



Reflections on Teaching Protecting You/Protecting Me[®] (PY/PM[®]) Youth-led Implementation Model

A program of **MADD**[®]

In Fall 2005, Protecting You/Protecting Me (PY/PM) staff sent emails to Peer Helper Teachers trained in Protecting You/Protecting Me inviting them to participate in an information-gathering activity. The teachers were asked to invite their students who taught PY/PM in previous years to write about their experiences, following a three question format. A total of 45 students (30 from Texas and 15 from Arizona) responded. The students taught all grades from kindergarten to fifth with most teaching first or second grade (25% and 31%, respectively) and very few teaching either kindergarten or fifth. The following summarizes their responses to the three questions asked.

1. Describe a personally significant event or series of events that took place while you were involved with PY/PM. Include all of the details you can about this particular memory. Why does this event stand out and how did it affect you personally?

Many Peer Helpers (18 out of 45) described how much the elementary students learned and remembered. Elementary students “were engaged and enjoyed learning,” “learned and applied the information to their lives,” “really listen and remember what you say.”

“Every week they would impress me with the details of the lesson from the week before, and they would always have stories to share. My first teaching experience taught me that you can make a difference in their lives and they really listen and remember what you have to say.”

In discussing what the elementary students learned, some Peer Helpers added comments about how the elementary students applied what they learned (“...ran into one of my kids [at Wal-Mart].. and he jumped in his mom’s car and said, ‘Look, I’m wearing my seat belt.’”), shared the information with their parents or other relatives (“It surprised me that they actually did the PY/PM homework with their parents.”), and were more familiar with alcohol than the Peer Helpers realized (“A lot of students shared that their family members or relatives had spent time in jail for drunk driving, had DUI tickets, or were physically hurt by a drunk driver.”).

A number of other Peer Helpers described the information that they themselves gained from teaching PY/PM. Ten Peer Helpers made comments about how much they

themselves learned about the material, particularly about the brain and negative effects of alcohol consumption on the brain.

"I learned that the brain continues to develop until the mid twenties. This totally contradicted what I had heard from relatives, friends, and the media while growing up. PY/PM makes it very clear that it is scientifically known that alcohol has long term, permanent effects on the brain."

Several other students (6) mentioned that the high point of teaching PY/PM was interacting with the children or a specific child, and as one Peer Helper wrote, "making a difference in their learning experience." Five students related stories of drunk driver incidents that impacted them. One commented, "It made me realize how important it is to teach PY/PM."

Some students described sharing of PY/PM information with others by elementary students such as a child who "said that he had talked to the uncle (who had been in a car crash due to drinking) on not drinking anymore" and by Peer Helpers, such as, "the lessons made me talk to my parents about what I learned...I also told the lessons to my little sister."

2. Reflect on your experience with PY/PM as a whole. How have you been affected personally by your involvement with PY/PM? What did you learn about yourself or about others? (You might consider any changes in your skills, attitudes, behaviors, goals, and achievements that may have occurred and any examples of how you act or feel differently now.)

The largest number of Peer Helpers (20) made comments about how teaching PY/PM had changed their attitudes about drinking alcohol.

"My opinion about alcohol and my behavior towards alcohol has changed as a result of PY/PM. It has taught me to stay away from alcohol consumption. This is very important because my parents have not discussed the dangers of alcohol with me. My dad was consuming a lot of alcohol this last summer (2005) and ignored an infection on the bottom of his right foot. In the end he lost a toe. Since then, he has been temporarily living with me and my Mom. I am continually reminding my father about the effects of alcohol because every now and then he forgets."

A large number of Peer Helpers (19) also wrote that they talked to friends or family about alcohol. Eleven of these comments were from the Arizona Peer Helpers who wrote somewhat similar paragraphs about how they had learned the effects of alcohol, and as a result, took action, such as, "made a commitment to myself that I would not drink," "became very vocal with family and friends about the effect of alcohol on our brains," "gained courage to say 'no' to people who ask me to drink alcohol," and

“because of PY/PM, I have stopped another person from getting behind the wheel of a car after drinking.”

Another segment of the Peer Helpers (10 people) wrote about how teaching PY/PM had changed them personally, such as one student who said “being in PY/PM has taught me a lot about myself actually.” Some ways they articulated that they were changed by PY/PM was that they became more confident, learned to be patient, learned to be loyal to what they believed in, overcame fear of talking in front of people, took on leadership roles, and were more assertive about telling family and friends not to consume alcohol.

“I’ve always had trouble talking in front of people especially my peers, now of course the students we taught were not my peers, but I think they were a good stepping stone for me to jump over my ‘fear’ and see that no one will think I’m dumb or stupid for what I think. I also think it helped me stay strong when all my friends wanted to go to a party or what not because I used to party with them, but when I was teaching those kids I never wanted to go to any of the parties because I didn’t want to be a hypocrite.”

Eight Peer Helpers noted that PY/PM helped them understand and appreciate children more and learn the importance of being a role model.

“I have been affected personally by using PY/PM because when I teach and I see the smiles on the children’s faces, it makes me feel happy. Knowing that I’m making an impact on their lives is really awesome. I never dreamed that I would have such an influence on children. My attitude has totally changed since I’ve used PY/PM. I cared about myself before, but now I’m really determined to be a role model for them—someone they could look up to.”

3. How could you have gotten more out of your experience? Explain.

The most frequent comments from the Peer Helpers about how they could have gotten more out of PY/PM related to two main suggestions: making PY/PM longer with more lessons and providing more time to teach, discuss, and interact with students. Regarding increasing the number of lessons, one student commented, “I would have like to have had more lessons to teach the students. By the eighth lesson, I noticed the students were grasping the concepts and really getting into the program.” Another student wrote, “It wasn’t until the fourth session that I was comfortable with teaching and was able to convey the PY/PM message.” Other students wanted more time to teach. “I think I could have gotten more out of my experience by talking with them more on an individual basis to hear their stories and answer their abundance of questions, but time would not allow for it.”

Conclusions

These reflections showed first and foremost how engaging and riveting the PY/PM material is, both for the Peer Helpers and for the students they teach. The Peer Helpers completing the Reflections activity made numerous comments about the information about the brain and the effect of underage alcohol consumption on the brain, showing how they grasped it, absorbed it, applied it, and in many cases, shared it with others. Being with children also was significant for many Peer Helpers, specifically the satisfaction they gained from learning how to teach, being a role model, and making a difference in children's lives.

PY/PM appears to have affected the Peer Helpers personally. They related how teaching PY/PM had changed their attitudes and behaviors regarding underage alcohol consumption, empowered them to try to change other people's attitudes and behaviors, and increased their self-confidence.

*Report prepared and submitted by: The Bell Group, Austin TX
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