

LEADER'S GUIDE

LIFE STEPS
with Michael Pritchard



Program #5

**Empathy, Caring,
and Compassion**

Series Overview

LifeSteps is a 12-video series designed to help students build character and develop the social and emotional skills they need to become responsible, caring, and successful adults. With well-developed social and emotional skills, young people will be more aware of their feelings and more capable of managing them. They will be better able to set goals, make decisions, solve problems, and relate to other people effectively. In school, these skills can increase motivation, lessen anxiety, improve study skills and boost academic achievement.

LifeSteps uses lively, unrehearsed student-centered discussion, dramatized dilemmas that accurately reflect teen experience, and themed comic interludes that deliver their message through humor. Filmed with actual students in schools across the country, each video is culturally sensitive and multiethnic. The series covers a broad range of skills and attributes: self-knowledge, self-control, resiliency, empathy, problem solving, developing interpersonal relationships, building character, respect, responsibility, and working towards success. Each of these skills and attributes is an important component of social and emotional intelligence.

The underlying structure of the *LifeSteps* curriculum is an eight-step problem-solving strategy. Explored in depth in Program #6, *Creative Problem Solving*, this strategy is demonstrated in each program and provides students with a flexible, practical approach to managing the social and emotional challenges they face every day. The eight steps are:

1. Stop and calm down
2. Name the problem
3. Understand others
4. Brainstorm solutions
5. Evaluate and choose
6. Make a plan
7. Reflect and adjust
8. Reward yourself

Although each program has unique objectives, they all share the goal of providing students with the above important life skills. The *LifeSteps* approach can help teens think through difficult situations and make good choices, during a stage in their development when they are driven by strong emotions.

How to Use This Video

This video is designed for use in classrooms, community centers, youth organizations, camps, teen groups, libraries, or for children at home. Although teens are the target audience, parents, teachers, school administrators, school support staff, counselors, social workers, youth workers, peer counseling trainers, mentors, and anyone else who has regular contact with, and a commitment to, young people can benefit from the video. This Leader's Guide is aimed at teachers, but it can be used by any group leader who wants to get the most out of *Empathy, Caring and Compassion*.

As with the other videos in the *LifeSteps* series, *Empathy, Caring and Compassion* is intended for use as part of a learning experience that begins before viewing the program and ends beyond the classroom walls. The discussion questions and activities are intended to focus and enhance this learning experience.

Before showing *Empathy, Caring and Compassion* to your students, you may find these steps helpful:

- Screen the video at least once, noting areas where you may want to stop the tape to focus on a particular issue.
- Read this guide through to get a sense of how you can use the video, what discussion questions would work best, and what follow-up activities would be most productive.
- Ask the students questions to get them thinking about some of the key issues presented in this program. You might want to distribute copies of the discussion questions on page 6. Be sure to review the questions in advance to make sure they are clear to you and appropriate for your students. You can then use them to encourage discussion after the screening.

Peer education, rather than frontal teaching, is the technique that underlies the entire *LifeSteps* series. Because we believe that teen viewers will more easily learn the skills and attitudinal changes proposed if they are taught by their peers, the programs are structured around discussions where real teens grapple with tough situations and model positive solutions.

Objectives

- To understand others by identifying their feelings, problems, and points of view
- To build the skill of seeing situations and events from multiple perspectives
- To develop compassion as a core value
- To recognize empathy and compassion as foundations of moral decision-making
- To learn how labeling, prejudice, and stereotyping impede the development of empathy

Synopsis

Michael opens the program with a story which illustrates that empathy can be hard—particularly when it's difficult to identify with the other person. He asks the teens in the group what empathy is. One girl describes empathy as sharing feelings with other people and understanding what they're feeling. A boy adds that empathy is like putting yourself in the other person's shoes. "How does empathy differ from sympathy?" A boy explains that when you're sympathetic, you feel sorry for someone; when you're empathetic, you understand how that person feels.

Mentioning several occupations, Michael asks the group to think of the problems people with these jobs may have. Teens offer their ideas on what the concerns of migrant workers, school principals, and police officers might be.

Michael asks whether the teens think it is easier to empathize with people who are like us or different from us; they respond by agreeing that identifying with people who are like us is easier. He provides some specific examples—a homeless person and a school custodian—and again, asks the group for their reactions. One boy thinks it would be hard to identify with a homeless person, because he can't imagine having nothing. Asked about their ability to identify with a school custodian, the group laughs. Michael questions the reasons for their laughter; teens offer that there is a subconscious bias and that nobody respects a school custodian. Michael makes the point that bias gets in the way of empathy.

He asks the group about their experience with prejudging others. A boy shares a story about prejudging a girl based on her appearance. Paired for a school assignment, they ultimately became close friends. The boy realizes that his prejudging could have made him "miss out on a beautiful person."

Another boy talks about the difficulty of his middle school years, when other kids thought he was gay. To prove that he wasn't, he joined in the teasing and labeling directed at others. He shares what this experience taught him: by labeling other people you become a lesser person, because you haven't opened yourself to others.

Asked what the benefits of empathy are, a girl says that empathy allows you to understand different cultures and races, and makes your friends trust you more.

Onstage, Michael shares a story from his own experience, about a time when he prejudged people based on their appearance, and then introduces the first dramatized segment. The dramatization features Peter, who describes a new boy in his school. Most of the kids think the new boy is "weird," and many, including Peter's friends, make fun of him. Rushing to class, Peter knocks the boy into the wall; the boy says nothing and just runs off.

The teens talk about what Peter is feeling. One thinks that Peter wants to empathize with the boy, but holds back because he is concerned about his friends' reactions. Another agrees that his friends may ditch him if he stands up for the new boy.

Michael asks how the new kid feels. A girl thinks he feels lonely and bad about himself; he probably assumed Peter knocked into him intentionally and ran to avoid confrontation.

The group shares their experiences of being the one who is left out. After moving from the city to a suburban school, one girl felt "shocked" when she walked into her classroom. A boy describes his feeling of loneliness, watching other kids interact. Michael asks if kids who are different get treated differently. One boy tells about having his books glued together. His friend, an avid birdwatcher, was also the butt of teasing; kids "tortured" him and poured ketchup on his books. What he learned

from these experiences is that there are other kids like him, and they can help each other. Subjected to racial comments after the 9/11 attacks, a girl shares her hurt over being asked if she was spreading anthrax.

The second dramatization follows. Peter is rushing to catch a train to the city, where he's meeting his friends at a basketball game. He sees the new kid waiting for a bus. It's a cold, rainy night; Peter knows that the bus is no longer running and that the kid will have a long walk through a tough part of town to get home.

Teens in the group say that Peter feels torn between doing the right thing and having fun, and the new kid feels scared, cold, and wet. Most initially think Peter should give him a ride home, but one girl questions that position, noting that Peter had already paid for his ticket to the game. A boy adds that it's easy to say you would stop, but he wonders what people would actually do in that situation. There is much give-and-take on what Peter should do, and Michael then raises the question of what might happen to the new kid if he has to walk home. The group realizes that he might get hurt, or even shot, on his walk home.

The debate continues, with one teen saying he would want someone to help him, while another says he wouldn't expect a person he doesn't even know to offer him a ride. Michael asks what values these choices show; the teens' answers indicate that the choice is between caring and independence.

At this point, Michael introduces the third segment of the dramatization. Peter and his friend come upon two guys who are bullying the new kid; Peter's friend starts to walk away. Again, Michael asks the group what Peter is feeling. They say he feels guilty and obligated to do something; one adds that just because his friend wants to leave doesn't mean Peter has to. The new kid, they say, feels angry, hurt, helpless, and worthless. One girl adds that, while life is generally not fair, this situation is particularly unfair. She says that no one should be humiliated because of who they are... "That's not our purpose on earth, to make fun of people."

In response to Michael's question about what Peter should do, a girl says he has to stay and help because it's the "absolute right thing to do." Some kids say they would try to get an adult to help, and Michael asks why that's a good idea. A boy tells about another kid who got hurt trying to end a fight.

One boy explains his idea that by helping, you alter the state of the world. If you help someone find the good in you—or if you bring out the good in someone else—you make the world a happier place.

In his conclusion, Michael stresses the need to reach out, care about others, and help them when they are in need.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about a time when a friend of yours needed emotional support. How did you know? Were you able to provide the support your friend needed? How did providing (or being unable to provide) that support make you and your friend feel?
2. You have a ticket to your favorite group's concert, which is on the same evening as your grandmother's birthday party. What will you do, and why?
3. General Norman Schwarzkopf once said, "You cannot help someone get up a hill without getting closer to the top yourself." What does this saying mean? Have you ever helped another person "get up a hill"? How did that experience affect you?
4. Has your first impression of someone ever turned out to be wrong? Describe what happened to change your ideas about this person.
5. Imagine that overnight everyone in school became more compassionate. How would school be different?
6. Michael asks the teens in the video about the benefits of empathy. How can being an empathetic person benefit you?
7. Do volunteers give more or get back more by volunteering? Give an example of a volunteer experience you had, and share what you gained from it.
8. What is a stereotype? How does stereotyping get in the way of people's relationships? Have you ever been stereotyped by another person? How did it make you feel?
9. What are the obstacles to being an empathetic person? What can you do to overcome those obstacles?
10. How does understanding a person's motivation help you empathize with their behavior? Give specific examples.

Activities

1. In this video, teens say that it is harder to empathize with people who are different from them. Imagine what it would be like to be homeless, and write an essay that describes your typical day, including both your experiences and your feelings.
2. Have several small groups role-play this situation for the larger group: It is lunchtime during the first week of school for a new student who does not speak English very well. Alternate role-playing the situation as you think it might happen and as it might happen if the participants made a specific effort to treat the new student with empathy.

3. A fable is a short tale that teaches a moral lesson, often using animals as characters. For example, Aesop's famous fable, *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, teaches that it's a good idea to prepare today for what you'll need tomorrow. Write a short fable that demonstrates the Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*.

4. Interview a person who works for a service organization in your community. Find out what the organization's mission is, what services it provides, what role the person plays, and what motivated him/her to choose this field of work. Ask about the role empathy plays in their work. Write a report of your findings.

5. As a class, compile the written reports from the preceding activity into a book that can be placed in your school library or guidance office to serve as a career tool for other teens. As an additional resource, include any descriptive materials the organizations have provided.



About Michael Pritchard

Youth educator, humorist, actor, former probation officer, and PBS host, Michael Pritchard is known across the United States for his ability to help young people gain self-awareness. He has a unique ability to get teens to listen and open up, and uses his distinctive style of humor to share serious messages with his audience— messages about making good choices, personal responsibility, and respect for others.

Michael's award-winning series include: *SOS: Saving Our Schools*; *PeaceTalks*; *You Can Choose*; *The Power of Choice*; and *Big Changes, Big Choices*. A nationally acclaimed motivational speaker, Michael serves on the boards of directors for The Guardsmen, The Giants Community Fund, the Special Olympics, the California Association of Peer Programs, the Chinese-American Educational Institute, Ronald McDonald House, and the Salvation Army.



Program Titles

- Program #1 The ABCs of Emotional Intelligence
- Program #2 Knowing Who You Are
- Program #3 Taking Charge
- Program #4 Bouncing Back
- Program #5 Empathy, Caring and Compassion
- Program #6 Creative Problem Solving
- Program #7 Getting Along with Others
- Program #8 Building Character
- Program #9 Respect
- Program #10 Responsibility
- Program #11 Developing Healthy Relationships
- Program #12 Doing Your Best

Each program is approximately 30 minutes long.

*LifeSteps Leader's Guides were written by
Karen Schader and edited by Sally Germain.*

***LifeSteps* was developed and produced by**

Jim Watson

HeartLand Media

Scientific Consultant

Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D.

Rutgers University, Department of Psychology Vice-Chair, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

***LifeSteps* was filmed on location at:**

Irvington High School, Fremont, CA

Dave Howell, Project Coordinator

Pete Murchison, Principal

Fred R. Turner, Director, Pupil Services and Alternative Programs

Abington Senior High School, Abington, PA

Carrie Jones, Project Coordinator

Dr. Robert Burt, Principal

Dr. Amy Sichel, Superintendent

Spring Valley High School, Columbia, SC

Beverly Hiott, Project Coordinator

Dr. Greg Owen, Principal

Dr. Steve Hefner, Superintendent, Richland School District Two

Mission San Jose High School, Fremont, CA

Fred Dillemath, Project Coordinator

Stuart Kew, Principal

Distributed by:



© 2003 The Bureau For At-Risk Youth and HeartLand Media
All rights reserved. No portion of this work can be reproduced in any
form without the express written consent of the publisher.