

**“THE LATEST BUZZ”**

**REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL/INFORMATIONAL (E/I) CONTENT**

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### **THE LATEST BUZZ SERIES DESCRIPTOR FOR FCC 398**

**The Latest Buzz** is a half-hour television program designed for middle and high school students aged 13-16 years-old and is rated TV-PG. Originally produced by the Family Channel in Canada, the series depicts the hectic and often humorous lives of five culturally unique high school students as they attempt to overcome their personal differences and work together to publish the first teen magazine to be written entirely by actual teenagers. Each 30-minute episode focuses on the student's activities during their last period of high school at the editorial offices of "Teen Buzz."

The viewer follows Rebecca, Michael, Noah, Amanda and Wilder as they learn about the fast-paced world of print publishing, all while experiencing the ever-changing life of a teenager. **The Latest Buzz** explores the topics of Media Education, Entrepreneurship, Creative Collaboration and Social Responsibility while inspiring young viewers to take a closer look at the messages they are receiving from Media and pop-culture.

**The Latest Buzz** is designed to entertain its core teen audience and also to inform and educate its viewers about issues that arise in school, within families and in an afterschool workplace. The storylines focus on social and emotional developmental challenges faced by all high school students, from forming and cultivating friendships and managing work relationships, to navigating ethical and moral choices at school and at work. The objective of the series is to demonstrate models of behavior for teen viewers—especially in a work/study environment—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.

Most scenes occur in and around the editorial offices of "Teen Buzz", where the students take their eighth period of the school day, and follow the social life of the teens. Work at the magazine is taken seriously, depicted through characters as they strive to complete assignments, cooperate with one another to meet tight deadlines and to achieve their personal best. The cast portrays teenagers with diversity along social and ethnic lines, providing opportunities for most viewers to identify directly with specific characters.

Each episode advances a few specific storylines based on particular social or emotional issues and takes them to a new conclusion. Characters act out behaviors that bring these social emotional issues to the forefront, and they solve problems, generally without intervention by adults but through communication with peers, which leads to a better understanding of each situation and each other. At the same time, actions do lead to consequences, and the outcomes provide a "life lesson" that is plainly evident but conveyed to the viewer in a natural, almost familiar way.

It is anticipated that, on viewing **The Latest Buzz**, 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. For example, parents viewing episodes that portray the role of technology and social media in students' lives may gain insight regarding a pervasive aspect of their children's experience that did not exist during their own childhood.

The series also touches lightly on significant societal issues, which is intended to inform teens on these topics, stimulate conversations among teen viewers, and potentially complement classroom discussions. These issues range from considerations of classism, stress, diversity, divorce, personal responsibility, teamwork, bullying and cyberbullying.

## **SERIES OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES**

***The Latest Buzz*** is a television series that revolves around the lives of five culturally unique high school students as they attempt to get over their personal differences and work together to publish the first teen magazine to be written entirely by actual teenagers. Each 30-minute episode generally focuses on the children's activities during their last period of school at the editorial offices of "Teen Buzz." The series targets 13-16 year-old viewers.

***The Latest Buzz*** is designed to entertain its teen audience and also to inform and educate its viewers about issues that arise in school and at afterschool work. The storylines focus on the social and emotional challenges faced by every high school student, from forming and maintaining friendships and romantic attachments, to ethical and moral choices within a work/study environment. With its concentration on work at the magazine, the series also provides young viewers with insights into practices of the publishing industry.

Most scenes occur in and around the editorial offices of "The Teen Buzz" and follow the interactions of the teens among peers and adult mentors. The series utilizes music, pacing and humor to maintain the interests of its audience throughout each episode, however work and school are both taken seriously, depicted through characters studying, discussing magazine assignments or organizing and conducting interviews. The cast portrays diverse groups along social and ethnic lines, providing opportunities for most viewers to identify directly with many characters. Parental involvement is inherent, but few adult characters are depicted.

The series follows three or four story "arcs" through the course of a season, but 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. For example, in specific episodes characters explore issues of identity by inventing new identities, trying them on and eventually realizing the value of being one's self over such fake personalities. Peers offer perspective and assist in resolving problems and conflicts. Characters generally solve problems not with adult intervention, but through communication with their peers, finding 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 not in an overly didactic manner.

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. 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 Latest Buzz*** 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 and possibly open lines of communication with parents or trusted adults. Additionally, qualities of ***The Latest Buzz*** 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, social and emotional challenges faced by teens and to open dialogue between teen viewers and parents of issues that might otherwise prove extremely difficult to discuss.

The series also touches lightly on significant societal issues, which may be complementary to classroom discussions on these topics. 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. For example, episodes dealing with bullying behavior may clearly illustrate for young viewers the negative consequences of participating in or condoning such behavior, versus the positive outcomes obtained by resisting and opposing such behavior.

The following illustrates issues covered in the series and provides episode overviews as a representative sample of *The Latest Buzz* series.

## **EXAMPLES OF EDUCATIONAL/INFORMATIONAL CONTENT**

### ***1. Media Literacy/Entrepreneurship***

The setting of *The Latest Buzz* makes it an educational vehicle for Media Studies. Absorbing, processing and interpreting information at a rapid rate, today's students require emotional insight to navigate an evolving technological world. Using humor to attract and sustain the interest of teen viewers, *The Latest Buzz* provides a starting point for class discussion of the influence of media. By exploring the media and learning to project their voices into their articles and videos, "The Teen Buzz" staff illustrates how to navigate these media changes while maintaining their humanity.

When the students attempt to mount a real-time webcast in *The Live Issue*, the Buzz teens discover that there is little room for error in a live production. After their scheduled guest, recording star Michael D'Ascenzo, receives an upsetting text mid-show from his girlfriend, Michael and Rebecca scramble to fill the dead air. Similarly, in *The Deadline Issue*, the Buzz Staff must work together against all odds to finish their various magazine assignments in time for a rapidly approaching publication deadline.

Unfortunately everything that can go wrong does go wrong. While Rebecca and Michael's argument about their friendship jeopardizes their editorial piece, Amanda has trouble reigning in a wayward interview with a supermodel. Noah's feature is completely botched, while Wilder causes an electrical blackout at the Teen Buzz offices, slowing everyone's progress. Still, despite the setbacks, the group pushes through the adversity, and work together to put out a magazine of which they can all be proud. The episode demonstrates the value of perseverance, teamwork and persistence.

### ***2. Controlling One's Emotions/Bullying***

Another significant aspect to teen emotional development is building self-control over one's emotions and any tendencies toward controlling behavior. *The Just Friends Issue* explores the overpowering effect of jealousy with regard to personal trust. Elliot, the boy Rebecca kissed in Paris over summer, arrives for a visit. Though Rebecca has told Noah that she has no romantic

relationship with Elliot now, Noah is suspicious of Elliot's intentions. He is blinded by his growing jealousy, though it is clear through her actions that Rebecca's feelings are for Noah.

In *The First Issue*, **The Latest Buzz** viewer is shown the potential repercussions of letting one's anger get out of control. When Noah and Michael battle for superiority, they allow their anger to lead them down a dangerous road, escalating the pranks they pull on one another. Inevitably, when Michael interferes with Noah's submitted music feature, it appears Noah may lose his job as a consequence. A humbled Michael does his best to rectify the situation, but in the end is penalized for his actions.

In *The Bully Issue*, various types of bullying are examined. Rebecca asks for Wilder's help with a new video game. Instead of helping his friend, Wilder runs up the score, brags and then makes fun of Rebecca, hurting her feelings and wounding her pride. In a parallel storyline, Amanda and Noah are working on a PSA about bullying. Whenever Amanda disagrees with Noah on how to produce the piece, Noah shuts down her opinion with his assertive attitude. In a third storyline, Michael's new girlfriend Yolanda makes all the decisions for the couple, whether Michael likes it or not. By the end of the episode, Wilder, Noah and Yolanda all realize they have been bullying their friends, and they make amends. (This episode was specifically designed and originally aired to coincide with Bully Awareness Week.)

### **3. Divorce**

Divorce is an issue teens are exposed to within their families or among the families of their peers. Divorce can have emotionally devastating impact and can lead to depression and self-blame in teens. In *The Truth Hurts Issue*, when Noah's father informs his son that he and Noah's mother are splitting up, Noah can't help but fight the tide. Desperate to stop the inevitable, he tries to out-lawyer his own father.

In *The Parents Issue*, the Buzz kids bring their parents to work. Amanda is upset when her father is a last-second no-show and sends Amanda's step mother in his place. Despite her bias, Amanda eventually realizes that her stepmother does in fact care for her and is now part of her extended family, whether she likes it or not.

It is clear from both episodes that the impact of the parents' break up continues to ripple through the lives of the children and their peer relationships. The story of Noah's family illustrates for many teen viewers the initial shock of a parental split, while Amanda's dilemma demonstrates the continual upheaval that they or their peers may face in a family torn by divorce.

### **4. Social Issues**

**The Latest Buzz** is an exercise in learning to work together. The portrayal of five disparate teens that are forced to work together on the same magazine illustrates the importance of the ability to overcome personal differences and find common ground in order to effectively work together.

For example, in *The Obsession Issue*, for a school presentation, unmotivated Amanda is teamed with the more aggressive Rebecca. It is obvious neither girl particularly cares for the other, and their first attempt at a cooking video is disastrous. Fortunately their teacher gives them another



chance, and they soon realize that, by relying on each other's strengths, instead of pointing out each other's weaknesses, each can contribute to making a better project. Viewers see the benefits of collaboration and teamwork over going it alone.

**The Latest Buzz** series also provides viewers with several models for romantic relationships. Noah and Rebecca are clearly committed throughout the series but face several obstacles, including their frequent difficulties in maintaining open communications with each other and a breakdown of trust. In *The Hip-Hop Issue*, Wilder and Amanda begin a healthy relationship that originates in a friendly rivalry and blossoms into mutual respect. Despite their differing backgrounds, they frequently have open dialogue, sharing ideas and their emotions to arrive at a better understanding of each other and a solid basis for a romantic relationship.

In *The Third Wheel Issue*, Noah, Wilder and Rebecca together attend the lengthy screening of a classic film. In the course of the outing, each experiences being "the third wheel" in their relationships to one another. The episode gives viewers a context in which to consider their own potentially awkward situations, as adolescents who are experiencing types of relationships, including romantic ones, that may be new or unfamiliar to them and as relationships with friends and family continue to evolve.

Episodes of the series also illustrate unhealthy relationships and potential consequences of them. In *The Love Me Love Me Not Issue*, Noah is stalked by French pop star Zuzu Moon, and in *The Super-Crush Issue*, Michael has to thwart unwanted advances from a long-time friend.

### **5. Morality and Values**

Frequently in **The Latest Buzz** series, characters confront ethical and moral choices, and viewers observe the negative consequences of making wrong choices. In *The Comeback Issue*, Michael realizes the power of the media, when he reports gossip purporting that supermodel Karina's interference has broken up her boyfriend's popular rock band. When he sees the damage he has done to Karina and her career, Michael has a change of heart. He works hard to fix the mess he's responsible for and resurrect her stalled career.

In *The Double Trouble Issue*, Michael and Noah pretend to be models in order to impress girls. Their plan quickly becomes complicated as they find themselves juggling more dates than they can handle. Their lies soon become unraveled.

The entire episode *The Hip-Hop Issue* turns on a series of lies and their consequences. Michael, trying to impress his boss, informs her that he has hired a hit deejay. Forced to cover for this lie, Michael takes on the role of "DJ Beat Boogaloo", an imaginary personality he has created. Since the boss also wanted Michael to photograph the dance, Michael has to continuously change back and forth between DJ Beat Boogaloo and Michael. Amid this stressful situation, he meets a girl named Chloe to whom he is attracted. Chloe claims only to date college boys, so Michael tries to use the Beat Boogaloo character to impress her. Eventually Michael is caught in his web of lies and forced to confess, disappointing both his boss and the girl he likes. Viewers see directly the impact of Michael's choices, that his dishonesty does not garner anyone's trust or respect or further his goals.

In *The Peer Pressure Issue*, when her old friend Caitlin comes to visit, Amanda doesn't want to accept that Caitlin is being cruel to her new friends at Teen Buzz. Once she hears with her own ears that Caitlin is mocking Rebecca, Amanda realizes the truth. By ending her friendship with Caitlin and embracing her diverse Teen Buzz family, Amanda has made a moral choice and defined what kind of person she wants to be.

## 6. *Societal Issues*

*The Latest Buzz* addresses issues of interest in contemporary society that are age-appropriate for young teens.

The role of technology in society is explored in *The Love Me Love Me Not Issue*, when Amanda, Wilder and Michael challenge one another to see who can last longest without their cell phones. Wilder folds first and then spends the rest of the episode trying to get the other two to crack. The episode poses the importance of having human to human connection without the aid of technology. In *The Infamous Issue*, an embarrassing video of Rebecca dancing goes viral, which illustrates potential dangers that may arise from activity on online social media.

The series discusses other important societal issues, including nutrition and fitness (*The Star Power Issue* and *The Shape-Up Issue*), gender issues (*The Boys vs. Girls Issue*) and racism and multiculturalism (*The Bollywood Issue*).

## 7. *The Search for Identity*

Identities are often defined in middle school and high school, where hard decisions about character dictate the person one is to become. Identity issues are a universal and highly significant aspect of the teenage experience which is illustrated in *The Latest Buzz*.

In *The Hip Hop Issue*, Michael creates an alternative identity for himself in an attempt to impress Chloe and to avoid rejection, so that "the real Michael Davies can't get hurt." Later however, he meets a different girl who is a fan of his column and appreciates Michael for his real identity. Also in this episode, Noah is having difficulty expressing his true feelings to Amanda, and Mr. Shepherd advises him, "In situations like these, it's important to stay true to who you are."

In *The Issue Issue*, Amanda wears flashy outfits to try to attract Wilder's attention, but he only notices her when she is wearing the simplest, casual clothing. She comes to the realization that Wilder appreciates her for her authentic self, not for the clothes she wears.

Also in *The Issue Issue*, Rebecca finds difficulty relating to Michael, who has been her friend since childhood. Ultimately Rebecca confronts the reality that, as she and Michael are maturing, their interests and personalities are changing, and their relationship must also change.

## **THE LATEST BUZZ OVERVIEW AND SAMPLE EPISODE DESCRIPTIONS**

### **Overview**

“The Teen Buzz,” a struggling youth magazine, decides to replace its adult staff with actual teens. Five young writers take their last period of the day at the magazine’s office, learning about the fast-paced world of publishing. The five teens, coming from various social and ethnic backgrounds, learn to work through their issues and come together on assignments, eventually developing friendships that are stronger because of their differences.

Rebecca is a brash and eager teen who has serious aspirations to become an award-winning journalist. She is thrilled to discover her best friend Michael has also been chosen to work on the Teen Buzz editorial staff. Michael is a quirky outspoken “fashionista” who considers himself the utmost authority on gossip. His stories in his Name Dropping column often cause considerable emotional stress for others, but it doesn’t slow his drive to be successful.

Rebecca is often teamed with Amanda, a financially privileged girl whose father owns the magazine. Because of her status, Amanda feels she has all the more to prove. Soon the two seemingly contradictory personalities will produce fast friends. Rebecca quickly develops a love/hate relationship with Noah, the sarcastic cool kid who writes the music column. Noah’s perfect world is turned upside-down when his parents announce they are getting a divorce, which is something he finds that Rebecca can relate to due to her experience of having lost her mother at an early age.

Noah’s best friend, Wilder, is interested in sports and gaming and not much else until he meets Amanda. Their romantic relationship blossoms over the course of the series as they work through their friendship before becoming a couple.

The teens are mentored by DJ, their editor, who pushes the young writers to give Teen Buzz their very best effort, and by their school’s media studies teacher, Mr. Shepherd, whom the students frequently approach for advice.

## **Episode 2: “The Obsession Issue”**

Objectives:

1. Learning to collaborate to utilize differing talents to achieve a common goal
2. Building new peer relationships through shared activities
3. Learning not to be judgmental because of first impressions
4. The benefits of compromise and sharing

Rebecca and Amanda have little in common. Amanda rides in a limo to school, Rebecca takes the bus. Rebecca works hard, Amanda lets her father solve her problems. Perhaps this is the reason their media studies teacher puts them together on a class assignment. “How many of you guys have ever watched a TV show and said, I can do better than that?” Mr. Shepherd asks his class. He picks the socially and ethnically opposed Rachel and Amanda to do the first presentation—a network pitch for a TV show. They will be graded on content and delivery.

The girls’ first attempt is a disaster. Rebecca doesn’t trust Amanda, so she does all the work without consulting her. Predictably, when they give their presentation, Amanda disagrees with everything Rebecca says, which leads to a snack food fight. When the contrite students both approach Mr. Shepherd the next day, he refuses to fail them and instead gives them the opportunity for a do-over with some clear advice: “You need to find some common ground.”

At first they resist, but when Amanda uses Rebecca’s grandmother’s scarf in a way she hadn’t considered, by tying up her hair, the girls realize that drawing from their differences is a strength and that they can create a better presentation by working together. Rebecca and Amanda do a polished presentation the next day for a show called “Babes on a Budget.” The project is a success and the girls have formed an unexpected friendship.

Meanwhile, Noah and Wilder have received a gift, a leather Pizza Patrol jacket, from a show grateful for reviews the two teens wrote. Since there is only one jacket, the boys are forced to share—something they do not do well. The jacket causes problems, and eventually DJ decides to take the jacket from them. The girls who have learned to compromise, happily turn the jacket into a vest and leather leg warmers that they both can use.

### **Episode 49: “The Bully Issue”\***

(\* “The Bully Issue” episode was created specifically to coincide with Bullying Awareness Week)

Objectives:

1. Standing up to bullying and resisting peer pressure
2. Identifying bullying patterns and learning how to address them
3. Understanding and empathizing with people who are different from oneself
4. Learning to work through conflict
5. Recognizing when a friend needs assistance

*The Bully Episode* explores the issue of bullying by presenting three different scenarios each of which are not, on the surface, as obvious an example of bullying as the archetypal playground bully. Instead ***The Latest Buzz*** attempts to shed light on the potentially less apparent form of bullying that can occur between friends.

When Amanda and Noah are chosen to work on a nationwide anti-bullying campaign, they are both eager to get started. However, when Amanda brings a binder full of ideas to their first meeting, she finds that Noah has already decided how to shoot the video and refuses to consider anything Amanda has to say. He bluntly dismisses her opinion, saying, “This is why you will never be a director.” Full of himself, Noah begins making absurd demands of the cast and crew to realize his ego-centric vision. Soon Noah’s crew walks out. Instead of browbeating her friend for his mistakes, Amanda makes an effort to show Noah that the way he treated her is similar to how Noah was treated by his older brother when Noah was little. Once Noah realizes he’s made Amanda feel badgered and underappreciated, he changes course. Finally looking into Amanda’s binder, Noah discovers the ideas he refused to listen to were actually better than his own.

In the second story, Rebecca asks Wilder for help learning to play a video game called “Robot Mouse Invaders.” He agrees to help, but instead of teaching her his trade secrets, he uses the opportunity to run up the score and taunt her. When Wilder’s Dad intercedes, Wilder finally realizes that it is a form of bullying to make a friend feel small when they are less informed and asking for assistance.

In the final bullying segment, Michael’s new girlfriend Yolanda has taken advantage of his easy-going nature and is now controlling his every movement. Keeping Michael on a strict timetable, Yolanda criticizes the way he walks and talks and even second guesses what he’s going to say. Things reach a boiling point when Yolanda insists Michael demand a bigger picture than the other staffers for his “Teen Buzz” byline. Michael goes to Mr. Shepherd for relationship advice. Hearing the story, the media studies teacher informs Michael, “This isn’t a relationship problem, this is a bullying problem.” Mr. Shepherd gives Michael a pamphlet on bullying. After reading the pamphlet, Michael realizes that he must stand up to his bullying girlfriend and explain how her behavior makes him feel. After listening to Michael bare his soul, Yolanda realizes how bad her behavior has been, explaining, “I am scared I won’t get my way, and the bullying comes from that.”

The video that Noah and Amanda made for the song “Stand Up (to Bullying)” is premiered at the end of the show, with the characters additionally providing advice on how to deal with bullies.

**Episode 62: "The Hip-Hop Issue"**

Objectives:

1. Learning how to navigate romantic relationships
2. Staying true to oneself
3. Exploring the moral consequences of lying
4. Learning to express emotions honestly
5. Experiencing and processing defeat

Teen Buzz is throwing a dance and DJ enlists Michael to help organize the event and to be the official photographer. However, Michael is out to impress Chloe, whom he has learned only dates what she believes are exciting guys. Michael constructs a fake persona, “DJ Beat Boogaloo”, and hires that person to spin records at the dance. This sets up a nearly impossible situation where Michael must switch back and forth between the two personalities for the entire evening.

Noah is struggling to open up to Rebecca and tell her he has romantic feelings for her. He wants to say, “I love you, R”, but each attempt to utter those words results in embarrassment for both of them. Rebecca expresses her frustration to Michael, who explains that guys find it difficult to admit their true feelings to girls, as may leave them vulnerable to rejection. Michael explains that it is also the reason he created the “DJ Beat Boogaloo” persona, so that “the real Michael Davies can’t get hurt.” Noah seeks relationship advice from Mr. Shepherd, who is a chaperone for the dance. Mr. Shepherd explains, “In situations like these, it’s important to stay true to who you are.”

Wilder is having romance problems of his own. He becomes jealous when Amanda brings a visiting prince to the dance as her date. Though he looks just like Wilder, the prince speaks in a more refined manner and wears fancy attire. Wilder unwisely challenges the Prince to a dance competition. When the Prince wins, Wilder proves himself to be the true gentleman by congratulating the Prince, while the Prince just gloats. Amanda reminds them that she is not a prize and then chooses to spend the rest of the dance with Wilder, “who always treats me like a princess.”

Michael’s web of lies finally unravels when DJ insists on a picture with both organizer Michael and DJ Beat Boogaloo. Michael admits his deception, disappointing Chloe and his boss. Later however, he meets a girl who is a fan of his column and of the real Michael Davies.

When Rebecca overhears Noah practicing how to tell her how he feels, she confesses to him that she feels the same way, and their honest communication propels their relationship forward.

## **Episode 56: "The Third Wheel Issue"**

Objectives:

1. Learning how to sustain relationships through adversity
2. Feeling empathy for others
3. The pitfalls of overconfidence
4. The value of productive collaboration

In this episode, Noah, Rebecca and Wilder try to find the balance in their friendship now that Noah and Rebecca are dating. Rebecca overhears Wilder and Noah making plans to go to the revival theater downtown to see the classic bad movie, "Doggie Medical School". The boys are surprised to discover that Rebecca is also a fan, and reluctantly they allow her to tag along. Rebecca soon finds that she is a third wheel to the old friends' raucous behavior, and she leaves in anger.

The next day, Noah apologizes for hurting Rebecca's feelings and wants to try again. Unfortunately Wilder overhears him and is eager to tag along for a second viewing. This time Wilder feels left out, as Noah insists on giving attention to his girlfriend. Rebecca feels badly for the way they have made Wilder feel, and for a third time the friends try to see the movie together. On this occasion Rebecca overcompensates, spending more time with Wilder than Noah. Finally the group sits down to discuss their changing interrelationships, and they come to a mutual understanding.

In the same episode, Amanda and Michael are representing Teen Buzz in a charity tricycle race. At first, they are overconfident, practicing their victory dance before the race, but, when it comes to designing the bicycle, they begin to argue. Soon they have offended one another and are entering the race separately. As both of their trikes fall apart during the race, they realize they were better off together and should have taken the time to work through their differences.

## **Episode 58: "The Comeback Issue"**

Objectives:

1. Learning how to absorb and process criticism
2. Using constructive criticism to improve work
3. Discovering how critical words can affect others
4. Consequences of gossip
5. Learning to accept challenges and overcome obstacles

It's time for peer reviews at Teen Buzz, and Rebecca and Wilder are paired to critique one another. Rebecca has a lot of criticisms of Wilder's work ethic—he's disorganized, doesn't use advanced vocabulary and turns in his articles on napkins—but Wilder takes the suggestions in stride. When it comes time for Rebecca's review, Wilder only has one real complaint (which he delivers on a pizza box): Rebecca's articles lack heart. Rebecca takes great offense at Wilder's one note and suggests that it is invalid.

Noah and Amanda have been volunteered by Mr. Shepherd to do the morning announcements at the high school. At first, they view this as a chore, but they soon discover they have a natural flair for this new venue. They adopt DJ names, "Mandy and Mad Goat". Unfortunately, the initial wave of positive response is forgotten as their radio act devolves into a string of easy insults about the lunch lady and the sports teams. Mr. Shepherd tells them that the whole school is offended. He explains that there are good-natured jokes and then there are jokes that "really hurt people's feelings." The next day, the chided duo get back on the high school airwaves to apologize to their peers, and then, to demonstrate their remorse, they engage in a battle of insults directed toward each other.

Michael also has learned how words can affect others, as a gossipy piece he wrote on the supermodel Karina has ruined her career. He tries several ways to make amends by working to resurrect her career, but he finally realizes she is a selfish person who chooses to wallow in self-pity. Michael decides there are better people he can help, and then he heads off to Rebecca's food drive to help the homeless.

At the food drive, Rebecca sees all the people who are affected by the charity drive and realizes that Wilder's criticism has real merit. She writes an article about the human element of community service and reduces Wilder to tears while also enjoying validation from her editor.



## **Episode 59: "The Issue Issue"**

Objectives:

1. Learning how to accept changes in peers
2. Confronting adversity at work
3. Individual persistence in achieving goals
4. Controlling romantic impulses
5. Being true to one's authentic self

*The Issue Issue* episode is framed as a flashback in three parts, with Noah, Amanda and Rebecca each writing articles on the subject of friendship for the latest issue of "Teen Buzz." It is clear that, while assignment was a struggle for each of them individually, collectively they appear to have persevered.

For her article, Rebecca re-examined her childhood friendship with Michael. As Rebecca tries to resuscitate an old routine they used to do as kids, Michael rebuffs her. Rebecca had hoped that the "Professor Squiggle" routine would remind them of their strong bond, but instead it only serves to embarrass Michael in front of the Teen Buzz staff. Michael walks out on a live web feed of the performance in anger. When she confronts Michael, he explains that he no longer wants to play childish games and would rather be shooting baskets in the gym. He reassures Rebecca, saying, "I may have changed, but our friendship has not."

For her article, Amanda is writing about how to shift from a friendship to a romantic relationship. Her plan involves dressing in various trendy outfits to try to get Wilder's attention. Wilder however is far more interested in his video games than any couture dress. It is not until Amanda relaxes in her grey sweats that Wilder finally takes notice, telling her she's never looked so beautiful. Amanda realizes that Wilder likes her for who she is, and not for the clothes she's wearing.

Noah hopes in the course of an interview that he might turn his relationship with one of his favorite rock stars from fan to friend. The interview goes well, but when the rock star speaks with his staff, they determine that the article is too revealing, and they refuse to allow its publication. In order to save his article, Noah tracks down the rock star in his limo and presents his ideas on why the interview should be published. He doesn't become friends with the musician but earns his respect, and the interview does get published.

## **Episode 42: “The Love Me, Love Me Not Issue”**

### OBJECTIVES:

1. How teens’ increasing dependence on technology may threaten social interaction
2. The difference between unhealthy infatuation and committed friendships
3. How unrealistic expectations can threaten relationships
4. Understanding and coping with parental expectations

When Amanda runs up a large cell phone bill, her usually permissive dad puts limits on her plan. Michael and Wilder insist that Amanda won’t be able to survive on her 20 minutes-per-day restriction. Insulted, Amanda challenges them both to a total cell blackout – whoever goes the longest without using their mobile phone wins.

Teen pop-star Zuzu Moon returns to Teen Buzz to guest-edit this edition, and it is clear that she still has feelings for Noah. Despite a blossoming friendship with Rebecca, Zuzu starts to secretly stalk Noah. Rebecca refuses to believe Noah when he claims that Zuzu has an obsession with him.

Not using a cell phone turns out to be harder than any of the Buzz kids anticipated. Wilder gives in right away, and Amanda realizes that her social life is severely threatened by her disconnection. Not only does she miss being able to contact her friends, Amanda realizes that when she is unable to respond to texts or calls immediately, she risks offending or alienating people. The teens discover that cell phone use can’t just be dismissed as a bad habit, that it has become completely woven into their social interactions.

Noah and Rebecca experience several miscommunications due to Zuzu’s strange and obsessive behavior. But, in the end, Zuzu acknowledges that her new friendship with Rebecca is more important than any fantasy relationship she had created for herself with Noah. She realizes that he’s not actually the guy that she imagined him to be, and that being honest with Rebecca has enabled her to figure that out.

**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.