

LEADER'S GUIDE



**LIFE STEPS**  
with Michael Pritchard



**Program #4**

**Bouncing Back**

## 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 *Bouncing Back*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *Bouncing Back* 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 *Bouncing Back* 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 pages 5 and 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 recognize common sources of disappointment and loss
- To explore the emotions that accompany disappointment and loss
- To become more aware of the signs of depression
- To identify a network for support during crisis periods
- To increase resiliency through the acquisition of positive coping skills for dealing with disappointment, loss, and depression

## **Synopsis**

Onstage, Michael opens with a story about his relatives in Ireland getting through hard times, noting that it helps to listen to others and learn what they've done to make it through. He asks the group what resiliency is. Their answers include persisting, bouncing back, standing strong, and being adaptable. In response to Michael's question about whether it is hard to be resilient, one girl explains that teens are trying to learn who they are and are often hard on themselves when they don't think they've done something well.

Michael next asks about everyday disappointments teens experience. The group gives examples that include relationships, grades, and sports. One boy shares his feeling of

being "torn up" when he didn't make a varsity team. A girl explains how hurt and disappointed she was when she didn't get the grades she wanted in a course. Michael asks a boy how he felt when his friends told others things he had told them in confidence, and he responds, "Betrayed...big time."

Next, Michael asks about things we lose that are hard for us. A girl shares that she lost contact with a friend when she moved, but then met a new friend. By taking the risk of reaching out to someone new, she learned that she can pull herself out of difficult times.

Several teens share personal stories about resiliency. In a particularly emotional segment, a girl describes how she bounced back from depression after multiple suicide attempts. Michael asks what she's learned; her response is that she now knows she has friends who can help and that people should never be scared to let others know if they need help. A boy tells of his father's death and says he's learned that everyone has hard times. Expressing his sympathy, Michael agrees that everyone does have hard times and it's important to find the strength to get past these times.

After an onstage story that illustrates the importance of taking action to improve your situation, Michael introduces the first dramatization. Kayla is a teenager whose life revolves around playing soccer. After a serious car accident, she learns that she may never be able to play again.

Michael asks the teens what Kayla feels; they suggest sadness, anger, frustration, disbelief, and hopelessness. One girl thinks Kayla is having an identity crisis because she's based her life around playing soccer; another girl understands Kayla's reaction because sports are central to her own life. A third girl tells about an ankle injury that required surgery. She describes her disappointment over missing her senior season and losing friends as a result.

Michael asks what she learned from this experience. She replies that she learned not to be so hard on herself, because she couldn't have prevented the injury. With help from her dad and friends who pointed out other ways she could enjoy herself, she came to understand that basketball was not her entire life.

In the second dramatized segment, Kayla has been hospitalized for three weeks and is showing signs of depression. Michael asks what these signs are. In response, group members note that she's shutting people out, not eating, and not focusing. He asks what the impact of her depression will be on her recovery. A girl thinks that focusing on what she can't do will slow down Kayla's recovery, and another girl agrees that Kayla's focus should be on getting better, not on the negative aspects of her situation.

Teens share their personal experiences with depression. One girl tells about a time when she was depressed and her friend, recognizing the signs of her depression, brought it to her attention. Another, whose father died, felt unable to talk about her feelings until she finally connected with her mother. A boy describes depression

as a "glass globe," which encapsulates people and keeps them from reaching out. Michael asks why we don't let others see our pain. A boy who didn't want people to know about his feelings when his father died explains that he wanted to seem above things. He agrees when Michael says, "We never are, are we?" Asked what he's learned, the boy says that his experience taught him to let people in.

Another boy says that one good thing that can come out of depression is the realization that people care about you.

In the last dramatization, Kayla is starting to feel better. She's spoken to her coach, who understands the intensity of her feelings about soccer. She's reconnected with her friends, and is looking toward the future. Michael asks what's happened, and teens respond that she's reaching out to others and beginning to make plans. Plans are good, one boy says, because they keep you from giving up.

Michael asks if anyone has ever been in a situation where a friend helped them through a difficult time. One girl shares that in the past, she's intentionally cut herself. Her boyfriend was finally able to help her by asking how she would feel if he did the same thing, which made her see the situation from his perspective. Another girl explains how great she felt being able to help a friend who faced problems similar to ones she had faced.

A boy tells how a girl in the group and he had each lost a parent. He had been unable to talk about his loss until the past year, when they had become a support system for each other. Michael notes that a "terrible disappointment" had been turned into a bond. Another boy summarizes his experience in the group by expressing how inspired he is by the power of his friends to bounce back.

Michael concludes the program by pointing out that we all have the ability to bounce back, supported by our friends, our family, and our belief in ourselves.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Teens in this program define resiliency as the ability to be persistent and bounce back from difficult situations. Think of someone you know who is resilient. What situations have they faced, and how did they show their resiliency?
2. Why is it important to be resilient?
3. We've all faced disappointment at one time or another in our lives. Tell about a disappointment you've experienced. How did you react to it?
4. Letting go of past disappointments can be very hard. Are there any disappointments you are holding onto? How does holding onto them affect you now? How would your life be different if you could let go of these disappointments?
5. What are some good ways to deal with disappointment? Give an example of a time

when you dealt with a disappointment well.

6. Have you ever had a serious loss that affected you deeply? How did you deal with it? What did you learn about yourself from the experience?
7. After her accident, Kayla's coach helps her by pointing out that, even if she can no longer play soccer, she can still coach. Has anyone ever helped you regain your perspective after a serious setback? Why is it sometimes easier for other people to help you than for you to help yourself?
8. People sometimes react to major disappointments and problems by becoming depressed. What are three signs of significant depression?
9. How can you help a friend who shows signs of depression?
10. What are the benefits of bouncing back well?

### **Activities**

1. Learn about a person who has had to cope with adversity, such as actor Christopher Reeve, who was paralyzed in an accident or Rosa Parks, who was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Write a brief essay describing how that person used negative circumstances as a springboard to positive action. Share what you have learned by submitting your essay to your school or community newspaper.
2. Organize a school-wide poster contest on the theme *Bouncing Back*. Display the winning poster(s) in a public area of your school.
3. In the program, Kayla is able to focus on getting better with encouragement from her coach. As a group, decide on an imaginary situation where an adult is talking to a teen who has had a serious disappointment. Have three pairs of students role-play the conversation. Then discuss which messages of encouragement were the most helpful, and why.
4. In small groups, brainstorm and develop a list of ten ways that teens can help themselves bounce back from adversity. Have each group present their list to the class, and together, decide on the five best techniques.
5. Keep a journal for one week, describing situations you encountered where being resilient either did help you, or might have helped you. Write down your reactions to each situation. If you were not satisfied with how you reacted, write about what you could have done differently.



### **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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