



# STEPPING STONES PROJECT

mentoring

rites of passage

nature

community



The SSP 'village' provides a much needed support system through the important and challenging transition from childhood into adolescence. Our program offers a unique long term approach that addresses key developmental tasks across the generations. By creating meaningful rites of passage, youth and their families have a powerful space to engage authentically with each other and the greater earth community.

The pillars of our program are:

- Mentoring
- Rites of Passage
- Nature Connection
- Family

SSP began in 1999 when a number of independent rites of passage leaders connected with Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Project founders developed a multi-year program, launching the Stepping Stones project as a 501(c)3 non-profit in 2002. SSP has served hundreds of youth and their families throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

***“This is the phase of life in which most contemporary people get stuck - and the phase in which most need the greatest support. Adolescence holds the key to our becoming fully human.”***

- Bill Plotkin, Advisory Council

***“Stepping Stones is perhaps the greatest gift I have given my children.”***

- Wendy, SSP Legacy Family

[www.steppingstonesproject.org](http://www.steppingstonesproject.org)

## What, Why, How?

Stepping Stones is a place for youth to discover the tools they need to confront the problems facing kids today, while celebrating their transitions into young adulthood. The SSP 'village' provides a much needed support system through the important and challenging transition from childhood into adolescence.

SSP is a long term program (2+ years) with regular meetings, daylong adventures, and summer trips. This format allows youth to deeply explore themselves in this wild time of transition. Consciously or unconsciously, youth begin to take their first steps toward fulfilling the universal need for initiation. Groups are led by 2 Leaders and an Elder who create a safe container for the youth to explore, take risks, falter, and grow.

Our program offers a unique long term approach that addresses key developmental tasks as youth cross this threshold. By creating meaningful contemporary rites of passage, youth and their families have a powerful space to engage authentically with each other and the greater earth community.

### ***The 4 key elements of our curriculum:***

- *mentoring by a non-parent*
- *positive sense of self in a group*
- *deepening relationship with nature*
- *personal code of honor*

*"The longing for initiation is universal, and for modern youth, it is crucial. Rooted in a fundamental need to grow, initiation proves one's entry into the world of men and women."*

**- Jack Kornfield, SSP Founding Advisory Board Member**

*"The middle school years are not always easy, and Stepping Stones provided a safe outlet for me (and the other girls in my group) during this time of intense transition both physically and emotionally. I was able to create sustainable, and meaningful relationships with other girls when my other relationships with friends and family were quickly changing. We were able to create a safe-space built on honesty and trust that allowed for questions, confessions, advice, and unconditional support for one another. Stepping stones helped me to stay grounded during a time when so many young teens start to feel lost. I am so grateful for my mentors, who provided me with the tools that help me stay physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy even to this day. The bonds and memories I shared with the other girls in my group will last forever." - K.C., Alumni*

*"As we went through the opening ritual with the parent group for my 6th grade daughter, I thought about my two sons who went through the program... I knew in the fabric of my being that this was the greatest gift my children can experience growing up. I think it is rare for our kids to be truly witnessed, truly known and so completely engaged by those outside of the family during the most crucial time in their lives." - Chris, SSP Legacy Family*

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## Coming-of-Age Program Overview

Stepping Stones provides a uniquely meaningful Coming-of-Age program for youth and their families. The core of our program is 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Grade, though we offer supplemental programs through high school. Two adult 'Leaders' collaboratively mentor a group of 8 youth in a 2+ years program. Groups typically start in the Fall of 6th (ideally) or 7th grade, finish the Fall of 9th grade, and are generally gender/geography/grade specific.

### Group Structure:

- 8 Youth
- 2 Adult Stepping Stones Leaders
- Parent Community
- Elder

### Meeting Content & Structure:

- Groups involve extended mentoring from **6th or 7th grade into Fall of 9th grade.**
- Groups meet year round and are organized in a **Quarter System** (3 month period).
- The groups integrate a unique **9-Quarter Curriculum**
- Each quarter holds **18 hours of group time:**
  - 5 meetings with the Leaders/Youth
  - 1 Day Long adventure with Leaders/Youth + group Elder when possible
  - 1 meeting with the Parents, Leaders + group Elder
- **Regular Meetings** (Youth + Leaders) are 2 hour groups scheduled in advance with the families. An example might be every other Wednesday night from 6:30-8:30pm.
- Every quarter is a **Daylong**, usually occurring in nature for a hike to a creek, a ropes course experience, or other local adventures.
- **The Parent Meeting** provides updates for parents about the group evolution and the program as well as an opportunity to share in the adventure of raising a young teen daughter or son. A group elder will be present at this meeting.
- The **Summer Quarter** looks like:
  - 2-4 day wilderness camping or backpacking trip
  - 3 Meetings of 2 Hrs each
- Each group ends with a **Marking Ceremony** that celebrates the development, gifts and belonging of each youth.

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## ELDERS IN STEPPING STONES PROJECT

*“Elders have been the ones who, over long lives of experience and growth, have converted knowledge and history into wisdom and whose revered role is to model this wisdom as they teach the younger generations.” - Ron Pevny, Life Coach*

Elders are in a stage of their life when they are inspired to gift their time and wisdom in working closely with Coming of Age Leaders to help participating youth learn to be authentic, self confident, and respectful of both others and the Earth. They support parents at quarterly parent meetings, and might shed light on parent or youth issues, help resolve interpersonal challenges, or simply witness and honor the Leaders in their work.

Elders are generally aged 50+, have previous experience raising and/or mentoring children (ideally through the transition from childhood into adolescence), and have a passion for coming-of-age or rites of passage work.

Elders are responsible to be in relation with their group (Leaders, youth and parents) and to the SSP organization. The core of the Elder's accountability is to attend Parent Meetings (once per quarter), keep in touch with leaders to have a pulse on group life, have a sense of the youth in the group, and join in the Elder Council and SSP gatherings as much as possible.

We accept applications for the Elder role year-round, with opportunities to participate and get to know the community throughout the year. Groups start in the Fall of every school year, when Elders are assigned their leader-pair and families. The Elder is a volunteer role within the Stepping Stones community.

If you or someone you know would make an inspirational addition to the Elders Council, please apply online or pass on our information.

*“Elders are people whose own roots, planted ancestrally so many years ago and now blossoming deep from within the soul, yearn to nourish the youth while participating actively in the process of creating a healthy, viable community for the future.”*

- Michael Lerner, SSP Elder