

OVERVIEW

Choices is an interactive decision-making workshop that empowers teens to achieve academic success in pursuit of their career and life aspirations.

In two 50-minute sessions, local business and community volunteers take students through real-world exercises on academic self-discipline, time and money management, and goal setting. Teens discover that they can take charge of their lives.

CHOICES is typically presented at the 8th or 9th grade level, since these students are old enough to envision the future, yet young enough to develop positive skills and habits for success in high school and beyond.

"You gave us an education about why we need an education!"

-Evan, Middle School Student

Background

CHOICES was started in 1983 by Gary Frizzell, a Seattle dad trying to reach his troubled teenage son. Gary worked in educational relations for US WEST at the time and, upon successfully helping his son, was motivated to further develop CHOICES to provide teens everywhere with a foundational message that would help them make positive decisions for their lives, and would lay the groundwork for other mentoring programs. CHOICES Education Group opened its doors in Seattle, Washington on June 10, 1985 through U S WEST (now Qwest Communications) as an outgrowth of one of their community service programs called CHOICES.

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

DAY ONE

Factors Influencing Who I Am

Each student is given a “fortune cookie card” containing a factor that influences who he or she is. Students call out their factors and each factor is discussed to determine which factors they feel they can control. The key factor is *self-discipline*. If students use self-discipline to make wise choices regarding the factors they control, they can impact their own future.

The CHOICES Challenge

Two students volunteer to take the CHOICES Challenge. They are given three situations regarding their education in which they can choose to use self-discipline, choose the easy way out, or choose the “Wild Card.” They discover that making deliberate, wise choices about their education will lead to more opportunities in their lives.

Time Management

Students are given worksheets to determine how many hours of free time they have each day and week. It is discovered that about 62 hours, or 35%, of their time is open for their control. Students are asked if 2 hours a night is too much to spend on homework, leaving about 48 hours – 2 whole days – free to themselves. Discussion follows about how free time can be used for their benefit academically, personally and socially. They are given tools and encouragement to manage their time so they can accomplish the things that matter most for their future.

Money Management

One student volunteers to be a high school dropout. A few more volunteer to be bill collectors. The dropout is given a low-skill, low-education, \$8.00 an hour job and receives his or her first monthly paycheck of \$1,375. The monthly bills are then paid to demonstrate what it takes to run a household and manage a budget. Results of the *Apartment Hunt* homework assignment are reviewed as part of this exercise. The presenter emphasizes the importance of students finishing school and continuing their education.

DAY TWO

The Time of My Life

A timeline is used to give students perspective of their lifespan and how the relatively few years they spend in formal education compares to the number of years they benefit from that education. The timeline stretches across most of the room and their formal education covers about one foot of that span, but affects most everything they do from that point on. The students quickly realize that the decisions they make today will impact them for many years to come.

Strategy for an Uncertain World:

Increase Your Options

The presenter reviews the results of the *Job Hunt* homework assignment and discusses with students the dream jobs and dropout jobs they researched. The emphasis is on the differences in education required, pay, benefits, hours, perks, etc. between the two categories of jobs. Three volunteers are invited to participate in this exercise. Each of the three draws a card. One has education beyond high school, one is a high school graduate and one is a dropout. Knowing only their education level, the class helps determine which of the three can submit an application for nine different jobs. In the end, the education beyond high school is able to apply for all nine jobs, the high school graduate has six choices and the dropout has three choices. We emphasize that NO job is a bad job; only that education increases life options.

Strategy for an Uncertain World:

Connections Between School & Work

The presenter explains that the building blocks for a solid education are related to similar building blocks for a successful career. Classes you take = Work you do; School grades = Job performance; Attendance at school = Attendance at work; Relationships at school = Relationships at work; Free Time while a student = Free Time while a worker. Students learn they are establishing habits now that will follow them throughout their lives. They are encouraged to establish a good work ethic in school so they will be good employees in the future.

Future Impact

This exercise shows students how the choices they make have an effect not only on themselves but also on friends, family, community, state, nation and world. They can see their choices have a ripple effect. Using the Future Impact worksheet and large group discussion, the presenter helps students discover how their choice to increase their level of education can affect them and others, now and in the future.

My Plan to Take Charge of My Life

This exercise introduces students to the goal setting process by asking them to establish at least one major educational goal for themselves and begin planning at least two daily steps toward achieving that goal. Goals other than educational are also listed on the worksheet. Students are encouraged to complete the worksheet after class, sign it and have an adult whom they trust and respect sign as a witness, so they will be supported by and accountable to someone as they work toward their goals. A more complete goal setting activity is available in the CHOICES Action Plan, which teachers are given and encouraged to teach the day after CHOICES concludes.

The Key to Success

At the end of the workshop, each student receives a rubber key fob which states, “The Key to Success is Self Discipline.” They are encouraged to keep this as a reminder of the CHOICES message.

CHOICES Action Plan Follow-up Exercise

This optional (but strongly encouraged) follow-up exercise is given to the teacher prior to CHOICES. It includes a complete goal setting activity that builds on the workshop. Teachers often use the Action Plan as an addition to, or the beginning of, students’ high school portfolios.

For more information:

www.CHOICES.org