

LEADER'S GUIDE



LIFE STEPS
with Michael Pritchard



Program #1

**The ABCs of
Emotional Intelligence**

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 *The ABCs of Emotional Intelligence*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *The ABCs of Emotional Intelligence* 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 *The ABCs of Emotional Intelligence* 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 7. 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 build a foundation for the development of social emotional learning
- To develop the critical skill of identifying internal and external **ASSETS**
- To achieve **BALANCE** by developing an appreciation of the emotional side of life and the ability to set personal priorities
- To develop positive values and **CHARACTER** that will lead to good choices

Synopsis

Onstage, Michael talks about the challenges of growing up. He draws an analogy to driving a car: If you don't want to end up on the side of the road, you have to know where you are going.

Pointing out that growing up is never easy, Michael asks the group how their way of looking at things has changed between middle school and high school. A boy talks about how his appearance is important to him now, although it didn't concern him when he was younger. Another teen responds that in elementary school, all she wanted was to be seventeen; now that she's seventeen, all she wants is to be three again. She describes the

pressures in her life: a job, seven classes, babysitting, a boyfriend, and extracurricular activities. Michael acknowledges that she has a lot to handle. Another girl shares that from kindergarten to sixth grade, you had a set social group, and your life was “strapped in,” but getting to junior high school was like having a seat belt taken off.

Michael asks about how boy-girl relationships have changed. One girl responds that in elementary school, guys are “icky.” In middle school, girls begin to think about guys, and by high school, boy-girl relationships become much more serious. A boy shares an amusing story about trying to impress a girl he liked.

Relationships with parents also change as teens mature; Michael asks whether it’s become more difficult for the teens to get along with their parents. A girl says it’s hard to talk to parents, who either don’t understand or don’t remember what it’s like to be a teenager. A boy explains that parents often don’t want to let you go, and Michael acknowledges that it’s comfortable for parents to still think of their kids as little.

“Are there a lot of pressures on you?” Michael asks. The group agrees that there’s a lot of pressure, including peer pressure—to do drugs, to smoke, to have sex—and academic pressure. One girl tells about a schedule that includes schoolwork, a job, and sports; often she can’t even begin her homework until 10:30. A boy describes pressures caused by living in a post-Columbine, post-9/11 world; kids today think about getting blown up or being shot—and on top of those concerns, they still have to deal with classes.

The group says that parents, teachers, and other adults don’t understand how pressured teens feel. One boy explains that parents have many years of experience dealing with stress, and may not realize that you need to learn what they already know about coping. Michael asks the group if they ever feel completely overwhelmed, and a girl responds that she often feels “overwhelmed with everything, very stressed out...gray hair stressed out.” Sometimes she cries for hours, and then talks to her mom, who cries with her.

Another girl has friends who are so pressured by coping with parents, schoolwork, and relationships that they don’t “feel like (they) can live.” Michael asks how she helps her friends; the girl responds that she tells her friends, “I am always here for you.” “She talks about a friend who tried to commit suicide; she told that friend “you have to do something.” Michael adds, “‘We’ need to do something...not just ‘you.’” He emphasizes the importance of helping each other and points out that when we ask for help, we bring resources into our lives.

Onstage, Michael urges the group to listen to their feelings, as well as their thoughts. He introduces the ABCs of emotional intelligence—assets, balance, and character—and explains the importance of recognizing, developing, and using your assets.

Assets

Michael leads into the first dramatized segment of the program, which features a teenager named Sonya. Sonya loves high school, but she does have pressure at school and her life is becoming even more complicated. She argues with her boyfriend constantly, and now her

good friend Cheryl is in crisis, because her parents may be getting a divorce. Sonya is very concerned about her friend; Cheryl is doing terribly at school and may be using drugs. Sonya wants Cheryl to get help, but Cheryl won't talk to anyone else. The overwhelming pressure is making it hard for Sonya to keep up at school.

The teens describe Sonya's feelings: "everything's going wrong," "stress," "confusion," "too much going on," "frustration." They agree that she needs to talk to an outside person. Michael questions who provides emotional support for the group; they say their friends are always there for them and can relate to their problems. One boy says people often feel alone, but should realize there are always people who are willing to help.

Michael asks the group if they ever spend so much time taking care of friends that they neglect themselves. One girl explains that she has internalized her parents' voice, which encourages her to do what is right for her. A boy describes how, in eighth grade, his mother died and he moved to a new school. He immediately made friends and got involved in school activities. Michael acknowledges that he must have been in pain; the boy says he dealt with it by giving himself positive, reassuring messages. Asked what advice he would give to parents and children, the boy suggests that parents must prepare their children for the future, and children must learn everything they can from their parents because they never know when the life skills their parents have taught them will come in handy.

What internal assets can Sonya call on to help herself? Various teens express their opinions about what Sonya should do: maintain perspective; deal with one problem at a time; remember to relax; and brainstorm her options.

Balance

In the next dramatization, Sonya poses her problem: How can she balance all the demands on her? Her boyfriend has bought tickets for a concert on an evening when Cheryl needs her; he is urging her not to let Cheryl's demands run her life. Sonya must decide how to balance her friend's needs, her relationship with her boyfriend, and her own need to study—or even just find time to relax.

The discussion begins with Michael asking the group if they've ever felt pulled in three directions at once. He invites them to share their thoughts, acknowledging that it tears you apart emotionally when you don't know how to help a friend who needs you. Some teens think Sonya should take time to relax and clear her mind. One girl says in Sonya's position, she would explain to Cheryl that they both need some space and encourage her to find additional sources of support.

Michael asks if it is hard for teens to balance all the demands placed on them. A boy offers that time management is important and agrees with Michael that it's not just a matter of managing time—there's an emotional impact too. Group members talk about the need to set aside time to help their friends and still attend to their schoolwork. A girl explains how she split her time between school and a friend whose parents were divorcing; Michael notes that she found a personal balance. One boy shares that he had to separate himself from his group and recognize that there is "a time when you can party and a time...to do what you have to do." A girl mentions the need to prioritize, while another girl shares that she tries to take time for herself. In response to Michael's question, "Why is it important to reward yourself?" a girl explains that relaxing helps her regain focus and brings her "back to where [she] needs to be."

Character

Onstage, Michael introduces the idea of character, the third facet of emotional intelligence. He defines character as knowing how to step up and do the right thing, even when it's a hard thing to do.

In the final dramatization, Sonya confides that Cheryl is using drugs to cope with her problems; she begs Sonya not to tell anyone.

Michael poses the difficult question of what Sonya should do. Some teens reply that she should talk to an adult—either a school counselor or her friend's parents. Michael wonders how easy it is to talk to adults in a situation like Sonya's. Opinions vary. One boy thinks that adults would only add more pressure and that it is possible to deal with the problem without "ratting." Another thinks that a loyal friend would tell. A third suggests that you can help on your own and still be loyal, and the first boy reiterates that you'd be breaking a friend's confidence by telling. Michael asks the group if they've ever helped a friend in a desperate situation. A girl shares that her friend is being abused by a boyfriend; she wants to help, but is concerned that her friend will be angry with her. Another girl responds that anger can only last so long, and friends will eventually come around. Michael urges the group to take the step of getting help for a friend.

What about life-threatening secrets? One boy shares his experience with a suicidal friend; he told his own mom, who then called the boy's parents. Michael supports his action, noting that immediately going to an adult was a good choice. A girl says she told about a friend who was suicidal and the friendship ended as a result. Again, Michael supports her decision, telling her that she made a good choice, even if it resulted in her losing a deep connection.

Michael sums up the ABCs of emotional intelligence by encouraging students to build communities that value the whole person—including caring and love, not just intellect and achievement.

Discussion Questions

1. What internal assets do you depend on to help you through difficult situations? Tell about a time when you had to rely on these assets.
2. Teens go through physical and emotional changes as they grow. What are the most significant changes you see in yourself over the past five years?
3. Why is it often hard for parents to accept their children's growth toward independence?
4. Do adults understand the stresses teens face today? How can you help to increase their awareness?
5. What are the three most serious pressures facing you now or in the future? How well do you cope with these pressures? What else might you do to help you cope?
6. In the program, Sonya has frequent arguments with her boyfriend and feels pressured by Cheryl's problems. What steps can she take to be less overwhelmed by these relationships?
7. Why is a personal support system important? How can you build a system for yourself?
8. Conflicting demands cause problems for many people. How do you set your priorities? How can you balance them to keep your life stable?
9. How strong would you say your character is? How does your character affect your relationship with your peers? With adults?
10. Have you ever had to decide whether or not to tell about a friend's problem behavior? What did you do, and why?

Activities

1. Form two teams to debate the question: *Is it more important to involve an adult or to protect the privacy of a friend who is using drugs?* After the debate, decide as a group which team presented the winning argument.
2. Interview your parent or another adult who plays an important role in your life. Ask about what issues were stressful when that person was your age, and about what issues that person thinks are stressful for today's teens. Write a summary of your interview and present it in class.
3. Write a story for young children illustrating the importance of maintaining balance in life. Share your story with a group of children.

4. Keep an hourly calendar for a typical school week, including weekends. At the end of the week, notice how much time you have taken for yourself. If your weekly schedule does not allow you to maintain a healthy balance by including enough time for yourself, develop a plan to reallocate your time.

5. As a group, discuss what internal assets are important for an emotionally healthy life. Agree on a list of the ten most important assets. Individually, write a brief paragraph about the degree to which you possess each of those assets. Where necessary, consider ways to strengthen your assets.



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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