

For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

Transcending Bad Examples

Freewrite and Discussion: 10 minutes

Make sure everyone has paper and a pen or pencil. Then ask the group to think about an adult in their lives who set a negative example for them. Do they remember when they realized that the person was someone they did not want to be like? How did they know? Ask them to write about that situation for a few minutes.

When most people have finished writing, ask the second prompt: Think about an adult you know or used to know who was a better role model for you. What was it about them that you wanted to emulate (be like)?

After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their examples (they can choose to share only the positive role model if they wish). Make two columns on the board: Bad Example and Good Example. With the group, brainstorm the kinds of behaviors that might fall under each.

Read the Story: 10 minutes

Have them read “Not My Father’s Son” by V.M. out loud, taking turns. Let them pass if they don’t want to read.

Discussion: 10 minutes

Ask for instances of V.M.’s father’s bad behaviors [had affairs, left V.M.’s mother, molested a child, didn’t like his visits with his son until his son bought him clothes, was mean to his son when his mother was dying, abandoned his son].

Ask the group how V.M. managed to steer himself in a better direction than his father. Whose example did he learn from [his foster father, who taught him adult life skills; Mr. Green who listened to V.M. and who told his son, “I’ll always be there”; his friend Josh who let V.M. express his feelings after his mom died]? What were things he did to help himself? [Asked “Is there something I said that made you angry?”; went to therapy and support groups; supported his little brother].

Ask the group if they think V.M. is succeeding at setting his own goals, rather than following in his father’s footsteps. Why or why not?

Closing: 5 minutes

Ask everyone to think about a time they shaped their behavior or self to try to be a better person. Give them a few minutes to write about this. What improvement were they trying to make? Why? How did they do it? ■

Figuring Out How To Quit

Freewrite and Discussion: 10 minutes

Make sure everyone has paper and a pen or pencil. Then ask the group to think about a bad habit or behavior that they would like to stop, have been able to cut down on, or have already stopped. It could be anything from smoking to over-eating to cutting to fighting—anything they’ve decided they’d be better off not doing. Ask them to write down the bad habit and also write about why they think they do (or did) this self-destructive or destructive thing. Tell the group that they will not have to share their answers if they don’t want to.

Give the group a few minutes to think and write, and then go around the circle or ask for volunteers to share. (You may want to share your own example to kick things off.)

Ask the group if, when they thought about it, they were able to explain why they did or do the bad habit. Did they understand that at the time? Does pinpointing a reason or trigger help them get control over a behavior or habit? (There is no right answer here; allow for discussion.)

Read the Story: 10 minutes

Have them read “Peaceful Warrior” by Anonymous out loud, taking turns. Let them pass if they want.

Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask teens to call out reasons why the author fought. Point out that reasons don’t have to be solutions or even make sense; they can be emotional reactions [e.g., her mom’s treatment seemed unfair and she was angry; she had no control in foster care and was crowded in with too many girls; “to get justice”]. Ask if fighting made any of that better [No].

Then ask, what *did* make the situation better? Brainstorm a list on the board or chart paper [yoga and exercise; analyzing before reacting; using a calm voice; going to therapy and expressing herself there and elsewhere; getting her own room].

Ask the group if anyone has tried any of these solutions for a behavior they wanted to change. Was it effective? What other strategies can help them change a bad habit? List additional suggestions on the board.

Closing: 5 minutes

Ask each teen to pick at least one strategy from the board that they would like to try for a change they want to make in their lives. They can write the strategy down, or go around in a circle and share out. ■