

# Jayden

You never really know who will take over the leadership in the MPOWRD meetings. Everyone has a chance to volunteer to lead the group. Then other members help with the readings and the question sessions. Teens asked for a structured format so that there wouldn't be any time wasted. Each person is encouraged to participate in the discussion. No one writes anything down.

The leader makes sure that each person is encouraged to participate and that the other members are actively listening with unconditional support. Teens are given a copy of the scripted guide each week so that they will be comfortable with the format.

In this particular group, Jayden was the group's favorite leader. The teens always encouraged him to take charge. He was respected and kept the meetings interesting. Jayden had a way of making each person feel valued. He had great eye contact, was friendly to everyone, and thanked each member every time they contributed their thoughts, opinions, or experiences to the group. He was a natural leader.

Jayden was from a well-liked family in the area who owned the local Italian restaurant in the mall. It was a great place to hang out and was known for its outstanding pizzas. He had one brother and two sisters who were older and were either in college or working at the restaurant. The family was well-liked and supported by the community. It seemed like the family had everything going for it.

In fact, they only had one major problem, and his name was Jayden.

Jayden was in the 7-year plan to get out of high school as he was way behind in credits for graduation. The problem was that Jayden didn't stay in school consistently throughout the year because during his "off" time, he was in juvenile detention. It was a revolving door because Jayden couldn't stay out of trouble.

Jayden was neither an angry teen nor was he a rebellious kid, he just continued to make bad decisions that would get him into constant trouble. You could call it immaturity, or you could say that he was addicted to risk-taking. He always hung out with the wrong crowd, was in the wrong place, doing the wrong things. And, he just couldn't say "no".

It had started with a group he hooked up with in middle school, which turned into his first arrest at the age of fourteen. He had been in and out of institutions for the past three years. His biggest fear was the fact that he was close to turning 18, which meant that soon he would be tried as an adult. That meant no second chances.

No matter how much his parents punished him and his siblings begged him to get his act together, Jayden just didn't seem to be able to find his way. He began to believe that he was destined to live a life in prison.

Jason was a great kid, and he was a criminal.

Now, the MPOWRD group didn't realize that Jayden was in as much trouble as he was. In fact, no one realized that he would be leaving the group until he made an announcement at the meeting. He didn't give a lot of details but simply said, "I'm going to miss you guys, but I'll be gone for a while. See you in the spring. I'm back in juvie for another four months. It's a bummer." The group was really disappointed.

But the next week Jayden walked through the door during the meeting. "Sorry, I'm late," he said with a big grin. The kids were surprised to see him.

One of the guys smiled and said, "Jayden, what's up? I thought you'd be gone for a while. Didn't the judge show or did you escape?" Everyone gathered around him.

Jayden just shook his head, kind of smiled and looked at the group. "You won't believe this, but I passed the tests, stayed clean and didn't get busted after all. This is the first time in three years that I wasn't in trouble. Do you believe it? My family thought the judge had made a mistake. I could hardly believe it myself. I even asked the court if they were sure. It's crazy. I really didn't think my life would change, but I guess it did."

Everyone laughed with him. Then he said, "But I need to tell you the whole story. It's important. It's about you."

"So, I'm standing in front of Judge McGinns who reminds me of a hungry bear ready to attack something for dinner. She loves yelling and usually just chews me out the whole time, complaining about all my bad decisions and irresponsibility, you know, the usual. She calls my parents the true angels in this world having to put up with such a disappointment like me. I always feel like some major loser. Well, I guess I am."

"This time, as she read through my reports, she almost had a smile. Almost. Then she looked up at me and said, "So Jayden, I must admit that I am in total shock. Every one of your reports has come in with perfect behavior. No crime? No use? No complaints? Is this a mistake or did I miss something? Tell me. What is going on here? What is different in your life? Why the change?"

I just stood there, definitely shocked, I was as surprised as she was. I mean it had been a while since I messed up, but I guess I had forgotten how long it had been. I honestly could think of no reason why my life was different. She said, "Think, Jayden, there has to be some reason. I know you too well. What is going on?"

And then it came to me. "Your honor," I said, "I've got it. It's because I go to these MPOWRD meetings." I told her that we have these groups in school where everyone has a chance to talk about life and stuff and kids support each other. Sometimes, the group is looking out for me and then other times I look out for them. We just have each other's backs. We really want each other to succeed. And, the truth is, it happens.

I mean, people work through some of their tough stuff and find a way out. I guess I've been changing more than I realized."

Then Jayden looked at each person and said, "I need to thank you, and you and you and you. You see, if it weren't for each one of you, I wouldn't be here. This day would have never come. You saved my life. You showed me that I could believe in me and now I have a chance."

The teens started to clap. Then they each gave him five, patted him on the back and congratulated him. They felt his victory. They had saved a life. His victory became their victory. They owned this moment with Jayden.

**Your thoughts: (no names or places)**

**Everyone gets in trouble at some time or other. Often when we think we are going to get caught doing something, no one notices. Then the next time, we think no one is paying attention and it becomes a disaster.**

**Jayden was part of the juvenile system for three years and couldn't break his cycle of getting into trouble. Why do some of us make the same bad choices over and over?**

**What qualities did you think were positive about Jayden?**

**What qualities were positive about his *MPOWRD* group?**

**How can teens have far greater impact on the life of another teen as opposed to the “system”, the school, the administration and sometimes, even our families?**

**Why is it important for teens to feel empowered at this point in their lives?**

**Think of a teen who has been empowered to either change his/her life or has impacted someone else. Once again, don't use real names or places.**