

**Category 4:**Understanding  
and Managing Feelings**Meeting 3****Power, Influence, and Making a Difference****Background**

We are all influenced by the actions of others in our lives. Sometimes that experience has a positive effect and can help us to become better people. Other times, someone else's ability to impact our beliefs and behavior can leave us feeling overpowered, insecure, or manipulated. For adolescents, the power of others may be concrete—like physical size, age, strength, socio-economic status, or the impact of a group. Power can also be less obvious and involve differences in intellectual ability, social skills, and social status. These power imbalances can lead to bullying. People who bully choose to harm people who are perceived as having less power than themselves. Sometimes, the fear or admiration of that person's power leaves bystanders unwilling to act.

The purpose of this meeting is to help students understand how they can cultivate power from within and use their own power and influence in positive ways—both to encourage action that contributes to a positive school climate and to reduce inappropriately used power by someone whose intentions are harmful. This class meeting provides teachers with two options, so this topic may be explored either in two sequential meetings or with students at different levels.

**Learner Outcomes**

By the end of this session, students will be able to

- identify people (and qualities of those people) who have had influence in their own lives and those individuals they themselves have influenced

- discuss how “influence” and “power” are related
- identify how people gain and lose social power
- discuss the role an imbalance of power plays in bullying
- list ways to use influence and power to create a more positive school climate

### Materials Needed

#### Activity 1:

- Blank sheets of paper
- Pencils

#### Activity 2:

- Using *Your Influence to Make a Difference*, one situation for each group
- Pencils

### Preparation Needed

- Search the Internet for “*Time* magazine 100 Most Influential People.” Select the most recent list. Consider obtaining pictures of six to ten people you think would be recognized by your students. Try to find a good mix of political, religious, and pop culture leaders. Pictures are available by clicking on names on the list.
- Print *Using Your Influence to Make a Difference* from the CD-ROM and cut apart the situations. Each group will need a situation.

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### Class Meeting Outline

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#### Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Every year *Time* magazine picks the 100 most influential people in the United States. What do we mean when we say someone is influential? (*Influence can be defined as the ability or power of someone to produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others.* <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/influence>)
2. Read some names from the most recent *Time* magazine list (and perhaps show pictures). You may wish to present the entire list to see

which people are recognized by students. **What traits or qualities make us consider these people (or people like them) influential? Are each of these people influential in the same way? Explain.**

3. **We all have been influenced by others and have influenced others ourselves, through actions, words, personality, or character. Sometimes that influence has been used in positive ways, sometimes negatively to manipulate or harm others.**

#### Activity 1 and Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

1. **We're going to do an activity to help you think about your personal experience with "influence."** Pass out a blank sheet of paper to each student. **On your paper, draw a line down the center. On the left side, write the heading People Who Influence Me. Take a few minutes and write down names of people who have influenced you in your life in positive ways, negative ways, or both. These people may be family members, friends, or acquaintances, or you may just know of them through history or television. Next to each name, write one quality about that person that has had an effect on you. These will not be collected and can stay confidential. You won't be required to hand these in or share what you write. Allow 5 minutes.**
2. **Next, on the right side of the paper, put the heading People I Influence. Now jot down names of people you believe you've influenced—people whose actions, behavior, and opinions you've affected. Next to each name, write one quality about yourself that may have influenced that person. Allow 5 minutes.**
3. **Is influence the same as power? How are they the same or different?** *(Influence can involve the power a person has to impact someone else's behavior, opinions, etc. But a person can have influence over someone without using power. Power can be having the ability to accomplish something and can involve having control over others.)*
4. **What are some different forms of influence or power?** *(Physical, intellectual, financial, power in numbers, being older/younger, power due to someone's position at work, physical attractiveness, ability to perform something well, such as athletics, academics, music.)*
5. **How does someone become influential or powerful?** *(They're well liked, they're confident, they're comfortable speaking in a group, they may be born into a family with a lot of money, people allow them to make decisions or speak for them, they take control by force, they are elected or hired by other people, they build respect for/by their*

- actions, they create needed change, they are charismatic or make us want to be like them, they give us hope, they are intelligent.)*
6. **Sometimes people have the power to influence others simply by virtue of who they are. Can you think of some examples?** (*Royalty throughout history, kings and sheiks, heirs to family companies/fortunes.*) **How about those from history who've gained power by force?** (*Hitler, Mussolini, Sadaam Hussein.*)
  7. **Why might someone lose their ability to influence others?** (*Because people no longer go along with them; stop paying attention to their behavior; recognize that influence is being used to manipulate, control, or harm others; believe their views no longer reflect the majority.*)
  8. **The ability to influence others can be used for the common good or to harm or oppress others. People don't have the power to influence us unless we give it to them. Of course, students in every school, including ours, have the ability to influence others. Some students have "social power" because other students give it to them, sometimes for positive reasons, and sometimes for negative reasons. If suddenly no one wanted to be with the most popular students in school, they would no longer have social power.**

### Activity 2 (25 minutes)

1. **What are ways in which students' power and influence can help the school be a more positive place and a better environment?** Have students discuss in pairs or groups of three for 5 minutes. Process highlights of those discussions as a group and list examples on the board.
2. **What are ways in which student influence (either individually or in groups) can be used negatively?** (*Pressure others to drink alcohol or use drugs, skip school or ignore assignments, be rude or insensitive to others, leave others out, form cliques or gangs, etc.*)
3. **How does the ability to influence others apply to bullying?** (*Those who bully others usually choose someone who is less powerful than they are—either physically or socially; someone who can't easily defend themselves. People bully others to feel powerful, they influence others to join in the bullying, bystanders feel less able to step in.*)
4. **How do students give power to those who harm others?** (*By joining in, by being friends with them, by encouraging them, by laughing, by not standing up to them or confronting the behavior, by pretending not to notice or ignoring the abusive behavior.*)

5. **How could students react in a bullying situation to promote a positive school environment and reduce destructive power?** (*By not encouraging, not joining in, "calling" them on their behavior, asking them to stop, showing support or compassion for the bullied student.*)
6. **Sometimes someone's physical presence (size, strength, age, looks) may discourage us from taking action in a bullying situation. How can students individually or as a group impact those situations?** (*Standing up as a group, telling an adult, getting help, not joining in or encouraging.*)
7. Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Give each group a situation from the handout and ask them to consider the following questions. Write these on the board or on chart paper:

- What options do students have to positively influence this situation?
- Evaluate each option for its potential level of risk. What options do you think would be the lowest risk? Highest risk?
- If you were the recipient of negative behavior, which options would you find most helpful or supportive?
- Identify two options you feel would be the most influential in stopping the negative behavior described in the situation.

8. Give the groups 5 to 7 minutes before calling them back into the larger group.



### Activity 2 Discussion Questions (15 minutes)

1. Bring the class back together.
2. Have the groups read their scenarios, present their best options, and describe how they made their decisions.
3. Highlight the thought process that went into determining low and high risk and what factors would affect individual and group ability to influence a situation in a positive way.

### Teacher Tip



A powerful example of how standing up as a group can make an impact is the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of the 1950s. The buses were segregated, with white riders permitted to sit in front and black riders required to sit in the back of the bus or stand. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to give up her seat to a white man. An organized bus boycott followed—black people in Montgomery stopped using buses until they were integrated. The boycott lasted for thirteen months and the bus company lost a great deal of money. A U.S. Supreme Court decision forced the bus company to integrate the buses.

4. Discuss takeaway messages that students want to highlight. How can using their influence (both as individuals and as a group) impact school climate, how people feel about school, or student achievement?

### Wrap-Up

1. Remember, your power to influence others can dramatically affect our school climate, for better or worse. People can use their strength in a number of ways to create an atmosphere where people feel supported, included, and listened to. You can “power with” others or “power over” others, which contributes to an environment that may feel unsafe, controlling, inconsiderate, and hostile.
2. When you see students misuse their influence over others, think about how you could make a difference when there’s a power imbalance. We all play a role. How might you use influence to shift power in the direction toward fairness and balance? Each of us can have a positive influence that can change our school for the better. The choice is yours.

## Curriculum Connections

### English/History/Science/Civics/Social Sciences:

- Students can do a presentation about who, in their opinion, has been the most influential person in history (or in a particular field). They should use research and citations to make their points.

### History/Civics:

- Suggest that students research examples of people (currently or in history) who use their influence or position to influence others in positive ways, to raise awareness about a particular issue or cause. (Examples: Michelle Obama—education, childhood obesity, treatment of military families; Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela—world awareness to the needs of a people; Mark Zuckerberg—ways that people communicate; Sigmund Freud—challenge to people to view their world in a different way; Louis Pasteur—health and safety of others.)

### Civics/Current Events:

- Review current events involving regime changes internationally. Using these, have a discussion about people and political parties in power and out of power, how they got to be powerful, what they do when their power is threatened, and how changes in power can be smooth or violent. Have students write a short research paper about how specific groups and individuals have influenced the balance of power in their own and other people’s lives. Topics could include current events as well as the Civil Rights Movement, labor unions and strikes, women’s suffrage, Mahatma Gandhi, apartheid rules in South Africa, ousting of political leaders in the Middle East.

## Using Your Influence to Make a Difference

**Instructions:** Print this document and cut apart the situations. Each group will need one situation.

### Situation 1

It seems that almost every day in your math class, John tries to embarrass Aaron. Aaron is smaller than most of the guys, so John comments about his size, tries to trip him, takes his papers, or pokes him. You think John's behavior is really immature. A couple of John's friends laugh. Other members of the class laugh as though they want to make sure that John doesn't try to embarrass them.

### Situation 2

Kris struggles with reading and dreads reading in front of other students. Other kids in your English class often give Kris a hard time whenever the teacher asks students to read something or give a presentation. When Kris reads, some kids see it as an open invitation to interrupt with rude noises, coughs, sneezes, or remarks.

### Situation 3

Latisha and Emma were best friends until Emma started dating Latisha's old boyfriend. Unfortunately, your friends chose sides and the ones that supported Emma gossiped about Latisha and her friends. The group that supported Latisha gossiped about Emma and the others. When Emma broke up with the guy, everyone went back to being friends again. But when you and your friends told each other the mean things that had been said, everyone started getting into arguments again.

### Situation 4

Trevor is a popular athlete in your school. Unfortunately, there is tension, name-calling, and separation between kids from different racial and ethnic groups. Whenever Trevor gets a chance, he makes nasty remarks about students of a different group. Even though adults are often around, no one seems to hear or step in to stop him. A few kids laugh when Trevor makes these comments. Many pretend not to hear and appear uncomfortable with Trevor's remarks but don't know what to do.

### Situation 5

Kendra and Monica sometimes did things with the same group of friends. Both were hoping to be on the homecoming court. Monica was elected to the court and Kendra wasn't. Kendra was disappointed and angry. She started a rumor that Monica won because she was "easy" and sexually involved with a number of boys at school. Monica started getting suggestive text messages from boys who assumed the rumor was true. Her close friends, including you, know it isn't true, but no one wants to take sides.