

THE POWER OF CHOICE

TEACHING GUIDE

For Use With
Program 11

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Discussion Questions

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Program Background

**Licensing Agreement
including
Public Performance Rights**

When a sampling of more than three thousand high school students were asked recently what aspect of their lives they'd like most to change, the most frequent answer given was "relationship with family." In fact, these young people considered this to be more important than changing either their personal qualities or their academic status.

In this program, comedian/teen counselor Michael Pritchard visits high schools in Nashville and Boston to explore the critical issue of teen-parent communications. Through probing dialogue and hypothetical situations, they examine some of the ways in which family communication gets blocked, and consider what kinds of choices they can make to improve the situation.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

_ To stimulate young people to think critically about how they and their parents communicate with each other.

_ To help them see themselves as having the power to improve those communications by making the right choices.

_ To focus their thoughts on what they can do differently to cause a change for the better.

_ To encourage them to take the initiative in improving their communications with their parents.

HOW TO USE THIS VIDEO

Use in classrooms, libraries, youth service agencies, youth groups, or show it to your kids at home. Ideal for parents, too.

THE POWER OF CHOICE[®] is an entertaining and thought provoking video series designed to help you empower your young people to make good choices in their lives. You can greatly enhance the effectiveness of this video by following it up with group discussions, writing assignments, and learning activities. This guide is intended to help you in your efforts.

We recommend that, before showing the video, you ask a few questions to start the kids thinking about the issues treated in the program. You'll find some useful questions on page 6. Also, you should expect that your students will have a lot to talk about after viewing the video, so it's a good idea to allow ample time.

While this discussion guide may appear to be written for classroom teachers, any group leader or parent will find it a useful tool for getting the most out of this video program.

PROGRAM CONTENT

COMEDY: Pritchard talks about growing up in a big Irish-Catholic family in Missouri.

INTRODUCTION: Parents and kids are often divided by a communications gap, but there's almost always a way to bridge it.

PRITCHARD sets up a role-play, where he takes the role of Dad, and tells the kids to "do it because I said so." They ask him to understand their thoughts and feelings, to give them more respect, and to give them reasons for what he wants of them.

DISCUSSION of why parents exert unreasonable authority - whether from fear or insecurity or the need to be the boss. One boy notes that some parents want to spare their children the pain they suffered by preventing them from making the same mistakes.

PRITCHARD asks, "what is the biggest problem you have communicating with your parents?" For some, yelling and making accusations are a barrier.

"Living with my parents is being trapped in a world I never made," says a boy who feels his father comprehends nothing that doesn't fit his view of the world. Any conversation turns into a fight, so the son keeps quiet.

A cultural gap between immigrant parents and their American-born children is a communications problem for two girls. One has a mother who was brought up shielded from sex. Another let her father become so frustrated by his inability to handle her that her family was "torn apart" by conflict.

One girl says she doesn't just want a mother-daughter relationship but a human relationship. She's learned to tell her parents how she feels.

HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION: How would you tell your parents if you got pregnant or got someone pregnant. One girl says she would tell them she has a serious problem that they aren't going to like, but that she needs them to stand beside her and help her with it.

"What do you do if a parent says something that hurts your self-esteem," asks Pritchard. A boy whose father used to always compare him unfavorably with a cousin says he finally expressed his anger, which made his father have more respect for his feelings.

"What are the ways to break down communication barriers," Pritchard asks. Responses include: talk before problems get out of hand, be honest, don't let pride get in the way, and don't be afraid to show emotion.

Pritchard says parents need to know when their kids feel they're doing a good job as parents. One boy realizes that he's never affectionately thanked his father, which partly explains why they're so cold to each other. Others bring up the importance of telling your parents that you love them.

In closing, Pritchard notes that when you take the initiative to improve communications with your parents, you're making a great choice.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions to ask before showing the video.

1. How many of you think you have good communications with your parents? What makes it good? How many of you are unhappy with your communications with your parents? What gets in the way?

Questions to ask after showing the video.

2. What was most meaningful to you in this program? In what way was it meaningful?
3. Whom did you most agree with in this program? Whom did you least agree with?
4. Are there things you feel you need from your parents that you're not getting? Do you tell them that? If not, what would happen if you did? Do you ask your parents what they need from you?
5. Can you think of anything you do that might make it difficult for your parents to communicate with you?
6. What could you do that would make it easier for your parents to communicate with you?
7. It's often said that people do what they're rewarded for doing. Do you ever praise your parents when you think they're doing a good job of being parents? If so, how do they respond? If not, how are they supposed to know?
8. Give an example of something you do that you don't tell your parents about. Why do you choose not to talk with them about this? What do you suppose would happen if you let them know?
9. What would you like to know about your parents that you

don't know now?

10. If you had to break bad news to your parents about something you've done, what would be the worst way to go about it? The best way?
11. Do your parents say "because I said so" rather than explain or discuss their reasons? In what situations do they do this? Why do you suppose they do this?
12. Do you find it difficult to express your emotions to your parents? If so, why?
13. What differences exist between your parents' values and your own? Do these differences have anything to do with some of the conflicts that occur between you? Do you try to consider their values when you talk to them about difficult issues?
14. Do you 'check in' with your parents so they know what's going on in your life? When are the best times to talk with them?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is the one thing you'd like most to talk with your parents about? Why is this important to you? What has been stopping you from talking with them about it? What are you afraid would happen if you did? How bad would that be? Is it worth the risk? Is there anything you could do differently that would make it easier or less risky? What do you conclude from all this?
2. List all the communication barriers you can think of that exist between you and your parents. For each one, think of something you could do differently that might eliminate it or at least make it less troublesome. Write these down. Then, pick the one you think you have the best shot at succeeding with, and try it. Write about the outcome.
3. Write a list of questions that you would like to ask your parents, including questions about their lives and about their relationship with you. After completing the list, mark the ones you might ask them. Explain why you would not ask the other questions, and describe what might happen if you did.
4. Write about what you think your parents' biggest fears are, and how that might affect their communication with you.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Brainstorm the worst possible ways to break bad news to your parents (e.g., you totaled the car, you got suspended from school). What would be the worst time and place? What words or expressions could you use that would really set them off? How could you make it into a total disaster?
2. Brainstorm the best possible ways to break bad news to your parents. What would be the best time and place? What words or expressions could you use that would get you the most cooperation and sympathy? What could you do to achieve the best possible outcome?
3. Name a conflict you have with your parents - say it's over something they won't allow you to do. Try a role play where you take the part of your parent, and somebody else plays you. In the role of parent you do your best to argue against giving permission. Then switch roles and play yourself. See how persuasively you can respond to your own previous arguments. Can you find a way to get what you want and still give your parents what they need?
4. What would happen if people had to pass a licensing examination in order to become parents? As a class project devise an examination and licensing procedure for parenting.

ABOUT MICHAEL PRITCHARD

Michael Pritchard is a juvenile probation officer turned comedian/youth counselor/public speaker. After his college graduation in 1973, Mike went to work for the St. Louis Police Department and then relocated to San Francisco's juvenile hall. In his years of working with young offenders, Mike discovered that his penchant for humor served as a powerful counseling tool, enabling him to break down communication barriers and help a lot of troubled kids turn their lives around. As Mike is fond of saying, ***"the shortest distance between any two people is a good laugh."*** Mike's unusual combination of talents gained him recognition as California's "Probation Officer of the Year" the same year that he won the San Francisco International Comedy Competition.

Whether he's being funny or serious, Mike's big love is talking with kids about the choices they make in their lives. He teaches young people that they have the power of choice, that they are responsible for the choices they make, and that they owe it to themselves to choose the best.



"The shortest distance between two people is a
good laugh."

HOW THIS PROGRAM WAS PRODUCED

THE POWER OF CHOICE began as a one-hour TV special for PBS. Our aim was to create a show for teenagers that would be both entertaining and educationally useful. With this goal in mind, we took San Francisco comedian/ youth counselor Michael Pritchard and a TV production crew to four high schools across the U.S. to talk with kids about how they make choices in life.

At each school Mike entertained a student assembly with comedy about growing up. Then, he led small groups of students in highly productive problem-solving sessions. These groups were selected by the schools before we arrived (we asked for a representative mix of students). The kids we got were amazingly candid. They revealed deeply personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and shared useful solutions and insights. We captured all this on videotape using three cameras, and edited the material down to a one-hour show.

When the program aired on PBS, educators and broadcasters expressed enthusiasm for having it made into a series. So, we immediately began work on eleven new half-hour programs exploring a whole range of issues important to teens. To develop the content, we spent one full semester at schools around the San Francisco Bay Area meeting with students and teachers. Following that, we took Mike and our production crew on a nine-week, 21 state tour of high schools throughout the U.S. (see list).

We returned with more than 100 hours of material, and spent five months editing the eleven new programs. The series was televised on PBS and is used in classrooms, libraries, and youth groups throughout the U.S. and other countries.

LOCATIONS

THE POWER OF CHOICE was shot at the following high schools:

San Francisco, Calif.

Lowell H.S.

Denver, Colorado

West H.S.

Biloxi, Mississippi

Biloxi H.S.

New York City

Murry Bergtraum H.S. for
Business Careers

San Rafael, Calif.

San Rafael H.S.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Venice H.S.

Phoenix, Arizona

Washington H.S.

Albuquerque, N.M.

West Mesa H.S.

Dallas, Texas

Woodrow Wilson H.S.

Wichita, Kansas

Southeast H.S.

St. Louis, Missouri

St. Thomas Aquinas/ Mercy
H.S.

Nashville, Tennessee

McGavock H.S.

Atlanta, Georgia

Northside H.S.

Gainesville, Florida

Buchholz H.S.

Columbia, S.C

Dreher H.S.

Washington, D.C.

School Without Walls

Philadelphia, Penn.

George Washington Carver
H.S. for Engineering &
Science

Wayne, New Jersey

Wayne Hills Senior H.S.

Brooklyn, New York

Edward. R. Murrow H.S.

Boston, Mass.

Newton North H.S.

Cleveland, Ohio

Glenville H.S.

Detroit, Michigan

Cass Technical H.S.

South Bend, Indiana

La Salle H.S.

Chicago, Illinois

Senn Metro Academy

Madison, Wisconsin

West H.S.

Bloomington, Minn.

Thomas Jefferson H.S.

Fremont, Calif.

Irvington H.S.

LICENSE AGREEMENT

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Program Titles

- 1: THE POWER OF CHOICE
- 2: ACTING ON YOUR VALUES
- 3: SELF-ESTEEM
- 4: COPING WITH PRESSURES
- 5: DRUGS & ALCOHOL - Part 1
- 6: DRUGS & ALCOHOL - Part 2
- 7: DRINKING & DRIVING
- 8: SEX
- 9: FRIENDSHIP & DATING
- 10: DEPRESSION & SUICIDE
- 11: COMMUNICATING with PARENTS
- 12: RAISING YOUR PARENTS