

10-PART VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

PeaceTalks™



PROGRAM #8

HANDLING PEER PRESSURE AND GANGS

Distributed by:

 **THE BUREAU®
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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 the violence in our society affects them. 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 HANDLING PEER PRESSURE AND GANGS.

As with the other videos in the *PeaceTalks* series, HANDLING PEER PRESSURE AND GANGS 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 HANDLING PEER PRESSURE AND GANGS 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.

Handling Peer Pressure and Gangs: Objectives

- To define peer pressure and examine why young people are susceptible to it
- To look at why teens join gangs
- To consider some of the consequences of gang behavior
- To examine the qualities that make a true friend
- To differentiate between true friends and false friends
- To explore options available to address conflict situations with peers

Handling Peer Pressure and Gangs: Synopsis

Peer pressure can be a very powerful influence on teens and the decisions they make. According to Michael Pritchard, when he was a teenager, he had friends who helped him pull his life together so he could graduate high school and go on to college. Not everyone is so lucky. Many young people have friends who influence them to do things that are negative, dangerous, and unhealthy.

“What’s important,” begins Michael, “is to understand how peer pressure works, so we can remember that even when we are faced with great pressure, it is up to us what we decide to do.”

Michael asks a group of teens how peer pressure works. Answers include, “I gotta do it or I’m not going to be part of their clique ... When you’re a teenager, you’re not really you, you’re the crowd you’re in. Whoever you’re with, you act like them. You’re never yourself ...”

Another girl says that it’s hard to be a teenager because you’re torn between wanting to do the right thing and wanting to be down with the crowd.

"But it all comes down to the individual," says another student. "You have to ask yourself, what do I want to be doing in a few years? There's a lot of pressure but you have to stick to your values."

"Have any of you ever felt pressure to do something you didn't want to do?" Michael asks.

One boy tells about being pressured by friends to jump off a bridge into the water. It took his friends a few days of calling him names, but he eventually went along with them even though he knew it was very dangerous.

Another boy tells about being out with friends who were using drugs. They tried to get him to join them and he eventually did. Afterwards, he was angry at himself and thought less of himself for giving in to the pressure.

Unfortunately, young people are often led into dangerous situations by their friends. It can be as simple as having a drink or doing a stunt that is risky. It can also be something as serious as joining a gang. One of the sad ironies of gang membership is that kids often join for protection, but gang members are much more likely than others to become involved in violence.

Michael asks the group if there are gangs in school. "Do any of you know someone who's gotten caught up in a gang?" he asks.

One girl says that she almost became part of a gang because her boyfriend was in one and she was always around the gang members. Another girl says that she was in a gang during her freshman year and that it was very hard to get out.

"Sometimes," says one boy, "people join a gang for protection, maybe they're afraid of someone. When they see how the gang is, they may not want to be part of it anymore, but then it's too late. If you try to get out of the gang, they'll turn on you."

Several young people tell stories of friends who joined gangs, changed their minds, and tried to get out. Some were attacked and even killed as a result.

More and more kids, whether they are in gangs or not, feel they need to use their friendships as a defense against threats of violence. Loyalty to friends often means the willingness to put yourself at great risk to protect them. While loyalty is the foundation of any important relationship, something is wrong if we need to prove it by putting ourselves in grave danger. If friends are asking us to put ourselves in harm's way, it's time to think about the kinds of friendships we are making.

Michael asks the group how they would respond to this hypothetical situation: "You have a best friend who has been beaten up badly. The friend asks you to go with him to talk to the leader of the group who beat him up. If you go, it may not just be threats but turn to violence. Would you go?" The teens are divided, but most say they wouldn't go.

"But what if a friend says that if you don't go, you're really not a friend ... that everybody's going. How can you let him down?"

"Everybody's not going, because I'm not going," answers one boy. "I don't have to do

that to support him. I can support him by trying to make him feel better right here.”

Other teens say they would go. Whatever happens, even though the consequences could be bad, they’re prepared to make that choice.

“How can you still be a friend and not go?” Michael asks.

Suggestions include:

- Using “the system” because it’s there
- Telling the person’s parents
- Getting a restraining order for protection
- Getting your friend to take a responsible adult along
- Being emotionally supportive

There’s a saying that when trouble strikes, we learn who our true friends are. True friends do stick together and help each other with their problems. But using violence to solve a problem never works, and can only lead to more violence. There are always alternatives to violence and a true friend will help us find them. Finding true friends isn’t easy. It comes with time and experience. It comes from thinking about what to look for in a friend and the qualities of a true friend.

“Does a true friend pressure you into doing something you don’t want to do?” Michael asks.

“If they’re your true friends, they’ll respect any decision you make,” one boy answers. The young people share personal examples of friendships they’ve had.

Michael asks if you can be very good friends with someone who has different values. The group feels that it depends on the value.

“What if you’re about peace and they’re about violence?” asks one boy. “Those friends can easily get you into trouble because they may not see it as trouble.”

Several teens share examples of friends with different values who drew them into potentially dangerous activities.

Many young people in the group offer personal answers to Michael’s question, “What is a true friend?” They feel a true friend is someone who:

- You can trust
- Is always there for you
- Can come to you with their problems or you can go to them with yours
- Won’t tell you that violence is the answer or put you in the way of danger
- Will tell you the truth even if it will hurt you
- Makes your world a little brighter
- Encourages you and makes you want to do even better

“My grandmother always told me, ‘Show me your friends and I’ll tell you who you are,’” shares one girl.

Michael concludes that encouragement, support and caring are the hallmarks of true

friendship. When we are a true friend, we help to make peer pressure a positive force which will allow us to be better, kinder and more peaceful people.

Handling Peer Pressure and Gangs: Discussion Questions

1. One of the boys in the video shares a story about friends pressuring him to jump off a bridge into the water. Why do some teens feel the need to participate in dangerous behaviors? What are some interesting or exciting activities you enjoy that don't put you at risk?
2. A student shares how he gave in to peer pressure by using drugs even though it was against his better judgment. Why do you think he did this? How did he feel about himself afterwards? Have you ever given in to pressure from peers to do something you didn't want to do? What happened? How did you feel afterwards?
3. The students in the video confirm that there are gangs at school. Why do you think young people join gangs? What are some ways young people can find a more positive sense of community?
4. Students in this video talk about the difficulty gang members have if they try to separate themselves from their gang. What can you do if a friend of yours is in a gang or considering joining a gang?
5. Michael Pritchard offers a hypothetical situation where a friend has been beaten up and asks for your help in confronting the attackers. What would you do in this situation and why? What are some possible consequences of your decision? How can you be a friend without putting yourself in danger?
6. The phrase "true friend" is used several times in this video. How would you define true friendship? Do you believe that you need to have the same values as your friends? Why or why not?
7. One girl quotes her grandmother, "Show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are." What do you think she means by that?

Handling Peer Pressure and Gangs: Classroom Activities, Projects, and Events

1. Ask students to write a report identifying and examining different types of groups throughout history such as tribes, fraternal organizations, etc. What makes groups like these develop and survive? What benefits do they offer members?
2. Divide the students into groups and assign each group to view a movie about gang behavior, such as *West Side Story*, *Oliver*, etc. Ask each group to write a report which includes a brief description of the story, the reasons members joined the gang, how gang involvement affected the characters' lives, etc. When completed, ask each group to present their report to the class. This can be used as a vehicle to compare and contrast the appeal of gangs and the consequences of gang membership.
3. Write the phrase "peer pressure" on the board and ask students for a definition. Brainstorm a list of positive and negative ways we are influenced by peer pressure.

Discuss the human needs which cause us to respond to peer pressure.

4. Ask students to write a wish list describing their ideal friend. Then ask each student to write a personal essay on one of these topics: How Good a Friend Am I, The Best Friend I Ever Had, or My Ideal Friend.

5. Create several role plays showing examples of peer pressure. Divide the students into small groups. Have each group select a role play which they will act out for the rest of the class. Use the role plays to open group discussion on options young people have to respond to negative pressure from peers.

6. Work with students to develop a gang-prevention action strategy for your school. Prepare an evaluation of the gang situation in your school, what prevention programs exist, and how successful they are. Include in your report ideas for prevention and education. Present the report to the administration.

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.