

## **PEER PRESSURE**

### **WHAT A PARENT CAN DO**

Today's kids are besieged by dangerous messages: drink alcohol, have sex, skip school. What's a parent to do? The following excerpt from the May 1991 *Reader's Digest* explains how you can, "Help Your Child Beat Peer Pressure."

#### **CHOICES COME EARLY**

While many parents feel powerless to make a difference, experts say that they are actually in the best position to help their kids resist troublesome urging from peers. A study by Linda Grossman, a psychologist in Laguna Niguel, California, found that kids who worked with their parents on techniques to assert themselves were better equipped to resist peer pressure.

#### **PARENTS ARE CRUCIAL**

Says Grossman, "Parental involvement is the crucial element in a child's ability to resist peer pressure." Here's what you can do:

1. **Go One On One.** To really know your child's concerns, you need to listen, every day. "Don't listen while you're watching TV or reading the newspaper," says James Ventress, Executive Director of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs chapter in Santa Clarita, California. "Look at your child. Give him your full attention. Parents who make that extra effort can make a major difference in their child's life."
2. **Face the Fears.** It can be scary to be different, to risk ridicule or loss of friends. Help diffuse your child's fears by explaining the possible outcomes of his or her actions. Would refusing to drink at a party really cause disdain and rejection by friends? Would saying no to sex mean the end of a treasured relationship? Discuss how likely it would be for a true friend to be lost so easily, Grossman suggests. "Talk about how daring to be different is hard, but that it can be the most mature and courageous thing to do," she says.
3. **Hold Practice Sessions.** Rehearsing for difficult situations can build a child's skills and confidence. You might play the role of a friend offering your child a cigarette, drink or drug, or being a date who won't take "no" for an answer. In a program created by Grossman, parents and teens rehearse a simple "No thanks," an emphatic, "I don't want to do that," and a self-confident, "I don't need that stuff, and I don't need to be like everyone else."
4. **Promote Self-respect.** Parents can decrease vulnerability by bolstering their child's sense of self. Ask his opinions, trust him to perform tasks appropriate for his age, and treat what he thinks, says and does with importance. The heightened self-esteem that results can help a child risk being different from peers and say "no" when it counts.

Another way to build self-esteem is to encourage your child to get involved in sports, a hobby, volunteer work, school club or part-time job. These activities can also combat boredom and help your child meet new friends with similar values. Let him choose the activity, and show your interest by attending his plays, concerts or sports events.

5. **Appreciate Positive Peers.** Kids can get tired of hearing all the "say no" messages from adults. The same advice or warning from another teenager, however, can have a powerful affect.

6. **Intervene With Love.** When your child's assertiveness and decision making falter, it's your job to step in. One mother forbade her son Brad, 14, to attend an unsupervised party with his 16-year old friend. "I told Brad that I love him, care what happens to him, and could not allow him to go," she says. "He argued, but not too strenuously. I think he was anxious about the evening and relieved when I intervened."

While you may need to caution your child about a problem friendship, be careful about forbidding the relationship. That can give the friend more power than he already has. In most instances, a crisis can be averted by intervening early. It isn't easy, especially with a teenager. But saying, "I'll always love you," in good times and bad, can mean more to a child and his ability to beat peer pressure than you may ever know.

