

TOP 20 CHOICE TO LIVE BY

1. Choose to be Drug Free.

It is a well-known fact that the abuse of drugs and excessive alcohol consumption are dangerous and often ruin the lives of individuals. There are people on the streets and some in prison who could have had very productive lives. Perhaps no one strongly emphasized the importance of saying no to drugs; or perhaps these unfortunate individuals didn't realize how harmful drugs can be until it was too late. In addition, relationships with family members can be devastated, while friends, coworkers, and acquaintances may also be severely impacted. Drugs and alcohol can also be harmful to one's health and excessive use typically shortens one's life span. Drugs and alcohol alter one's thoughts and actions. **Therefore, we want Top 20 II students to be unaware of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol and instill in them how important it is to be drug free.** We want them to know that if they are offered drugs, they should refuse and walk away.

2. Choose to Practice Good Oral and Personal Hygiene.

Maintaining good oral hygiene is one of the most important things you can do for your teeth and gums. Healthy teeth not only enable you to look good, they make it possible to eat and speak properly. Brushing and flossing routinely are the best measures to take at home to care for your teeth and avoid the negative consequences of improper care. This also increases the chances of keeping your teeth for a lifetime. **Regular care can provide advance warning and indicate the onset of other physical ailments or diseases.** There are also social advantages of good oral health. Failing to keep one's breath fresh or allowing teeth to yellow or decay can bring about ridicule from peers, thereby lowering self-esteem. The same negative effects can occur when neglecting to practice good personal hygiene. Good hygiene requires that you bathe regularly. Failure to practice good personal hygiene has social consequences. It gives others a bad perception of you and research has shown that people who do not bathe or brush their teeth tend to have lower self-esteem.

3. Choose to Stay Active throughout Your Life.

The Healthy People 2010 Health Indicators reflect that people living in Northwest Indiana compared to levels nationwide are less likely to engage in physical activity. Young people today tend to be more sedentary. Studies reveal that students are more prone to play video games and watch television as opposed to going outside to run, jump rope, ride a bicycle or play with their friends. Limited activity can lead to being overweight and obese. It can also contribute to diabetes and heart disease. **Therefore, finding fun, enjoyable activities, such as dance, will help people stay energetic, maintain a healthy weight, and increase their longevity.**

4. Choose to Eat Healthy, Balanced Meals Each Day.

It is important to eat balanced healthy meals each day. This can be difficult in today's society where fast, greasy food is so prevalent. Students tend to like to eat burgers and fries or pizza on a regular basis. Since their parents often prepare the family meals, students have limited control over what is served. There are hidden sugars and fats in foods that are difficult to detect unless you can interpret the scientific terms on the labels that describe the ingredients. Studies indicate many parents are unaware of how to create balanced meals and others feel healthy eating is beyond their financial means. By teaching students to eat healthy, they are likely to encourage this habit in their families. We want the students to know "You are what you eat."

5. Choose to Learn Your Bodies So You Know When Something is Wrong.

It is important to eat balanced healthy meals each day. This can be difficult in today's society where fast, greasy food is so prevalent. Students tend to like to eat burgers and fries or pizza on a regular basis. Since their parents often prepare the family meals, students have limited control over what is served. There are hidden sugars and fats in foods that are difficult to detect unless you can interpret the scientific terms on the labels that describe the ingredients. Studies indicate many parents are unaware of how to create balanced meals and others feel healthy eating is beyond their financial means. By teaching students to eat healthy, they are likely to encourage this habit in their families. We want the students to know "You are what you eat."

6. Choose Academic Excellence.

Academic excellence is a mindset. It is the desire to search for knowledge, the interest and pride in doing well. It is the need to ask questions and to perform to the highest degree possible by completing assignments and always doing the best you can. Developing these skills will be helpful on the job and in other life circumstances. **While academic excellence may not ensure that the students will be "A" students, it will help them to perform at their highest capacity and gain confidence in their abilities.** It will increase their chances of being accepted at quality post-secondary schools or institutes. It will improve their chances of being successful in life. We encourage the students to continue their education beyond high school because it is essential for career choices of the future and has a direct bearing on their earning power over their lifetimes.

7. Choose to Dream and Nurture those Dreams.

Dreams are living things that are brought into existence by our thoughts, desires, and actions. We must treat them like living objects by giving them love, respect, and protecting them from the negativity. By nurturing them, we encourage them to grow and flourish. **You must visualize what you want, see a positive outcome, and not put boundaries on yourself.** We want the students to make a conscious effort to hold their dreams close to their heart, to guard them from the jealousy and negativity of others, and to believe that they can come true. Therefore, we want the participants to set goals and make plans to accomplish the things they desire.

8. Choose Persistence and Perseverance.

Persistence means sticking to a course of action in spite of opposition. Perseverance involves sticking to a belief, idea, or purpose. It is steadfastness and endurance. These qualities are ingrained in successful people. Without these characteristics, it can be easy to give up when life gets difficult. Few people get through life without being disappointed, without thinking of themselves as a failure, or temporarily giving up on their hopes and aspirations. The best things in life come from hard work. **When things get difficult, you must buckle down and work harder to achieve what you desire.** That's why we believe: "You are only defeated when you think you are."

9. Choose to Think before you Act.

It is important to think before you act. This is especially true of if those actions could affect your life. The lack of forethought before taking action results in making rash decisions. Rash decisions can be painfully regrettable, and are usually hard to undo. Rash decisions can be made when we are angry or under pressure. People need to think through their response to situations in order to make an informed decision and to act accordingly.

10. Choose to be Open to New Ideas and Experiences.

If you never try new things, you will never know the possibilities. It is the intent of Top 20 II to introduce the participants to new experiences through the program, including working with new people, learning new styles of dance, taking field trips, and engaging in community service and cultural events. In doing so, they might meet new and interesting people. It is important to be open to new ideas and experiences to seize the opportunities of life.

11. Choose to Provide Service to Your School and Your Community.

Schools and parents are encouraging youth to volunteer their time in order to make a difference in their communities and touch the lives of its residents. That is why about one-third of the nation's schools are incorporating service experiences into their classrooms. Community service is also viewed favorably on college applications and those who interview for the admissions offices. There are obvious benefits to the recipients of the service, but the rewards accrue to the persons who give of their time and energy. Several benefits of community service include:

- Helps to gain a sense of human compassion by supporting others and affecting their life;
- Builds a stronger community by utilizing the strengths and skills of volunteers to have a beneficial impact on our society;
- Obtains an intense awareness of self while gaining knowledge outside the classroom;
- Provides an excellent way to experience diversity to enhance mind and spirit and look at life from different perspectives;
- Builds a bond between those who are working together for a common goal □ Helps to understand about the reality of what is going on in the world and the well-being of those around us;
- Allows you to find out who you really are and take pride in what you do; and finally, □ Teaches about courage, compassion, love, appreciation, teamwork, and humility—a crucial part of well-rounded education.

12. Choose to Encourage, Enlighten, and Energize those Around You.

You should never underestimate the value of encouragement. **Being able to encourage those around you is a powerful tool.** All of us thrive on the encouragement of those we know and love; and, most of us wither a little when someone discourages us. We often fail to realize when others are under stress, emotionally down, and/or depressed. Nonetheless, if we are aware that someone needs encouragement, we should always strive to provide words that will energize them, cheer them up, and give them confidence. It is also important to encourage others to do what is right, if you are aware that they are doing something wrong or struggling with whether to do the right thing. Encouraging others might inspire them to do something they may not have otherwise done or to raise their confidence to a level where they will attempt a difficult task at a time when it is needed the most. Encouragement helps people to overcome their self-imposed limitations.

13. Choose to Listen to Others to Build Cooperation.

Listening is a skill that is sometimes difficult to acquire, often because we are too busy talking. To become a better listener, concentrate on what is being said. Actively focus your attention on the words, ideas, and feelings related to the subject. Get rid of distractions and concentrate on the main points and ideas of the conversation. **Listening is the key to understanding others, to negotiations, to garner cooperation, to build an effective team, etc.** Building cooperation involves communication, interaction, and negotiating situations. One of the more difficult skills to develop is listening. Top 20 II's cultivates an environment that fosters the development of friendships and cooperation. By working together on dance routines and interaction in the classroom, the students learn to build cooperation and team work. Choose to Listen to Others to Build Cooperation.

14. Choose to Love and Respect Yourself.

Love and respect for oneself cannot be overstated. It encompasses what you think about yourself, how you behave, and the confidence you project. The way you feel about yourself can affect the way you treat others as well as how you interact with them. You may think that respecting yourself is simple, yet many people do not give themselves enough respect. If you do not respect yourself, you may find that others may not display much respect for you either. Self-respect affects your conduct, character, and reputation. You may also find that it is difficult to respect others when you do not respect yourself. **Self-respect is liking and giving oneself dignity and self-worth.** Self-respect is important because without it, self-love is impossible and loving others in a healthy way is also impossible. If you lack self-respect, you will allow others to trample on your dignity. On the other hand, when you have self-respect, you genuinely like yourself and, therefore, have dignity. You set boundaries in your lifestyle and relationships and others admire you for it. You allow no one to treat you poorly. If you do happen to get treated poorly, you are less likely to internalize such matters. You won't allow that treatment to continue, and you will know how to move on with your life. Top 20 II helps the students set boundaries, develop healthy relationships, and realize their value.

15. Choose to Learn About The Community In Which You Live.

It is the goal of Top 20 II for each person to be a contributing member of society. **Each resident has the potential to be a vital asset to their community.** Top 20 II encourages community service. As students learn about their community—the benefits it offers, as well as the issues, needs, and problems it faces—they can serve as a catalyst for change and improvement.

16. Choose to Accept Diversity.

The world is very diverse. Diversity refers to the variety of differences between people. Diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnic group, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background and more. Diversity not only involves how people perceive themselves, but how they perceive others. Those perceptions affect their interactions. Therefore, we have intentionally taken efforts to be as inclusive as possible in the program in terms of the ethnic and social mix of the students. We also provide diversity in the curriculum and the activities in which we engage the youth. This helps to connect the students in ways that increase their awareness of self and others. It is our hope that Top 20 II will provide the youth new experiences and opportunities to interact with students of other cultures and nationalities. The intended result would be that they gain an understanding of diversity, learn respect for others, and improve their ability to incorporate these values into their everyday lives. This will benefit them in their individual neighborhoods, as they venture off to post high schools, and as they visit other states or countries with different population compositions than that in East Chicago. **Understanding others that are different from themselves will help prepare them for the world in which they currently live and will ultimately work.**

17. Choose Your Words and Actions Wisely.

Words and actions have impact. Words can be painful or uplifting and actions can be hard or meaningful. They can affect our attitude and behavior. Therefore, we want to encourage the children to decide what to say and do before the words leave their mouth or they take any action. Also, the students need to be able to stand up to any peer pressure that they may face by saying "no" to their friends or fellow classmates

18. Choose Justice.

Synonyms for justice include impartiality, righteousness, fair dealing, honesty, integrity, and uprightness. Justice means fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way people are treated or that decisions are made. Justice is an important element to the fair treatment of people and always requires truthfulness. Truth must be verifiable and valid for justice to exist as a fact. **Together truth and justice guide our direction and make the difference between doing the right and wrong thing.** We have adopted the motto: "Stand up for what is right. Unless you do, you will fall for anything." Therefore, it is important to teach the students to always tell the truth and to stand up for what is right. It is also important for them to talk to an adult if someone is doing something that they believe is wrong, especially if it is or could harm someone else.

19. Choose to Dress Appropriately.

Clothes that are too revealing, too tight, or too short are not suitable for young people to wear in public and definitely not to school or to school events and/or games. Students want to wear the latest fashions. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find attractive, fashionable clothes that are not more revealing, tighter, and shorter. For girls, the challenge is to avoid clothes that show a whole lot of skin. Tube tops, crop tops made with clingy, lightweight or sheer materials are showcased in the malls, magazines, and by celebrities. Despite the fact that females everywhere are sporting that look, a bra under sheer material is not appropriate. Pants show off every aspect of their figure and are rolled down below the waist. Low-rise jeans are all the rage. Skirts are high on the thigh, shorts are dangerously close to revealing the girl's rear side, and low-cut dresses are the fad. For males the style is to "sag" showing their underwear and sometimes their skin. They tend to wear sportswear to most occasions, some of which are not appropriate. Dressing inappropriately, or in a way that lacks modesty gives people the wrong impression that is not complimentary. It makes people think you don't respect yourself and it can be offensive or appalling. Most importantly, those that dress this way are shaming themselves. **In this cultural climate, we wanted to emphasize and encourage modest, decent or appropriate attire for school, at the dance program, and while on field trips or doing community service.**

20. Choose to Be Responsible.

To be responsible means that one takes care of his/her duties and answers for his or her actions. A responsible person is one who is able to act without guidance or supervision because he or she is accountable and answerable for his or her behavior. Such a person can be trusted or depended upon to do things on his or her own. Such a person will follow through on obligations. **We want to teach students to grow into responsible young adults and to be accountable for their actions.** This is part of developing good character.

