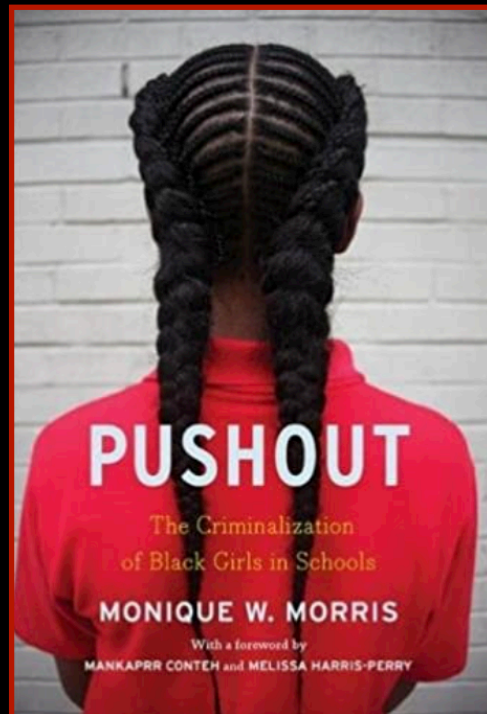


**Transcendence Academy**  
**Course 1: Getting Started**  
***Questions and Answers***



Based on an excerpt from the book

***PUSHOUT***

By

Monique W. Morris

## **1. Why should I care about school? I need to make some money.**

How much money do you want to make? Black women who have some high school education and no diploma earn just \$861,353 over their entire lifetime; but those with a high school diploma will earn \$1.07 million! Black women with a bachelor's degree from college earn \$1.86 million in their lifetime, and those with a master's degree earn \$2.3 million in their lifetime. In other words, school is about giving you options and the skills that will make you more marketable in the workforce. Life can sometimes get hard, and that can make school seem less important. But remember that if you want a career, something more than just a job that pays the bills, you have to plan and prepare for it. That planning includes completing your education. Consider it an investment—in yourself, which will produce the maximum return. Once you have an education, no one can take that from you. And in fact, being educated will only make you a stronger candidate for success in life, not just for the moment.

## **2. Sometimes I feel like school is not for me. How can I get motivated?**

First, take a moment to think about why you are feeling this way. Ask yourself: “Why do I feel this way about school? Who is associated with how I feel about school? Is there something about school itself that makes me not want to go, or is it about something else that’s happening around me? When did I start to feel this way about school? What happened?” Once you have collected your thoughts, get a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On one side, list all of the things you like about school, and on the other, list all of the things that you don’t like about school. Now, turn the paper over. Make a list of the things that you want to accomplish in life. Sometimes these can be as basic as “leaving this town” or “having a house of my own,” but you can also dream big, like “own my

own business” or “become a lawyer.” Sometimes women fail to give ourselves as much energy as we offer to others around us. Love is supposed to make you stronger, but sometimes we allow fear to drive our practice of love—and this is more prone to happen when we haven’t laid our foundation first. As a young woman, a central part of your foundation is your education. Make a promise to focus on your own well-being.

Here are two active steps you can take:

- *Find someone at school, at home, or in another part of your community (such as a community center or agency) who can help you create an educational plan.* Ask this person to help guide you toward fulfilling your plan. Find an academic mentor or coach who can check in on you to make sure you’ve finished your homework and to encourage you to focus on going to school. Their support will help you to be the strongest student you can be.
- *Surround yourself with people who want to achieve, like you do. People who encourage you to stay away from school—whether they are girlfriends, boyfriends, family, or other adults with power—do not have your best interest at heart.* People who love you want you to have your best chance in life, and that begins with staying in school and taking care of yourself.

### **3. What do I do if I feel like my teacher is picking on me?**

It’s hard to feel picked on or bullied by your peers or your teachers. Truthfully, this is an issue that probably can’t be resolved with a few words of advice, or even in the course of a school year. In general, you would be best served by taking the high road. Take control of the situation by documenting (writing down or recording) what is happening and what you are observing. If you’re struggling with this, try to find an adult you trust to help you record your experiences. As you document each incident, be sure to include a careful description of what happened just before the teacher acted or reacted, and what you did in response. Record every

detail and be sure to honor how you might have contributed to escalating the situation.

Just thinking about what is happening will help you slow down a heated situation and be more aware. Paying close attention to the situation might even cause you to choose or act differently, even if you are being disrespected or treated unfairly. Once you have collected enough information to support your claim, and if you feel safe enough doing this alone, first try talking to your teacher one-on-one about how the situation could be resolved. Schedule a meeting to talk about behavior—yours and theirs. If your first meeting only results in a one-sided rant, or if you do not feel that you otherwise have a respectful enough relationship with your teacher to have a helpful conversation, then try to schedule a meeting to have a conversation that includes you, a parent or loved one, your principal (or a dean or counselor), and the teacher.

Keep track of the following questions in this meeting:

- Is there anything different about how everyone involved is seeing the situation? What is the difference? What is similar about each version of the story?
- What do I want to change about our relationship? What actions will I take to change the situation between my teacher and me?
- What or who do I need in my corner to help me do the things I've agreed to do?
- What actions has my teacher agreed to take to change the situation? Who will hold the teacher accountable?
- How will we hold each other accountable for our agreements?
- Is there a written agreement?
- Are there regular conversations and check-ins?
- Do we need other people to be there for these meetings?

#### **4. How should I respond if I keep being challenged to fight in school?**

First, stop and breathe. Let's start with some facts: You are the only person who controls your actions, no one else. No one can make you hit that other person who is provoking you, and no one is making you walk away. You control your own behavior. Now, let's deal with reality: It is possible that you are feeling pressured to fight. There might be social pressures, or maybe you want to feel in control. You could also be triggered to fight after being bullied by other girls or boys who talk about you, spread rumors about you, call you names (in person or on social media sites), or try to intimidate you in some way (in person or on social media sites). You could be feeling pressure to fight in order to keep your relationship with another person intact. Take a moment to check in with yourself about why you are feeling like you want to fight. Learn your triggers. As soon as possible, find an adult or another friend who can intervene. That adult should be able to guide you both in a conversation that allows you to get to the bottom of why you are fighting and think about how you can overcome the urge to come to blows.

#### **5. How do I know if I'm in an unhealthy relationship?**

Every relationship has its ups and downs. But if a relationship is causing physical or emotional reactions in your body or your spirit that are not positive, then you need to check in to see if this is the right relationship for you. How frequently do you feel upset with your partner? Do you feel jealous, suspicious, or envious of your partner? Is there constant arguing? Do you feel put down, controlled, or manipulated? If you are nodding or answering yes to these questions, then you might take some time to think about why you are in this relationship. These are not feelings that you should feel in a committed and loving relationship. Sometimes the thrill of a relationship, especially if that person is popular or powerful in some way, can make us overlook these feelings. Maybe you feel like you have no one else who understands you, or no one else to rely on. But if you are more

unhappy than you are happy, love yourself enough not to ignore your own well-being. In other words, remember that you are sacred and loved. If your relationship does not honor this basic idea most of the time, you may want to reconsider if your partner is the right one for you, even if you love or have love for this person.

## **6. Why do I get so annoyed when people look at me?**

Sometimes, when we feel a little self-conscious, someone's look can feel like a judgmental stare. This stare can feel rude. It can be challenging. It can be sexually provocative. People try to pretend that a look or an expression isn't that important, but those things do matter. They matter because they give us an indication of what someone is thinking about us, and what we are thinking about ourselves. Looks have meaning, words have meaning, and physical actions have meaning—we know this instinctively. But it's our interpretations that give them that meaning. In other words, only if you feel inadequate in some way do looks or words have a meaningful impact on your life. When you feel whole, it's harder to be triggered by another person's problems, issues, or judgments of you.

Here's the thing to remember: Your life is beautiful. Their looks are about them, not you. Just because you may not be where you want to be yet, or have all of the material things you want—and that everyone else seems to think are important—doesn't mean that you are any less worthy of respect than the next person. Find ways to be true to yourself under all circumstances. That doesn't mean lashing out with your own special stare or with words at anyone who seems to be challenging you. It also doesn't mean that you have to belittle people who do have some of the material things that might be nice to have. No matter who has what or where you or anyone else comes from, think about the ways that you can treat everyone around you with respect.

Consider that you might be able to turn what feels like a judgmental stare into something else, by smiling at them. Say hello. Teens are notorious for

calling that kind of reaction to something “weird” — but don’t worry. Just do you. Don’t worry about what others think about you. How do you want to feel about yourself? Are you happy with who you are becoming? If the answer is yes, then that’s really all that matters. Everyone else will fall in line. If the answer is no, then think about why. It may help you start to see what’s missing or what’s not working, and how you might be able to lead a more fulfilling life. Ultimately, approval of your life needs to come from inside of you, not from someone else. Focus on what it takes to make you feel whole. The closer you get the more you’ll recognize that what used to feel like a challenging or angry stare might actually be a glance of admiration.

## **7. How do I get along better with my mom?**

The mother-daughter relationship can be tricky. It can also be one of the most sacred and beautiful experiences in life. It can be a bond like no other, which is why—even when our mothers get on our last nerve or when they make mistakes in their own lives—we forgive them. We are forever connected to them.

Remember, mothers are people too. If you can, find a time when you can calmly sit next to your mother and talk about what’s going through your mind. Nothing beats a good conversation when you’re trying to get at the heart of what is bothering you. Ask her to tell you her story. Maybe she’s already told you some things about her life several times, but ask her to tell you what her story is. What was life like for her growing up? What’s it like for her now? What did she want to do when she was your age? What was her relationship like with her mother? What are her hopes and dreams for herself? Chances are that the same hopes and dreams that she had for herself growing up, she also has for you. Maybe those are not consistent with the dreams you have for yourself—or maybe they are. But you’ll never know unless you talk about them.

The problem with differences usually isn't that they exist. Rather, it's all the assumptions we tend to make about other people—even our mothers. Even if you don't always see eye to eye, talking openly and regularly can transform your relationship. Try to carve out a regular time for the two of you to sit down together and share stories. Once she's done with her story, then you should tell yours. Yes, whether you're twelve, fifteen, or nineteen years old, you have a life story. Sharing with each other builds a foundation for mutual respect and, hopefully, a more fulfilling relationship. This strategy may not work for everyone, but give it a chance. Sometimes it helps to bring in other people—a friend, an aunt or cousin, a therapist or counselor—if it's hard or if it seems impossible to start the conversation on your own. If this strategy doesn't work, or if your mother isn't around for you to talk to, try to find another older woman to connect to. Whether or not you have a good relationship with your mother, focus inward and prepare for when it is time to lead your own life. You can make it.



