



**COPSCARE**

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**New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association**  
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**CHOOSING  
TO LOSE**

## **In the Classroom**

At the heart of this powerful program are the N.Y.S. Correctional Officers and the personal experiences they bring with them. They come into the classroom to have an honest discussion with students about the facts of prison life. At first glance, this topic might not seem relevant to the typical middle school student. However, the officers are quick to illustrate the roles that personal responsibility and decision making play in the lives of potential delinquents.

They discuss scenarios that many teenagers are likely to experience, involving negative peer pressure, drugs and alcohol. They effectively show just how easy it can be to make a poor choice in the blink of an eye, and then have to pay a terrible consequence that never seemed possible – time in prison.

This is not a “Scared Straight” program. The officers do not believe that fear of punishment alone will alter the attitudes of adolescents. Instead, they want to effectively present a clear and appropriate explanation of the negative consequences of criminal behavior to a middle school audience. Some of the topics presented by the correctional officers are:

- The reception process
- Cell description
- Inmate population statistics
- Inmate jobs and payment
- Rules for inmate behavior
- Weapons in prison

Visual aids are used throughout the presentation, including a inmate I.D. card and rule books. When viewing the inmate’s I.D. number on the card and learning about how it is used, students quickly become aware of the inmate’s loss of identity in the prison system. The Inmate Behavior rule books are displayed and discussed highlight the inmate’s complete loss of freedom.

The correctional officers use plain language throughout the program to describe the reality of prison life. Those details are then illustrated through the use of the 22 minute **Choosing to Lose** video. From this video, students will gain a very clear sense of daily prison life, stripped of any myths or misconceptions that it is somehow glamorous or cool.

Based on the groundwork laid by the officers' presentation and the video, students will then have well-informed discussions with the officers. The program encourages adolescents to examine the attitudes and behaviors that place them at risk of incarceration.

Some of the questions that the officers ask students during their discussion on decision making are:

- What are you trying to decide and how do you know about it?
- How do you know if your information is accurate?
- Who gave you the information?
- Will your decision be affected by drugs? Alcohol? Peer pressure?
- What are the positive consequences of this decision?
- What are the negative consequences of this decision?