

## **Coping Strategies for Dealing with Peer Pressure at School**

Wanting to be part of the “in crowd” is a temptation for many kids. Many times association with the “in crowd” may lead to dangerous and less desirable behaviors such as skipping school, smoking, experimenting with drugs, defiance with teachers, and cruel behaviors to the less popular kids. Although this is a normal stage children tend to visit in pre-adolescent and adolescent stages, being prepared as a parent or caregiver can combat some of the negativity that can surface during this time.

Dr. Gail Saltz from the Today Show offers some strategies for preparing to address these issues with your children.

- **Encourage Your Children to Participate in School Activities:**

Children tend to get into trouble when they have free time with no structured activities. Encourage your child to seek clubs, sports, and programs that interest them. This fills up “empty” time and gives them a productive way to spend it. Children also tend to develop positive peer relationships when connecting with children through these sorts of activities. In addition, a success in these activities also increases self-esteem, which is an issue that adolescents can struggle with during this period of their development as well.



- **Be a Source of Information:**

Dialoguing about the consequences that come with certain choices and actions, certainly allows your child to know that you are aware and available to talk about issues they are facing. Providing examples of what can happen when you choose to get in a car with someone who has been drinking, for example gives your child a concrete understanding of how poor choices can result in very negative consequences.

- **Don't Lecture or Nag:**

According to Dr. Saltz, “Too many reprimands may well drive a child into the crowd you are trying to avoid or incite them to be spiteful and rebellious.” This is a difficult time for a child and sometimes just lending an ear instead of nagging, can be enough support for your child to make the right choices.

- **Provide Coping Strategies:**

Sticky situations with peers can be hard to get out of without positive coping strategies. As Dr. Saltz indicates “Just say no” rarely works. Prepare them with ways of distancing themselves from a tough situation while still saving face such as arming them with the ability to use humor, flattery, or even shifting the blame to a grown up.

- **Decide on a Code Word:**

It is a good idea to discuss ahead of time with your child a way they can make contact and signal you that they can't talk openly and want your help. This also helps them save face and not have to deal with the peer pressure of having to say no, or make up excuses.

- **Bail Them Out:**

As difficult as it is, it is necessary to bail your child out under all circumstances without punishment. Sending the message to your child that no matter what, you are there for them and they should always call you when they are not sure what to do.



- **Know Their Friends:**

Knowing who your children are hanging with, will empower you to understand what pressures your children are experiencing. Dr. Saltz suggests meeting the parents of your children's friends to get sense if their values are in line with what you want your child to be around.

- **Pick Your Battles:**

Don't sweat the minor stuff such as clothes, piercings, and hairstyles. Experts say that individuality is important part of developing your personality as a young person and defining who you are. Kids will eventually tune you out if everything coming from you is negative and a fight. Focus on issues that appear to be self destructive or harmful to others such as suspected drug use or drinking that can cause serious harm to your child or others. A final thought for parents and or caregivers: Remember that not all peer pressure is bad. KidsHealth for Kids reminds us of the power of positive peer pressure. Power is in numbers and if kids armed with the right behaviors and responses stick together against the negative pressures of "bullies", then the pressure to do the right thing will become the norm. Simply said, just talk and listen to your kids on a regular basis. Kids respond when they know you are listening and interested. Being aware of the how to keep your kids safe from the negative influences of peer pressure, will give you a step up when dealing with this difficult issue.

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**Sources:**

KidHealth.org; Updated and reviewed by: Kevin J. Took, MD

Originally reviewed by: D'Arcy Lyness, PhD (Internet Source)

Kids Facing Peer Pressure, How to Battle Back; Dr. Gail Saltz (Internet Source)