The purpose of this discussion is to help teenagers explore their television viewing habits and understand the influence television has in shaping their values and behaviors.

OVERVIEW

Using an informal survey during the summer of 1997 (a copy of the survey, for your future use, is found at the end of this discussion), a group of young leaders obtained the following results in Colorado Springs, CO:

- They watch these shows because they are funny, realistic, entertaining, scandalous, strange, or intellectually stimulating.
- The teenagers said they watch an average of 2 hours of TV a day during the school year.
- Some of the shows they noted as portraying the "worst values" are "Singled Out," "Beavis and Butthead," "Beverly Hills, 90210," "Married with Children," "Melrose Place," "Friends," talk shows, and "The Simpsons." However, few of them indicated that because these shows portray poor values, they do not watch them.

The group received mixed messages regarding whether young people think that TV influences their own or their friends’ values and behaviors. Responses range from, "Not really, values should already be set," to "TV gives ideas about bad stuff to try," to "Yes, because you’ll do what you see on TV." Many stated that they feel that while TV does not influence their values and behaviors, it does influence others.

LEADER PREPARATION

- Study and adapt the attached survey for your situation.
- A few weeks before the scheduled discussion, conduct this survey yourself or give it to other leaders to distribute. Try to get about 50 teenagers to complete the survey. Then compile the results.
- The week prior to the discussion, videotape and watch the top five shows. Take notes of any particular values or behaviors you see portrayed, both positive and negative.
- Prepare a videotape to record particularly interesting short clips that communicate any points you want to make.

GROUP BUILDING

Open the time with a few songs to draw them in and make them feel comfortable.
Open up with a non-threatening question like, "If they could be in any TV show, which one would they choose and why?"

GROUP PRESENTATION

Show them the results from your survey of the top five shows that teenagers in their community voted on.

Ask them why they thought these shows were so popular. Then ask them the values and behaviors that each of these top five shows portray. This should be an enlightening time for a leader to sit back and listen to your teenagers.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss any of the following questions:

- What are the positives of television?
- What are the negatives of television?
- How do you see either the positive or negative aspects playing out in your life or in the lives of your friends?
- How can you use television to support your values and your education?

WRAP-UP

Review these points from the discussion:

- Television portrays both positive and negative values and behaviors.
- All viewers should critically consider the values they are learning from TV.
- Young people can use their mind and time in other fun, creative activities.

TELEVISION SURVEY OF TEENAGERS

- What are the top five shows that you and your friends watch?
- Why do you think they are so popular?
- How much TV do you watch on the average day and during the week during the school year?
- Do you think TV influences your values and behavior? Explain.
- How does it influence your friends?
- What shows do you think portray the worst values? Do you watch these shows?
- What is your favorite commercial?

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