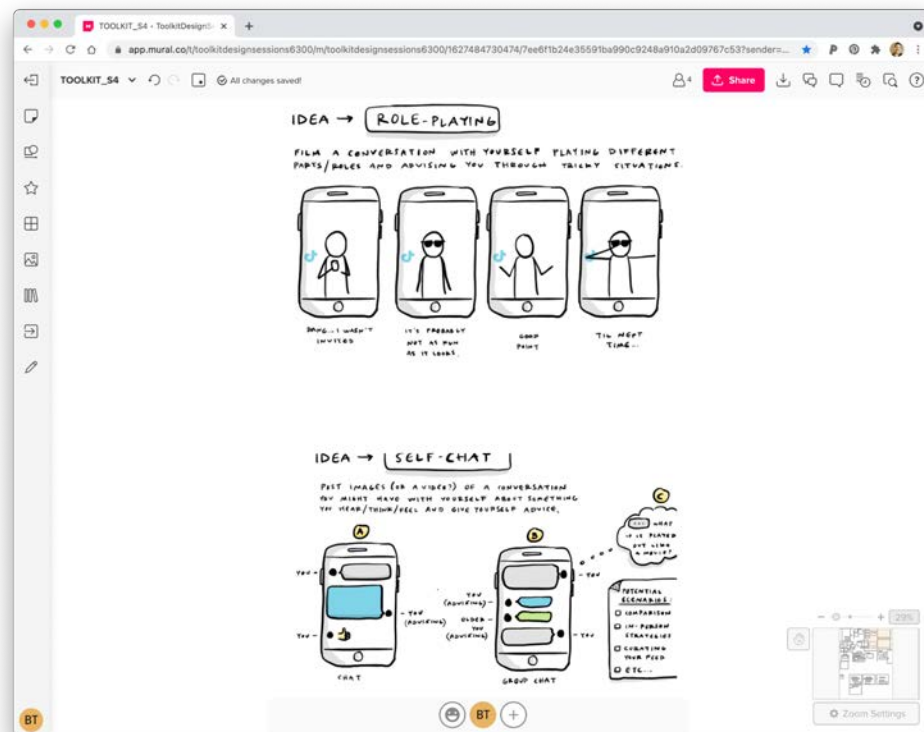
BUILDING ON

We started by sharing a possible idea for the toolkit, “Conversations with Self.” As we described it: **What if the toolkit was organized as a series of conversations between people and themselves?** There could be different conversations keyed to distinct scenarios/DWB issues (e.g., someone talking to themselves in ways that alleviate the grind to be more productive; another might focus on self-talk for

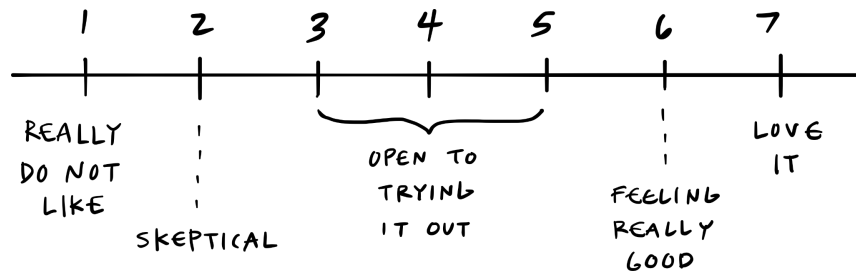
feeling FOMO or being left out).

We shared two sketches of how this could be presented, just to get thinking in motion.

- One (“Self Chat”) looked like a screenshot of a group chat conversation between your current/future/past selves.
- The other (“Role Playing”) looked like a TikTok duet video talking to yourself.



We voted anonymously to share reactions to the broad idea of "Conversation with the self," 1 to 7 (1= Really do not like this idea; 7=Love this idea and excited to help build it out).



All votes were in the middle – signaling some interest and openness to the idea but not full-on enthusiasm.

DIVING IN



ACTIVITY

Our plan going into this session was to do a “Poster Session”: inviting everyone to reflect on our design work to date and then create a “poster” to share their own vision of what this toolkit could be. We had invited participants to bring any supplies they might want to use for creating on paper (paper, markers, pen), and also offered the option of using MURAL to create their posters digitally.

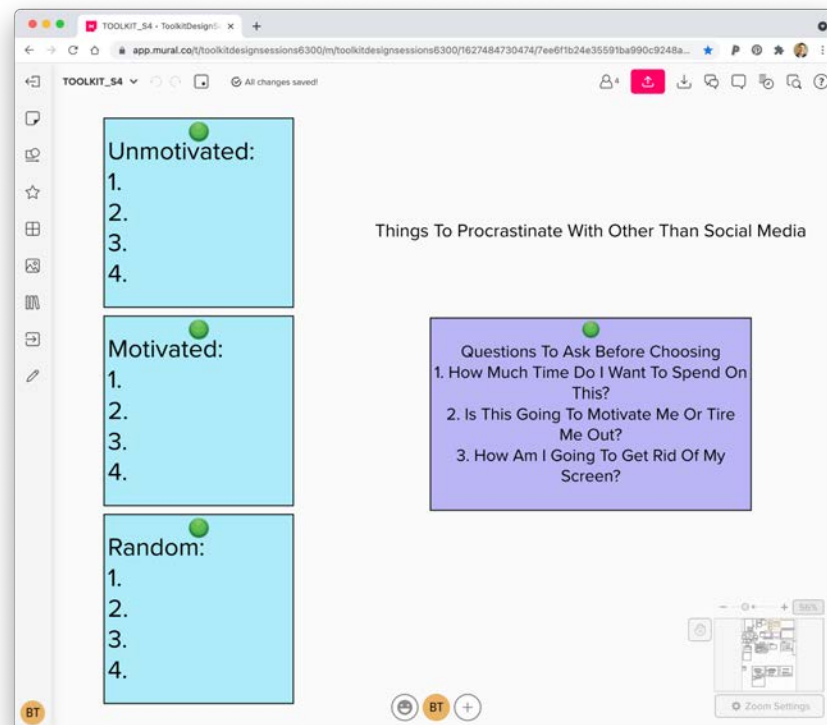
In our session pre-planning, we sketched out three possible paths:

- 1) If teens were really excited about the idea of “Conversations with the self,” we would have everyone work on posters to communicate their visions of how this idea could take shape.
- 2) If the group was unenthusiastic about the idea, we would share a broader invitation — “putting aside the idea of Conversations with the Self, what do you imagine this toolkit could be and contain?”
- 3) If the group was split, we planned to invite people to pursue the self-conversation idea if they wanted, or to go in a completely different direction.

When the votes were in, the group was mostly 3/4/5s so we went with this third path (pursue anything you want — the Conversation idea or something else entirely).

We moved into a 15-min block of individual work time (cameras off and music on — after teens submitted music requests in the chat). We then regrouped and each shared our ideas via 90-second presentations. After each mini-presentation, we created space for appreciations about the idea and any questions of clarification. Here is an example of a poster from one participant.

POSTER FROM "G": GETTING UNSTUCK FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

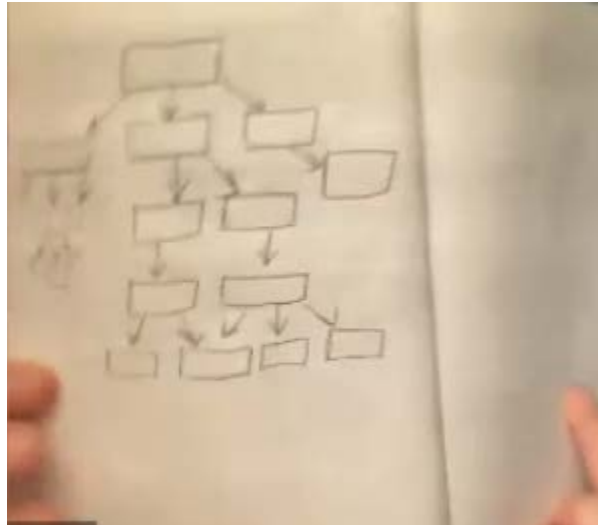


"G's" explanation: I struggle with putting my phone down and closing out of social media...So I thought of a way to get a lot of the hard thinking done about what I'm going to do instead, in advance — which was having a couple of lists that you make when you're feeling kind of motivated about things to do, when you're unmotivated, and just like a couple of random things to do when you just can't get off of social media and just feel really like stuck and need something else to do but don't want to like do homework or something like that. So it's kind of an issue I think all of us probably struggle with.



POSTER FROM "M": CONVERSATIONS WITH SELF FLOWCHART

"M" offered an idea of a flow chart to guide conversations with self when social comparison with others on social media gets hard.



"M's" explanation: With self-talk, I really liked the visual of it, but I thought of an option [where] somebody is more involved in a conversation...choosing, kind of like guiding the conversation themselves. So I thought about a flow chart...It would be [focused on] a problem, like comparing yourself to someone else. [There might be] a question like "Is this something you could realistically change?" and then you'd have like "yes," "no," and "no, but I wish I could." And so I planned out the yes things a little bit so it'd be like "yes" and then it'd be like a little "Reflect" box and questions you can ask yourself.

STANDING BACK

Following the poster presentations, our original plan was to use a dot-style voting process to collectively decide on which direction to pursue from the ideas people shared. The idea was to allow people to use their dots in whatever way they wanted: putting all three on

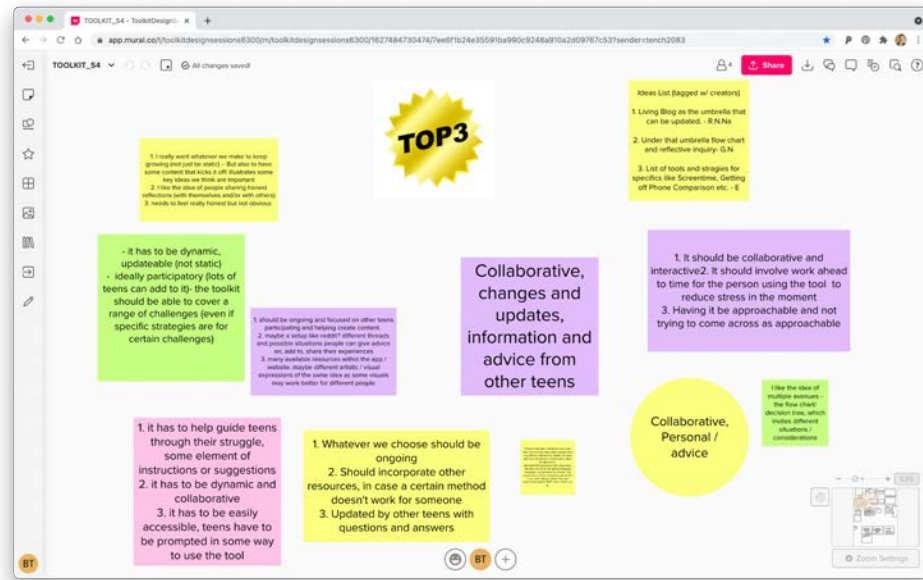


PIVOT



ARTIFACT

one idea, or dispersing them across different ideas. But we pivoted during the session and did something different. As people shared their ideas, we noted that they weren't all mutually exclusive and several ideas had key overlaps. Instead of voting on just one idea, we instead asked everyone to reflect on **three key things they heard through the poster presentations that they wanted to be sure were components of our toolkit.**



Our lists ultimately converged as a powerful set of design principles for the toolkit itself.



ARTIFACT

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE DWB TOOLKIT

- ✓ Dynamic (not a static resource)
- ✓ Collaborative / participatory (other teens can add to it + create content, i.e., not just created by the people who are in this group)
- ✓ Inclusive of personal advice + information from other teens

- ✓ Share multiple avenues/types of strategies (recognizing that people like to engage in different ways and value different kinds of strategies)
- ✓ Able to cover a range of challenges and issues
- ✓ Able to incorporate/highlight other resources
- ✓ Not another social media platform in and of itself — but synergistic with existing platforms (can share content on Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)
- ✓ “Low floor” — accessible entry points, easy to grasp, not too much reading or text
- ✓ Avoid anything that could be viewed as like adults trying to cater to the typical “Gen-Z” — e.g., “No emojis!”

In the end, this was a super productive design session, perhaps especially for two reasons:

- 1) The investment in building rapport and trust paid dividends as people honestly shared their hesitations about a sacrificial idea we shared (“Conversations with Self”), and we ultimately moved away from it in favor of other directions.
- 2) Improvisation was something we embraced as a research team — and with increasing comfort around ambiguity and real-time pivots. We did some improvising around the prompt for our poster session, and then even more so when, in the session itself, we completely abandoned the voting idea and came up with an alternative path forward.

This session was the second time we shared a prototype or framing



INSIGHT

design idea that didn't fully resonate with the group. By this point, we had started to feel more comfortable with the discomfort of "getting it wrong" — recognizing that it was generative to try "throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks." Even design ideas that weren't embraced led to valuable insights and — in this case — a powerful set of design principles to guide our next steps.



NEXT
STEPS

As we worked together as a research team to prep for Session 5, we fleshed out top insights into the Design Principles list that appears above. We focused on really attending to teens' instincts about what the form factor should and should not be, tabling any initial assumptions we (as a research team) may have had about what the toolkit would look like. As we did, one of our research teammates made a connection to two different online resources that use the concept of a "card deck". It seemed like a digital card deck could be an idea that hit every one of the priorities surfaced by teens (e.g., created in a participatory way, dynamic, amenable to different kinds of strategies and insights, etc). We decided to offer the concept as we continued our work together in Session 5.

CO-DESIGN SESSION 5: THE DECK IDEA

In Session 5, we planned for a dual focus on (1) form factor and (2) specific content — in part because we now recognized that they needed to go hand-in-hand for our design work. We explored how we could build a truly participatory toolkit, co-created not only with teens on our design team but everywhere; we also considered how to span different kinds of strategies, insights, and reflections. We then worked on elaborating content for particular strategies teens wanted to include in the toolkit.



Our key aim for this session was to (re)focus on strategies that teens want the toolkit to include, while prototyping in a format that built directly on collectively defined design principles. We explored:

- How do we create a toolkit that is participatory, and has a format that can span different kinds of strategies for a range of issues?
- Might a digital, co-created card deck provide a useful format?
- What strategies do teens want to share with others on digital cards or in another format?



ACTIVITY

OPENING UP

We began the session with gratitude: **Everyone shared out one thing they feel grateful for right now.**

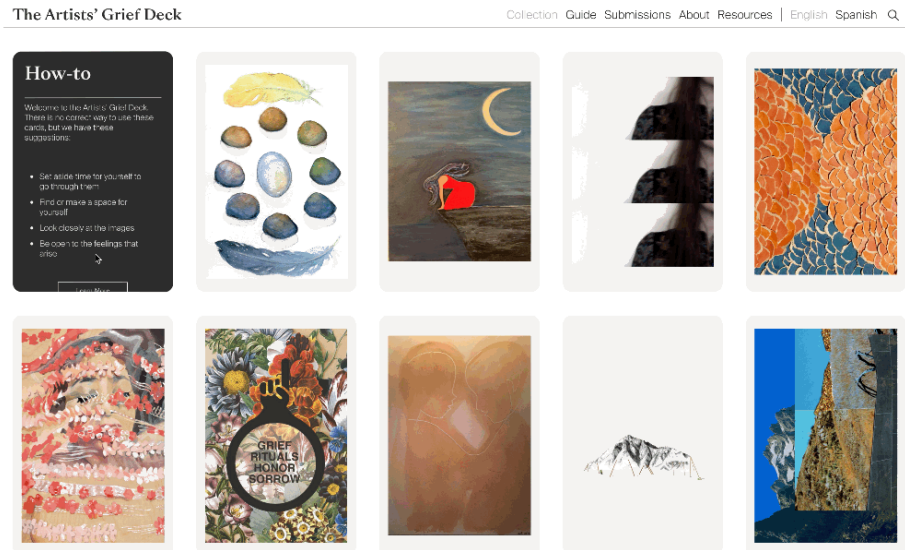
BUILDING ON

We kicked off design work for Session 5 by sharing back a compiled list of the toolkit design principles our group had made explicit at the end of Session 4. We then shared an example of a digital card deck

([the artists' grief deck](#)) for people to explore and asked: **How does this shape your thinking about the toolkit? Is this a model that could elevate your ideas?**



PROTOTYPE



Our mural space for Session 5 featured the design principles, and recapped some of the powerful format ideas that came out of each person's poster presentation. We also included a list of potential "grinds" and issues to cover in the toolkit based on challenges raised in prior sessions.

Enthusiasm about the mural content and grief deck example was immediate and strong (e.g., *"Yes! You got it!"*; *"I already just sent this deck to five of my friends."*)

DIVING IN

Given the enthusiastic response to the deck concept, we decided to spend the rest of the session imagining what cards could look like for our own version of a deck-style DWB toolkit. We had created a template in MURAL for card ideas, and we had teens work in pairs to create potential cards — using their own ideas from the prior week,



ACTIVITY

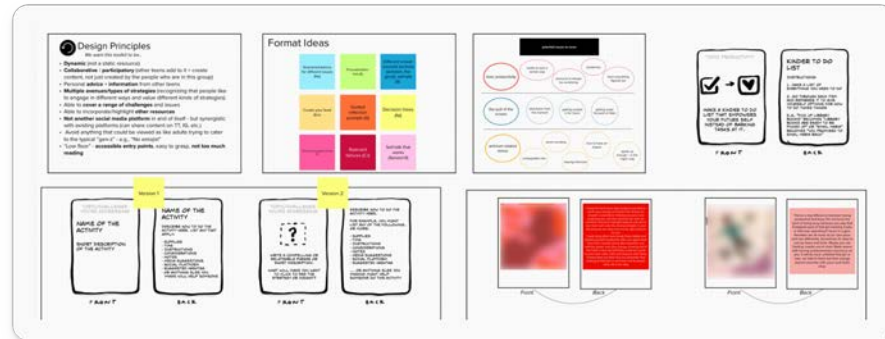


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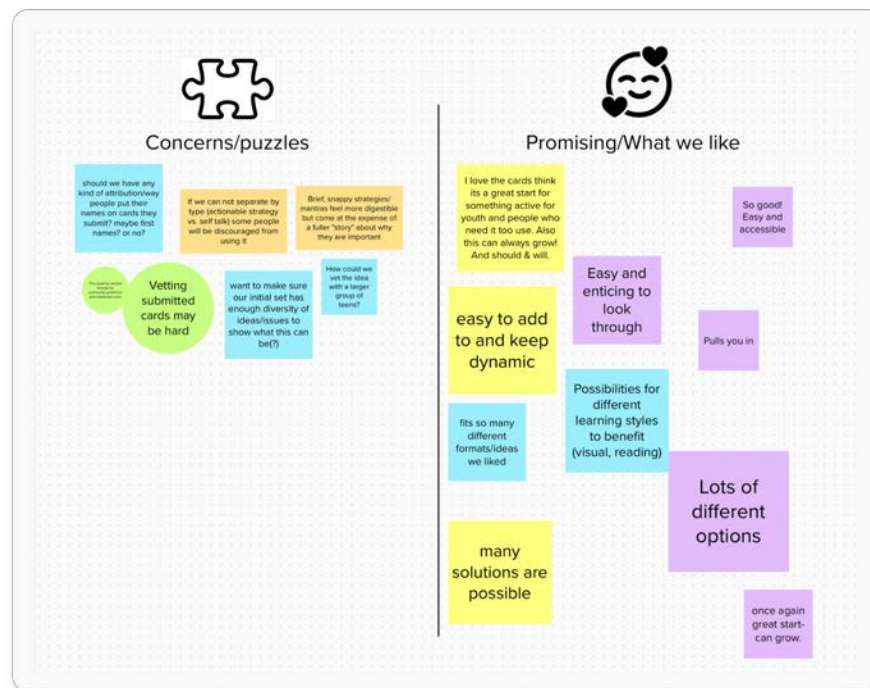
building on an idea they liked that someone else shared, or going in an entirely new direction. The instructions were broad: **Be fearless in trying out ideas. Have fun. Just mess around, and see what you come up with!**



Everyone spent 15 mins working in pairs to develop card ideas (see above), and then we regrouped and shared with each other the cards we had each created so far. After sharing and hearing others' ideas, we went back into our pairs to further develop ideas and/or create new ideas of cards. During the session, we collectively created 20+ cards as we explored the idea of a deck.

STANDING BACK

We wrapped up this session with a "Standing Back" exercise, once again. We asked everyone to use digital sticky notes to name what they were excited about related to this direction and to surface any puzzles or concerns about this direction.



We had two asks of teens before our final session:

- 1) **Try explaining the toolkit to 1-2 people over the next week**
- 2) **Keep adding card ideas!**

This session had exciting momentum from start to finish. The deck idea landed in a way that the other two framing ideas we shared (in Session 3 and in Session 4) had not. In those sessions, sharing potential ideas was generative because we saw ways that the concepts were not quite aligned with teens' visions or somehow missed the mark. In this case, the deck idea seemed to create space for so much of what they wanted to see in the toolkit, in a format



INSIGHT

that felt participatory and dynamic, plus inclusive of different formats (self-talk, actionable strategies, etc.).



NEXT STEPS

After Session 5, our research team analyzed teens' cards for insights. Almost all were created with a combination of a key image on the front + text on the back. We noted that the content seemed to fall into different categories: some cards featured personal reflections and internal dialogue/self-talk, some contained concrete DWB strategies to try out, and some included activities meant to help the reader explore their own thinking or support their coping in the future.

As we prepped for Session 6, we thought about what we felt like we most needed from our last group design session. We created a mock-up of a card template for everyone to share feedback on. Now that we recognized this as a promising direction, we were keen to collect targeted insights about a MVP (minimum viable product) for the deck.

CO-DESIGN SESSION 6: THE MVP

In Session 6, we focused on elaborating possible next steps to build out and disseminate a version of the toolkit that takes the form of a dynamic, co-created digital card deck. We started by discussing feedback people heard as they shared the concept with peers. Then, we moved into thinking about how to frame and build on the toolkit.



Our key aim for this session was to think as a group about details that would enable us to produce an "MVP" (minimum viable product) for the toolkit. We explored:

- What did we learn as we shared the deck idea with others?
- How might we produce and package a preliminary version or MVP of the toolkit?
- How could we build interest, awareness, and get this project out to a wide audience of teens?

OPENING UP

We began the session with a final **Mind-Body-Heart check-in**.

BUILDING ON

We created space for a different kind of share back: each of the teens sharing back with us and each other insights from their conversations with: **what did they learn as they talked to peers about the deck?**

Insights/ideas/feedback from those conversations included:

- Variety is important in terms of both topics and strategies. We may want a system for tagging cards so people know what type of strategy it is (e.g., reflections, meditations, activities, *"actual strategies"*).
- Something we missed topically = what to do when someone or something triggers you on social media
- May want to seed the deck with some predetermined and well-developed strategies for common challenges
- Some cards are too text-heavy; *"don't have too many words!"*
- Maybe some cards could support positive general/mental health practices like gratitude

DIVING IN

We then used a version of [layered elaboration](#) during this session, breaking into two groups and working through a rotation. We engaged sequentially with different "boards" for four main topics we had identified as areas that would benefit from collective consideration:



ACTIVITY



INSIGHTS

- **Name + description:** **What should we call this deck? What brief description can help people understand what it is?**
- **Template + Categories:** **What should our card template look like/include? What do you think about having categories like: Reflections and Self-talk; Strategies; Activities; and possibly some "Question" cards in the mix?**
- **Ideas for the Starter Deck:** **What is a realistic way to start putting together a MVP?**
- **Dissemination:** **How could we build interest/awareness to get this project to a wide audience of teens?**

The groups started at different places on the mural and then rotated

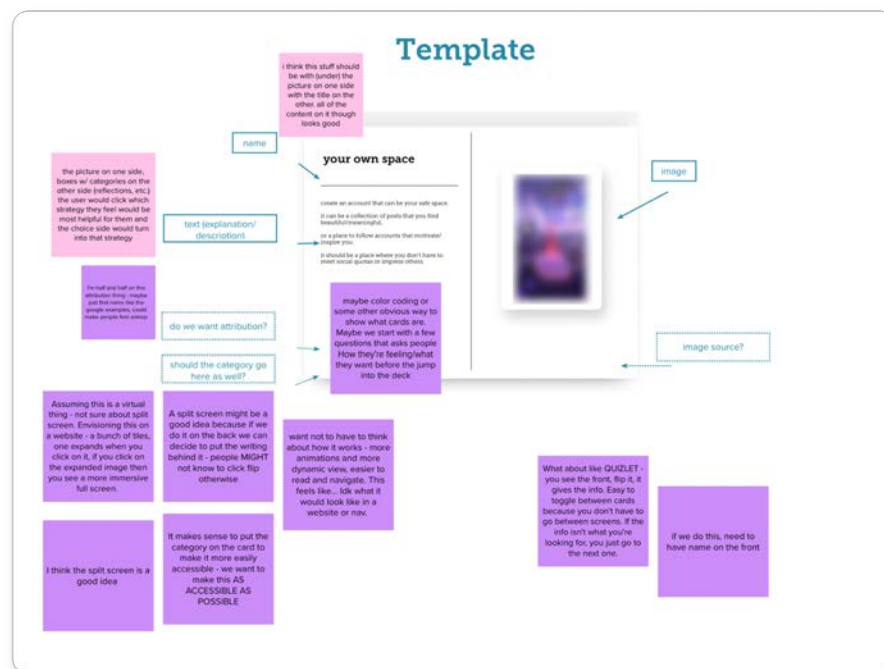
and layered elaboration and ideas onto the ideas left by the prior group.

We didn't land on a final idea for the **Name** of the deck, but played around with different ideas like:

- *Tech Deck*
- *The social media issue deck*
- *Digideck*
- *PROactive*
- *Digital health check* (then vetoed because sounded too serious and "adult")



For the card **Template**, the group was aligned about including images and text, but ultimately divided about whether or not to use a split screen set up vs. single panel front/back. Overall, the most important takeaway about the template may have been to use color coding or another obvious indicator of what "type" of card people are seeing.





There was consensus that **Categories** are generally useful and important to include. Our research team initially suggested four potential categories based on the different kinds of cards the group created organically in Session 5: Reflections + Self-talk, Strategies, Activities, and Question cards. Session 6 brainstorming and feedback revealed that distinction between Strategies and Activities was not clear to teens, and they didn't really understand the need for separate Question cards, which some worried could get repetitive. They also wondered if we were missing a "Resources" category with links to vetted resources for sensitive topics.

We discussed visions for a **Starter Deck**. Some key contributions:

- Any initial version should focus on inviting teens' contributions plus some kind of submission portal for teens
 - Might be good to have some kind of incentive for people to contribute
- Could be housed on: an app, a website, or even an Instagram account — "*Anything but TikTok*"
- Make it interactive, if possible ("*Something to click around, rather than just look at*")
- Ideally would launch with a relatively large number of example cards, e.g., 50

For **Dissemination**, focus should be on getting submissions and contributions from a wider audience of teens. We asked teens about "influencers" who we might engage, but this potential direction didn't get a lot of traction. We heard a stronger focus on teen participation; potentially use a "*short and sweet*" hashtag to boost attention.

STANDING BACK

We closed out with an overarching "stand back" activity on the entire design process and experience. We asked everyone to

imagine a large pot or calderon. Then, we went around and each added into the “pot” a word to describe something we are taking away from the experience. We acted out "stirring together" those insights and then drinking together from cupped hands. Among the words added: “*Awareness.*” “*Empathy.*” “*Collaboration.*” “*New strategies.*”

In our final session, the energy across the group was less dynamic than in our prior sessions. There were likely a number of reasons: the opening check-in indicated that people were more tired than usual; one participant needed to leave early for a social commitment; another participant had ongoing internet connectivity issues. Also, the asks and tasks we put to the group may have felt less compelling since we were co-designing a pragmatic plan for next steps, rather than co-creating content ideas based on personal reflections. That said, the session raised a number of interesting insights and, when people shared closing words, a lot of gratitude for the exchanges across the six sessions.



NEXT
STEPS

After Session 6, we took stock of what we learned across all six sessions and considered the most promising directions for the toolkit. First, we reflected on key DWB insights across all the sessions, compiling lists of “What’s Hard” and “What Helps” (a framing that was a byproduct of our co-design work). Then, we carried out a team design brainstorm to surface possible next steps for the toolkit MVP, integrating what we heard from teens in S6.

REFINING THE VISION

Our next steps are to consider how to build based on what we learned through this work. Possibilities include building out an interactive website, creating other intervention supports that leverage insights from our co-design sessions (e.g., Maker Project sequence so that other teams can use some of the key activities like The Grind and the card concept in their own communities), and/or exploring further opportunities for peer-based connection about DWB.



PROTOTYPE

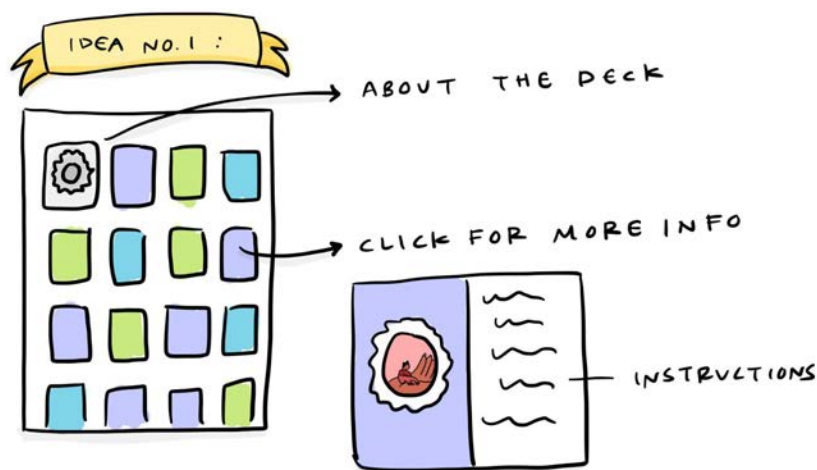
Based on teens' shared visions and the design principles we sketched in S5, we assume that the toolkit - if created as an interactive website - would have a home webpage and a corresponding social media presence.

We selected 3 leading ideas for the layout and content of a toolkit home page and created another mural to invite asynchronous feedback from our teen design partners. We created two short videos to walk through each idea. In the first video, we described three ways the website concept could move forward. While all three ideas offer teens a way to read and create both stories and strategies, they differ in the following ways:

The first idea uses the Grief Deck as a model and presents a deck of cards with various DWB strategies. Both stories about DWB experiences and strategies are represented as cards:

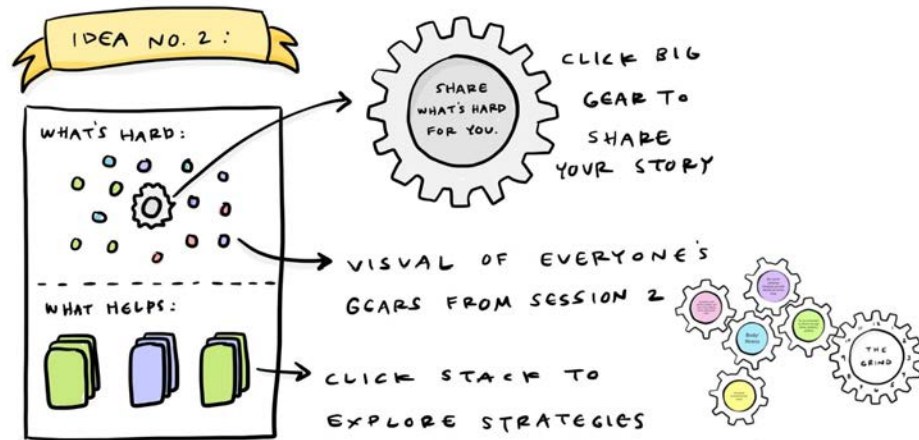


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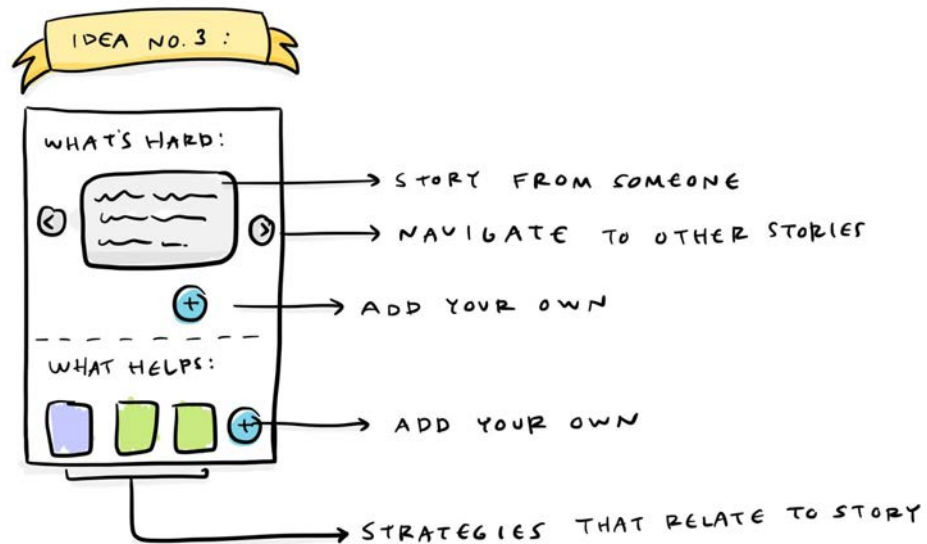




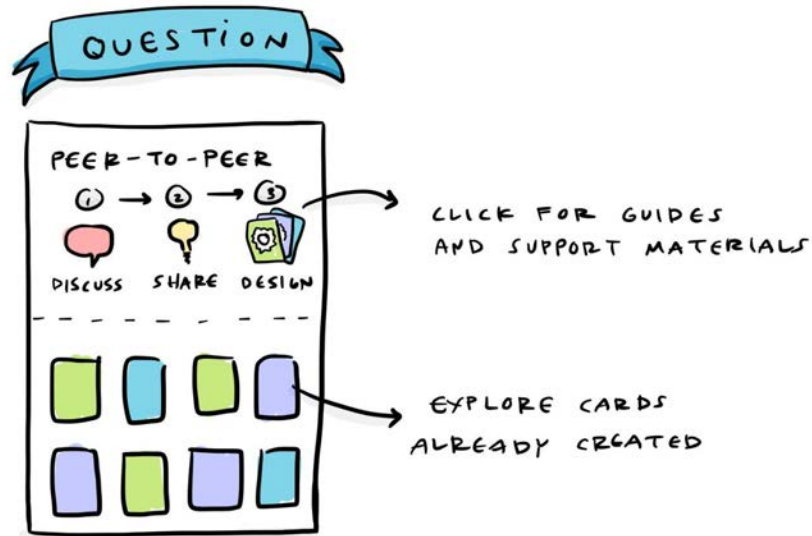
The second idea uses a “What’s hard” and “What helps” framing. It displays a composite visualization of The Grind with gears featuring stories about what’s hard. Strategies that help appear below as card stacks:



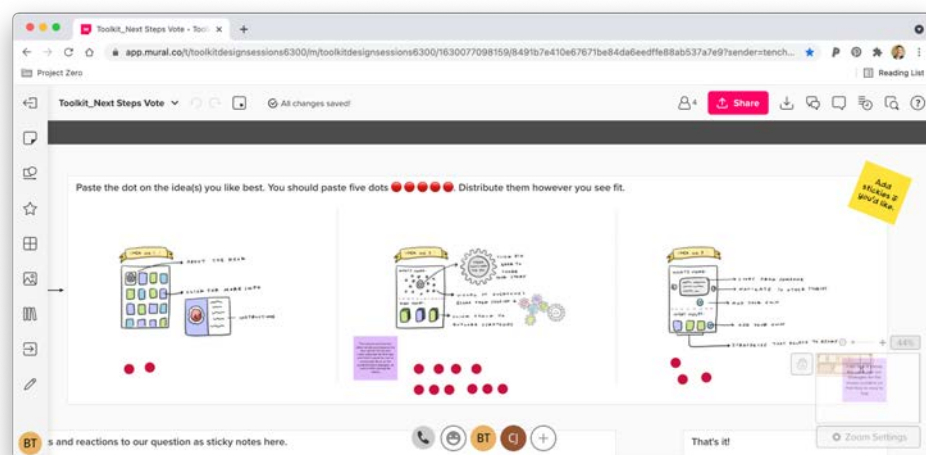
The third idea also uses a “What’s hard” and “What helps” framing. In this version, stories are linked to specific strategies. Users navigate through stories and browse strategies that appear as cards below:



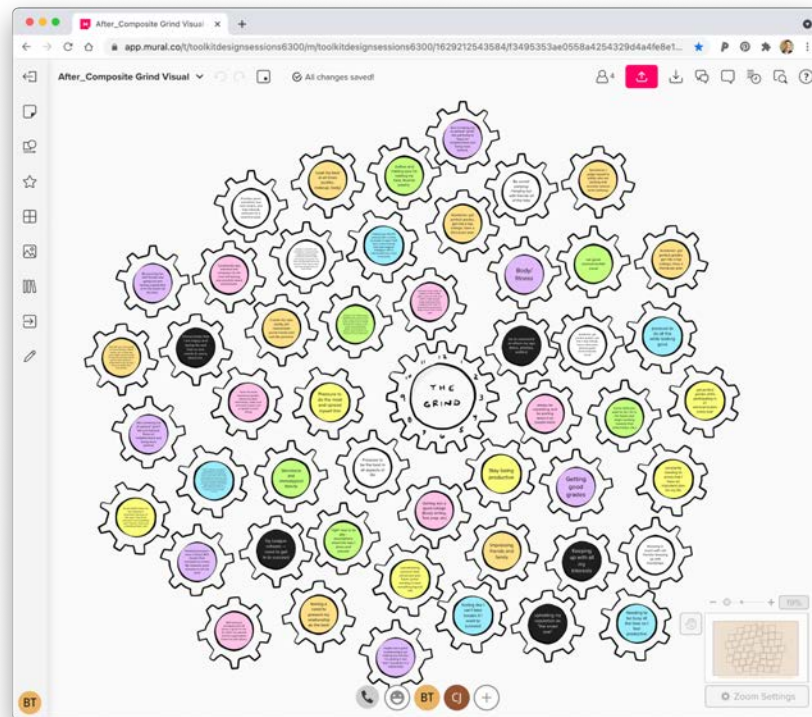
In the second video, we asked teens for their feedback on a peer-to-peer offering, which would support teens in facilitating activities with each other. Some example activities suggested were filling out The Grind and creating strategy cards.



Videos and sketches were shared with teens on a MURAL board where they voted for their favorite idea(s) with red dots, and also provided feedback on the peer-to-peer option. Idea No. 2 (see above) was the MVP "winner" with 67% of the votes cast as of 9/8/2021.



And here is a composite visual of The Grind:



[Click here to view a higher resolution version.](#)

We are currently carrying this vision forward in dialogue with SCE, our peers in the Youth Voice Cohort, and other youth-serving organizations. We have created a [Maker Project Sequence](#) with activities from this process, which we hope will allow other sites and teams to similarly engage teens around DWB to reflect on what's happening, what's hard, and what helps (exploring the grind, creating cards, and carrying out meaningful peer-to-peer conversations). We are also actively working on additional resources that support teen-identified strategies like self-talk, and considering how to support peer-to-peer conversations and connection over DWB.