

LEADER'S GUIDE



LIFE STEPS
with Michael Pritchard



Program #6

**Creative
Problem Solving**

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 that is explored in depth in this program and demonstrated in the other eleven *LifeSteps* programs. This strategy 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 *Creative Problem Solving*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *Creative Problem Solving* 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 *Creative Problem Solving* 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 understand and apply the *LifeSteps* problem-solving approach
- To identify the actual problem in complex social situations
- To understand the benefit of brainstorming multiple solutions and be able to choose the best possible solution
- To recognize the importance of planning
- To develop the ability to predict obstacles and, where needed, revise a plan

Synopsis

Opening with a story which points out that everyone has problems, Michael notes that one of the keys to dealing with challenges is to develop a problem-solving attitude. He asks the group about the problems teens face today; they mention peer pressure, pregnancy, drug abuse, and school violence. On a more personal level, their problems include homework, stress, and their relationships with their parents. As a group, they say they have a lot of pressure.

Michael asks about problems at school, and a boy says problems arise when you "butt heads" with people whose views differ from yours. Agreeing with his point, a girl tells about trying to work on a school project with a friend; they clashed because her friend was very dominant. Another boy talked with the members of his

football team when they didn't want to take his suggestions; he helped the team come up with a plan that resulted in a win for them. Why is it important to include everyone involved when you are trying to solve problems, Michael asks. The boy says that one person may not see the whole picture; if you don't have everyone involved, the people who are left out may be the ones who would be able to offer a solution.

Onstage, Michael talks about approaching life with a problem-solving attitude. He outlines the first four steps of *LifeSteps'* problem-solving approach: stop and calm down, name the problem, understand others, and brainstorm solutions.

Michael introduces the first dramatization, which alternates between David and Michelle, two teens who are trying to organize an event to raise money for the homeless. At a Student Council meeting, Michelle introduces the idea of a fundraising dance. David responds with his suggestion: to solicit donations from people with money. Claiming that he is trying to steal her project, Michelle is indignant and threatens to quit, while David is surprised to find that some council members support Michelle's idea.

Michael asks about their feelings. The teens say that Michelle feels like her idea is being stolen and that it doesn't count because she isn't part of the Student Council group. David doesn't want to give her a chance; she's never done anything for the school before and he doesn't trust her. Asked what David and Michelle should do, one boy says they need to cool off; they are too emotional and can't focus on the actual problem. **(Step 1: Stop and calm down.)**

Michael asks for examples of times the teens needed to calm down before trying to solve a problem. Two girls share their experiences and Michael comments that taking the time to calm down allowed them to have perspective.

Do David and Michelle even know what their problem is, Michael asks. **(Step 2: Name the problem.)** A boy says their real problem is ego; they can't accept that there might be a better way than the one they've suggested. A girl adds that admitting there's a problem and focusing on it is the first step to solving it. Another boy notes they are both so set in their opinions that they are not communicating with each other. **(Step 3: Understand others.)** Several teens agree that the two are not keeping an open mind. The benefit of seeing a situation from the other person's perspective, one girl says, is that seeing other ideas helps you find the best solution.

"What are some ways they could brainstorm here?" Michael asks. **(Step 4: Brainstorm solutions.)** The group offers several suggestions: have a donation table at the dance; invite people who might make large donations to the dance; raise public awareness about homelessness by highlighting the issue. A girl says this type of brainstorming is important because it provides different ways to look at something.

Onstage, Michael outlines the next four problem-solving steps: evaluate and choose, make a plan, reflect and adjust, and reward yourself.

In the second dramatization, Michelle and David describe the plans they are going to present at the Student Council meeting. Michelle has arranged a location and music for a dance and David has gotten access to a studio for a fundraising party—both on the same night.

Michael asks the teens to act as the Student Council and decide what to do. **(Step 5: Evaluate and choose.)** They debate; some think the dance would be more fun and involve more students, while others think the fundraiser would raise more money for the homeless. The group votes, but remains split about the best course to take. They discuss their reasons for voting as they did, and their discussion brings out differences in their goals, their values, and their assessments of the plans' practicality.

In the next dramatization, the Student Council has postponed their decision and asked Michelle and David to compromise. Working together, they've decided to combine their ideas and hold the dance at the location originally planned for the fundraiser. They agree that they both have a lot of work ahead.

What do they need to do, Michael asks. **(Step 6: Make a plan.)** Make a list, form committees, plan decorations, and arrange for advertising, two girls suggest. Another girl says it's important to set priorities, and Michael asks how. A boy responds that you have to decide what is essential and what is just nice to do.

Next, Michael asks why it is important to predict obstacles. **(Step 7: Reflect and adjust.)** One boy says that you need to be realistic, because something will always happen. A girl says you need a backup plan. Another boy agrees, saying that a backup plan means you don't have to be perfect; it's important because "you know you're going to make [mistakes]." Different students share stories about how planning has helped them.

The final dramatization features Michelle and David after the fundraising dance. There was a good turnout and the students really enjoyed themselves, but the event did not raise as much money as expected. Both teens say that, in the end, they worked together well and learned from each other.

Michael comments that they seem disappointed in the outcome and asks the group if they should be. **(Step 8: Reward yourself.)** A girl says they pulled off an event the Student Council didn't think would work, and a boy adds that they shouldn't let the outcome blind them to what they've actually done. Michael asks what the teens would say to David and Michelle, and a boy says he would tell them to focus on what they did and reward themselves. Several teens give examples of ways they have rewarded themselves for their accomplishments; one boy says that, after a busy time, he went to bed and reflected. He woke up the next day, thinking "That was a pretty good day I had."

Onstage, Michael ends the program with a quote from Duke Ellington, who said that a problem is nothing more than a chance to do your best.

Discussion Questions

1. A problem-solving approach can help in many different areas of life. What aspects of your life would benefit most from this approach? How can you introduce this approach to improve your situation?
2. Think of a time that you were in a pressured situation. Were you able to calm down before dealing with the problem? How might the outcome have changed if you had been able (or unable) to calm down?
3. Why is it sometimes difficult to name a problem? What can you do to make it easier?
4. In conflicts, why is it helpful to see the situation through the other person's eyes? Have you ever tried to do that? What effect did it have on resolving the conflict?
5. In the program, teens talk about the need for a backup plan. Have you been in a situation where having a backup plan helped you? Where you did not have a backup, but could have used one? Tell what happened.
6. Have you ever had to change a plan that was important to you? What happened, and how did it make you feel?
7. How does brainstorming make it easier for a group to develop a plan or solve a problem?
8. Some people tend to dominate group discussions, while others sit back quietly. Which is your primary style? How does it make you feel? What do you think it would feel like if you played the other role?
9. Have you been involved in, or are you aware of, a conflict that ended the way David's and Michelle's did, with both people appreciating each other? What was the problem and how was it resolved?
10. Why is it important for people to reward themselves? What do you do to reward yourself?

Activities

1. Invite a speaker from a local mediation group to explain how mediation works. If possible, present real-life problems to the mediator and talk about possible solutions.
2. Select a problem, real or imagined, and have two groups role-play the process of arriving at a solution. One group will use the brain-storming method, while the other

will have a leader-dominated session. After the role-plays, discuss the experience and success of the two groups.

3. Watch an episode of a television show that involves a problem or conflict. Notice how the participants try to resolve the situation, and whether or not they are successful. If they did not use a problem-solving approach, think about how that approach might have changed the outcome. Share your findings with your group.

4. Think of a person you often have conflicts or disagreements with. For a specified period, use the eight-step approach in your interactions with that person. Keep a log and at the end of the period, describe how your relationship has changed.

5. Choose a long-term group project and agree to follow the *LifeSteps* problem-solving method you have learned about in this program. Have one group member keep a journal of the project, focusing on the interactions between participants. After the project is completed, talk about what effect the *LifeSteps* method had on the process.



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.

*LifeSteps Leader's Guides were written by
Karen Schader and edited by Sally Germain.*

***LifeSteps* was developed and produced by**

Jim Watson

HeartLand Media

Scientific Consultant

Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D.

Rutgers University, Department of Psychology Vice-Chair, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

***LifeSteps* was filmed on location at:**

Irvington High School, Fremont, CA

Dave Howell, Project Coordinator

Pete Murchison, Principal

Fred R. Turner, Director, Pupil Services and Alternative Programs

Abington Senior High School, Abington, PA

Carrie Jones, Project Coordinator

Dr. Robert Burt, Principal

Dr. Amy Sichel, Superintendent

Spring Valley High School, Columbia, SC

Beverly Hiott, Project Coordinator

Dr. Greg Owen, Principal

Dr. Steve Hefner, Superintendent, Richland School District Two

Mission San Jose High School, Fremont, CA

Fred Dillemath, Project Coordinator

Stuart Kew, Principal

Distributed by:



© 2003 The Bureau For At-Risk Youth and HeartLand Media
All rights reserved. No portion of this work can be reproduced in any
form without the express written consent of the publisher.