

Self-esteem, Refusal Skills and Positive Friends can Blunt Peer Pressure

Peer pressure — it's a powerful reality for children and adolescents. It can be a negative force, possibly leading to behavior such as alcohol and other drug use, but it can be a positive influence in their lives, too.

Regardless of a child's age, it is important for parents and caregivers to recognize the enormous power they have to help their youngster counter peer pressure's negative effects. Here are a few tips:

- **Nurture strong self-esteem.** Strong self-esteem helps children and adolescents make decisions and follow through with them, even if their friends do not think some choices are “cool.” Be generous with praise, teach children how to perceive themselves in positive ways, and avoid criticizing them in a way that takes the form of ridicule or shame.
- **Help your child develop the skills to resist negative peer pressure.** Make children comfortable with what they can say when confronted with peer pressure. For instance, shy children and adolescents might be more comfortable saying, “no thanks” or “I have to go” when presented with the opportunity to drink alcohol. Those more outgoing might say something like, “forget it!” or “no way!” Role-play with your child so that he or she feels comfortable responding to the type of situations they might face.
- **Talk with your child about how to avoid undesirable situations or people who break the rules.** Children and adolescents who are not in situations where they feel pressure to do negative actions are far less likely to do them. Likewise, those who choose friends who are positive influences are far less likely to get involved in negative things.
- **Promote positive peer pressure.** Acknowledge when your child and his or her friends make good decisions together. Talk with your son or daughter about the benefits that come with choosing friends who can help them move in a positive direction.
- **Remind your child that there is strength in numbers.** When young people can anticipate stressful peer pressure situations, it can be helpful to bring friends for support.

- **When it comes to youth alcohol and other drug use, remind your child that they are in the majority if they don't experiment.** Most children want to fit in. Reinforce the fact that most kids say they do not experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Surveys back this up.

Remember, you are the most powerful influence in your child's life, even amid the force of peer pressure. Ongoing support and advice from you, and keeping the lines of communication open, can help your kids make good decisions.

Many of these concepts were originally published by the *Federal Center for Mental Health Services*. For more parenting resources, please contact the nonprofit Oregon Partnership at 503-244-5211, or www.orpartnership.org.