

LEADER'S GUIDE



**LIFE STEPS**  
with Michael Pritchard



**Program #10**

**Responsibility**

## Series Overview

*LifeSteps* is a 12-part 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 program 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 Program

This program 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 program. 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 *Responsibility*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *Responsibility* 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 *Responsibility* to your students, you may find these steps helpful:

- Screen the program 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 program, 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 learn the relationship between responsibility and freedom
- To understand the importance of personal responsibility
- To gain risk assessment skills to avoid dangerous situations
- To use cause-and-effect thinking and recognize that all choices have consequences
- To think responsibly about romantic relationships and delay sexual activity

## **Synopsis**

Michael opens onstage with an anecdote which illustrates that as young people grow, they have more freedom to make their own choices, as well as more responsibility to make those choices good ones. He asks the group about their current responsibilities; responses include jobs, babysitting for siblings, and earning money to pay for things like cell phones and cars. What about choices, Michael asks. A girl responds that her choices are the same as any teen's: drugs, alcohol, grades, and boys. She adds that their responsibilities have changed since they were younger, because they are on their own for the first time. "Scary?" Michael asks, and the girl replies, "Yes, very."

Asked about school responsibilities, one boy says he has to try harder at school and also think about college. A girl adds that there is no more handholding, and you are responsible for everything you do. There is more pressure to be responsible when your actions may affect others, the boy says. Another boy notes the responsibility of having a

license; he is very careful about everything he does when driving.

Michael asks about increased freedom. The teens say they are allowed to stay out later and their parents don't question them as much. One girl says that she earns her parents' trust by her actions; another agrees, noting the need to be responsible with trust. "Trust is a great benefit of responsibility," Michael says.

He asks about times when the teens have been able to do something fun because they are responsible. A girl tells about going on a trip with her friends; she describes it as her "treat" for being trusted. Michael asks about the relationship between responsibility and freedom, and a girl replies, "You do the work and get your freedom."

"With freedom comes responsibility," one boy says, noting that no one is guiding you at this stage of life. A girl adds that there are consequences and rewards to the choices people make. "It ultimately comes down to what you want to do and what you choose to do," she says.

Onstage, Michael tells a story which makes the point that we can avoid a lot of trouble by simply asking ourselves the question, "Where am I supposed to be right now?" He then introduces the first dramatization featuring Ben, a boy whose mom has asked him to stay with his younger brothers on a Saturday night—at the same time, there is going to be a great party on his block. His friend James stops by with a bottle of vodka, urging Ben to go to the party and pointing out that his brothers can take care of themselves.

Michael asks the group about Ben's feelings. One boy says Ben is torn between being wanting to be responsible and wanting to cut loose; another mentions peer pressure, noting that it's hard for Ben to say no to his friend. The teens talk about times they've faced similar situations. A girl says that her mother had asked her to baby-sit one month in advance and then there was a party on the same night. Knowing that she had made a commitment to her mother, she missed the party.

Discussing what Ben should do, the group tries to put themselves in his place. A boy says he would go because he's got to have his own life. One girl says she would put on a movie so that the kids would fall asleep, while another says she would go to the party and check on the kids every hour, if she knew that they were not the type of kids to get in trouble. A boy raises the point that something might happen to the kids, noting that "all it takes is a minute."

The debate continues, with a girl saying that she wouldn't go if her mother had trusted her with the responsibility of babysitting. Role-playing, Michael tries to goad her into going, but she remains firm; she wouldn't leave her siblings alone. Another girl adds that "it may take years to build trust and seconds to destroy it."

A girl says that when your conscience makes you sense that something will go wrong, something bad always happens. Michael asks why it is important to pay

attention to your conscience; she answers "Most of the time it's right." She says that conscience is a regulator, adding that if you left your decisions to your body, you'd do anything.

In the second dramatization, Ben is at the party. He's dancing closely with Pamela, a girl he's very interested in. Holding the bottle of vodka, James asks Ben and Pamela if they want to drive out to the Rock, a spot where teens go to be alone. Ben is embarrassed, but Pamela urges him to go. Ben realizes that he has two hours before his mother will get home. He devises a possible plan to run home and put on a movie for his brothers, so that they'll fall asleep watching it.

"What do you think now?" Michael asks. The boys and the girls are divided in their answers. The boys think this decision is difficult. Several share that they are torn; they'd want to go, but realize that if they were thinking properly, they wouldn't. A number of girls say emphatically that they wouldn't go; they are concerned about the consequences and the effect on their self-respect.

Michael asks the teens to think about the worst thing that could happen. When a girl talks about a parent's reaction, coming home and finding the teen not there, Michael raises a more serious question: What about getting into a car with James? The group immediately recognizes the issue of drunk driving. One teen says he'd never get into a car if he knew the driver had been drinking, for fear of being hurt or arrested; another says she would call her parents. Why is it so hard to evaluate the risks in this situation, Michael asks. There are so many, a girl responds.

The third dramatized segment follows. Ben and Pamela are at the Rock, and the pace of their sexual activity is making Ben very uncomfortable. He tries to slow things down, but Pamela just laughs and tells him not to worry so much.

"He's getting ready to make a choice," Michael says to the teens, and asks a boy how Ben could say no to Pamela. Saying that Ben should make an excuse and get away, the boy notes that Ben knows what's happening is wrong, but doesn't know how to say it. Another boy says that since most guys in this situation would just choose to have sex without thinking, it's important to make the choice before you are faced with the situation.

Michael asks what Ben should be thinking about, and a girl says "the consequences of his actions." There is always the possibility of pregnancy. Another girl notes that a sexual relationship is not something you should go into with doubts, and Ben is too young to be making this choice. It would be a "regretful experience" for Ben and Pamela, with pregnancy, STDs, and AIDS as possible consequences.

Delaying sexual activity is important, one girl offers. She says that rather than thinking about the "quick thing" and the "fun thing," you have to "think about what could happen next." Michael asks if the teens know anyone who got pregnant at an early age, and what life is like for them. Two girls talk about the struggles of being a teenage mother; one says she wouldn't want that to be her and you've got to make the right decisions—not just about sex, but about drinking and drugs as well.

Noting that it can be hard, Michael says that you have to be the one to make the choices and take personal responsibility for yourself. He concludes onstage, encouraging teens to think about their futures, rather than just what is immediately in front of them, and to make choices they can be proud of.

## Discussion Questions

1. "Freedom with responsibility" is a frequently repeated theme in this program. What do you think it means? How can you earn the right to increased freedom?
2. What does the word "risk" mean to you? How are risks related to responsibilities and freedom? What do you risk by not acting responsibly?
3. Have your responsibilities ever felt like more than you could handle? What positive strategies helped you ease the pressure? Were there any strategies you considered, or actually tried, that were not good for you?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where peer pressure affected your ability to act responsibly? What happened, and what did you do?
5. What are the dangers of parties held with no adults present? Do you know of situations where such parties got out of hand? What happened?
6. If you were in Ben's position, would you go to the party or not? Share your reasons with the group.
7. Do you agree with the teen who says that your conscience is your regulator? Have you ever acted against your conscience? What happened, and how did it make you feel?
8. Think of someone you consider to be a responsible person. What behaviors make you think of that person as responsible?
9. What does the saying "Look before you leap" mean? Give an example when following that advice helped you avoid trouble.
10. Michael asks the group what they do to earn their parents' trust. Do you think your parents trust you? Why or why not? Have you ever lost their trust? How did you regain it?

## Activities

1. Form two teams to debate the pros and cons of the statement: *Colleges should regulate alcohol use in fraternities.* At the conclusion of the debate, decide as a group which team presented the winning argument. Based on situations that have been

covered in news media, discuss real-life incidents where alcohol abuse on campus had serious, or even fatal, consequences.

2. Imagine you are an expert on child development, writing a guidebook about parenting. Write a chapter advising parents on how to raise responsible children. Include suggestions on how parents should change their approach as children get older.

3. Role-play a discussion between a parent and a teen in a family that has a "no party" rule when the parents are away. The parent has returned home and found clear-cut evidence that there has been a party in the house. After the role-play, decide as a group whether this incident should affect the teen's privileges in the future.

4. In this program, Ben is faced with decisions that many teens have to make as well—decisions about alcohol use and sexual behavior. Invite a speaker from an organization such as MADD or SADD to address your group on responsible behavior for teens.

5. Interview your parents, grandparents, and/or other adults to compare the freedom and responsibilities their generation had with those of teens today. Share your findings with the group.



### **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.*

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