



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Choices That Adolescents Make

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.05.04
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This unit will explore the many pressures and choices that our adolescents are faced with and make on a daily bases. Many of them (through no reason or fault of their own) are forced into a position of being the head of the household. This role of head of the household may require them to make proper decisions concerning the safety and well-being of others. Many afternoons and evenings children come home to an empty home; nothing is prepared for dinner and they must care for a younger sibling. As these children approach adolescence this leadership role is expected of them by parents, many of whom are single and some that also work.

This role as head of the household may require adolescents to leave school at an early age and put their personal goals on hold to help the current family unit survive. A need for pocket money along with idle time could now set an adolescent up for a difficult road ahead.

If an adolescent has been raised in a strong secure family with good adult role models, then his chances for surviving a crisis-free adolescence is somewhat better than it is for someone from a less secure background. If there is a breakdown in communication in the home or, if there is a lack of a good role model, where does an adolescent obtain all the vital and pertinent knowledge needed to be successful in life? The majority of the time it is from the peer group. Adolescents seem to be most comfortable around their peers. Without proper guidance this group now turns to the streets. Once on the streets they can get caught up in a vicious cycle usually beginning with cigarette smoking, drugs, alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, health issues and if they are not lucky even death.

So it is very important to help adolescents make positive choices. One way to do this is by supplying them with accurate information about the consequences of negative behavior. This unit will look at adolescent choices from four different directions. The first section will explore the adolescent thinking process and review such things as egocentric thought and its application to adolescents. The second section will examine substance abuse, viewing it through the eyes of adults. This section will include the so-called stages of substance abuse. Section three will look at the problem of substance abuse through the eyes of adolescents. In this section will be some of the factual information that has been written on adolescent substance abuse. Section four will analyze the risks involved in substance abuse and evaluate some of the prevention measures already in place in various communities.

This unit will be targeted for students in the middle school (grades 5-9) who are taking life skills classes (at the

time of presentation) or have already completed them. The material contained can also be used in any class that deals with social development and/or problem solving. The unit has included a teacher's reading list, student reading list, a list of related filmstrips and movies, in addition to a complete reference and bibliography, all annotated. This is an enjoyable unit.

(Recommended for Science, Social Problem Solving, Health/P.E., grades 6-8)

Key Words

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