

# **THE POWER OF CHOICE**

## **TEACHING GUIDE**

For Use With  
Program 5

# **DRUGS AND ALCOHOL PART I**

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including  
Public Performance Rights**

**M**ore than four-and-a-half million American teenagers have been identified as problem drinkers, and many more have relatives or friends who are. Half of the high school seniors have experience with marijuana, and 17 percent have tried cocaine. Meanwhile, the entire world is caught up in a drug battle that rages from the heads of state to the family living room. How are kids growing up in such a chaotic environment supposed to know what to do when the opportunity presents itself to experiment for themselves?

In this program, host Michael Pritchard encourages teenagers to come to grips with the question of *what to do when "just say no" and "just say yes" just won't do*. Students from high schools in Atlanta and Albuquerque talk openly and honestly about the choices (good and bad) they have made with alcohol and drug use. As one teenager relates, "I look back, it felt good then. Now I could cry. Once it wore off, I had to face myself again."

## EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

**To stimulate** teens to think critically about their choices involving drugs and alcohol.

**To help them see** that they have the power to make those choices for themselves, regardless of any social pressures they may feel.

**To make them aware** of how drugs and alcohol can take over their power of choice and reduce the amount of control they have over their own lives.

## 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**<sup>®</sup> 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

INTRODUCTION: Today's teenagers face important choices about whether to use, abuse, or refuse alcohol and drugs.

PRITCHARD asks, "why do people use drugs and alcohol? What's good about them?" Answers include: to lose inhibitions, to deal with stress, to relax, and to feel good.

One girl tells about getting carried away with speed when she came to depend on it as a means of coping with an overloaded schedule and a lot of social pressures. Another girl took up drinking to overcome her "naive and little girlie" image.

A boy who drank and smoked dope "because everyone else was doing it" talks about the time he got stoned and fell down a flight of steps at a concert. Later he explains that he left the crowd he'd been hanging out with in order to have more control over his life.

Pritchard asks what's bad about drugs. "Where you get them from," says one girl, who points out that some pushers put harmful additives in the drugs they sell. Pritchard kiddingly assures them that drug pushers have their best interests at heart.

A brunette tells the story of her addiction to a pain killer she stopped taking only because she could not afford to buy more. She acknowledges feeling much better sober, but says she'd take the drug again if she had any. Another student speaks about his experiences with marijuana, which he took to escape his problems. However, his problems didn't go away, and eventually he realized he had to stop wasting his life and get off drugs.

PRITCHARD talks about being an alcoholic and coming to the realization that he had to quit. A girl suggests that deciding to quit is not as hard for an addict as the long term reality of actually not using.

"Besides addiction," Pritchard asks, "what are reasons not to take alcohol and drugs?" The discussion centers around controlling one's own behavior and avoiding potential trouble. One girl tells of a time when she was drunk and walked a highway divider at two a.m. A boy says that quitting drinking has set him free because he doesn't have to worry about getting in trouble or how he'll get home at night. A girl with curly blonde hair says its best to make decisions about drinking or drug use ahead of time instead of making the decision at the moment they're offered.

DISCUSSION of various alternatives to drugs and alcohol for people who take them in order to feel less insecure. Talking to people and making friends is one option. Another is finding one's natural high, as one girl did when she discovered she enjoys speaking in public. Pritchard responds by saying that he took a risk when he started performing comedy, but had he continued drinking he would have been risking his life. Fortunately he realized that he had the choice to stop. "And in this life you can make good choices or you can make rotten choices, but you will always have the power of choice."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Questions to ask before showing the video.*

1. What's wrong with taking drugs?
2. At what age is it okay to drink? Why does age matter?

### *Questions to ask after showing the video.*

3. Who in this video did you most agree with? Who did you most disagree with? Why?
4. What are the reasons that people you know drink or take drugs? Are the reasons for drinking any different from the reasons for taking drugs?
5. Have any of you noticed a connection between drug or alcohol abuse and self-esteem? Explain.
6. Think of someone you know who has gotten heavily into drugs or alcohol. Have you noticed any change in that person's values? In his or her choice of friends? In any of the other choices that person makes?
7. Suppose you're at a party and somebody offers you a drug. How can you be sure it is what they say it is? How can you be sure it's not "cut" with something dangerous?

8. The brunette who took a morphine based pain killer every day until her bottle ran out says that she feels much better when she is sober. Why, then, does she still want to take this drug? Is she addicted? (See next question for help with this.)

9. What is addiction?

**Tip:**

This question often triggers a hot debate. A definition which is popular among treatment professionals is that a person is addicted if he or she is a compulsive user, cannot reliably control his or her use, and continues using despite negative consequences.

10. Is alcohol harmful only to those who might become alcoholics? Are other drugs harmful only to those who might become addicted to them?

11. At least one person in the video talked about a "natural high." What does that mean? How do you get one? Is it an alternative to intoxication with alcohol or drugs? Is it preferable? Explain why.

12. Which of these is less addictive, less intoxicating, or less harmful: beer, wine, hard liquor, or wine coolers?

**Tip:**

Alcohol is alcohol. You'll get the same amount of alcohol in a 12 oz. can of beer, a 4 oz. serving of wine, or a shot of whiskey. A bottle of wine cooler contains more alcohol than any of these.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Team up with one or two of your classmates and attend a young people's meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Then, write an account of your experience, giving your observations and what you learned. Present this as an oral report to your class. **Note:** You do not have to be an alcoholic to attend an open meeting of AA - visitors are welcome. To find out the time and place of an appropriate meeting, look up Alcoholics Anonymous in the yellow pages.
2. When people become dependent on drugs or alcohol they usually deny it to themselves and everybody else until some event makes it impossible to ignore. Do some research on denial and write an essay or dramatic scene which illustrates it. You'll find the subject of denial in almost any book on alcoholism or drug addiction.

If you or someone you care about is involved with drugs or alcohol, there are several organizations you can call for immediate help:

**Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous** are self-help organizations for people with alcohol or drug dependencies. **Al-Anon** and its junior division, **Alateen**, are for people who are affected by another person's drug or alcohol use.

To find out more about these organizations, give them a call. They're listed in the yellow pages under "Alcoholism" or "Drug Abuse."

## GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Invite a speaker from Alcoholics Anonymous to come to your classroom for a question and answer session. AA is a nationwide fellowship whose members help each other get sober, stay sober, and work out healthful patterns of living. You'll find them in the yellow pages under "Alcoholism."
2. When people become dependent on drugs or alcohol they usually don't realize what's happening until late in the game. Make a checklist of warning signs for drug or alcohol dependency. You can get help with this from your local alcoholism information center
3. Brainstorm ways to have a great party without alcohol or drugs. Figure out ways to make it attractive to people who usually get high at parties.
4. Brainstorm ways to refuse an offer of drugs or alcohol and still be cool. Role-play scenes in which a person at a party refuses such an offer. Then, evaluate the way he or she handled it. Was the style of refusal convincing? Could it be improved on?

**For an enlightening look at what to do when someone you care about is hooked, see *Drugs and Alcohol - Part 2*, program #6 in THE POWER OF CHOICE series.**

## 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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# THE POWER OF CHOICE

## Program Titles

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- 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