

The city I live in, Lake Oswego, is known for being well cared for, flourishing, and beautiful. Our streets are lined with perfectly groomed trees. We succeed in academics, sports, and careers. We thrive on our image of perfection. However, below the surface are problems lurking such as drugs and alcohol consumption in the teen population. While other cities have drugs and alcohol more widely acknowledged, Lake Oswego masks our issues for fear of a dent in our image. The few times the community hears about the actual usage of drugs and alcohol is when something as terrible as a drunk driving accident occurs.

Since the city of Lake Oswego is so small many students argue that there is nothing else to do on the weekends besides get drunk or get high. Many teens do such things as a way to entertain themselves and their friends. But I believe that these excuses to partake in such activities are not worth the consequences that follow. I had an incredibly smart friend who smoked weed occasionally, and when I would ask him why he smoked he merely replied, "Because I like to get high, no other reason." He graduated high school and was accepted into a top private university. However, he lost everything when he made a decision to continue to smoke in college and was eventually expelled. This simple habit of his cost him his higher education; and essentially, his future. To me, any reason to smoke or drink is not a good enough reason to risk my future or someone else's.

Between D.A.R.E, health classes, commercials against drugs, and parents, the message that drugs and alcohol are bad for you, your health, and the people around you comes in loud and clear. If all our lives we are told not to use these illegal substances because of the effects they have on your body, then why is it that some teenagers feel the need to smoke and drink? While other factors such as home life, natural tendencies, and community influence the decisions, I believe that there are different key factors influencing these decisions, such as the need to impress peers, the desire to go against authority figures, and sheer boredom.

Approval from peers is exceptionally important in high school. While teens want to be unique in some way, they also want to blend in and be accepted by the general population. In some cliques, teens will feel the pressure to drink and do drugs to gain acceptance. Some teens believe that by saying no to beer at a party or a joint will cause them to be ostracized for the rest of their high school career. So they take the beer or joint, and while it may not seem like a big deal at the time, one beer can escalate into five beers every weekend or one hit can lead to the dependency to be high everyday. But what teens do not realize is that they will not be outcast by saying no. I, personally, have said no to a beer and no to a joint and both times received a head nod of acceptance for my decision. I believe that by saying no, you are making yourself an example for the other students to look up to. Quite possibly, someone will see that you have said no and will follow your lead, creating a positive pattern instead of a negative cycle.

We, as teenagers, reject almost all authority figures whether it be policemen, teachers, or parents. It is commonly felt that everyone is "out to get us" and wants to control us. At this crucial time in our lives, we are developing the sense of independence and do not

want people to tell us what to do. When adults try and take "control" of teens lives, teens rebel, and may experiment in order to find out for themselves their personal limits and what is right and wrong. If teens are going to rebel to the extreme, drugs may give them that outlet that shows them, at least, that they can do what they want, despite the effects the drugs have on the body. In this situation, teens need to realize that adults just have their best interests in mind and merely want to help them achieve their own independence but without illegal substances.

Since peer pressure plays such a large role in the reason people do illegal substances, I choose to set an example and set myself apart by saying no. I hope that by this simple word, I can show someone else that it *is* acceptable to say no. There are *other* things to do on the weekends *besides* drink; I know, I do it every week and I have just as much fun, if not more fun, because I remember my weekend.

Every time you light a joint or open that can of beer, you put yourself in jeopardy of getting an MIP, or a DUI, or killing someone in a car accident. Your body, your mind, and your friends suffer every time you choose an illegal activity. I value my body, my mind, and my friends too much to make that choice. I choose not to sacrifice my future for that tipsy or high feeling for the acceptance of peers, the statement of rebellion, or because I have nothing else to do. Make a choice. I did.