

Peace

Grades 9-12

Segment Summary:

Saul Avina's peaceful childhood in Mexico changed to one of gangs and violence after his parents divorced. Fortunately, with his new life in America, he has found tranquility once again.

Saul Avina experienced a wonderful childhood in Mexico until his parents divorced when he was 9. His world then changed from a peaceful life with two parents to one of drugs and gangs. After the divorce, his mother moved to America, and Saul was recruited by Mexican gang members who promised to be his new family. He started off selling marijuana to other kids his age, and his experiences exposed him to fighting and other forms of violence. Saul's turning point came after he witnessed his first and last drive-by shooting. It was then that he decided the money and the sense of family weren't worth the fear and anxiety that he was feeling. His father allowed him to go live with his mother in America. Ironically, Saul was tested again when American gang members approached him and asked him to join their group. This time he had the strength to say no and to resist the temptation, choosing to live a peaceful life instead. He took a job as a cook and earned his paycheck the hard way. The sense of pride that came with Saul's legitimate work was overwhelming, and he eventually found a job working with kids like himself, who come from Latino families and who have witnessed domestic violence. Saul talks to these kids about preventing violence at school, at home and in the community. His experience has taken him full circle, from a peaceful childhood to a violent adolescence and back again to a peaceful existence.

Discussion Questions:

1. At what points in Saul's life did he experience peace? What are some peaceful memories you have from your childhood?
2. What caused Saul to seek a family outside of his own house? Have you ever looked outside of your family for elements that a family "should" fulfill? When and why did you do this?
3. Describe Saul's life as a Mexican gang member and a drug dealer. How did the gang lifestyle make Saul feel anxious and cause stress in his life? Based on this description, would you choose to become a gang member? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever experienced peer pressure? What were the circumstances? How did you feel?
5. Have you ever gone along with your friends even though you knew what they were doing was wrong? Why did you choose to do this?
6. In what ways did Saul's "new life" in America save him and provide him with a fresh start?
7. What choices did Saul make in America that helped him rediscover the peace of his childhood? If you had recently immigrated to America, would you have made the same decisions that Saul did regarding gang membership and employment?
8. How hard do you think it is to leave behind a familiar lifestyle and country? Would you be able to leave these familiarities behind the way Saul did? Why or why not?
9. What gives Saul peace? What gives you peace?
10. How can you create a peaceful environment at home, at school and in your community?

Vocabulary Words and Definitions:

Anxious (adj.)

Definition: constantly being very worried about something that may happen or may have happened

Context: Oswald was so anxious about the exam that he was unable to get a good night's sleep.

Communicate (v.)

Definition: to exchange information with an individual or group by using a common system of symbols, signs or behaviors

Context: Making eye contact with people is one technique that Kraig uses to communicate that he is listening.

Conflict resolution (n.)

Definition: a process or method of dealing with a problem so that there is no longer a disagreement

Context: Because she is shy, Naomi's method of conflict resolution is to give in to others' demands.

External control (n.)

Definition: the ability to change or manipulate a situation that is outside of one's authority or jurisdiction

Context:

Without external control, Karmen was forced to wait until the judges made a decision.

Inner peace (n.)

Definition: the internal feeling of being calm, happy and not worried

Context: Ameila was able to find inner peace after she learned how to let go of her anger.

Meditate (v.)

Definition: to empty one's mind of thoughts and feelings in order to relax completely

Context: Joaquin meditates to clear his mind and relax his body when he feels stress.

Peace (n.)

Definition: a situation in which there is no conflict, dispute or discord between countries or people

Context: Open communication between parents and children fosters peace in the home.

Self-mutilation (n.)

Definition: the injuring of one's body (by cutting, bruising or branding) to deal with tough internal feelings

Context: Calliope made cuts on her arm, using this form of self-mutilation as a way to escape her pain.

Stability (n.)

Definition: the condition of being strong, steady and not changing

Context: The stability of his home life was shattered when his parents divorced.

Stress reduction (n.)

Definition: the act of lowering the level of anxiety and worry a person feels

Context: Listening to the soothing sounds of the ocean is Tom's favorite method of stress reduction.

Support group (n.)

Definition: a group of people who help someone resolve a problem or deal with a difficult time in life

Context: Simone's parents and sister were her support group during her recovery from alcohol abuse.

Turning point (n.)

Definition: the time when an important change starts, especially one that improves the situation

Context: The turning point in Adam's reckless behavior occurred when he was suspended for cheating.

Tranquility (n.)

Definition: a peaceful, calm feeling

Context: After his violent stepfather moved out of the house, Chan felt a sense of tranquility.

Source: *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 2000

Activity: And Then What?

Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Recognize the relationship between inner peace and external control
- Describe situations that cause them to feel anxious
- Predict worst-case scenarios and learn to look beyond them
- Use reasoning skills in response to stressful situations |

Materials:

- Pens, pencils
- Paper
- Chalkboard or overhead projector
- **Pathway to Peace** worksheet|

Procedure:

1. Begin by sharing a situation in which you had to deal with circumstances you couldn't control. Describe your feelings, but don't tell students how you resolved the situation. The more dramatic your description, the stronger your point will be.

Examples:

- You were stuck in traffic and were late for work.
 - Your boss called an emergency meeting after work, and you couldn't pick up your children on time.
 - Someone was rude to you while you were shopping in a department store.
2. Explain to students that when we face situations that are out of our control, it's difficult for us to react peacefully. We become anxious, angry and perhaps even violent. Ask students to give examples of how they might have reacted if they were placed in the same situation as the one you described.
 3. Tell students that before you reacted to the situation you faced, you mentally went through the steps in the following process:
 - First, determine the worst-case scenario for your situation.
 - Next, ask yourself "And then what?"
 - Keep asking the question "And then what?" until you realize that even the worst-case scenario is usually something you can overcome. Students may have to ask themselves "And then what?" several times before they reach a resolution they think they can accept.
 4. Direct students' attention back to your original example. Determine your worst-case scenario and write it on the board. Then, using the process from *Step 3*, question yourself aloud and record your answers each time.
 5. Explain to students that working through this process helps people realize they can get past their present situation – even when it seems like the worst thing that could possibly happen occurs. This realization helps with stress reduction and alleviates anxiety.
 6. After you've modeled this process for students, pass out the **Pathway to Peace** worksheet. Assign students to identify a personal situation that is out of their control and write it down on a piece of paper. You may decide to offer the following examples or let students come up with their own.

Examples: a pop quiz, getting stuck in traffic (whether driver or passenger), parents arguing/fighting, boyfriend or girlfriend acting differently, a sporting event being cancelled due to bad weather, etc.

Note: Remind students to think of realistic outcomes and urge them not to exaggerate the worst-case scenarios.

7. Allow students time to work through the steps on their ***Pathway to Peace*** worksheets.
8. For homework, assign students to use their ***Pathway to Peace*** worksheets as an outline to write a short personal reflection focusing on the following points:
 - Extend your ***Pathway to Peace*** worksheet by asking yourself “And then what?” at least two more times. How do you feel about the final outcome? Is it as bad as you originally thought? Why or why not?
 - What are some other situations in your life that make you feel anxious or powerless? Would you use the process of asking “And then what?” to help you stay calm and find tranquility in those situations? Why or why not?

Pathway to Peace

Name: _____

Directions: Summarize your situation. Then use the top box to record the worst thing that could happen as a result of these circumstances. Follow the arrows and read the directions until you get to a “Finished” sign.

