

10-PART VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

# *PeaceTalks*™



**PROGRAM #9**

## **DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND GUNS: TRIGGERS TO 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 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 DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND GUNS: TRIGGERS TO VIOLENCE.

As with the other videos in the *PeaceTalks* series, DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND GUNS: TRIGGERS TO 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 DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND GUNS: TRIGGERS TO 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 pages 5 and 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.

### **Drugs, Alcohol and Guns: Triggers to Violence: Objectives**

- To consider the role of peer pressure in teen use of alcohol and other drugs
- To understand how alcohol, drugs and guns act as triggers to violence
- To look at the reasons why teens put themselves at risk for violence
- To teach students how to recognize warning signs in order to avoid dangerous situations
- To emphasize the importance of personal choice and responsibility in relation to violence

### **Drugs, Alcohol and Guns: Triggers to Violence: Synopsis**

The teen years are very emotional times, full of conflicts and the potential for violence. And when you mix teenagers, drugs, alcohol, and guns, you're creating a very dangerous situation.

Michael asks a group of teens if a lot of young people today use drugs and alcohol and why. The kids answer yes, that most kids do, basically because of peer pressure. They say that when you go to a party, you might only find a few kids who aren't drinking. At parties, people pass beer and weed around and everyone is expected to take some.

The teens say that it is easy to get drugs and it is mostly teenagers who sell them. One girl says that the drugs are sold in small packages that cost only a few dollars to make it easy for little kids to buy. Everyone seems to know where they could get drugs if they wanted them.

The students share stories about peers who sell drugs and carry guns to protect themselves. Some have even been shot and killed as a result.

Although these teenagers agree that there are more guns in the big cities than in the

suburbs, guns are now a possibility everywhere and anywhere.

Michael asks if having a gun earns its owner respect or status. A gun makes someone feel “bigger,” the kids say.

The young people share stories about going to house parties where there are guns. Often, one person gets mad at another about something small or stupid. Then the guns come out and everyone needs to run for safety.

“When you go to parties, do you need to worry about that kind of thing?” Michael asks one group. “You do now,” answers a boy. “And it can be anybody, because if they’re drinking ... it can even be your best friend.”

“Does this sound like a good combination,” Michael asks, “drugs, alcohol, and weapons ... in the teen years?”

One boy says, “No, most teenagers our age lose their cool too quick and don’t make the right judgments.”

Everyone acknowledges that alcohol and drugs make us change our emotions quickly. The teenagers say they’ve seen that too many times to count, where things are one way one moment and, in a flash, someone has lost their temper or totally changed. They tell stories about best friends under the influence of alcohol who get into a physical fight as a result, or teens drinking and fooling around with guns, and someone getting shot.

When you use alcohol or drugs and go someplace where there’s a good chance someone will be carrying a gun, you’re putting yourself at extreme risk.

One girl shares a story about the last house party she attended. It was by invitation only and everyone was supposedly checked for weapons when they came in the door. But in the middle of the dance floor, two boys bumped into each other and a fight started. Guns were pulled and shots were fired. Two people got shot in the melee, although not fatally.

“What did you learn from that experience?” Michael asks.

“To stay in the house ... no more drinking ... no more smoking ... watch TV ... go to the movies ... get a job,” shares the girl, shaken by her experience.

“Why do you go to these parties?” Michael addresses the entire group.

Even though some youths share that, “You don’t know what’s going to happen ... There isn’t shooting all the time or every night,” and “You try not to mess with anyone,” there’s agreement that there are serious consequences to attending parties where drugs, alcohol and guns might mix.

Another girl says that you hear there’s a party and even though you know there will be alcohol, drugs, and maybe guns, you’ll go. Once tempers start rising, it’s time to leave.

“You can always get out in time?” asks Michael.

The kids agree that not everyone does get out in time. “It’s a gamble, but you’ve got

to gamble. There's danger everywhere, in the mall, in the street," says one teen.

"You plan your escape route before you go in," shares a girl. Her friend says that if she has to plan an escape route to go to a party, she isn't going.

Michael tries to get the teens to look at the potential danger in what they are talking about doing.

In an emotional plea, one girl asks viewers to wake up to what is happening. She wants others to see what might happen and change what they are doing before they have to go through the loss and grief that she has experienced.

Michael finally asks the group what they might say to other young people who watch this video.

"Just think what you're doing before you do it. Look at the consequences of what you're doing. Don't do things like getting drunk and hanging outside or going to a party, or drinking and driving. Drugs, alcohol and parties aren't worth your life."

Even though you can't control everything in life, you do have control over whether or not you go to parties where there are drugs or alcohol and guns, Michael concludes. He encourages young people to hear this wake-up call and choose safer ways to have fun.

## **Drugs, Alcohol and Guns: Triggers to Violence: Discussion Questions**

1. In this video, students talk about peer pressure. Have you ever experienced peer pressure in regard to alcohol or drugs? Why do you feel teenagers are especially susceptible to peer pressure?
2. The kids in the video claim that today drugs and guns are a possibility anywhere. How can we use peer pressure to guide our classmates away from such dangers?
3. One girl in the video shares a story about two friends who got into a fight over a beer. Has alcohol or drugs ever affected a friendship of yours or one that you know about? What happened?
4. Michael says that some kids believe a weapon will bring them respect or status. Do you think that is true? Why?
5. Michael emphasizes that teens, drugs, alcohol and guns are a bad combination. What happens to us when we are under the influence of alcohol and other drugs? Why are guns such a dangerous addition to the mix? Do you believe teens are more likely to lose their cool than adults? Why or why not?
6. The students in this video seem to feel that going to parties where these triggers for violence are present is just a fact of life. Do you agree? What are some other options available to you?
7. One girl talks about an experience where shots rang out at a party and a panicked crowd was stuck inside a garage trying to escape. What could young people do to prevent getting caught in a similar situation?

8. Michael mentions danger signs that let you know trouble is brewing. What are they? What should you do when you sense trouble? Do you think being at a party is worth the possibility of getting hurt, shot, or worse? Why?

9. What are some things teenagers can do to prevent violence? What can we do as a class? As a community?

### **Drugs, Alcohol and Guns: Triggers to Violence: Classroom Activities, Projects, and Events**

1. In cooperation with your school's art department, coordinate an art exhibit fundraiser in support of a local organization working to prevent violence in your community. Establish a violence prevention theme and schedule a date when the entries will be displayed in a well-traveled area of the school. Invite community leaders, a representative from your school, and local newspapers to draw attention to this important topic.

2. Invite a guest speaker from Alcoholics Anonymous or another local prevention agency to speak with your class. Ask the speaker to discuss the impact of drugs and alcohol on behavior and how these act as triggers to violence.

3. Hold a classroom debate on the issue of whether or not young people should attend parties or other social events if they know that alcohol and drugs, gang members, or guns will be present. Assign or ask for volunteers to represent each position. Instruct the participants about any classroom rules you wish to establish for your debate, such as how much time each side will get, who will go first, and so on. Invite the remaining students to view the debate and vote for the winning team.

4. Ask students to create role plays concerning the loss of judgment or control under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and the potential risks. After performing the role plays for the class, direct a group discussion to come up with prevention ideas to help keep students safe.

5. Discuss with students the elements of a good (and safe!) party. Have the class work together to create a small guidebook on throwing terrific parties that are drug-, alcohol-, and weapon-free. For instance, include a list of 25 party themes, write a 7-step program for keeping parties safe, and create a catchy title for the booklet. Try to involve everyone in the class and have fun with the project so that safe social events become an important focus for teens.

## **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.