

10-PART VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

# *PeaceTalks*<sup>™</sup>



PROGRAM #1

## PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Distributed by:

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## ***PeaceTalks: Series Overview***

Violence is a choice, and each and every one of us can reduce violence and make our lives safer by choosing peace. Choosing peace means understanding that violence is not random, universal, or inevitable. We can prevent and reduce violence by choosing to avoid or deescalate conflicts and avoid risk factors for violence such as alcohol, drugs, guns, and gang membership. This is the underlying message of the 10-part *PeaceTalks* video series featuring humorist and youth counselor Michael Pritchard.

Filmed across America, in real schools with real students, each *PeaceTalks* video program turns its attention to one aspect of the spectrum of violence that young people face in their everyday lives: managing anger, resolving conflicts, dealing with bullies and troublemakers, the issue of respect, sexual harassment and dating pressures, racial conflicts, peer pressure, gangs, and triggers to violence such as drugs, alcohol and guns.

In these programs, Michael and the young people take a long and honest look at kids' lives today and how they are affected by the violence in our society. Michael uses his special talents of humor, warmth, empathy and understanding to help the teens discover for themselves the choices they have and the answers to living together peacefully. Together, they look at the basic changes teens need to make in their attitudes and beliefs, and the skills they must learn in order to step up to peace.

*PeaceTalks* offers a three step program for choosing peace which is the unifying theme for all ten programs. These steps are:

1. Predict Consequences
2. Cool Down
3. Walk Away

Throughout the videos, Michael encourages young people to have the maturity, confidence, and composure to walk away from insults and confrontations, and channel peer pressure into a positive force for peace in their schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

## **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 teenagers are the target audience, parents, teachers, school administrators, school support staff, counselors, social workers, youth workers, peer counseling trainers, and anyone else who has regular contact with and a commitment to young people would benefit from the video as well. This Leader's Guide is aimed at the classroom teacher, but it can be used by any group leader or parent who wants to get the most out of PREVENTING VIOLENCE.

As with the other videos in the *PeaceTalks* series, PREVENTING VIOLENCE is intended to be used as part of a learning experience that begins before viewing the program, and ends beyond the classroom walls. The discussion questions, activities, projects and events suggested in the guide are intended to focus and enhance this learning experience.

Before showing PREVENTING VIOLENCE to your students, the following steps would be useful preparation:

- Screen the video at least once, and note areas where you might want to stop the tape to probe an issue more fully.
- Read this guide to get a sense of how the video might be used, what discussion questions would work best with your students, and what follow-up activities or projects would be most appropriate and beneficial.
- 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 of this guide. Be sure to go over these questions in advance to make sure they are understood and that they are appropriate to your students. They can be used to spark discussion after the screening.

The teaching technique underlying the entire *PeaceTalks* series is peer education. 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 kids grapple with tough situations and model positive solutions and attitudes.

### **Preventing Violence: Objectives**

- To stimulate student discussion about violence
- To help students develop the ability to evaluate situations and predict consequences
- To enable students to recognize the role of personal responsibility in issues of personal safety
- To educate students about the choices they can make and the support available to help them stay safe
- To prevent violence by teaching young people how to handle their emotions and avoid dangerous situations

### **Preventing Violence: Synopsis**

This program paints a picture of teen violence today, identifying the types of violence young people face.

According to Michael Pritchard, teens can get into a fight about almost anything. Sometimes, all it takes is a few words. And no matter how petty or small the conflict may be, there's always the possibility it can grow into something bigger and more dangerous.

In every conflict, there are two paths. In one, we try to work things out and resolve the conflict peacefully. In the other, we turn to aggression and violence to get our way. Unfortunately, it seems that today, more and more teenagers are resorting to violence instead of working out differences peacefully.

Michael Pritchard asks a group of teens if they think there are a lot of arguments in the teen years and why. The teens say yes, that arguments turn into fights more often

because they have more stress and their emotions are more intense. The young people agree that things have gotten worse today as a result of the violence. When there's violence now, there are often guns involved and people can get killed.

Michael establishes that it is easy for young people to get weapons. If you have the money, you can find someone who will sell you a gun. This availability of guns in the hands of teens and children who don't understand the consequences has a strong, negative effect on our sense of personal safety.

"My mother always told me that your teenage years and your childhood are supposed to be footloose and worry-free ... but these days, you're too worried about, what should I wear, how am I going to look, and you're always worried about, oh, I might get hurt," shares one girl.

Michael asks how violence has changed the teenagers' lives.

"I watch my back more now. I worry about things," shares a boy.

Others share that you can't walk around freely because if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time you might get beaten up or worse. Classmates and friends sometimes carry weapons such as knives or guns and you never know what might cause them to turn on you.

One student recounts an experience of having a gun held on him, and others talk about their fears as they go about their lives. After a story about a teenager getting killed, one boy talks about the senselessness of young people getting shot for no reason. "All the dreams they had... they wanted to have families, they wanted to be grandparents and die of old age."

Another student shares a nightmare she has about her parents getting shot and not being able to save them. Michael acknowledges that the students have deep feelings and fears about violence.

The level of violence we experience in this country affects us all deeply and can sometimes feel overwhelming. It often seems that violence can strike anywhere. But while random violence does occur, it is rare. Most violence grows out of an escalation of a conflict between people who know each other, and is often the result of some dangerous activity. What this means is that there are skills we can learn and choices we can make that will reduce the potential for violence in our lives.

Michael asks the students what they would do in the following hypothetical situation: "A bunch of your best friends want to go to a club to hear a popular new group. The only problem is that there's often trouble when this group plays. At the group's last performance, a big fight broke out. The club is in kind of a tough section of town, but your whole crowd wants to go. In fact, some of them want to go because they want to see the trouble happen. But you really like this music group a lot. Do you go?"

The answers vary from, "You should go because you can't let someone else control what you do in your life," to "I think I would just wait for the tape to come out."

Michael then takes the hypothetical situation a step further asking one girl, "What if you go and there are some girls there who don't like you and start to hassle you and call you names?"

"They can call me whatever they want as long as they don't lay a hand on me," she answers at first.

"And what if one of them pushes you?"

"Well, I'm not going to stay pushed. I'm going to push back."

"You're going to take on six girls?" asks Michael.

The girl answers that sometimes you get so mad that you don't care about anything. "Are you in control anymore, when the anger is that bad?" Michael asks her. "Who's in control?"

"My anger is in control."

"And where can that anger lead you?"

"If you don't know how to control it, six feet under," answers one of the boys.

Michael moves his attention to another boy, asking him how he would respond to a hypothetical bully calling him a punk. The boy's initial reaction is that he would shove the bully if pushed too far. Michael asks what if the antagonist pulled out a gun in response to his shove. A gun would certainly make him change his mind, he admits. The boy concludes that his best response would be to just walk away.

Michael says that using your head in a tense situation is always a good idea, and thinking about what you'd do before something happens is even smarter. Predicting the consequences of our actions is a basic rule for reducing violence and making our lives safer.

The time to get control of a situation is before the confrontation gets heated. We need to be able to identify dangerous situations and avoid them when the risk is high. When we're involved in a confrontation, we can cool things down by controlling our anger and by looking for positive ways to resolve our differences.

This leads to a group discussion on prevention. Michael asks one of the girls what she could do before going to the club to stay out of trouble. Her answers emphasize the importance of self-control and thinking in advance about the consequences.

"Predict the consequences!" Michael tells the group. He asks how the teens can read for signs of potential violence and learn to respond in a controlled way.

Members of the group contribute solutions for "chilling out" and avoiding trouble. They agree that the best way to diffuse trouble is by walking away.

Michael poses the question, "Is it possible to walk away and keep your pride?" The group agrees that it is and points out that whoever is instigating the trouble seems foolish then, because when you walk away, you're in control.

Michael reaffirms the steps for choosing peace: "Predict the consequences, cool down, and walk away. These are three ways you can make your life safer... If we all take personal responsibility for the choices we make and we have the courage to choose peace, we will find ways to stop the violence."

## **Preventing Violence: Discussion Questions**

1. What are some common types of violence that occur in your school or neighborhood? In what ways have you seen or experienced violence in your life?
2. In this video, some of the students discuss violence-related fears or nightmares they've had. What fears do you or someone close to you have that relate to violence?
3. What are some common causes of conflict among teens? Why do many of these small conflicts escalate into fights or other kinds of violence? Who is responsible for preventing a conflict from escalating?
4. What steps can you take to evaluate a situation and determine if it has the potential to become violent or dangerous? How can you use this information to stay safe?
5. In this video, Michael Pritchard sets up a hypothetical situation about going to see a popular band at a local club. What would you do in that situation and why?
6. The video's three step program for choosing peace includes predicting consequences, cooling down, and walking away. Which of these steps would you find the easiest to do; which would be the most difficult for you?
7. Think of a recent conflict situation in which you were involved. What happened? What choices did you make? Did these choices give you the outcome you wanted? If not, what might you have done instead?
8. PREVENTING VIOLENCE examines the relationship between pride and the ability to walk away from a confrontation. Do you believe it is possible to walk away and keep your pride? If so, how?

## **Preventing Violence: Classroom Activities, Projects, and Events**

1. Assign students to small groups. Ask each group to create an imaginary situation which has the potential for erupting into violence and role play it for the class. After each skit, ask the audience to discuss possible outcomes for the situation.
2. Cooling down is the second step in the *PeaceTalks* program for choosing peace. Ask students to share some of the ways they cool down when they're in a conflict situation. Review anger and stress management techniques such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and meditation.
3. Assign a small group of students or make it a class project to research the violence prevention programs in your school or community. What programs exist? How long have they been in existence? What results have they had? How might they be improved? Create a report on these violence prevention efforts to keep in your school library as a reference for students and faculty.
4. Have an essay or poster contest in your school with a violence prevention theme. Schedule an assembly or other event to announce the winner or winners and bring attention to the subject.

5. On the blackboard, create a list of the positive ways we cope with anger. When the list seems fairly complete, transfer it to a large classroom poster which can be referred to when students become involved in a conflict during the school year.
6. Have students bring in newspaper articles about violence. Discuss ways these confrontations might have been avoided.
7. Invite professional speakers from your community to participate in a panel on youth violence and its prevention. Panel members might include a representative from the police department, a youth counselor, a mediation expert or someone who runs a peer mediation program, a teacher, someone who works in a local hospital emergency room, a parent or representative of your school's PTO, etc.

## **A Few Words About Michael Pritchard**

Michael is a humorist, actor, youth activist, former probation officer and PBS host who is known to audiences across the United States for his ability to help young people gain insight into themselves and the choices they make. He gained national attention when *The Power of Choice*, his popular PBS series for teens on values and choices, first aired in 1987. His fans have grown with the release of his two subsequent series, *You Can Choose!* and *Big Changes, Big Choices*. Mr. Pritchard serves on the boards of directors for Special Olympics, The California Association of Peer Programs, and the Chinese-American Educational Institute. He also acts as a consultant to the California Consortium on Child Abuse and the Department of Pediatrics at San Francisco General Hospital.



### ***PeaceTalks* Program Titles**

- Program #1 Preventing Violence
- Program #2 Resolving Conflicts
- Program #3 Managing Your Anger
- Program #4 Dealing with Bullies, Troublemakers and Dangerous Situations
- Program #5 Respecting Yourself and Others
- Program #6 Handling Dating Pressures and Harassment
- Program #7 Bridging Racial Divisions
- Program #8 Handling Peer Pressure and Gangs
- Program #9 Drugs, Alcohol and Guns: Triggers to Violence
- Program #10 Stepping Up to Peace

*Each program is approximately 30-minutes long.*

***PeaceTalks* was shot on location at:  
Pinole Valley High School, Pinole CA  
De Witt Clinton High School, Bronx NY  
Amos P. Godby High School, Tallahassee FL**

**M**aterial for *PeaceTalks* was developed with the help of students and staff at the following schools:

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Mission High School, San Francisco  
George Washington High School, San Francisco  
Albany High School, Albany CA  
Kennedy High School, Richmond CA  
San Rafael High School, San Rafael CA  
Tamalpais High School, Mill Valley CA**