**Background Information:**
Youth are part of a very complex social structure. They often spend a great deal more time with peers and friends than with family. Peers have a lot of influence on how they act, think, and make choices. In this complex structure, there can be several levels, or social categories (See Additional Notes/Extension/Glossary).

Youth can belong to several different groups within each of these social categories, and they are influenced in some way by all of them. For instance, if a person hangs out occasionally with a member of a neighborhood gang, he or she may be considered a gang member. The stereotype of gang members is not necessarily positive, so the youth is influenced by not only the gang, but by what others think of that gang. To help youth avoid risky behavior such as the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, they need to learn how they are influenced and how those influences affect their choices.

**Instructions:**

1. Discuss with participants the different social categories (stereotypes, peers...). Have participants take turns sharing specific groups that might be in each social category until all have been shared. Write the group names on a chalkboard/flipchart under the specific social category.

2. Discuss the following questions:
   - Are groups listed where they should be?
   - What other groups need to be added?

3. Place the two pieces of heavy string in straight lines parallel to each other on the floor. The pieces should be far enough apart so all of the group can stand between the lines. Participants need to pretend they are on the “social bus” by standing between the two lines of string. They are going on a trip. When they reach a site, everyone must get off. They will have two choices and they need to get off on the side of the bus corresponding to their choice.

4. The first choice is pepperoni pizza on the left side of the bus or cheese pizza on the right side of the bus. So, if they choose pepperoni pizza, they get off on the left. If they choose cheese pizza, they get off on the right. Why did you make that choice?

5. Participants are to get “back on the bus.” Ask them which they would choose: Chocolate ice cream – off on the left; strawberry ice cream – off on the right. Why did you make that choice?
6. Now, you will get “on and off the social bus” making the following choices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6th grader</td>
<td>Current grade</td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>Techie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Honor student</td>
<td>Skater</td>
<td>Goth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preppie</td>
<td>Techie</td>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>Brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druggie</td>
<td>Preppie</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jock</td>
<td>Nerd</td>
<td>Nerd</td>
<td>Druggie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you make your choice, why did you choose as you did? Most of the groups that were called out have stereotypes associated with them. What is the stereotype you have of the different groups?

7. Discuss the following questions on who influences you:
   - What classes to take in school?
   - What to do after graduation?
   - Whether to go out drinking?
   - Whether to smoke or use smokeless tobacco?

8. Review the Open Ended Questions.

Additional Notes/Extension/Glossary

**Stereotypes** – broad sweeping statements, generalization about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

**Peers** – groups of people roughly the same age and same maturity (classmates, religious groups, clubs).

**Cliques** – small groups (between 2 and 12) who are the same age, and generally the same sex. The group is defined by common activities or friendship (friends, drama club, science club, cheerleaders, band members, long-time friends, study group).

**Friendships** – supportive, positive relationships. A friend may or may not be in the same clique (could also be someone from other times in your life that you don’t hang out with now).

**Cohorts** – a group of individuals born during a certain era. (Millennia, Generation X, Baby Boomers, Matures)

**Crowds** – groups whose identification is based on similar reputation or image, those who have a common features (jocks, druggies, brains, nerds, tough guys)