

“HOW TO BE INDIE”

REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL/INFORMATIONAL (E/I) CONTENT

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"HOW TO BE INDIE" SERIES DESCRIPTOR FOR FCC 398

"HOW TO BE INDIE" is a television program designed for middle and high school students aged 13-16 years-old and is rated TV-PG. Originally developed with Canada's public broadcaster, CBC, the series depicts the life of Indira "Indie" Mehta, her family and her friends. Each 30-minute episode generally focuses on Indie's experiences as an eighth-grader at Rexdale Junior High School and at home with her parents and siblings. Indie comes from a traditional family, with strict, protective parents who have extremely high expectations of their children's academic performance. Indie is the youngest of three children, and she struggles to define herself and her role in the family, while trying to live up to the achievements of her older, more accomplished siblings.

"HOW TO BE INDIE" is designed to entertain and inform its core teen audience, while using humor to illustrate and educate its viewers about issues that arise for teens in school and at home. The storylines focus on social challenges faced by teenagers, from forming and maintaining friendships, sibling conflict, honoring family while trying to assert one's separate individuality, to ethical and moral choices at home and at school. The objective of the series is to demonstrate models of behavior for teen viewers, allowing them to consider choices that they themselves may face, to witness the potential outcomes of these choices and gain positive tools that they can use to resolve issues and conflicts in a constructive way.

In particular, the series frequently centers on how Indie navigates through issues of identity, self-image, and social standing in her community. Indie deals with growing pains from getting older and wanting more independence but needing to understand her limitations and learn to communicate effectively with her parents to earn that freedom. Indie has the added struggle of learning to appreciate her immigrant parents' background, with Indie wanting to honor her family and culture while also yearning to be seen as "normal" by her peers and not be teased for how different her family can seem to be. The child characters are generally believable role models, feeling social pressures and wanting to fit in, and relying on peer relationships and family, as typical teenagers do on a daily basis.

Most scenes occur in and around the Rexdale School with Indie and her best friends, Abigail ("Abi") Flores and Marlon Parks. Other scenes occur in Indie's home with her parents and siblings, AJ and Chandra, or at the Happy Breeze Food Hut, a restaurant owned by Abi's family, where Abi often works after school. School work is important, depicted through characters in class, receiving or discussing grades or doing homework at home. The cast portrays teenagers in a generally realistic manner, although some aspects may be exaggerated for dramatic effect and to present the teenager's point of view, with diversity along physical, social/emotional and ethnic lines, which provides opportunities for most viewers to identify directly with specific characters.

Each episode advances a few specific storylines revolving around particular social, developmental or societal issues. Typically Indie and her friends act out behaviors that bring these issues to the forefront, and they solve problems, generally through communication with

peers and adults and through direct action, leading to a better understanding of each situation and each other. Outcomes provide life lessons that are often communicated directly to the audience by the main character, Indie.

It is anticipated that, on viewing ***“HOW TO BE INDIE”***, teen viewers will compare their own behaviors to those of the characters, and the series may provide a vehicle for them to openly express to peers, and potentially teachers and parents, their own ideas and concerns relating to the issues portrayed. Parental viewing may also provide parents an additional perspective on the developmental process and social and emotional pressures in their children’s lives.

The series website provides additional materials, including Study Guides, to assist educators and parents in stimulating discussion of ***“HOW TO BE INDIE”*** with teens.

SERIES OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

“HOW TO BE INDIE” is a television series that revolves around the everyday lives of teenagers at Rexdale Junior High. The series targets 13-16 year-old viewers. Each 30-minute episode portrays the interactions between Indie Mehta, her friends and her family.

“HOW TO BE INDIE” is designed to entertain its teen audience and also to inform and educate its viewers about issues that arise in school and at home. The storylines focus on the social and emotional challenges faced by every teen, from forming and maintaining friendships, to ethical and moral choices and family relationships.

Most scenes occur in and around the Rexdale School and the teens’ homes and follow the interactions of the teens. The series utilizes humor to maintain the interests of its audience throughout each episode. School work is important, depicted through characters studying in class, receiving or discussing grades or doing homework. The cast portrays diverse groups on physical, social/emotional and ethnic lines, providing opportunities for most viewers to identify directly with many characters. Parental involvement is inherent in generally realistic ways, although in specific situations may be exaggerated for dramatic effect, and to provide the teenager’s point of view.

Each episode advances a few specific storylines based on particular aspects of social or emotional issues and brings them to a new conclusion. Characters act out behaviors that bring these issues to the surface. Peers generally offer perspective and assist in resolving problems and conflicts. The youth solve problems generally without direct intervention by adults, but through communication with their peers and family, they find solutions and a better understanding of each situation and each other. At the same time, actions do lead to consequences, and these outcomes provide “life lessons” that are shown plainly and naturally and are self-evident to the viewer but presented in an entertaining, often humorous fashion.

It has been well established that teen viewers can be significantly impacted by television programs and may model some behaviors after those they observe on television. In fact, as early as 1987, as noted by Harwood and Weissberg (Yale Journal of Early Adolescence, 1987), research has indicated that television “has potential both as a powerful stimulus for learning, and also as the foundation of an intervention that can be both easily disseminated and systematically evaluated.” When Drs. Dorothy and Jerome Singer (“Media, Children and the Family”, 1994), tested the impact on teens of viewing specific “Degrassi Jr. High” episodes, the researchers found a positive effect on children from the program. The researchers noted strong indications suggesting “the benefits of the series as a method of stimulating children to think seriously about substance use and about practical approaches to their common problems.” They found that classroom discussions were especially helpful but “showings without discussion were also useful.”

In a review of literature on the prosocial effects of television on children, Hogan and Strasburger recognize the behavioral “mechanisms” which may be impacted by television, and that “logically, these mechanisms are also relevant to prosocial media viewers. Young viewers

could imitate positive behaviors, draw upon scripts for behavioral to use in parallel situations, and exhibit various emotional responses to compelling, prosocial mediated images. Rushton (1979) writes that “prosocial could have stronger effects on viewers than antisocial content because prosocial behaviors are more in accord with established societal norms” (cited by Mares & Woodard, 2001).” (“Media and Prosocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents”, Hogan and Strasburger, from Handbook of Moral and Character Education, Nucci and Narvaez, 2008.)

Writing in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Strasburger further observed that, while the potential negative impacts of television on teen behavior have been documented, “At the same time, clinicians need to recognize the extraordinary positive power of the media. Antiviolence attitudes, empathy, cooperation, intolerance toward individuals of other races and ethnicities, respect for older people—the media can be powerfully prosocial.” (“Media and Children – What Needs to Happen Now”, JAMA, June 3, 2009.)

An American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) policy statement acknowledged “the positive, prosocial uses of media and the need for media education in schools and at home.” (“Policy Statement: Media Education”, Pediatrics, September 2010). In a recent update to its policy statement, the AAP further suggests that “media literacy and prosocial uses of media may enhance knowledge, connectedness, and health” and that “the media can also teach empathy, racial and ethnic tolerance, and a whole variety of interpersonal skills.” The statement recognizes specific potential impacts on teens: “Prosocial media may also influence teenagers. Helping behaviors can increase after listening to prosocial (rather than neutral) song lyrics, and positive information about adolescent health is increasingly available through new media, including YouTube videos and campaigns that incorporate cell phone text messages. (“Policy Statement: Children, Adolescents and the Media,” Pediatrics, November, 2013).

It is similarly anticipated that the **“HOW TO BE INDIE”** viewing experience will prompt its teen viewers to compare their own behaviors with those of characters in the series, providing an opportunity for open discussion of such ideas with peers. Additionally, qualities of the **“HOW TO BE INDIE”** production, including its storylines, have demonstrated the ability to retain the interest of adult viewers as well, and may thus provide a vehicle to give parents a view of the developmental challenges faced by teens and to open dialogue between teen viewers and parents of issues that might otherwise prove extremely difficult to raise.

The series also touches on some significant societal issues, which may be complementary to classroom discussions on these topics. These issues range from considerations of diversity and bullying to online social networking and cyberbullying. The portrayal of these stories by the young cast also provides viewers with a window from which to view the possible consequences of choices they face in their lives.

The following illustrates issues covered in the series and provides episode overviews relying on Season 1 as a representative sample of the **“HOW TO BE INDIE”** series.

EXAMPLES OF EDUCATIONAL/INFORMATIONAL CONTENT

1. The Search for Identity

Identity issues are a universal and highly significant aspect of the teenage experience which is illustrated in several episodes of **"HOW TO BE INDIE"**. For example, in *How to Make Your Rep*, Indie believes that it will improve her social standing if her new eighth grade peers gain the false impression that she went to a summer camp. When she drops the pretense and is honest with her new friend, Skye, she learns that Skye, too, has exaggerated her summer experience. The two build a friendship based on honesty and shared experience. In the same episode, Marlon hopes to improve his standing by forming an entourage of less popular kids, but it backfires on him when they feel he has disrespected them.

Especially for Indie and those in the eighth grade 13-14 age group, part of the search for identity includes a need to understand one's place in the maturation process as well as a continuous testing of age appropriate limitations. In the Halloween episode, *How to Trick Your Parents Into Treating You Like A Grown Up*, Indie chafes at the limitations placed on her as the youngest in the family. She wants her parents to allow her to watch the scary movie with her older siblings and believes that her aunt's gift of a doll "for ages 5 and up" is another sign that her family is still treating her too much like a child. Ultimately Indie decides that, while she is older and more mature than before, she still may be too young to enjoy the scary movie comfortably and that there is no rush for her to grow up quickly.

In *How to Get a Pet*, Indie believes she is old enough to have the responsibility of caring for a pet dog. To convince her mother of this, she creates a turtle rescue shelter at her school, but then loses the turtle. Indie is faced with having to choose between putting up a false front about the success of the shelter or admitting that the turtle is lost in order to save its life. She chooses to be honest and saves the turtle. Indie's mother is impressed that, by putting the turtle's welfare ahead of her own, Indie has shown that she may be mature enough to care for a living thing. But Indie then decides on her own that, while she is more mature and grown up than before, judging from the turtle mishap, perhaps she isn't ready to assume the responsibility of raising a puppy.

In *How to Make a Good Impression*, Indie wants to impress Chad Tash, and she is self-conscious about her family seeming too weird to him. She ultimately finds out that Chad and his brother Todd Tash are self-conscious about their family, too, and afraid that Indie may think they are the weird ones.

2. Understanding and appreciating cultural diversity

A recurrent theme in the series is that of appreciating cultural diversity. For Indie, her search for identity takes on additional meaning for as a child of immigrant parents and student of a school that celebrates diversity. Indie must frequently balance her family and cultural identity with the desire for broad social acceptance in the Rexdale community.

For example, in *How to Get on Carlos Martinelli's Capital 'L' List, and Live*, Indie is concerned that her family may seem strange to the other kids, and she fears that when they discover her

grandfather's chickens, she will be embarrassed and humiliated. When Indie embraces her culture, the other children are impressed and find it interesting and exciting.

In *How to Have Your Samosa and Eat It Too*, Rexdale celebrates a world food day. Indie struggles with how to put her culture in the most positive light by presenting the best food, while Marlon searches for a new cultural identity (from a made-up country) to compensate for what he sees as a lack of cultural flavor in his family.

In *How to Get Some Cred*, Indie is criticized by her cousin Ruby and her friends because they don't think Indie has the proper appreciation of their Indian culture. Indie tries to fake her knowledge, but when she sees her mother's skill as a performer of classical Indian dance, she realizes how special their traditions can be. Indie wins over Ruby's friends when she admits that her own "cred" may be lacking but shows pride in her mother's impressive talent.

3. Controlling One's Emotions and Bullying and Control

Another universal aspect to the teen experience is the process of developing control over one's emotions and any tendencies toward controlling behavior. In **"HOW TO BE INDIE"**, Indie and her friends experience the negative aspects of aggressive behavior, including bullying and how to combat it.

In *How to Get on Carlos Martinelli's Capital 'L' List, and Live*, Indie is the victim of Carlos' bullying, but Indie stands up to him and her friends support her, and Carlos is forced to back down. In *How to Have Your Samosa and Eat It Too*, Indie is bullied by Ram, who wants to force her to date him, but she stands up to him and ultimately he has to agree to leave her alone.

In *How to Prove You're Actually a Nice Person*, Indie loses patience with AJ and Chandra, and when she complains about it at school, the students mistakenly think she is making fun of a new student, and they shun Indie. Indie unsuccessfully tries several schemes to improve her image but finally realizes her best chance would be to start with "Step 1: Stop being a jerk."

In *How to Make a Good Impression*, Indie fails at her attempts to control her family's behavior, but it is her own actions that give Chad Tash a wrong impression. When she steps back from the situation, and leaves the family to be themselves, her relationship with the Tashes sorts itself out.

4. Social Issues

The **"HOW TO BE INDIE"** series provides viewers with several models for peer relationships, including competition and rivalries as well as beginning romantic relationships and successful peer collaboration. The series also provides several examples of how open communication helps foster understanding between children and their parents.

Indie's frequent rival is her cousin, Ruby. In *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Lying*, Indie competes with Ruby in the Micromanagers club to see who can start the most successful business. Indie overcomes challenges to become successful, while Ruby tries to cheat, gets

caught and loses. In *How to Get Some Cred*, Ruby challenges Indie to a dance-off of classical Indian dances, and Indie is the one who is tempted to cheat. Ultimately Indie earns the respect of Ruby's friends when she does the right thing and admits to her lack of knowledge about Indian dance.

In *How to Strike a Balance*, their mothers enter Indie and Abi into the same music competition, even though Indie has far less experience and musical talent. Abi offers to intentionally perform badly and "tank" the competition to avoid making Indie look bad. But Indie realizes this wouldn't be fair to Abi, and she urges Abi to do her best, while Indie finds her own unique way to earn applause and her mother's respect, even if it doesn't win her a trophy.

In *How to Make a Good Impression*, Abi and Marlon feud after he accidentally drops her dental retainer into a toilet. The feud escalates until both have been embarrassed before their peers, and Indie convinces them to refocus their energies and get "a fresh start".

In *How to Get a Pet*, AJ and Mike O'Donnell are competing for membership in the Shadow Kings IT club. Through the competition, they earn each other's respect and realize that they have more to gain as friends, working together, than as rivals, and both inform the club that they are no longer interested in joining.

In *How to Make a Comeback*, Indie, Abi and Marlon learn to train and work together to realize their common goal of being the winning "Quiz Bowl" team.

In *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Lying*, Indie offers the audience eight signs for how to recognize "if the boy you like likes you back" and then quickly realizes these signs can also show that he doesn't like you. She concludes in an age-appropriate, self-conscious way by saying, "Obviously, I'm still figuring some things out." In *How to Make a Good Impression*, Indie learns that her crush, Chad, is just as self-conscious about his family as she is about her own, and that to impress him she should just be herself.

In several episodes, including *How to Make a Comeback*, *How to Be Ridonkulous*, *How to Get Some Cred*, and *How to be a Mehta*, Indie learns that by considering her parents' experience and trying to understand their point of view, she can better express her own ideas and desires to them, often making them proud and getting what she wants.

5. Morality and Values

Frequently in the "**HOW TO BE INDIE**" series, characters confront ethical and moral choices, and viewers learn the negative consequences of making the wrong choices. For example, in *How to Make Your Rep*, Indie creates the false impression that she is an experienced camper and nearly lands herself on a dangerous excursion. When she finally owns up to her prior deception, Skye also admits that she has exaggerated her own camping experience, and the two become fast friends.

In *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Lying*, Indie discovers a problem with her product and makes the right choice by providing her customers with a warranty and recalling the product. Her cousin Ruby tries to cheat by advertising the product without being honest about its defects, and in the end she loses their competition when her dishonest plan comes to light.

In *How to Get a Pet*, Indie faces a difficult choice but ultimately puts the well-being of another living creature for whom she is responsible (Victor the turtle), ahead of her own interests.

6. Societal Issues

“HOW TO BE INDIE” touches on issues of interest in contemporary society in a way that should resonate with teen viewers, from the idea of service-learning to the use of cell phones and online social networks.

In *How to Prove You’re Actually a Nice Person*, Indie signs up for a huge number of service-learning opportunities just to prove to the other students that she is really a nice person. When she realizes that actually being of service to another person is more important, her concerns about her standing are also quickly resolved.

In *How to Get on Carlos Martinelli’s Capital ‘L’ List, and Live*, Carlos is a “cyberbully” who intimidates the other children by posting embarrassing pictures of them online. Indie turns the tables on him by getting a humiliating picture of Carlos, but she shows proper restraint by not actually putting the picture on the internet.

In *How to be Ridonkulous*, Indie gets her first cell phone and immediately has “feature fever”, irresponsibly running up a large bill by abusing unnecessary, expensive special features on the phone. As a direct consequence of her bad choice, she loses her phone privileges when her mother confiscates it.

In *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Lying*, Indie learns how to promote a new product on the internet, and when her commercial “goes viral”, sales go through the roof. When her cousin Ruby puts a dishonest commercial online, Indie’s friend views it and then warns Indie about Ruby’s plans. Indie demonstrates positive uses for the internet when she researches new products for her business project or, as in *How to Get Some Cred*, she goes online to research classical Indian dance.

“HOW TO BE INDIE” SEASON ONE OVERVIEW AND SAMPLE EPISODE DESCRIPTIONS

Episode 1: “How To Make You Make Your Rep”

Objectives:

1. Understanding the value of being one’s authentic self
2. The consequences of dishonesty in relationships
3. Building new peer relationships through shared activities
4. Learning to collaborate to utilize the talents of many to achieve a shared goal
5. Learning to communicate effectively with parents

It is the first week of school for Indie Mehta and her best friends, Abi and Marlon, as they start life as Eighth Graders. Indie intentionally gives other students the false impression that she has spent the summer at camp. A new friend, Skye, is impressed by this and invites Indie on an advanced wilderness camping trip. Unexpectedly, her parents allow Indie to go on the trip. Indie discusses this with her wise grandfather, who helps her realize that, to truly impress her friends, Indie must do so by her actions. When Indie reluctantly shows up with her gear for the trip, she finds Skye struggling to set up a tent, and realizes that Skye wasn’t quite the experienced camper after all, that in fact Skye was exaggerating to enhance *her* own reputation. Indie figures out how to fix the tent and comes clean about her actual summer experience. The girls end up having a great camping experience and begin to build a friendship based on helping each other out.

Indie explains: “How to make your rep? Don’t just stand there in your camp shirt making animal noises. Do something to show people who you really are.”

Marlon’s effort to improve his standing by having an “entourage” of less popular kids backfires when he disrespects them, and they seek revenge by using his personal information against him. Abi is working at her parents’ restaurant, the Happy Breeze Food Hut, and she helps Marlon shed his fake “cool” image by convincing his former entourage members that their best revenge against Marlon would be to deny him their attention

Indie’s siblings, Chandra and AJ, attempt to convince their parents to buy a microwave oven. Ultimately, when they try appealing to their parents’ work ethic and values, the children are successful, and the family gets their microwave.

Episode 2: How to Have Your Samosa and Eat It Too

Objectives:

1. Balancing one's family and cultural identity with the desire for social acceptance in the broader community
2. Dealing with rivalry and competition and its pressures
3. Standing up to bullying
4. Honoring the knowledge and experience of elders

Indie, Abi and Marlon dread the return of "Wonderful World of Food Day". It celebrates the school's cultural diversity and brings each of them problems. Abi is forced to bring rejected food from her family's restaurant. Marlon has trouble finding anything to bring – previously he brought mayonnaise sandwiches, as he believes that his family doesn't have a special culture.

Indie's problem is that she will be in the South Asian booth with Ram Ramachandran, who is a terrible cook and makes unwanted passes at Indie. Indie and Ram make a bet. Each will bring their best food. If Indie's food is more popular, Ram will stop attending Food Day. But if Ram's food is more popular, Indie must go on a date with him.

Indie thinks she is set when she convinces her mother to make samosas for her, but the night before the event, her mother leaves to help a sick relative. Chandra and AJ pitch in and try to help Indie make the samosas. They try to improvise their Mom's recipe, but the result is terrible. Their grandfather comes home, sees their predicament and offers to show them how it is really done. As they do the hard work required to make the food correctly, the children gain a new respect for their Mom's efforts and attitudes. But their Grandfather's recipe makes the samosas way too spicy to eat, and there is no time to make more.

On Wonderful World of Food Day, it appears that Indie will be defeated, but she makes Ram eat the first samosa, which leaves him begging Indie for a cold drink and willing to promise to leave her alone. Marlon convinces Mrs. Roland to give him credit for creating the made up country of Austro-Bulgonia, its entire cultural history and its ethnic beverage, "yurgenmaltzen". Abi gets her credit by taking defective fortune cookies from the Happy Breeze Food Hut, writing fortunes for them and stuffing the fortunes into the cookies.

Indie explains: "How to have your samosa and eat it too? Remember, one of the most important things about a meal is how you serve it, and no meal is complete without a nice cool beverage."

Episode 3: How to Get on Carlos Martinelli's Capital 'L' List, and Live

Objectives:

1. Standing up to bullying and resisting peer pressure
2. Balancing one's family and cultural identity with the desire for social acceptance in the broader community
3. Learning to communicate effectively with parents
4. Not completing homework and negative outcomes
5. Issues related to online social networking
6. Understanding and empathizing with people who are different from oneself

Indie inadvertently makes it onto bully Carlos Martinelli's "L" list. According to Rexdale lore, the only way off of his list without suffering humiliation at the hands of the bully is to throw a party. But parties at Indie's house are notoriously dull due to the influence of her strict parents. Abi and Indie engage Indie's Mom and negotiate terms for the party.

The day before the party, Indie's grandfather brings chickens home and puts them in the basement. Carlos drops by to take a look around Indie's house. He sees the chickens, takes a picture and posts the picture on the internet to embarrass Indie. On the night of the party, Indie feels her parents may ruin everything with their ethnic food and her father's bargain sympathy napkins. By the time Abi has helped rein her parents in, the chickens have gone missing. The children try to entertain their friends and ignore the potential for a chicken outbreak. Eventually, Indie decides to own up to the kids at the party about having chickens in the house, and it all works out for her, when Buster the chicken attacks and embarrasses Carlos, and the children at the party find it exotic and entertaining. Indie take an embarrassing video of Carlos to hold over him but says that she is not going to post it.

Indie explains: "How to get on Carlos Martinelli's list and survive? Take one standard party game, add video phone and sprinkle liberally with one Buster, the beak of death."

AJ is interested in astronomy and has trouble convincing his friend Chuck to watch the eclipse with him using AJ's telescope. Chuck later becomes interested when he realizes their pretty science teacher's window can be observed using the same telescope. The teacher is on to them and as punishment, gives them extra homework. Because of his authentic interest in his studies, AJ manages to score highly on the homework, while Chuck, who has not honestly studied it, does poorly.

Episode 4: How to Trick Your Parents Into Treating You Like A Grown Up

Objectives:

1. Understanding and respecting age appropriate limitations
2. Understanding and appreciating one's unique place in the development process
3. Learning to ask for help

In this Halloween episode, Indie feels that she is being treated too much like a young child. Her parents and her older siblings prepare for their annual ritual of viewing a scary movie together. Indie is forbidden from watching with them, as she has always been much too frightened of the movie. Her Mom makes Indie smiley-faced cookies for her snack. When presents arrive from their aunt, Chandra gets earrings, AJ gets a mature-rated video game, and Indie gets a doll "for ages 5 and up". Indie thinks there is something odd about the doll.

Abi claims that nothing is scary if you look at it logically, while Marlon has seen many scary movie marathons and advises Indie to stay away from the doll. Marlon tries to scare Abi at lunch, but she uses logic to figure out that it is a prank, and she turns the tables on him. Indie hides the scary doll in her closet at home, but the next day it shows up in her locker at school and frightens her. Marlon convinces Indie that, if they were in a movie, the thing to do would be to destroy the doll with sulphuric acid and/or saw it in half.

The doll lures Indie into the guidance counselor's office. There the guidance counselor tries to help Indie with her issues about growing up. Indie takes the doll to AJ's shop class and tries to use their saw on it, but the doll escapes. The counselor communicates with Indie's parents that seeing the film will give Indie more confidence as she is going through typical teen issues. Then Indie thinks she hears the doll and goes to the kitchen, where she fights with the doll and finally throws the doll into a pot of her mother's volcano stew, which destroys it. In the end, Indie decides that, while growing up is great, she may not be quite as grown up now as she thought, and she may not be so anxious to grow up all at once.

As Indie explains to her parents: "Sometimes being a grown-up is way over-rated."

Episode 5: How to Strike a Balance

Objectives:

1. How to manage competition among friends
2. The value of creativity

Abi wins a trophy, and this “upsets the balance” of awards between Abi and Indie, which then ignites a fierce rivalry between their Moms. Indie’s Mom forces her to play piano and prepare to enter a competition to earn another award. The Moms enter both girls in the same music competition.

AJ and Chandra feud over the last piece of chicken, and Chandra makes disparaging remarks about her brother’s complexion. He turns out to have chicken pox, and Chandra quickly also gets them, soon earning both the chance to sample their Mom’s frightening home remedies. Indie tries to catch the chicken pox from her siblings to try to get out of competing in the music contest against her friend, but she learns from her mother that she had already had the disease as a small child.

Indie continues to practice but her playing is not improving. Her Mom calls an agency to send a piano tutor, and that turns out to be Abi. When they realize that Indie’s talent isn’t piano playing, Abi offers to perform badly so that neither of them will win the competition, and balance will be restored. But on the day of the competition, Indie hatches a new plan with Marlon. She implores Abi to do her best, and cheers her on. And when it is Indie’s turn, Indie performs instead an original dance routine, which earns cheers from the audience and makes her mother proud, even though it does not earn her a trophy.

Episode 6 – How to Be a Mehta

Objectives:

1. Dealing with rivalry and competition and its pressures
2. Cheating on school work and negative outcomes
3. Learning to communicate with parents
4. Realizing that being oneself is more important than false posturing in one's relationships

Indie's mother keeps a "graph of excellence" to chart the progress of her children. Since her siblings get all "A"s, when Indie brings home a "B+" grade, no one is impressed, and Indie loses her fabric softener privileges. Abi and Marlon offer to help. They decide that Indie's best opportunity for an "A" could be in gym, but Indie's klutziness at badminton appears to ruin that possibility, and her gym teacher gives her an "F". Terrified to show her mother the failing grade on her badminton evaluation, Indie explains the predicament to her older siblings, and they convince her to forge her parents' signatures on the report. Her Mom catches her in the act of the forgery and tells her that, as punishment, Indie will be sent away to boarding school – in India. Later Abi tries to help Indie, and she discovers that the boarding school brochure is a fake, invented by Indie's parents to throw a scare into her. Rather than show her parents up, Indie finds a graceful way for them to admit the deception, and they reciprocate by showing some understanding of the pressure they have put her under.

Marlon gets new shoes from his Mom that look amazing but turn out to be knock offs and are terribly uncomfortable. Marlon's friend and awkward sidekick, John Lu, tries to copy Marlon, but John's Mom gets him the authentic brand of the shoes, and they work well for him. Marlon believes he has "lost his mojo" as a result, while John seems to have discovered his and is enjoying new found popularity. John decides he must take Marlon's shoes to "restore order," then insists that both of them get rid of their shoes so that the friendship can go back to its original state.

Episode 7 – How to Make a Comeback

Objectives:

1. Rivalry, competition and potential outcomes
2. Learning how to collaborate to utilize the talents of many to achieve a shared goal

Indie's father is a trivia buff, but he can't seem to get his kids to love it too. Then when Rexdale needs kids to represent the school at the "Quiz Bowl," Indie decides to follow her Dad's lead, and she signs up herself, Abi and Marlon to go.

At first her father hesitates to coach her team – he reveals that, as a child, he was almost "Quiz Bowl" champion, but suffered an embarrassing loss in the championship match. He finally agrees to help, but he becomes a harsh taskmaster, and Abi and Marlon tell Indie that she must get her Dad to stop. It is hard, but Indie explains the situation to her Dad. He agrees to stop coaching the team, and they get much worse, while their nemesis, Frowncrest Academy, takes on Indie's Dad as coach.

On the big day of Quiz Bowl competition against Frowncrest, Indie's team quickly falls behind by 100 points, but Indie realizes that her father is not enjoying the match and empathizes with his situation. In the middle of the competition, she apologizes to her Dad, he returns to their team, and they win the match by scoring the biggest come back in Quiz Bowl history

Indie explains: "How to make a comeback? Save the day with a not so useless fact. Question for my Dad: Is Quiz Bowl really about a. the trivia, b. the winning or c. repairing that wounded ego and being needed by your daughter?"

Episode 8 – How to Be Ridonkulous

Objectives:

1. Dishonesty and negative outcomes
2. Learning open communication with parents
3. Responsible use of cell phones

Indie is desperate to attend the Ridonkulous concert, but she has to do chores and misses her chance to buy a ticket. Abi waits in line to buy tickets and gets one for herself but can't manage to get another one for Indie. Indie wants to ask her mother for help, but she knows that, in her family, if you want to do something, you must answer three questions: how is it not wasteful, how is hard work involved, and how can this be combined with dusting? Indie's last hope is to enter a radio contest to win tickets and hope the radio station calls her, but her mother and siblings rule the phone at home, and she is afraid she will miss the call. Indie convinces her parents to get her a cell phone. But once she gets the phone, Indie gets "feature fever" and tries all the expensive extra features of the phone, which leads her Mom to take the phone away from her.

Indie searches for the phone all over the house. Her sister Chandra tries calling the phone, and they find it in her grandfather's pocket. Just as the radio station calls and awards Indie two tickets to the concert, her mother catches her with the phone and grounds her. Chandra shows Indie where their mother has likely hid the phone and then how to sneak out of the house through a basement window. Indie finds the phone and tries to sneak out but gets snagged on the window latch and is caught by her mother and grounded again.

Indie's Mom tells her, "Who needs to play when you can clean?" Indie then realizes how different her mother's childhood was from her own. She decides to try a different tack with her Mom and invites her to go to the concert with her so that the two free tickets "don't have to go to waste". By showing sympathy for her Mom's life of hard work (and by appealing to her thrifty side), she convinces her Mom to go, and they both have a great time.

Indie explains: "How to be Ridonkulous? Easy. Step 1: Realize that your mother never had time to act Ridonkulous herself. Step 2: Realize that she probably wanted to because once she was a kid, like you. Step 3: Give your no fun Mom an opening to have a good time."

Episode 9 – How to Get a Pet

Objectives:

1. Dishonesty and negative outcomes
2. Learning to take responsibility for one's actions
3. Understanding age appropriate limitations
4. Learning open communication with parents

Indie and AJ watch Indie's favorite dog movie, "The Legend of Li'l Bingo", and it reminds Indie how much she wants a pet. She begs her mother for a puppy, but her Mom doesn't want to take care of it, and she thinks Indie is too young to take on that responsibility. AJ teases Indie that he also doesn't think she could handle it.

Determined to impress her Mom with how pet responsible she is, Indie asks Mrs. Roland, if, for the upcoming Parent's Day, Indie can create a Rexdale rescue shelter for pet turtles. Indie sets up an amazing terrarium shelter – but loses track of the turtle, Victor. Abi, Marlon and Indie search for Victor, but, before they can find him, Mrs. Roland sends them back to class. The three stay after school to look for Victor, but the turtle doesn't come out. The cafeteria is advertising a new turtle soup, and the kids are afraid that if they don't find Victor in time, he may be put into the soup. That night Indie has a dream that Victor is in trouble, and she realizes how helpless the turtle must feel.

As Parent's Day is about to start, Marlon gives Indie a fake turtle to replace Victor. But as Indie presents her shelter, she starts to feel guilt for losing Victor, and her Mom notices that the turtle in the shelter doesn't move. Indie suddenly bolts from the parents and runs to the cafeteria, hoping to save Victor from becoming soup. Indie overturns a large pot of soup, which turns out to be just a green pasta dish. Victor suddenly appears and crawls over to Indie. Indie's mother tells her that she has done the responsible thing by putting Victor's needs above her own, and that perhaps it is time for them to get a puppy after all. But Indie realizes that maybe she doesn't need the responsibility of a pet dog right now. A new "Li'l Bingo" movie may be all she can handle for the time being.

Indie explains: "How to get a pet? The easy way. Fake it, stay in Mrs. Roland's good books and impress Mom so much she can't help but to get me that fluffy ball of wonderfulness. Or I could throw that all away to save some reptile named Victor. What would you do?"

AJ is invited to join the Shadow Kings IT club. His nemesis, Mike O'Donnell, has received the same invitation. The club pits them against each other in various initiation competitions, but eventually their shared adversity brings the two enemies together. They become friends and both drop the idea of joining the Shadow Kings club.

Episode 10 – How to Succeed in Business Without Really Lying

Objectives:

1. Dishonesty and negative outcomes
2. The importance of honesty in business transactions
3. Issues related to using the internet
4. Forming early romantic relationships

Indie feels that her cousin Ruby is a terrible cheater. But when Ruby challenges Indie to compete in the Micromanagers, a business club for Rexdale students, Indie takes her on.

Indie sits at the Food Hut with her laptop and searches the internet for potential products to sell for her Micromanagers project. Marlon suggests a device invented by his Uncle Stan— it’s a robotic arm that dunks cookies into milk and then tosses them into the user’s mouth. Dubbing the invention “the cookie tosser”, Indie makes a hilarious commercial and puts it on the internet. When the commercial goes “viral”, and cookie tosser sales soar, Ruby vows to stop it.

Indie and Marlon are at the Hut counting their money, when Ruby introduces them to Anthony, a customer who claims to suffer from oatmeal in his ears due to a defective cookie tosser. Indie asks AJ to figure out how to fix the cookie tosser’s defects. She owns up to the problem, gives her customers a warranty and rounds up all the units to fix them. Unfortunately AJ’s repair is going to cost more than the customers have paid for the product, and Marlon has already reinvested their earnings into the purchase of more cookie tossers. Ruby offers to buy out all the inventory at cost and solve all of Indie’s problems if Indie will admit that Ruby has beaten her. But a friend sees Ruby’s new online commercial and shows it to Indie – Ruby’s plan is to re-sell the defective cookie tossers without fixing them.

Indie tells Ruby that their deal is off, and Ruby gets angry and calls the tosser a “splatapault”, which gives Indie a new idea for re-positioning her product. She, Marlon and Abi bring the newly renamed “splatapaults” to detention, and they are used them in a food fight. The fight grows to epic proportions, and Mrs. Roland, fighting with her own splatapault, wins. Indie’s new commercial for the splatapault is a winner, too, and she sells out all the units and defeats Ruby.

Indie explains: “How to succeed in business without really lying? Don’t sell your product on what it can’t do, sell it on what it can.”

Between homework and work at the Hut, Abi is exhausted, but she promises her mother she will be at the Hut after school no matter what. Trying to help her, Marlon sets Abi up to look like she is pranking Mrs. Roland, and Mrs. Roland gives Abi detention. Abi confronts Marlon, and he explains how he planned this to get Abi out of working at the Hut. But Abi explains that this will only get her in more trouble with her parents. Marlon tries to fix the situation but only manages to get her in more trouble with Mrs. Roland. Abi reports to detention, but in the commotion during the food fight, Abi is able to leave detention early and keep her promise to her Mom.

In a final segment, Indie tries to tell the audience how you can “tell if the boy you like likes you back”, but in doing so, she realizes that her eight signs that he likes you can also be the eight signs that he doesn’t like you, and she comments, “Obviously I’m still figuring some things out.”

Episode 11 – How to Get Some Cred

Objectives:

1. Dishonesty and negative outcomes
2. Dealing with rivalry and competition and its pressures
3. Learning open communication with parents

Indie's cousin Ruby and her Indian friends are critical of Indie and her family's apparent lack of appreciation of Indian culture. Abi points out that the girls are also into mall shopping, and, as a way to win them over, Abi suggest Indie try a hip new outfit. Ruby's friends are impressed, and they apologize to Indie and invite her to dance with them at a world dance festival. Indie lies and tells them she knows how to do the classic Indian dance called Bharata Natyam and then she accepts Ruby's challenge to a dance off.

Indie, Abi and Marlon look up the Bharata Natyam on the internet to see if Indie can learn the dance, but it is extremely complicated. Abi decides that their best new plan would be for Indie to get into trouble and be grounded by her parents and therefore unable to attend the dance. Indie goads her Mom into grounding her by telling her that she wants to go to a teen dance. Her Mom forbids her from going to the teen dance, and instead has a surprise trip for Indie. She has bought them both tickets to the world dance festival that Indie has been trying to avoid.

Indie comes up with a new plan – she will dance at the festival and fake an injury before it is too obvious that she doesn't really know the dance. When Indie finds her Mom in the basement, she is doing a dance while folding laundry. Her Mom explains that the dance is a classical Indian dance called the Odissi, and that she danced a lot when younger but put her dancing aside to focus on raising a family in a new land. Watching her Mom, Indie realizes that the dance off is trivial, but the dance tradition is special, and that her Mom is the one who really deserves the "cred".

Indie approaches Ruby and her friends at the world dance festival and admits to them that she doesn't know as much about the culture as they do. She points to a stage where her Mom has begun dancing Mokha, the dance of liberation, and Ruby's friends are impressed and have new found respect for Indie and her family.

Indie explains: "How to get some cred? Start by realizing that your petty dance off makes a joke of something special. And if you're gonna act that shallow, maybe neither of you deserves any cred."

Marlon's Mom has shrunk his pants and now they are too tight. Abi suggests a plan to make his too-tight pants seem like a hip fashion statement. Marlon decides the first place to promote his new look should be with the school jocks, who are taste-makers at Rexdale. He wears the pants in a pick-up basketball game and makes all his shots, although, by the end of the game he has fallen and can't get up again. As Abi wheels Marlon into the Food Hut on a dolly, they realize all the boys there are now wearing too-tight pants. Marlon thinks he has the power to start more trends, but when his too-tight pants explode, and he suffers a "pantsplosion", no one is interested in following that trend.

Episode 12 – How to Prove You're Actually a Nice Person

Objectives:

1. Understanding and empathizing with people who are different from oneself
2. Issues related to service learning

An elderly neighbor, Mrs. Papadopoulos, keeps asking Indie for help. AJ and Chandra imitate the neighbor's screeching voice just to annoy Indie. When Indie hears Fiona, the new girl at school, speaking in a screechy voice, she assumes it is a prank caused by her siblings, and she tells Fiona that her voice is annoying. Abi and Marlon explain to Indie that she has missed an announcement telling the students that Fiona is sensitive about her voice, and that everyone is supposed to be nice to her and not tease her about it. Now the students think Indie is mean - even Carlos Martinelli, the bully, says that Indie is being a "monster", and no one will sit with her at lunch.

To rehabilitate her image, Indie registers with Fiona for the Spirit Week Charity Drive. Trying to make the best possible impression, Indie overcommits and signs up for too many events, from a 5k Fun Run and a Ping Pong Marathon, to Magazine Sales and a Pie Fight. On the day of the Charity Drive, Indie loses her schedule and keeps showing up to the wrong events at the wrong times, and she isn't able to fulfill her charity funding promise. Fiona explains that the funding promise will have to be paid for whether Indie successfully finishes her Charity Drive or not.

Abi and Marlon try raising money for Indie at the Hut, but no one will contribute. AJ offers to lend her the money but wants her to be his servant in return. When Mrs. Papadopoulos asks for Indie's help again, Indie realizes she has been wrong to keeping sending her away, and that if she really wants to be a good person, she should start by helping her elderly neighbor. Indie visits Mrs. Papadopoulos, helps her find her medication and then tells her the crazy story of all her fund raising activities. When Indie gets to school the next day, she is prepared to suffer the consequences of her failed Charity Drive, but Abi tells her that Mrs. Papadopoulos has made calls and gotten all of her friends to contribute to Indie's charities so that her funding promise would be met. Fiona says that if she can spend so much time helping an elderly neighbor, Indie must really be a nice person after all.

Indie explains: "How to prove you are actually a nice person and not a complete jerk like everyone thinks? Step 1: Stop being a jerk. Step 2: See step 1".

Episode 13 – How to Make a Good Impression

Objectives:

1. Realizing that being oneself is more important than false posturing in one's relationships
2. The consequences of attempting to form a romantic relationship based on false impressions

Indie has a crush on her new next door neighbor, Chad Tash. She's afraid the Tashes will want to move – the Mehtas have had many different neighbors, and Indie thinks it is her “weird” family that keeps frightening them all away. To prevent this from happening again, Indie calls a family meeting and asks her relatives to accept a make-over using a list of rules designed to avoid scaring away the neighbors. They agree to play along, and even Indie's Mom will make a tuna casserole for a house-warming gift, rather than her personal favorite, a spicy tikka masala. At school Indie tries to grab her brother's ant farm so he won't seem so geeky to Chad. The ant farm goes flying, landing down the hall and right in Chad's arms.

Expecting a visit from the Tashes, Indie pays Chandra to take AJ to the mall, then puts on a robe, rubs cream onto her face, and tries to relax, when Chad and his younger brother Todd show up unexpectedly early. Indie and Chad have a misunderstanding, and the visit is a disaster.

Abi suggests Indie patch things up by sending Chad a gift basket. Indie asks Todd to tell her what Chad likes, so she will know what should go in the basket. After he gets the basket, Chad visits Indie, complains that everything in the basket is insulting or upsetting to him and says that both he and Todd now want to move. When AJ tells Indie that someone has put their trash on the next door neighbor's lawn, Indie suspects Todd, and she calls him over. Todd admits that he has caused all this trouble because he thinks Indie's family is too perfect, and that his family is too weird to be living next door to them. Indie calls another family meeting and tells her relatives to just be themselves. Chad, looking for his little brother, visits Indie's house and overhears Todd admitting to Indie that it was his fault that her gift basket upset Chad. Chad apologizes to Indie for being angry with her and for his family being so weird. Indie realizes that she has felt the same way about her own family.

Indie explains: “How to make a good impression? Stop trying so hard to make a good impression - and start being a good neighbor.”

At lunch Marlon asks Abi to hide her dental retainer so he doesn't have to see it. When Abi forgets the retainer on her lunch tray, Marlon finds it and holds onto it for her. He makes a stop in the bathroom and accidentally drops Abi's retainer in the toilet, and, before he can wash it, Abi takes the retainer from him and puts it into her mouth. Later Marlon visits the Hut and discovers that Abi has found out about the dirty retainer and is vowing to have her revenge against him. The two pull pranks on each other until Indie convinces them that both are being embarrassed by the rivalry and that what they really need is a fresh start.

KELLY ANNE SYERS, M.M.S.
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING CONSULTANT

Kelly Syers has a truly unique perspective on television programming for youth and teens that combines her educational background with several years of youth network programming experience and a commitment to children's education.

Ms. Syers began her career as a director of distribution of CATS Television Programming, where she directed the worldwide distribution of the Richard Rich-produced series, "Animated Stories from the Bible," and the "The Swan Princess" movie, the last major feature film produced with traditional ink-and-paint animation. She also directed worldwide distribution of the multi-lingual "Down at the Zoo" children's series, with a focus on Latin American and African territories.

Kelly became Acquisitions Manager of Nickelodeon, where she evaluated thousands of hours of programming for license by the network, including the Warner Brothers animation library and off-network series. Kelly played a pivotal role in the programming strategies developed for Nick and the formation of the TV Land and Noggin channels. Kelly also held executive youth marketing positions with Much Music, ElectricSchoolhouse.com, The WB Network and KidsWB! Her experience has emphasized youth educational and outreach campaigns, including Nickelodeon's "Big Help" and "Ad Council Teen Pregnancy Awareness" and "Above the Influence" (on drug abuse) campaigns at The WB.

As a children's programming consultant to Program Partners, Kelly has provided strategic analysis for the company's youth programming initiatives, including the educational - informational (E/I) program offerings, "Degrassi: The Next Generation" and "Edgemont."

Kelly is a member of the educational staff of the Beth Shir Early Childhood Education Center in Santa Monica, CA. She earned her B.A. from Pine Manor College in 1991 and a Masters in Media Studies from The New School for Social Research in 1998.