

The Acceptable “No”

“Never give into peer pressure.” How many times have you said this to your children or heard it from your parents? Personally, I had felt like I had heard that statement preached way too many times since I walked into middle school six years ago. Until recently, I rolled my eyes every time I heard someone say it, thinking, ‘could it really be that hard to just say no and move on? Why would someone choose to do something they know they shouldn’t be doing, just because their friends say they should?’ High school students have this crucial decision to make about the road they choose to pursue, the friends they hang out with, the confidence that they bear, and that obvious need that so many have to “fit in.” These are all reasons I believe that some choose to drink alcohol and take drugs in high school, knowing very well that it is something that is very harmful and can ultimately not only hurt themselves, but those around them.

I believe that there are multiple reasons that high school students choose to take that first drink or smoke their first joint; one reason I believe they would make the decision to do these things would be because of what friends they choose to have around them, friends that maybe don’t have their best interests in mind. Then, most of the time, they are blinded to that fact and even when you know that your “friends” are using you, you just let it go. Because on top of everything else, the expectations your parents have of you, your own academic priorities, the last thing you want is to have no social life at all or to deal with the drama that would arise if they decided to move. This would be one reason to keep those not so idealistic “friends.”

High school is filled with cliques and everyone, no matter who you are, has a desire to be in at least one of them; to have consistent friends to sit with at lunch or to go to the movies with on Fridays. “Fitting in” might be one of the hardest challenges faced in high school.

These reasons, the friends chosen in high school, the pressure to fit in, the stress of having to live up to all the expectations around you are all reasons I believe that high school students choose to use drugs or drink alcohol.

The most challenging factor in a high school students decision to drink or take drugs, I believe, is peer pressure. Again, until recently, I used to think that it was like a broken record when people would say, “Don’t give into peer pressure.” I have some of the best friends I could ever ask for, whom respect me and I have the utmost respect for them. Recently, we were hanging out and one of my friends had brought alcohol with him. Long before, I had made a

personal decision that I was not going to drink until I was 21; this was because I didn't want to take the chance of making some horrible mistakes that I would regret later in life and I didn't want to hurt my parents either. Everyone had a drink, and I was the only one just sitting there not really saying anything. To "lighten" the mood, everyone was joking with me saying things like, "Just try it. One sip isn't going to kill you," things like that. Everyone there knew that I didn't drink, but nonetheless they still ragged on me until I finally just said flat out "No," and got irritated. I'll admit, even though I have been raised to be a strong willed individual and to never let anyone pressure me into doing something I don't want to do, it was probably one of the most difficult things I've had to do. It was hard to say no, but I knew I had nothing to prove to my friends.

Others, who maybe had recently developed new friendships, haven't had their friends very long, might feel like they have to prove something to keep them around or to even just fit in. This, I believe is the most challenging factor in a high school students decision to drink or take drugs.

I resist the influence to drink and take drugs by ultimately attempting to keep myself out of those types of situations, and when I am placed in a situation of the sort, I am very lucky that I am a stubborn person who doesn't give in easily! I have chosen not to disregard my own personal decisions to make anyone else happy. The steps I take to prevent another student from using alcohol or taking drugs is by being the first to say no, being the first one to make it acceptable not to do what everyone else is doing. Sometimes it is very difficult to be that first person to say no, and let others know that it's cool to make your own decisions without the negative influences of those who may be around you at the time.

High school is a very rough time for most teenagers; choosing what kind of life you want to lead and what kind of people you want to surround yourself with. Although it is hard not to give into peer pressure or get caught up in counteractive behaviors, everyone needs to know that it is acceptable to say no, that it's acceptable not to drink alcohol or take drugs; that it's more important to lead a happy and fulfilling life the way *you* want to lead it, as well as to keep yourself and those around you safe.