



Advisory Facilitator Guide

Research shows that children and adults who emotionally connect with an experience are more likely to make life-long behavioral change than those who just receive information about that experience. Business experts call it “see-feel-change,” fueling action by sparking emotion. Connect with Kids calls it **educating the heart**: using the power of storytelling and peer-to-peer connections to create heart-felt associations.

Connect with Kids programs feature “real” children and teens taking about today’s issues, along with the latest research on the topic at hand and advice from experts. Students relate to the peer-to-peer programs that touch on the social, health and behavioral issues that they are facing in their lives. The award-winning videos and cross-curricula activities offer proven methods with practical, solution-oriented learning experiences.

Preparation for Classroom and Advisory Sessions

The WebSource Advisory Guide offers a suggested order to use Connect with Kids video and print resources. Facilitators are encouraged to objectively prepare for the curriculum by reviewing the material prior to the advisory sessions.

Facilitator Tips: Setting an Agenda for Lessons and Climate for Learning

Experts agree that a most important variable in conducting student advisory sessions can be how the adult facilitator relates to the students in the class. The challenge: To create an emotionally safe environment for honest dialogue and sharing without relinquishing one’s role (and control) as the teacher. As an effective facilitator, students need to know that you are both in charge of the classroom and that you are a truly caring person who is interested in the social, emotional *and* academic challenges they face.

In order to effectively involve students, the advisory facilitator should develop a working agreement with the students. Each session, encourage participation by asking for feedback and responses from the students, and an atmosphere of acceptance by encouraging students to listen to differing viewpoints.

An advisory leader’s role is to remain neutral; to be supportive and encouraging of *all* points of view. Create a platform for open communication at the start of each advisory by:

- Rearranging classroom seating to allow students to sit in a circle facing each other can help to encourage open and direct communication.
- Keeping the discussion on topic. If participants get off-topic, it’s the facilitator’s job to bring them back on task. Find a moment in the conversation to gently remind participants of the goal and topic.

At the core of effective social and emotional learning is the notion that the leader must understand the population he/she is teaching; referred to as “*preparatory empathy*.” It is important for advisory facilitators to prepare for the adolescent audience by considering:

- What pre-teens and teens may be thinking and feeling about the many issues addressed in adolescent social and emotional learning, such as peer pressure, substance abuse, bullying and violence prevention, and developing the character and life skills to handle adversity and build lifelong resilience.
- What it is like to be a teenager in today’s world.
- What reaction will the advisory facilitator is likely to have to what is expressed.

The Mutual Aid Model

Connect with Kids video and print resources put into practice the Mutual Aid Model of counseling. This theoretical approach emerged from the field of social work and was developed by William Schwartz and built upon by Lawrence Shulman and Alex Gitterman. It recognized the power of one’s peer group as a vehicle for solving common problems. The peer group provides a forum for trying out new behaviors; giving and receiving feedback; providing positive support; and, most important, learning to help and support others through the aid of a trusted adult. It takes advantage of the positive roles that peers can play in working together to find new solutions to old problems.

Key Dynamics to Establish Mutual Aid

The classroom lessons are designed to establish Mutual Aid that engages students in a learning process where students are open to hearing the advisory facilitator and each other. The following dynamics are central to the process of offering and receiving Mutual Aid and should be incorporated throughout the lessons.

The “All-in-the-Same-Boat” Phenomenon

A potent force in Mutual Aid is the discovery that one is not alone in his or her thoughts, feelings, and emotions. There is something special in hearing others articulate similar feelings and experiences. Such mutuality produces support that energizes learning. As students respond to key questions in the lesson, the facilitator can establish connections by acknowledging the adolescent experience, including academic stress, social anxiety and peer pressure.

Information Sharing

Each student has his or her own unique life experiences. The discussion questions following each video segment are designed to assist students with sharing their experiences and beliefs about the topic at hand. By encouraging their participation in the learning process, the program facilitator can help students listen to each other while correcting any misinformation that the students may have.

The Dialectical Process

Class discussion, led by the program facilitator, can be a vehicle for students to develop insight into their own behaviors as they share their thoughts and listen to the experiences of others. Hearing their peers articulate similar feelings and experiences produces support and encourages learning. The facilitator needs to be prepared for this process and be able to assist students with navigating different ideas, opinions and reactions. Within this process the leader has the opportunity to encourage an exchange of ideas while acknowledging and reinforcing the new pro-social behaviors that are learned during class discussions.

Mutual Support

The curriculum provides students with the opportunity to receive support and validation from the advisory facilitator and each other as they participate in activities and discussion which ask them to explore their struggles and need to make wise choices. When appropriate, the leader guides students toward supporting their peers by asking them to react and give feedback.

Mutual Challenge

While it is important for students to have support from their peer group and adults, it is not sufficient to create change in behavior or intention to change. Research shows behavior/attitude changes occur when students have information and learn new skills. Developing *new* attitudes and behaviors may first need *old* ideas and behaviors to be questioned and evaluated. The discussion questions and activities ask students to challenge their own views and those of their peers. Adolescents are in a good position to confront and challenge each other's thoughts, assumptions and actions.

Individual Problem Solving

As part of the discussion questions and accompanying activities, students are often asked to identify their struggles and successes, raise specific problems and respond to another's problems by asking questions, making suggestions and reflecting on the experience. The advisory facilitator's role is to encourage many exchanges and to indicate how each student's individual responses relate to the class experience as a whole.

The "Strength-in-Numbers" Phenomenon

Adolescents often feel overwhelmed by everyday stress and the pressures. Media, peers and communities often contribute to this. The pressure is less overwhelming and frightening when students are able to deal with these pressures as a large group. When students collectively address this in the classroom, they can learn from each other and garner the support needed to manage these pressures.

Navigating Difficult Conversations and Creating a Climate of Sharing

Students will learn and adopt new behaviors from adults and their peers when a climate of honest and thought-provoking discussion and sharing is fostered. That climate of sharing often leads to questions that can be difficult to address. The following guidelines and responses are offered:

What should I say if students ask challenging questions?

When encouraging an open and trusting dialogue to support social and emotional learning, students may ask challenging questions, such as *“Do you use drugs?” “Have you ever used drugs in the past?” “How have you dealt with prejudice?” “Have you ever broken the rules?”* While they may simply be curious, more often the questions are asked because they want to see if you, as the adult program facilitator, really understand what it is like to be a teenager faced with handling these situations.

Tough questions from teens should be answered after considering the following: your school or agency’s guidelines, your own comfort level and your past history of use. Generally speaking, self-disclosure about past use is best kept to a minimum, or not shared at all. When it comes to drugs and alcohol, keep in mind that it is illegal for anyone to use certain substances and any disclosure about current use of legal substances is best shared with a positive health message: “I have a glass of wine with dinner, but I never drive.”

All things considered, it is best to say: “We are here to talk about the challenges we face throughout life and I do know how difficult that can be for teens.”

What should I say when a student discloses substance use/abuse information about family members, or friends or him or herself?

The curriculum is designed to have students watch videos about “real teens” and react to their stories. Therefore, it is likely that students will share personal information. Prior to discussions, it is important to tell students that they should not use names or identifying information. It is equally important to monitor if the disclosures are relevant to the discussion.

What should I do if the students do not seem to connect with the stories in the video?

Although a diverse group of teens are represented in the video segments, not everyone can relate to all of the teens. Some students may get distracted if the teens in the video “don’t seem like them” and will need help to refocus. It is important to redirect the discussion to the issue and how they would handle the situation at hand. Ask students if there is anyone in the video who they were able to relate to or transition the discussion to relating to the overall situation depicted, rather than the specific individuals featured in the video.