

LEADER'S GUIDE

LIFE **STEPS**
with Michael Pritchard



Program #2

**Knowing
Who You Are**

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 *Knowing Who You Are*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *Knowing Who You Are* 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 *Knowing Who You Are* 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 page 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 identify personal emotions and sort out complicated, conflicting feelings
- To learn techniques for coping with difficult emotions
- To use self-monitoring as a method of understanding behavior and gaining personal insight
- To develop willingness to take positive risks
- To make ethical decisions in real-life situations

Synopsis

Onstage, Michael introduces the program with a story about being real, both in our emotions and about who we are.

Beginning the discussion, Michael asks the group what emotions they would feel in different situations: riding on a wild roller coaster, waiting for a friend who is late, hearing a funny joke, and having their father tell a bad joke in front of their friends. They describe emotions they might have in each situation.

Next, Michael asks if the teen years are an emotional time. Teens in the audience agree that they are, for a variety of reasons. One boy mentions relationships with parents, teachers, and the opposite sex. A girl notes the pressures of college, school,

work, family, and friends. Another girl mentions that when kids are younger, everyone tells them what to do, but in high school, they have to make their own decisions.

Michael asks about times when the teens have felt "off," without really knowing why. A girl shares that she feels that way most of the time. A boy whose parents are divorced talks about feeling angry and supportive toward both parents at the same time. Another boy describes feeling generally upset when his family moved and he had to start over again in a new school. A girl tells about questioning the point of living and having thoughts of suicide. In response to Michael's question about how she handles these confusing feelings, she says that it's important to look at priorities and see opportunities to do things. He emphasizes the need to have spoken to someone when she had suicidal feelings in the past.

The next question is about who teens talk to when they are feeling overwhelmed. Some choose parents, professionals, siblings, or other adults. One girl says just having a friend listen helps her clarify things for herself. The group describes other ways they clarify their feelings: one teen plays the piano, one writes poetry, and one writes in her journal.

Onstage, Michael shares an anecdote about learning who you are by taking a risk. He introduces the first dramatized segment about Ben. New at school and unsure about how to fit in, Ben has difficult choices to make. His mother encourages him to take some risks, and he decides to try out for the glee club—he has always wanted to develop his singing ability.

The teens describe Ben as scared, confused, insecure, excited, and overwhelmed. Michael asks if any of them have ever been the new kid at school. One girl tells about trying so hard to fit in, and finding that the harder she tried, the worse her situation got. Finally, she decided to just be herself. Another girl stayed in the classroom at lunchtime, so she wouldn't have to be alone. By starting to talk to people, she learned to open up, rather than worrying so much.

Michael asks what Ben should do. One girl thinks he should try out for the glee club; even if he has no talent, she thinks it is better to try than to regret not having tried. Michael next asks if anyone has ever faced a time when they took a risk. A girl talks about the pressure she experienced trying to get on the swim team; she concludes that despite the pressure, it was worth the risk.

In the second dramatization, Ben has tried out for the glee club and not made it. His mom encourages him to continue playing his trumpet, pointing out that at least he now knows he's not a good singer.

Michael questions whether Ben should have tried out, and the teens who respond agree that he should have. One boy says failing makes you stronger by allowing you to realize it's not so bad. Why is it important to take risks, Michael asks. "Risks are the steps to learning who you are," one girl says. A boy shares his experience trying out for the wrestling team. He explains that even though he lost badly, he

felt really good about having taken the risk.

Michael asks the group about their secret dreams. A girl who had always played field hockey decided she hated it; she had always wanted to be in the school play. She tried out and got a speaking part. She tells the group that if she hadn't tried out, she never would have known she "could live the dream [she] had in [her] head." Michael adds, "Not just in your head...it's in your heart."

Onstage, Michael tells an inspiring story about a girl who kept her dream of playing the violin alive, despite obstacles in her path.

In the third dramatized segment, Ben has made a new friend. The two spent time together on the computer having fun, but then some of the web sites and chat rooms his friend visited made Ben feel uncomfortable. Now, his friend wants to buy an MP3 player being sold from the back of a truck for a very low price, and Ben must decide whether he will buy one too.

Michael asks what's happening. One boy thinks Ben knows what's right, but is too afraid to just be himself. He questions whether it would be worth Ben's compromising his values, and a girl disagrees, saying it's good to try new things. Michael asks what funny feelings—like Ben's when his friend is visiting questionable web sites—tell us about situations we're in. A girl responds that when a situation makes you uncomfortable, you "... have to state who you are."

The teens talk about whether or not Ben should buy the MP3 player. Some say it would be okay, and others disagree. Finally, one boy says there's a principle involved: It's not right to support someone who ripped off another person, because ultimately, someone else has been hurt.

Asking what is the worst thing that can happen, Michael leads the group through the possible ramifications of accepting stolen merchandise. Now, the group sees the possible effect of the choice they've been talking about, and Michael asks what they've learned. One boy sums it up, saying that there are good risks and bad risks. If the consequences of your action can hurt you, it's a bad risk; if not, go for it.

Michael asks whether anyone has faced a tough choice and was helped by knowing themselves. A boy tells about his choice not to use drugs at a party, while a girl talks about her friends who were caught for shoplifting after she left them because she didn't want to participate. Michael questions the benefits of knowing who you are. A girl replies that she wants her future to be bright, and she realizes that one little mistake can ruin you for the rest of your life.

Michael ends the program onstage, acknowledging that it is difficult to know oneself. He urges the group to get acquainted with themselves, to be open to new experiences, and to maintain a strong moral sense that will help them make good choices.

Discussion Questions

1. The teens in this program describe different activities that help them clarify their feelings: playing the piano, writing in a journal, and writing poetry. When you need to understand your emotions, what do you do? How does this activity help you?
2. To help sort out your feelings, who would you be most likely to talk to? Why would you choose this person?
3. Conflicting emotions often make it hard for us to act. Tell about a time when you felt an emotional conflict, and describe how you sorted out your feelings. What made sorting out your feelings difficult?
4. Being the new kid in town presented Ben with challenging choices. Think about a time when you were new, whether in school, a club, team, neighborhood, or elsewhere. What did you find difficult about being new? How did you try to get involved? What worked well, and what didn't?
5. Learning what you like can be a trial-and-error process. Why is it important to give activities or people a chance? How do you know when you've given the activity or person an adequate chance?
6. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* contains the famous advice: "...to thine own self be true." What do you think this means? Do you think it is good advice? Why?
7. Think about your personal goals. How do these goals help you stay on target? What helps you to keep these goals in mind?
8. Our instincts, or gut feelings, often help us make good choices. Was there ever a time when your gut feelings kept you out of trouble? Talk about what happened.
9. Teens in this program have many different opinions about buying an MP3 player that may have been stolen. If you had this opportunity, what would you do? Why?
10. What is a positive risk? What do you think about taking positive risks, such as enrolling in an advanced placement course?

Activities

1. Think about the person who makes you feel most pressured — possibly a parent, teacher, sibling, or friend. Write a letter to that person, explaining how their behavior affects you and what changes they could make to help you feel less pressured.
2. As a group, choose a situation that often affects teens, such as breaking up a relationship. In small groups, talk about the emotions involved in the situation you've chosen. Have these small groups role-play the situation for the larger group, focusing on how each person can manage their emotions.

3. Build on Ben's experience by developing a welcome packet for new kids in your school. Decide what activities and information should be included. Then, create the materials for the packet, and present the packet to your school's administration.

4. People can learn a lot about themselves from how they react under stress. Think about a time that was very stressful for you. Then, choose a medium—writing, drawing, music, or whatever you prefer—and use it to express what this stressful time felt like. Share what you learned about yourself from the experience.

5. Feelings often change over time. Using a topic or situation where your ideas have evolved, create a time line that shows how you have changed. Even if you can't pin-point specific dates and times, try to focus on the stages you have gone through. Then write a paragraph explaining the advantages of where you are now, compared to your starting point.



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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