# THE POWER OF CHOICE

### **TEACHING GUIDE**

For Use With Program 4

## COPING WITH PRESSURES

**Discussion Questions** 

**Group Activities** 

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**Program Background** 

Licensing Agreement including Public Performance Rights

The teen years have always been a time of turmoil, but adolescence seems decidedly more pressured now than ever before. One girl participating in THE POWER OF CHOICE describes a classmate's insistence on keeping all his burdens to himself as "building up scar tissue on your heart."

In this program, comedian/teen counselor Mike Pritchard and students from St. Louis; New York City; Cleveland; Detroit; Columbia, South Carolina; and Gainesville, Florida, talk about the pressures they face, from academic competition to peer acceptance and parental expectations. In small group dialogues, they grapple with ways of keeping pressures in perspective and of learning to handle those pressures in ways that serve their best interests.

## EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

To stimulate young people to think critically about the kinds of pressures they live with.

**To encourage and empower** them to choose for themselves how they will respond to those pressures.

To explore the differences between legitimate and illegitimate pressures.

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#### HOW TO USE THIS VIDEO

Use in classrooms, libraries, youth service agencies, youth groups, or show it to your kids at home. Ideal for parents, too.

THE POWER OF CHOICE® is an entertaining and thought provoking video series designed to help you empower your young people to make good choices in their lives. You can greatly enhance the effectiveness of this video by following it up with group discussions, writing assignments, and learning activities. This guide is intended to help you in your efforts.

We recommend that, before showing the video, you ask a few questions to start the kids thinking about the issues treated in the program. You'll find some useful questions on page 6. Also, you should expect that your students will have a lot to talk about after viewing the video, so it's a good idea to allow ample time.

While this discussion guide may appear to be written for classroom teachers, any group leader or parent will find it a useful tool for getting the most out of this video program.

## PROGRAM CONTENT

COMEDY: Young people often feel as though everyone else knows something they don't. "I'm the only one that doesn't get it!"

INTRODUCTION: We can't choose to live without pressures, but we can choose how we respond to pressure.

DISCUSSION: Teenagers talk about some of the pressures they are under. A boy remarks that there are many different kinds of pressure, and they're all very real. But there are ways to cope with every one of them.

Another boy tells the story of being unhappy at a military school he was attending just because his dad went there. When he finally expressed his unhappiness to his father, the trouble was resolved and he changed schools.

A good student tells of the time he got straight A's but his parents failure to praise him made him question why he was putting himself under so much pressure. He realized that he needs to do things for himself.

A girl who got an F says that she felt so ashamed that she made herself her own prisoner. Never before had something gone wrong for which she could blame no one else, and she realized that it was up to her to change things for the better.

PRITCHARD asks, what's a good pressure? A boy gives an example of repeatedly revising a poem he wrote because a teacher insisted he could improve it. The final result exceeded his own expectations.

HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION (to girls): You and two other girls are invited to a party where there are twelve boys who are drinking and taking drugs. What do you do? One girl says that she would refuse to go, but suggest better alternatives. Another

girl admits that two years ago she would have gone because she didn't have much self respect.

A boy tells of the time he joined a gang to earn a reputation as a fighter so he wouldn't be pushed around when he entered high school.

A girl asserts that peer pressure can be positive or negative. Instead of bowing to negative peer pressure, she says, we should generate positive peer pressure.

PRITCHARD says that when we're under pressure it can be difficult to keep things in perspective. At times it may be helpful to find someone who can help by just listening.

DISCUSSION over whether it's better to cope with our problems on our own, or to reach out for help. Some of the kids contend that it makes us stronger to do it by ourselves. Others argue that it's better to reach out, otherwise it can build "scar tissue on your heart."

DISCUSSION of role models. A girl admires her twin sister for coping well with pressure, another admires her mother for being successful both with career and family, and a boy is inspired by a professional basketball player who, under pressure, "stuffs it in the hoop!"

#### DISCUSSION OUESTIONS

#### Questions to ask before showing the video.

- What pressures are you under? Give both a negative and a positive pressure.
- 2. How do you distinguish between good and bad pressures?

#### Questions to ask after showing the video.

- 3. Describe a time when the pressure you felt to excel at something got in the way of appreciating or enjoying it.
- 4. Can you think of a time when you felt like you were getting a lot of pressure from others, but it turned out that you were actually putting that pressure on yourself?
- 4. What's the worst way you've ever dealt with a pressure? How could you have handled it better?
- 5. What's the best way you've ever dealt with a pressure? What did you learn from that?
- Is there a relationship between our self-esteem and the way we respond to pressures? Describe a time when high self-esteem helped you overcome a pressure you felt was wrong.
- 7. Do you ever put unfair pressure on yourself because you can't say "no?" How could you change that?
- 8. In what ways do you think pressure might affect the way you make choices?
- 9. Have you ever lost perspective because you were under heavy pressure? How did that affect the choices you made?
- 10. Some of the kids in the video said they thought it made them stronger to cope with their problems on their own. Others argued it was better to reach out for help, or at least talk to someone. Which do you agree with, and why? Do you have someone you can go to when you are feeling under pressure?

- 11. What is peer pressure? Is it more influential for teenagers than for other age groups? If so, why?
- 12. How do you respond to peer pressure? Would you give an example?
- 13. One girl in the video talked about creating positive peer pressure. Can you think of some positive peer pressures you've experienced? Describe them.
- 14. Do you know anyone who isn't influenced by peer pressure? Why is that person not influenced by it?
- 15. Do you have a role model who copes well with pressure? Describe that person.

#### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

- List the pressures you are under and rank them from smallest to largest. Explain why you have these pressures at this time. Indicate if any are related to each other: for example, family pressures or pressures over grades you feel both at school and at home. Then write out a strategy for coping with the largest pressure and the smallest pressure.
- 2. Write about some of your qualities that help you cope with negative pressures in your life. Name some of your weaknesses that allow these kinds of pressures to get to you. How could you compensate for these weaknesses at times when the pressure is on?
- 3. Write about one or two positive pressures in your life. What's good about them? How do you respond to them? In what ways do they serve your best interests?
- 4. Write a short dramatic scene in which someone is under peer pressure to go driving with a group of drunken friends. Show how this person can get out of the situation without alienating his or her friends.
- 5. What kinds of pressures do you feel you are under just because of your age? Write an essay describing this pressure, and explain why you don't expect this pressure to be part of your life in the future.

#### GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Role Playing. Do a scene in which a person who is under negative peer pressure puts positive peer pressure on the others, winning over at least some of the people in the group. Then discuss whether this strategy was believable. If not, suggest some alternative sure-fire strategies for overcoming negative peer pressure.
- 2. Divide into positive peer pressure groups. Discuss how cliques, gangs, or other groups you know are putting negative peer pressure on you. Work out strategies for putting positive peer pressure on them.
- 3. Write two headings on a blackboard or on large piece of paper: "Legitimate Pressures" and "Illegitimate Pressures." Take turns listing things under these headings. Then discuss what's good about some pressures, and make suggestions for how people can overcome the negative effects of illegitimate pressures.

#### ABOUT MICHAEL PRITCHARD

Michael Pritchard is a juvenile probation officer turned comedian/youth counselor/public speaker. After his college graduation in 1973, Mike went to work for the St. Louis Police Department and then relocated to San Francisco's juvenile hall. In his years of working with young offenders, Mike discovered that his penchant for humor served as a powerful counseling tool, enabling him to break down communication barriers and help a lot of troubled kids turn their lives around. As Mike is fond of saying, "the shortest distance between any two people is a good laugh." Mike's unusual combination of talents gained him recognition as California's "Probation Officer of the Year" the same year that he won the San Francisco International Comedy Competition.

Whether he's being funny or serious, Mike's big love is talking with kids about the choices they make in their lives. He teaches young people that they have the power of choice, that they are responsible for the choices they make, and that they owe it to themselves to choose the best.



"The shortest distance between two people is a good laugh."

#### HOW THIS PROGRAM WAS PRODUCED

THE POWER OF CHOICE began as a one-hour TV special for PBS. Our aim was to create a show for teenagers that would be both entertaining and educationally useful. With this goal in mind, we took San Francisco comedian/ youth counselor Michael Pritchard and a TV production crew to four high schools across the U.S. to talk with kids about how they make choices in life.

At each school Mike entertained a student assembly with comedy about growing up. Then, he led small groups of students in highly productive problem-solving sessions. These groups were selected by the schools before we arrived (we asked for a representative mix of students). The kids we got were amazingly candid. They revealed deeply personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and shared useful solutions and insights. We captured all this on videotape using three cameras, and edited the material down to a one-hour show.

When the program aired on PBS, educators and broadcasters expressed enthusiasm for having it made into a series. So, we immediately began work on eleven new half-hour programs exploring a whole range of issues important to teens. To develop the content, we spent one full semester at schools around the San Francisco Bay Area meeting with students and teachers. Following that, we took Mike and our production crew on a nine-week, 21 state tour of high schools throughout the U.S. (see list).

We returned with more than 100 hours of material, and spent five months editing the eleven new programs. The series was televised on PBS and is used in classrooms, libraries, and youth groups throughout the U.S. and other countries.

#### **LOCATIONS**

THE POWER OF CHOICE was shot at the following high schools:

San Francisco, Calif.

Lowell H.S.

Denver, Colorado

West H.S.

Biloxi, Mississippi

Biloxi H.S.

**New York City** 

Murry Bergtraum H.S. for Business Careers

San Rafael, Calif.

San Rafael H.S

Los Angeles, Calif.

Venice H.S.

Phoenix, Arizona

Washington H.S.

**Albuquerque, N.M.** West Mesa H.S.

Dallas, Texas

Woodrow Wilson H.S.

Wichita, Kansas

Southeast H.S.

St. Louis, Missouri

St. Thomas Aquinas/ Mercy

H.S.

Nashville, Tennessee

McGavock H.S.

Atlanta, Georgia

Northside H.S.

Gainesville, Florida

Buchholz H.S.

Columbia, S.C

Dreher H.S.

Washington, D.C.

School Without Walls

Philadelphia, Penn.

George Washington Carver

H.S. for Engineering &

Science

Wayne, New Jersey

Wayne Hills Senior H.S.

Brooklyn, New York

Edward. R. Murrow H.S.

Boston, Mass.

Newton North H.S.

Cleveland, Ohio

Glenville H.S.

Detroit, Michigan

Cass Technical H.S.

South Bend, Indiana

La Salle H.S.

Chicago, Illinois

Senn Metro Academy

Madison, Wisconsin

West H.S.

Bloomington, Minn.

Thomas Jefferson H.S.

Fremont, Calif.

Irvington H.S.

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## THE POWER OF CHOICE

### **Program Titles**

- 1: THE POWER OF CHOICE
- 2: ACTING ON YOUR VALUES
- 3: SELF-ESTEEM
- 4: COPING WITH PRESSURES
- 5: DRUGS & ALCOHOL Part 1
- 6: DRUGS & ALCOHOL Part 2
- 7: DRINKING & DRIVING
- 8: SEX
- 9: FRIENDSHIP & DATING
- 10: DEPRESSION & SUICIDE
- 11: COMMUNICATING with PARENTS
- 12: RAISING YOUR PARENTS