

Instructor's Guide
for
***Youth Corrections Series for Young Men:
Choices, Consequences, and Your Future***

Created Family: Choosing Friends Wisely

Overview

We all want someone to care about us. We want to feel important, to feel like we are part of something larger than ourselves. We long for a sense of community, a sense that we belong. While some people have the needs met by their families, many others rely on friends to provide that support and sense of community. For those people, their friends *are* their family.

Unfortunately friends, like family members, can be a positive or negative influence. While becoming part of a gang or connecting with peers who engage in criminal behavior can increase one's feelings of self-worth temporarily, they are not worth the long-term costs. That's why it is crucial for individuals who leave treatment to not return from the environment—and the people—that contributed to their criminal behavior in the first place.

And that's why it is also important for you to teach your students the value of making friends who will also be good role models and have a positive influence. That may require redefining what it means to be a friend. It will also require opening students' eyes to the harmful effects past friendships might have had on them.

This video discusses the role that friends play in shaping our identity and behaviors. It emphasizes that while friends are important, they aren't always helpful and, in fact, are often harmful. It encourages students to think about the positive and negative characteristics of their friends and to think about ways that they can escape the influence of peers who might have encouraged their criminal behavior.

The video provides opportunities and questions for group discussion. Feel free to follow the cues, pausing for activities and discussion as your own schedule dictates.

Presentation Suggestions

Begin by asking students to think about the role their friends have played in their lives. What did they learn from their friends, both positive and negative? How did their friends make them feel? What did their friends ask or expect of them? Were they closer to their friends than they were their family? Keep in mind that these are intensely personal issues, and some students may be reluctant to discuss these matters in a group setting. It might be easier to talk about this in general terms.

When you feel students have begun thinking about these issues, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to watching the video. If you wish, allow the students to state their answers and discuss them.

Show the video. Encourage students to take notes or to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video.

At the conclusion of the video, ask students to discuss any changes they made to their answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of information they learned. Follow up this discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from students or assign the questions as homework essays.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group. Assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

Anticipation Quiz

Directions: Answer these questions as completely as possible. You may revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. What impact do our friends have on shaping who we are?
2. What is a support network?
3. True or false: The only family you can ever have is the one you are born into.

Answer Key

1. For many, friends act as a surrogate family, especially if their own family is absent or uninvolved. In such cases they often become the role models and teachers that parents and siblings would have been.
2. A support network is a group of people—friends, family members, professionals—who can serve as good role models and can help you in times of need.

3. False. Families can be created. A group of friends can act as a surrogate family. The difference is, this is a family you can choose.

Activities

Activity #1

Title: Knowing Who Your Friends Are

Format: Group

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Paper, pen

Procedure:

1. We all have a variety of people we consider friends. Some of these are people we are really close to. Others are just people we like to spend time with. Some might be other students or colleagues who we never see outside of school or work. Our levels of friendship vary. So does the level of influence our friends have on us.
2. Divide the class into groups of three or four and have each group discuss the definition of the word “friend.” How many different kinds of friends are there? What makes for an ideal friend? Where do our ideas about friendship come from? How does one go about making friends? When does a friendship become dangerous or problematic?
3. Come back together as a whole group and discuss the various definitions of “friend.” What do the definitions share? How are they different? How can your students start to rethink the way they see their friends? What can they do start choosing friends better?

Activity #2

Title: Models of Success

Format: Individual/Group

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Paper, pen

Procedure:

1. Individually or in groups, have students brainstorm a list of people who they consider to be “successful.” First have students define what success means, then have them generate a list of 5 to 10 names. These can be people they know personally, celebrities, sports figures, politicians, historical figures, etc.
2. When they have their lists, ask students to pick *the* person they consider to be the *most* successful from that list and write a paragraph about why that person is successful and what they did to be successful. You might assign this as homework.
3. Finally, have students review their choices as a whole group. What qualities make for a successful person? What can your students do to follow the model that person has outlined for them?

Discussion Questions

1. When is a friend no longer a friend? At what point is it more important to say no and be alone than to go along with a friend and possibly engage in reckless or risky behavior?
2. Why is it difficult to ask for help sometimes? What keeps you from relying on or trusting others? How do you know whom to ask or whom you can trust?
3. How do we choose whom to be friends with? Are our friends chosen for us? Is it a matter of circumstance? What makes some people better friends than others?

Quick Quiz

Note: You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for students to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise.

Directions: Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the video.

1. Many young men are more afraid of their peers than they are of prison.
2. Friends are always a more positive influence than family members.
3. It is important to fit in with your peers at all costs.
4. It is important to find a community you can belong to.
5. Everyone needs a support network. Nobody can be successful in this world alone.
6. Effective reentry depends on having good relationships.

Answer Key

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| 1. True | 4. True |
| 2. False | 5. True |
| 3. False | 6. True |

Homework Option

Have students create a “want ad” for a friend, like the kind you would find in the classified section of the newspaper. Have them list the qualities they would expect in a friend. Have them list the expectations they would have. Have them also list what they (the student) have to offer in return. Use this in the next class as a basis for a discussion about how to choose friends wisely.