

Date Used: \_\_\_\_\_

Group: \_\_\_\_\_

## **CHANGING CHANNELS**

### **Topic: Television Viewing**

#### **Purpose of this Session:**

Young people watch hours and hours of television every week. This generation of kids has been raised primarily on visual media. Since television has such a powerful influence on our children, use this TalkSheet to discuss with your kids how it is shaping their lives.

#### **To Introduce the Topic:**

Ask the group members to name all of the channels or stations they watch on television. Write each of these down on a chalkboard or on newsprint for everyone to see. This will give you the big picture concerning the general content of your group's television diet. See which stations are watched the most—public television, movie channels, sports, news, MTV, and so on. Take a poll to see how many kids live in homes with cable or satellite television. Also ask how many use VCRs to tape and view programs.

#### **The Discussion:**

**Item #1:** Young people will swap stories about their most and least favorite TV shows. Generally kids have an easier time thinking of their most favorite. Some kids may have only one or two favorites, which is okay. In fact, you want to affirm those kids who do not watch much television, but do so without making them look like nerds in front of their peers. Some young people will mention shows that others in the group are not allowed to watch. If this occurs you may hear "Your mom lets you watch that?" or "My dad won't let me watch that!" You do not want kids to put each other down for what can or can't be watched. If this happens use it as an opportunity to talk about appropriate content. You could ask questions like, "Why might parents not want their children to watch \_\_\_\_\_?" or "Why do parents want their kids protected from certain TV shows?" When the kids have had a chance to share their choices, ask them what makes a program a most or least favorite.

**Item #2:** Explore why kids watch so much television. You may have a wide variety of responses, from the kid who says, "Our family doesn't own a TV" to the child who states, "Our TV is on all day."

**Item #3:** Take each question one at a time. You will have many kids say that they would go to their friends' homes to watch TV or that they would substitute other media, such as video games or radios. Explore alternatives other than the media, like playing, reading, church involvement, sports, family activities, and so on. Ask the kids what they would miss the most and why. You can tell the kids they sound like people who are trying to get off drugs in their "withdrawal" comments. Ask how healthy this really is.

**Item #4:** Talk about the fairness and unfairness of each of the rules. Use this opportunity to support parents in their quest to monitor and sensibly use the television. Ask the kids to create their own list of rules they think would be pleasing to God.

**Item #5:** Most kids will declare they always or sometimes watch television shows that they know are not good for them. Explore what they mean by a TV show not being good for them. The kids will say things like, "I learn bad words" or "There is too much violence." Ask how negatively influenced we are by what we watch on television. Young people do not believe these shows will adversely affect them. Create a list of negative consequences from viewing these programs (more comfortable with violence, don't get exercise, don't learn to study).

**Item #6:** Many kids have never considered God in their TV viewing. Explore with the students the plans God has for them, for the present as well as the future. Then discuss how TV can hurt what God wants them to do. Some responses are that TV encourages them to put off doing their homework, it teaches them things that are wrong, commercials teach them to be materialistic, TV takes them away from their families, and so on.

#### **To Close the Session:**

Summarize what has been covered during the discussion. Then ask the group to plan a week of TV viewing for a pretend average fourth, fifth, or sixth grader. Use a TV listings booklet from your local newspaper or a TV Guide to help. Take into account all the other activities your pretend kid is involved in. You can then create a large Monday through Sunday schedule on the chalkboard or on newsprint. This gives you the chance to guide the students to think about their TV choices.