

Discovering the Real Me

Student Textbook 8
Going Through Changes

For young adolescents 13 to 14 years of age

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Chapter 1

Pablo's Choice

Pablo was excited. Five boys from the neighborhood were going to Jim's house to watch a movie. Everyone was supposed to bring something to eat or drink for everyone to share. Pablo had a big bag of snack chips under his arm. It was like a daytime party!

Jim let Pablo in and said, "Great!" when he saw the big bag of snack chips. Everyone else was already there, with the curtains drawn to keep the sunlight out and make the TV screen brighter.

Pablo's heart raced with happiness. There was a lot of laughter, and there were all kinds of things to eat. A couple of the boys started throwing snacks at each other.

"Don't," said Jim. "My mom said we couldn't do this if we made a mess."

"So? She's not here, is she?"

Pablo said to Jim, "Your mom's not here?"

"No, she went shopping. She said we were old enough to be alone for a couple of hours."

They settled down, ripped open the other bags of snacks, and poured juice and soda.

The movie came on. Pablo had never seen it, and it looked exciting.

"Have you seen this before?" he asked Jim.

"No, but I heard it's really good."

Pablo wasn't so sure. Right away, a man and a woman who were not married were kissing passionately. Pablo felt uncomfortable. His parents were really strict about this kind of thing. He hoped the scene would end, but the couple kept going further and further until their activity was getting sexual. He closed his eyes, the way his parents had taught him to do.

"Just because there's dirt in front of you doesn't mean you have to look at it," they told him.

Almost every other scene seemed to be the same.

"I thought you said this was an action movie," said Pablo to Jim.

"Here's an action scene right now."

There was an action scene, but then the movie went right back to another man and woman. Pablo was getting more and more miserable. If his parents knew he was watching a movie like this, he would be in big trouble. Yet there he was, sitting between his best friends in the world, and no one seemed to think anything of it. He wished Jim's mom were home. Would she really let them watch this?

Pablo got so uncomfortable, he finally brushed the crumbs off his jeans and stood up.

"Where are you going?" demanded Jim.

"Oh, just to the bathroom," said Pablo. He didn't really have to go to the bathroom, but once he came out and was still on his feet, it was easier to walk to the door. His friends protested as he turned the knob and started to go.

He said, "This movie's giving me a headache. See you later."

Pablo really did have a headache. It was just too stressful to sit there and watch something that could get him in big trouble. The darkened room, no parents at home—he didn't like the whole feeling.

"I thought you were over at Jim's," said his mother in surprise when he came home.

He told her what had happened.

“I’m proud of you, son,” she said. “It took some courage to walk out of there.”

“Not really,” said Pablo. “I didn’t tell them why I didn’t like the movie. I didn’t really stand up for what I believed.”

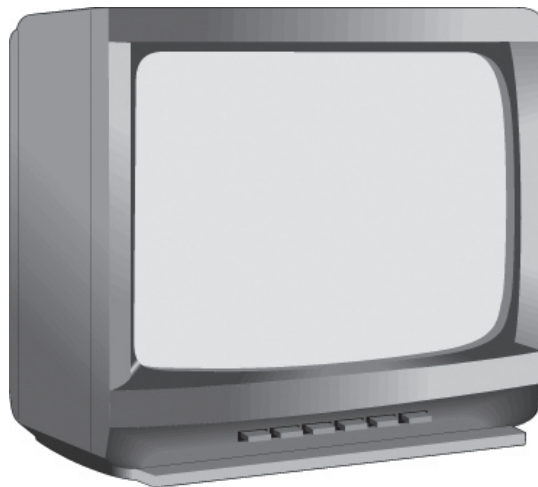
“You did okay,” said his mother. “It might be easier to tell them individually how you felt instead of as a group.”

Later on, he talked to his friends one by one and said, “That’s not the kind of movie my parents want me to see. And I didn’t like it myself.”

The others said they hadn’t really liked the movie either. They also said that when Jim’s mom came home and saw what kind of a movie they were watching, she became really angry and sent them all home. Jim was in big trouble with his parents, and the other kids’ parents weren’t too happy either.

“We should have left when you did,” his friends said to him.

Pablo felt exuberant. Now he really knew he had done the right thing.



* * *

As we enter adolescence (around 12 or 13), our life seems to speed up in many ways. Our world is expanding, and we start finding ourselves in many new types of situations, such as the one in the story above. We face things that we never had to be concerned about before. We’re much more independent than we were as children. Our friends mean more to us than ever before, and sometimes we are alone with them and have to make decisions without our parents there to guide us. Sometimes we have to face something called peer pressure.

Peer pressure means that people your age pressure you to be a certain way, act a certain way, dress a certain way, or to hold certain opinions. It can be good or bad.

Sometimes it's great to go along with peer pressure. It's great if your friends pressure you into joining in more activities that are healthy, fun, and good for you. It's great if your friends pressure you to dress nicely, to behave well, and to get good grades.

Sometimes, however, your peers pressure you in a bad way. They may pressure you to shut out someone you might like for a friend because they think that person is "not cool." They may pressure you to wear clothes you don't really like, or to do things you don't really want to do, or even to do things that are wrong.

When we're teenagers, we tend to worry about being popular and fitting in, so it's easy to want our friends' approval of everything we do. Sometimes, though, their values may contradict the values of the people who are still the most important ones in our lives—our parents.

As adolescents, we feel the urge to be more independent, to start to "spread our wings." At the same time, we need our parents more than ever to help us navigate the uncharted waters of growing out of childhood. We need the benefit of their experience and wisdom as we face difficult decisions. The reality of our world does not make it easy for teenagers to make the right choices. In many ways, the world tempts us to make choices that we may regret—choices involving school, money, smoking, drinking, and relations with the opposite sex.

Bad choices may be offered to us by the people we like and want to be liked by—our friends. But bad choices may cause a break in our relationship with our parents.

As we saw in the story, our parents still have a strong influence on our choices. Pablo's relationship with his parents and his agreement with their values are important parts of why he does what he does. In contrast, Jim seems to be going against his parents' wishes. Which of the two boys ends up feeling happier?

Our parents want to trust us with more independence, and we want more independence at this age. At the same time, our parents' views come from a lot of life experience. Also, they have spent a great part of their lives raising us, investing in us, guiding us, and clothing, feeding, and sheltering us. They love us and are concerned for our lives. It is wonderful when we agree with their values, but when we are not sure of ourselves, or when we are under peer pressure, sometimes we just have to trust our parents' words.

The adolescent years are likely to put some strain on our relationship with our parents, but we would do well to hold onto that relationship tightly. Our relationship with our parents is like a lifeline in a stormy sea. Holding on to our parents and what they believe can help us get through the many storms of adolescence and get safely to the shore of adulthood.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you ever been in a situation in which your friends were doing something that made you uncomfortable? How did you handle the situation?

2. Do you think Pablo handled the situation well enough?

3. When a situation is uncomfortable and you feel bad peer pressure, experts say it is best to physically get away as soon as you can. How did Pablo do this?

4. Is it easier to share your values with your friends individually or in a group?

5. Do you agree with your parents' values?

6. Do you think you could stand up for those values if your best friends were going against them?

7. What's wrong with watching movies with sexual content? Have you ever thought about it? Have your parents ever said anything about it to you?
