

Dear Educator:

As your students begin making the transition from childhood to adolescence, they face a multitude of changes, one of which is taking responsibility for many aspects of their lives. Yet, if you ask them what responsibility means, they will most likely have a difficult time defining it. This study guide, one of a series in the **RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW** program, focuses on responsibility – defining it and giving students a solid foundation on which to form their own attitudes and actions.

Too often, young people associate the concept of responsibility with blame (“Who’s responsible for this?”) or duty (“It’s your responsibility to . . .”). The activities in this program will help your students develop a more positive and proactive sense of responsibility, one that rests on a recognition of their role in a given situation, respect for the rules that apply to the situation and a commitment to their own set of values. Working alone and in groups, they will learn to test their sense of responsibility in the decision-making process, and learn what it means to take responsibility for their actions. In the end, the program should help your students become more self-aware about who they are and what they believe in, and better informed about their responsibilities to themselves and to others.

The **RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW** program is funded by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which firmly believes that children should not smoke. The program, created for use with students in grades 6-9, is designed to help them become more responsible, committed citizens.

We encourage you to share this exciting program with your colleagues. Although the materials are copyrighted, you have permission to reproduce them for educational purposes.

Please take a moment to complete and return the enclosed response card. Your comments help us create programs that will continue to meet your needs. Returning this card also ensures your continued receipt of free educational materials.

We hope you enjoy sharing this new unit of the **RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW** program with your students and watching them grow in confidence as they learn to make the right decisions, right now.





Teacher's Guide

Introduction

The activities and teaching suggestions in this unit of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program are designed to help students understand the meaning of responsibility and learn to take responsibility for their own actions. By instilling a sense of responsibility and commitment in students now, the program will assist students in developing into citizens who accept and act on their responsibilities to themselves, their families, their community, the work-place and society in general.

Background

Responsibility can be a nebulous concept for young people, especially as it becomes removed from their immediate life. They will readily and accurately tell you that it is their responsibility to do their homework or take out the trash. Yet they may have a difficult time identifying their responsibility toward their community or even their school and peers. Some may not recognize that they have specific, personal responsibilities in these areas, while others may feel personally burdened with responsibilities that are beyond them. As students work through the activities in this program, they will learn how responsibility can be both an individual and a group concern.

To measure students' understanding of responsibility before and after they complete the activities, you

might discuss the following situation with them and determine who is responsible, how they are responsible and why.

A group of teens is hanging out on a street corner, just talking and playing around. One teen challenges another to see who can take out the street light. They begin tossing rocks, until the light breaks. Several days later, a young boy runs out into the road and is almost hit by a car because the driver didn't see him due to the darkness. Local residents complain to town officials about the broken light and the dark corner, wanting to know why it wasn't fixed. Whose responsibility was it to keep that corner safe by having a working street light?

Initially students may think it is the responsibility of the public works or police departments to keep the light working. After completing the activities in this program, students should recognize that the responsibility is actually shared by town officials as well as the kid who broke the light, and the other kids present, who were responsible for not stopping the damage and then for not reporting it.

Building upon the decision-making skills and techniques taught in earlier RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW units, students will continue to exercise their skills in a series of activities that reflect real-life situations. As students complete the activities, they will be encouraged to reflect upon the factors that influence their decisions and to apply decision-making skills that they have learned to specific situations. The program will culminate with students using their decision-making skills to create a "teen guide" that will help them make the right

decisions as they travel the road of life. The guide is general in nature, however it does include tips that are applicable to almost any tough decision-making situation in which students may find themselves.

Intended Audience

The RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program has been designed to be used with students in grades 6-9. The materials can be incorporated into social studies, health or life skills classes.

Objectives

This unit of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program is designed to help students:

- recognize their responsibilities to themselves and others – both now and in the future.
- understand the importance of making commitments and being responsible for seeing those commitments through.
- realize that they play an important role in society, and develop in them a feeling of empowerment that they can help guide the success of their school and community activities.
- use the skills and insights they have learned in previous units pertaining to decision-making, consequences of decisions, refusal skills, values and conflict resolution as they take on responsibility.
- gain confidence and a positive self-image.
- learn to work cooperatively with their classmates to create an atmosphere within their school, and community in which students take responsibility for their own actions and those of their peers.

Program Components

1. Four activity masters to reproduce as individual and group worksheets.
2. This teacher's guide that contains:
 - suggestions for introducing and presenting each activity.
 - ideas for extending each activity.
 - a list of resources for additional information.
3. A full-color poster that encourages students to remember that making the right decisions is important in achieving positive goals.
4. A teacher response card that allows you to comment on the program. Please return this card to ensure that you remain on our mailing list and receive future free educational materials.

Implementing the Program

Introducing the Activities

As you present each activity, plan to give students enough background information to prepare them for completing the On Your Own and In Your Group parts of the worksheet. Through exploring their own beliefs and working within groups, students will examine many aspects of responsibility and how it operates – in their community, in their school and in their own lives. Then you can reconvene the class, sharing students' findings and feelings about responsibility.

Group Work

The program is designed for students to work collaboratively on one portion of each activity. If your class is already arranged for cooperative learning, use your groups of 4-6 students. Otherwise, group students randomly or by a selection method that works well for your class. You can have students remain in the same group throughout the unit or change groups for each activity.

Each group will need a group leader and a recorder. The group leader is responsible for facilitating the group's discussion and keeping the group focused on the task. The recorder will record the group's comments, discussion and/or answers, and report the group's conclusions to the class. These roles should change with each activity.

The following rules should be introduced to the entire class in the beginning of the unit, then reiterated by the group leader before each group activity:

1. Students may pass if they feel uncomfortable with specific topics.
2. No put-downs are allowed.
3. Students must take turns when talking and contributing to the discussion.
4. Any answer is an appropriate answer and worth discussing.

Poster

The poster encourages students to take charge of their lives by accepting responsibility for their own futures. It contains simple tips and tools for making decisions. These tips are comprised of the skills and techniques that students learned in earlier units of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program. Display the poster in your classroom so that you and your

students may refer to it at any time. Encourage students to continue using these tips both inside and outside of school for greater success in achieving their personal goals.

Follow-Up

After you have completed this unit:

- encourage students to continue sharing situations that call for responsibility and commitment.
- offer positive feedback for students who exhibit responsible behavior.
- encourage students to share any news articles that feature people who exhibit both positive and negative examples of responsible behavior.
- reward and praise students who are positive role models, inspiring others to act responsibly. Also encourage your students to find those role models among their peers.
- invite committed parents or members of the community who exemplify responsibility to your classroom as guests. Your guests might share their experiences with your students, or simply be honored with a reception.

Activity One

Your Community

... who's responsible?

Objectives

- To help students gain a better understanding of community and their roles as members of a community.
- To allow students to explore and define their personal values in relation to their roles as members of a community.

Introduction

Introduce the activity by clarifying with students the meaning of the word responsibility. Write the word on the chalkboard and ask students to give you words, phrases or sentences that come to mind when they hear this word. Then use students' answers to write a class definition for responsibility. Extend the discussion by asking students to share their concepts of what their responsibility might be to the community, to the school and to themselves.

As you distribute the worksheet for Activity One, tell students that they are going to explore these issues, beginning with their responsibility to the community, by looking at specific situations and determining who is responsible and what their roles would be.

On Your Own

Encourage students to use this part of the activity to examine their own feelings and beliefs as they determine their responsibility to the community, other citizens and to themselves. Conduct a class discussion on this part of the activity before students go on to their group work. Remind students that they do have choices in what they should do, cautioning them not to try to be heroes in situations that involve danger.

In Your Group

Have group leaders call their groups together to complete this section of the activity. Set a time limit that is appropriate for your class, after which you will ask the recorders to report their group findings to the class. Encourage them to focus on the differences between those group

members who felt responsible and those who did not. Elicit from students how attitudes can affect the actions of community members. You might also ask students to share any difficulties they had in defending a position that was not their own. Discuss the value of "stepping into someone else's shoes" for a discussion like this.

Extending the Activity

1. Ask students to share some projects that they are involved with that show responsibility toward the community. Some of these might be recycling, actively practicing and encouraging others not to litter, working with voluntary organizations or individually to help others, perhaps with improving reading skills or other school subjects, helping the elderly with yard work or carrying groceries, etc. Take this opportunity to encourage students to volunteer, perhaps having each student make a commitment to help someone in need for a week or more.
2. Ask students to scan the newspaper for a week, clipping and compiling articles that deal with community issues. Using these articles, have students identify who is responsible for taking some form of action in each one. Students should be prepared to give reasons for identifying the "responsible" individuals or officials.

Activity Two Your School ... what is your role?

Objectives

- To help students evaluate and define their responsibilities to their school community.
- To help students recognize the many decisions they make while at school.
- To allow students to see the importance of those decisions and how they may impact their goals for the future.

Introduction

Many of the decisions that students make at school will involve friends or classmates, with peer pressure and peer influence playing an important role in the final decision. You might review the concepts of *peer pressure* – overt pressure such as teasing, challenging or dropping someone from a friendship or group – and *peer influence* – the pressure students put on themselves to be a part of the group. Guide the discussion so that students can see how these powerful factors might conflict with their sense of responsibility when making decisions.

On Your Own

As students complete this part of the activity, remind them to think about these actions in terms of responsibility to teachers, other students and themselves. Then they should think about how most students would react to each action noted and base their recommendation on those reactions as to whether there should

be rules about these things or if they should be left up to the individual students to decide.

In Your Group

Have each group leader call the group together to share their thoughts on the On Your Own part of the activity and to debate one of the two propositions. Depending upon your class, you can have students debate either formally or informally. If you choose to have a formal debate, review the debate format: (1) opening statements from both pro and con teams, (2) questions from pro to con, (3) answers from con, (4) questions from con to pro, (5) answers from pro and (6) closing statements from both pro and con. Encourage students to write down the key points they wish to highlight so that they can refer to them during the debate. Remind students that they might anticipate the opposition's statements and questions by "stepping into their shoes" and looking at the issue from another perspective.

Since preparing for a debate may take additional time, you may wish to extend this part of the activity over two or three class periods. Once the groups are ready, have them debate before the entire class. When all groups have had an opportunity to debate, the class can discuss any interesting ideas that evolved from this exercise. Perhaps they might want to take responsibility for their actions and the actions of those around them by following through and implementing some new rules or guidelines for their school. Caution them, however, to work through the student council or the administration.

Extending the Activity

1. Invite the principal and student body council members to your debates. Ask your students to share what they have learned about community, responsibility, commitment, issues and values with those guests.
2. Students might take a poll of their classmates' concerns or issues at school. They should graph and discuss the results before presenting them to the administration and/or student body council.

Activity Three I Believe . . .

Objectives

- To help students clarify their sense of personal responsibilities.
- To help students determine what they value and what their goals might be.
- To enable students to define themselves as individuals.

Introduction

As you move from the social responsibilities featured in Activities One and Two to personal responsibilities, invite students to compare the two by creating two lists: one of responsibilities they feel are their own; the other of responsibilities they feel others – especially adults – impose upon them. Some examples:

- Taking care of possessions
- Completing homework assignments
- Being home at a reasonable time
- Taking care of their appearance
- Showing respect for older people
- Performing tasks at home

Some students might list all of these as imposed responsibilities, while others will say they feel some measure of personal responsibility for one or more items on the list.

Close your discussion by pointing out that even our personal sense of responsibility can be influenced by commonly held beliefs and attitudes.

In Your Group

Before students meet in their groups, talk about sayings that represent people's beliefs. Give an exaggerated example such as "only tall people are good at basketball." Discuss the validity of this statement with students (is it true, what is tall, what is good, etc.) If a short person truly believed this, how might it affect his or her attitude and actions in playing basketball or trying out for the basketball team? Explain that they will be doing an exercise to see how specific sayings might affect their actions.

Once the groups have completed the exercise, invite them to share their findings in a class discussion. Help students to understand that if they agreed with numbers 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8, they probably believe that things outside their control rule their lives. Encourage and help these students to find ways to develop a more positive outlook and gain control over their own lives. Those who agreed with numbers 1, 4, 6, 9 and 10 probably have a more positive outlook and feel they have control over their lives. Encourage these students to continue to take charge of their lives and make decisions that are right for them.

On Your Own

Explain to students that many organizations have credos to help them remain focused on their beliefs and/or missions. Discuss with students why this might be important to an organization and to an individual. Research has shown that organizations that have a written mission statement succeed in accomplishing that mission more often than those that do not have a written mission.

Extending the Activity

1. Have students collect credos (mottos) from organizations, such as Boys' or Girls' Clubs, the United Way and/or individuals in their community. Share these with the class without telling who the credo belongs to. Let the students guess whose credo is being shared and what it signifies.
2. Invite students to turn these credos into raps or songs. Students might even work in groups, performing their "solos" in sequence.

Activity Four The Road to Success...

Objectives

- To help students identify tough decision-making situations they are dealing with now or think they might encounter in the future.
- To give students some sound ground rules for handling difficult situations.

Introduction

Most young people approach adolescence with both excitement and trepidation. The aura of independence can be quite exciting, yet brings with it myriad fears about obstacles they may encounter. As students begin to set goals for their future, they will also need to establish ways to overcome any obstacles that might prevent them from fulfilling their goals.

Explain to students that having a plan to deal with any difficult situation or obstacle that they may encounter can help relieve feelings of uncertainty or pressure they may be experiencing and give them a greater sense of control. This activity will

give them an opportunity to work together to create a guide that helps them deal with obstacles, especially those involving tough decisions.

On Your Own

Once students have had ample time to complete the section, encourage them to state their goals and concerns. If you find students with similar goals and concerns, you might group them together for the In Your Group portion of this activity.

In Your Group

Have students gather in their groups to create a guide for themselves. As they create their guides, encourage them to refer to the poster for ideas. For example, they should think about both short- and long-term consequences of any decision, whether it be a simple one such as studying or going to a party, or a tougher one such as smoking or drinking. Knowing when and how to say No will give them an advantage. An important part of decision-making is to know your beliefs (credo from Activity Three) and to live by them. Finally, students should practice their decision-making skills to help them take control of their own destiny.

Extending the Activity

1. Invite a counselor to review and discuss the guides with your students. Ask the counselor to give resources and support services available for students who might encounter problems that require more detailed attention.
2. Give each student a large piece of paper and direct them to write one important personal goal at the top of the paper. Then ask students to create a "road map" that shows how they will reach this goal in time. Give examples on the board and remind students that goals

are not achieved without a lot of planning and hard work.

Culminating Activity

Create a class mural that depicts a roadway to the future. Invite students to draw themselves near the end of the road as they see themselves in the future. They should also include themselves on the roadway now – with symbols such as sports equipment or computers – that show what they can do now to help reach that future goal. Display the mural for all to appreciate.

Resources for Teachers

Berman, Sheldon. *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility*. State University of New York Press. 1997.

Kirschenbaum, Howard. *100 Ways to Enhance Values and Morality in Schools and Youth Settings*. Allyn and Bacon. 1994.

Lickona, Thomas. *Education for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Bantam Doubleday Dell. 1992.

Siccone, Frank and Canfield, Jack. *101 Ways to Develop Self-Esteem and Responsibility: The Power to Succeed in School and Beyond*. Allyn and Bacon. 1992.

Youniss, James and Yates, Miranda. *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*. University of Chicago Press. 1997.

