



Stay the Course

A Program Guide for Making Responsible Decisions

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Stay the Course

A Curriculum Guide for Making Responsible Decisions

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Session 3

Choices to Make

SEL FOCUS: RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Story: "Can't Afford to Follow" by Charlene George

Story Summary: Charlene gives into peer pressure from her friends to cut school, drink, and smoke. When they are arrested, she has a change of heart.

Learning Objectives

Youth will build their SEL by:

- Describing what influences their decision-making process
- Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for resisting peer pressure

Youth will practice their literacy skills by:

- Making meaning of text through group read-aloud and discussion
- Creating and performing a role play using character motivation as the basis for character actions
- Expressing ideas clearly, and actively listening during collaborative discussions

Materials

- ☐ Group agreements and agenda, posted
- ☐ *Stay the Course* anthologies, one for each group member
- ☐ Journal or notebook paper, colored pencils, and markers

Preparation

- Read the story and session plan ahead of time.
- Prepare the session agenda.
- Write the prompt for the Draw It activity (**in bold**) on chart paper.
- Make copies of the Resisting Peer Pressure worksheet (p. 43), one for each group member.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone and have them sit in a circle. Review the agenda (posted):

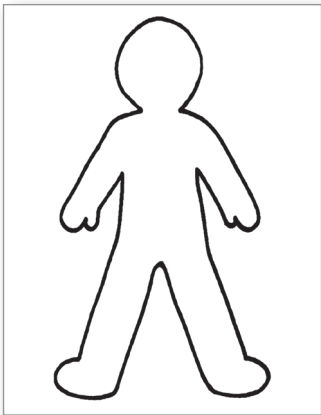
Agenda: Choices to Make

- Review Group Agreements
- Opening Activity: Draw It
- Read and Discuss: "Can't Afford to Follow" by Charlene George
- Explore the Ideas Activity: Role Play
- Closing Circle

OPENING ACTIVITY — DRAW IT (12 minutes)

Practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing the story as a group will help members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. After reviewing the agenda, tell the group that they are going to do a drawing activity where they explore what influences their decision-making process.
2. Read aloud the Draw It prompts from the chart paper you prepared:



- In your journal, draw a gingerbread figure.
 - Imagine that a friend is trying to get you to cheat on a test. You can't decide if you should do it or not.
 - On the outside of the figure, write or draw at least three influences that affect your decision-making process *from the outside* (e.g., if you get caught cheating, your mother will punish you).
 - On the inside, write or draw at least three *thoughts, feelings, or values* that will influence your decision (e.g., your pride in being an honest person).
3. Pass out journals or notebook paper, colored pencils, and markers.
 4. Give group members 10 minutes to complete their drawings. Move around the room offering support and encouragement.

5. Time permitting, group members can share their drawings. As an alternative, you can lay them out on a table (or hang them up on the wall) and have group members get up and walk around to look at them.
6. Then, invite group members to reflect on what stood out to them and share with the group.
7. Thank the group for sharing.

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READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (20 minutes)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. **Introduce the story:** Explain to the group that you are going to read a story by a young person who has to decide whether or not she should hang out with friends who put a lot of pressure on her to do things that aren't good for her.
2. **Set expectations for reading the story:** Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



Tell the group to turn to p. 13 in their anthologies. (See the leader's version in this guide for stories with discussion questions included.)

3. **Read and discuss the story together:** As group leader, you should pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (**in bold**). Ask the group this question and facilitate a short discussion before returning to the text.



Can't Afford to Follow

By Charlene George

I heard the same things from my new friends at middle school nearly every day. “Yo, Charlene, let’s not go to school today. Let’s go smoke and get some alcohol. Let’s maybe go to the movies, museum, or the zoo, but let’s not go to school today.”

They seemed really nice, and when they spoke about all the fun places they went during school, I decided to join them. I wanted to hang out with them and be the type of friend they said was cool.

One day we went to the movie theater and saw five movies—but we only paid for one. It was so great to see action, funny, and scary movies that had just come out, all in one day.

Then my friends told me to steal \$20 from my mom so we could go to the movies again. They also wanted me to buy some things for them. I didn’t want to let them down, so I said OK. But I couldn’t bring myself to steal from my mom. Instead, I pretended that I’d stolen from her when I really had \$20 saved up.

I lived with my foster mom, and I’d been with her since I was 7 years old. I felt she really wanted the best for me. I wondered why my friends never wanted to talk about their own families, and why none of them could say even one good thing about their parents.

But I kept on doing things with my friends to show that I was one of them. About three weeks after I started cutting school with them, we went to the Bay Plaza mall. We didn’t have any money, so we were just window-shopping and looking around in a store called Rainbow.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

[“What do you think draws Charlene to hang out with these friends? How are they influencing her?”]

Then, to my surprise, my mother’s good friend Kim popped out of the back. It turned out that she worked there. She asked me what I was doing there during school hours.

Before I could answer, the man who worked at the counter started yelling at my friends. It wasn't a pretty sight the way he was grabbing them, like his nails were digging into their skin. Their bodies were leaning to the side and they were screaming, "Help, he's hurting me."

When the boss went over to the counter to see what was going on, I was shocked. My friends were stealing small items like candy, earrings, and fake rings that would turn your fingers green in a second. He called the police and my friends looked afraid, like they were wondering where their lives were headed now.

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When the police came, they needed my friends' family information so their parents could come get them. Most of them had their parents come to pick them up. But when the police asked the two ringleaders of our group about their families, their faces looked shocked, like the time we all cut school to see scary movies.

The two ringleaders said they didn't have any information to give the police. For the first time, I suspected that they didn't have anyone taking care of them to come pick them up. The policemen took them to the station, and I never heard from them again.

As they left the store, it hit me that maybe they cut school and stole things because they had no one taking care of them and teaching them how to act. But I did, so why was I acting this way? I imagined being locked up away from my mother, just because I wanted to be a follower. I thought to myself that my future couldn't be a jail cell. It had to be a home and family.

I was lucky to have my foster mother, and I didn't want to lose her. I asked myself, "Am I going to let this peer pressure keep getting to me?" Doing what they asked me to do was only getting me in trouble.

["What does Charlene learn from the incident at the mall?"]

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

Luckily, while my friends were stealing, I was standing next to Kim. After the police left, Kim made sure that I went home right away. She said she knew that I wasn't the type to steal. She said, "I'm not going to tell your mom," and that made me feel really happy.

Then she said, "You have to tell her all by yourself. Letting your mom know would show her what you did wrong, but it would also show that you're growing up."

I was upset. I'd hoped that Kim would let me go without telling anyone. But I knew I had to tell my mother, because sooner or later the truth would probably come out.

When I got home, I told my mother how I'd cut school that day. Her face got really crazy, and her eyes were almost poking out of her head. As she yelled at me, she was spitting so much that my sister was wiping off her face like it was raining cats and dogs.

"You are grounded for one whole week with no TV and no electronics," my mother said. "I'll be coming up to your room to take the phone away from you."

An hour later, my mother had calmed down. We started talking about the issue all over again. She told me I still had to do my punishment so I'd learn from my mistakes, but that she was happy I'd told her all by myself. (She didn't know Kim had made me tell her.)

That's when I realized that Kim really helped me by making me start doing things on my own. Even though she didn't know me that well, she helped make me choose whether or not I wanted to keep giving in to peer pressure.

I realized that when I want to change, my friends, Kim or my mother can't make that change for me—I have to stop smoking, drinking and hanging out with my old friends.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

["Aside from Kim urging her to do so, why do you think it was important for Charlene to tell her mother what was going on?"]

For one whole week, I hung out by myself. Now that I was going to school every day, I didn't see my old friends because they were still cutting. After school I'd go home and watch the Disney Channel, Law and Order, and CSI during my free time. I was being a good person, but I got really bored and lonely.

I felt like I was walking through a maze trying to find some new friends. Then, after a week and a half, I met a boy named Peter and girl named Vicky at a swim meet after school. They both went to my school and were in my swim group.

I started going to their houses to play video games and chilling with them at the movie theater. One time, the three of us had a conversation about being able to tell each other the truth. Even though it felt a little funny saying it, we all admitted that we had cheated on tests before. We knew cheating was wrong, but we all felt good that we shared something with each other.

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Peter and Vicky didn't pressure me to skip school, drink or smoke. We didn't hang out on the street getting in trouble. I was still going to school, earning good grades and perfect attendance and putting a smile on my mother's face.

["How will hanging out with Peter and Vicki impact Charlene's behavior?"]

READ-ALOUD
QUESTION

When we went to the movies, I remembered my old friends sitting next to me. I remembered jumping because we were scared of the movie, with the popcorn going up into the air and getting on the people in front of us—and them thinking we threw it at them. Those were the good old days.

But if I were still listening to my old friends, I would be just like a remote control car, going everywhere they wanted, and just being used all the time.

Recently, one of my classmates asked me to slap another classmate on the back of the head when he was asleep, so no one would know who did it. I told him that if he was so big and bad, he should do it himself.

Now when I get pressure from a peer, I deal with it by using my brain. I go back to my memory of when I messed up with my old friends, and I tell myself I don't want to face those consequences again.

["What did you learn about peer pressure from Charlene's story?"]

READ-ALOUD
QUESTION

Charlene was 18 when she wrote this story.

EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — ROLE PLAY

(15 minutes)

During this post-reading activity, group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce the next activity by saying to the group:
 - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to perform role plays where we rehearse ways to resist peer pressure.”
2. Divide the group into partners and then refocus them for directions.
3. Explain that there are two roles in the role play scenarios:
 - **A student who is peer pressuring another student to do something.**
 - **A student who is trying to resist that peer pressure.**
4. Pass out the Resisting Peer Pressure worksheet (p. 43).
5. Tell group members to talk through the roles and scenarios with their partners, using what they learned from the story. Point out the “motivation” listed for each role in the scenarios. Explain that “motivation” is the reason behind an action. When they perform the role play, they need to keep the character’s motivation in mind to play the part well.
6. Assign the partners one of the role play scenarios. Tell the partners to decide who is going to play which role. Then tell them to decide what’s going to happen in their role play. Encourage them to take notes on what they want to say. They won’t have time to write a script, but they should figure out the beginning, middle, and end of their role play.
7. Give group members five to seven minutes to plan and rehearse. As they work, circulate and make sure that their role plays will be realistic portrayals of conversations between two group members, one who is pressuring a peer, the other using strategies to resist that pressure.
8. Bring everyone back to the group and facilitate a quick discussion about how the Group Agreements apply to role plays like this. (For example, audience members should practice close listening and support one another with encouragement.)

9. Ask partners to perform their role play for the group.
10. After each role play, ask everyone:
 - “What did the student who was being pressured do to resist?”
 - “Do you have any suggestions for new methods or strategies that the characters can use?”
11. Thank group members for performing, supporting, and sharing.

3

CLOSING CIRCLE (3 minutes)

In Closing Circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with each other.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. “What stood out for you in Charlene’s story, ‘Can’t Afford to Follow,’ and our activities today?”
2. Finish this sentence: “I can resist peer pressure by...”

 **SUPPLEMENTAL**

WRITING EXTENSION

Use the prompt below as an extra writing assignment. This extension gives group members the opportunity to share their point of view and provides additional literacy practice.

Write a story about a character who is pressured into doing something. Choose whether the character gives in to the pressure or resists it. If the character chooses to resist, demonstrate a realistic strategy they use. Either way, include the consequences of the character’s choices.

Include descriptive details, dialogue, and scenes in your story. In your first draft, don’t be too concerned about proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

(See next page for Leader Reflection prompts to complete once the session ends.)

LEADER REFLECTION

After leading this session, reflect on the prompts below through writing, discussion with a colleague, or just by sitting and thinking:

- How well did participants come up with realistic strategies for resisting peer pressure during the role plays? How do you think the *Stay the Course* group will help them continue to develop positive strategies?
- What was important for you as a young person to consider when making a decision? How can you bring in your own experiences to help group members understand the way decisions affect our experiences?



"Can't Afford to Follow" by Charlene George

Resisting Peer Pressure

Directions: For the role play scenario you were assigned, decide who is going to play which role. Read through the description of the character and their motivation. Work with your partner to create a general outline for your role play, including a beginning, middle, and end. The purpose of this activity is to practice resisting peer pressure, so make it realistic. Include what you learned from reading Charlene's story.

Role Play Scenario #1	Role Play Scenario #2
<p>Jessica has been doing well in math, but her friend, Layla, has been failing all her tests. On the day of another big test, Layla sees Jessica in the hall and asks Jessica if she can cheat off her during class. The teacher barely looks up from their desk during the test anyway, so why can't Jessica just be a friend and let her cheat? Layla asks. Jessica feels weird about cheating during the test and is hesitant to let Layla look at her paper.</p> <p>Jessica's motivation: To resist Layla's pleas to help her cheat since Jessica feels that cheating is wrong. She does want to see Layla do well on the test, though.</p> <p>Layla's motivation: To get help on the test by cheating off Jessica during the exam.</p>	<p>Darnell is a great student and goes to class every day. He's started hanging around some new friends, including Jesse. Jesse asks Darnell to cut class and come to the movies with him. Jesse also likes to smoke and drink when he cuts class and encourages Darnell to do the same. Darnell feels uncomfortable, not only with cutting class, but also with the activities Jesse is doing while he's cutting.</p> <p>Darnell's motivation: To continue doing well in school and keep Jesse as a friend.</p> <p>Jesse's motivation: To get Darnell to hang out and party with him.</p>
Role Play Scenario #3	Role Play Scenario #4
<p>Miguel is hanging out with Kevin when they come across an old, abandoned building. Kevin picks up a rock and throws it, smashing one of the windows. Kevin laughs and insists that Miguel break one of the windows. Miguel is worried they could get in trouble. Kevin tells Miguel to "do it or else."</p> <p>Miguel's motivation: To resist joining in with Kevin's vandalism and not get physically attacked by Kevin.</p> <p>Kevin's motivation: To get Miguel to join him in smashing the windows of the building.</p>	<p>Thanmayi and her friend, Megan, want to buy a shirt at the mall, but it's way too expensive and they don't have any money. After a few minutes of thinking, Megan tells Thanmayi to steal the shirt. Thanmayi is afraid she'll get caught and thinks stealing is wrong. Megan presses Thanmayi to take the shirt and says if Megan does not, it's because she's a "scared little kid."</p> <p>Megan's motivation: To get the shirt despite not being able to pay for it.</p> <p>Thanmayi's motivation: To not break the law but to also not come across as childish to Megan.</p>