At the high school I attended in the 1960s, 12th graders could relax in the “Senior Lounge.” It was the only place in the school where students could smoke, and it reeked of tobacco. Some of the seniors who went there started the habit because their friends did it, and because they saw smoking as a sign of maturity.

I stayed away from the lounge and its smoke. My mother, a lifelong smoker, was dying of cancer that was probably caused by her addiction.

That lounge is long gone. But the peer pressure that led some of my classmates to start smoking is still there. Teenagers increasingly look to their friends for feedback on how they’re coming across and what they might change. I see this in my son and remember it from my own adolescence.

Peer pressure is one reason why adolescents are at much greater risk than adults for starting to smoke. It’s also why it’s so important for parents to take an active and repeated stand against smoking.

Parents know their children best. But sometimes we all need some guidance on when and how to talk about tough topics. That’s where this brochure can help.

It was created in consultation with an advisory board of respected psychologists, psychiatrists and public health professionals who are deeply committed to preventing children from smoking.

Remember that while peer pressure is powerful, in the long run you will have much more influence on the choices your children make.

“Peer pressure is one reason why adolescents are at much greater risk than adults for starting to smoke. It’s also why it’s so important for parents to take an active and repeated stand against smoking.”

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The quotes from individuals throughout this brochure are intended to offer insights and tips. Your own experience with your children may vary. The photographs and names are illustrative only and are not those of the quoted individuals.
During adolescence, kids assert their independence and explore their identity. Yet they still crave the approval of their peers and worry, often unnecessarily, about being rejected. Dr. Jacqueline Lerner, a professor of psychology at Boston College, says, “Adolescents behave in accordance with their perceptions—which do not always match reality.” You can help them accurately perceive the world by sharing your experiences and a more factual perspective on reality. Your words do make a difference, even if it seems your kids aren't paying attention.

The effects of peer pressure
When it comes to smoking cigarettes, kids are clearly influenced by what their friends do. The smoking rate among kids who have three or more friends who smoke is 10 times higher than the rate among kids who report that none of their friends smoke.1

Parents and peer pressure
As your child grows into a teen, he may seem to tune out much of what you say. But research shows that parents are still the strongest influence on adolescents’ big decisions, like whether to smoke, drink or have sex. Teenagers who don’t smoke say one of the main reasons is their parents.3 Kids know and respect their parents’ expectations—if their parents have stated them clearly and repeatedly.

Peers and pop culture will probably influence your child’s choice of clothing, hairstyles, music and the like. That’s OK. You might not like their music or the way they look, but if you let them make these relatively minor decisions, they are more likely to listen to you on the ones that really matter—like not smoking.

Your influence is real. You are in the best place to help guide your child as he struggles with peer pressure, examines his options, and gradually becomes a mature, independent thinker.
When are they vulnerable?
You may remember the excitement of moving up to middle school or high school. But you may not recall how it feels to walk into the lunchroom and believe everyone is scrutinizing your words, your walk, your clothes...your entire worth.

During the ups and downs of adolescence, these transitions can be especially challenging times. Kids can be overwhelmed and intimidated by the new surroundings, new faces and their sudden fall in stature from being the oldest in school to the youngest. They begin to experience more pressure to try things they know aren’t right.

Encouragement from friends to smoke cigarettes is one of the new pressures your child might encounter. A 2004 study showed that among 11–17-year-olds who smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days:

- 73% were with a friend(s) when they tried their first cigarette.
- 65% got their first cigarette from a friend’s pack.

How can I help?
Below are some good reminders of ways you can help your child resist peer pressure and remain strong through some of the more challenging times.

See through their eyes
As they develop, adolescents often struggle to understand how others—especially their peers—view them. They worry about being rejected if they don’t fit in.

Reassure your child that while friends will sometimes hassle her for not going along, many times they won’t. Either way, the most important thing is for her to make her own decisions.

Adolescents also tend to overestimate how many people are actually involved in risky behaviors. Adolescents in a recent survey said they thought that approximately 41% (on average) of their peers smoke; this is much higher than the actual rate. Make sure your child knows that the large majority of both kids and adults simply DO NOT smoke.

Set boundaries
Your expectations must be clear. Your rules must be clear. This goes for the things your child shouldn’t do, such as smoking and drinking, as well as for privileges such as driving and curfews. Involve him in setting some boundaries and rules (curfews, for example), but remember that on important topics, like smoking and drinking, you should have the final say. Make sure he knows that the consequences for breaking rules will be enforced.

Know your child’s friends
Knowing your child’s friends is actually just the beginning. Make her friends feel welcome in your home—when you’re there. If they’re comfortable, they’ll spend more time at your home and less time in unsupervised places.

Pay attention to how the kids interact with you and with each other. Are the relationships equal and respectful? Do your kids hold their own when they’re joking or goofing around, or do they seem to be easily influenced by what their friends say to them? Use these observations for discussion with your child.

If one of her friends smokes, tell your daughter you disapprove of the smoking; don’t say “I don’t like your friend.” If you focus on the behavior, she will be more likely to discuss the friend’s smoking and not be defensive. Point out the friend’s positive qualities as well as the negative.

Reward your child for making good choices in friends. Extend his curfew once in a while when he’s with those friends, or have him invite the group over and treat them to pizza.

Know the friends’ families too. When you drive your daughter to a friend’s house, introduce yourself to the parents. If she plans to attend a party, let her know you’ll call the host’s parents and ask what’s planned.

Insights and tools

“I think who you pick for friends does affect how much peer pressure you’re under.”
— Allie, California

Teens who feel good about themselves are more likely to handle peer pressure successfully and say “no” to smoking.

Help them shine. To build healthy self-esteem, help your child discover and develop her strengths. Whether she’s good at sports, music, training the family dog or organizing neighborhood games, tell her so and give her more opportunities to use her talents. If he is skilled with computers, ask him to help you with projects.

Be positive. Sometimes parents spend too much time and energy telling a child what he does wrong. Make a point to talk more often about what he does well.

Show your pride. Display artwork, photos, certificates and other mementos. Share her success stories with relatives and friends.

Teach them to learn from mistakes. Help your child see mistakes as opportunities to improve, not as failures. Talk about the things you’ve learned from your own mistakes.

Manage stress
Stress is a big factor in youth smoking.1 Here’s how you can help:
• Be on the lookout for signs of stress. You know your child best, but some common signs include: frequent headaches, feeling irritable, chest or stomach pain, anxiety, withdrawal or sleep problems.
• Teach your child to prioritize activities. If she’s doing too many things, help her figure out what she likes most about each activity, and then decide which one(s) to drop.
• Help him learn to keep things in perspective. Empathize with his feelings, even if you think the problem is minor. (“I can see how angry you are that you weren’t invited to that party.”) Once he’s no longer so upset, help him see the positive things in his life, and remind him that both you and his friends will still care about him no matter what.
• Show her the way. When you practice ways to reduce and manage stress, she will follow your example. Exercise, sleep, eat well, have fun!

Encourage independent thinking
Help your child practice thinking for herself. Encourage her to be a leader, to form opinions and make decisions based on her own judgment.

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MAKE THEM STRONG

“I was at a party and somebody offered me a cigarette,” says Sarah, 14. “I said ‘no thanks,’ and it was cool. I thought it would be a big deal, but it was so easy.” When faced with tough choices, will your child be as self-confident as Sarah? Teach her the 5 Knows and the 5 Nos.

5 Knows
1. Know yourself. Think about who you are, who you want to become and what you believe in. Know your family’s beliefs and values. When faced with a difficult choice, ask yourself, “Does this fit with who I want to be?”
2. Know the facts. Some decisions can be based on simple facts. For example, smoking is addictive and expensive, and causes serious diseases. It’s illegal to sell cigarettes to minors.
3. Know the situation. Before going along with friends, know what you’re getting yourself into. Where are they going? What will they do? Who will be there? When and how will you get home?
4. Know when to ask questions. If you don’t know the facts and the situation, ask questions. Make sure you get answers.
5. Know how to get help. Everyone needs help at times. Think about which responsible adults in your life you can turn to for guidance and support when you need it. Remember, asking for help is usually a sign of strength, not weakness.

5 Nos
1. Plain and simple. “No thanks.” Like Sarah discovered, sometimes the most direct way is the simplest and most effective.
2. Forceful. Some kids have enough self-confidence to say no in a way that their friends will never ask again. “Are you crazy? Those things can kill you.”
3. The strict parent. Tell your child he can always use you as a way to say “no.” “My mom would smell the smoke and I’d get in trouble.”
4. The switch. Come up with a better plan. “I’m gonna go swim some laps at the Y. Want to go with me? You can’t smoke if you’re gonna do that.”
5. The friend. Remind your child that a real friend won’t ditch her if she doesn’t go along with the crowd. Have her use the same logic with the friend: “If you were really my friend, you wouldn’t ask me to do something that could make me sick.”

Ask questions like, “What do you think of what that group’s doing? What do you think of their choices?” Remember that having him think through these problems can be just as important as the answers he comes up with. The more he trusts himself and his ability to make independent decisions, the less vulnerable he’ll be to peer pressure.

Show and teach empathy
Empathy involves seeing things from your child’s perspective so you can understand her emotions. When you show empathy for your child’s feelings, you teach her that you value her thoughts. This helps her learn to trust herself. It also helps her understand your perspective as a parent: “I knew you might worry, so I called home.”

Get them involved
Some kids take inappropriate risks, including smoking cigarettes, because they’re bored.2 Getting your child involved in groups or clubs that fit her interests can reduce the chances of boredom and provide her with a new set of strengths. Besides building her confidence by helping her to achieve something positive, being involved in activities can expose her to a group of peers who share her interests, as well as to coaches or group leaders who can reinforce your message and be mentors and role models.


“Your parents have a better sense than your friends of what’s good for you and what’s not.”
— Erik, Colorado
Teach kids
to think on their feet

Resisting peer pressure takes practice. Use this exercise to help prepare your child for tough situations.

“Peer pressure feels like having a spotlight shined on you in a big crowd,” says Logan, 17, from Michigan. “You need to make a decision quickly and you don’t know what to do.”

Your child may find himself in that harsh spotlight many times during adolescence. To help him prepare for tough decisions, do this exercise together. It’s designed as a discussion starter. There’s more than one right answer.

Remind your child that if his friends do get angry, their anger will probably pass quickly. If it doesn’t, then they’re not good friends.

Problem 1: The ride
The setup. Your girlfriend wants a ride to the mall, but you only have a learner’s permit. Should you drive her alone?
The deal. If you do it, you might look cool and get to spend time with her. But it’s illegal and dangerous. If you get caught, you could lose your permit and not be able to get your license.
Conclusion. It’s not worth the risk.
What you could say. “For now, I can only drive if a parent is in the car. My mom can give us a ride.” Or, “It’s gonna be great when I get my license. Then I can take you places. If I lose my permit, I won’t get my license for a long time.”

Problem 2: Smoking friend
The setup. One of your best friends has started smoking, and some of your other friends are leaning on you to pressure him to quit.
The deal. If you talk to your friend, he may see that you have his best interests in mind and think you’re a good friend. Or, he might not appreciate you bugging him about it. If you don’t, his health is at risk. And your other friends might lose respect for you.
Conclusion. It’s worth the risk to lean on your friend to stop smoking.
What you could say. The facts approach: “Why are you smoking, anyway? Don’t you know it’s bad for you? You can get hooked really quickly. You’re just wasting your money.” Or the teasing-but-true approach: “That stuff reeks. Nobody will kiss you if you smoke.”

Start with the following problems, which give some conclusions you and your child might reach. Then do the exercises in the box. As you work through them, discuss:

Teaching kids to think on their feet

Visit the Parent Resource Center at www.philipmorrisusa.com for an expanded version of this exercise and more information about how to talk to your child about not smoking.
If you smoke

Even if you smoke, you can talk to your child about not smoking.

Like most adults who smoke, Roger started when he was a teenager: "Everybody I ran around with smoked. My parents smoked too." And like most parents who smoke, Roger finds it difficult to talk to his children about it.

You may feel guilty. You may think that because your child has told you again and again not to smoke, he would never try it. Or you might feel like a hypocrite telling him not to smoke when it’s something he knows you do. You’re not alone. Most parents who smoke feel the same way. But you’re still the parent. You set the rules.

As the chart shows, children whose parents smoke cigarettes are at much greater risk of smoking themselves.1 But you can decrease your child’s likelihood of smoking if you let him know clearly and repeatedly that you don’t approve.2,5

• Spell out the reasons why your child shouldn’t smoke. Keep in mind that he is more likely to respond to the immediate effects—the cost, smelly clothes, yellow teeth and bad breath—rather than the long-term health risks associated with smoking.
• Set consequences for smoking, and be prepared to follow through. Let her know that smoking is simply unacceptable.
• Share your story. Talk about why you started to smoke. If you began smoking because your friends smoked, tell him. When you first started, how long did you think you would keep smoking? Has that changed? Talk about your addiction to cigarettes and the effect smoking has had on your health. If you have tried to quit, make sure he knows how difficult it is.

If you are considering quitting smoking, check out some of the public health resources listed on page 15, or visit the QuitAssist™ Information Resource at www.philipmorrissusa.com.


If your child smokes

“My son was 13 when I suspected he was smoking. I could smell it on his clothes. I asked him if he was smoking and he said ‘yes.’” says Kathryn, a Midwestern mother of three. “I couldn’t believe he would smoke. When he was younger he was so against it. He’s a smart kid and he clearly understands the risks. I was shocked that he’d try it.”

Some wake-up calls are more subtle than Kathryn’s. Maybe some of your daughter’s friends are smoking or your son’s hair smells of tobacco. These are signs that your child may have tried smoking. What do you do?

• Stay calm. Start by asking questions about what’s going on. How long has she been smoking? Do her friends smoke?
• Enforce the consequences of the rules you have set about not smoking.
• Without lecturing, remind him of the negative effects of smoking, such as the expense, how it causes wrinkles, bad breath and diseases like cancer.
• Discuss the signs of addiction:
  • Having strong urges to smoke
  • Feeling anxious or irritable when you’re not smoking
  • Having tried unsuccessfully to quit

Tell her it’s possible for teens to report showing signs of addiction with only occasional (non-daily) smoking.4,5 And remember, smoking is not just a discipline issue, but a medical problem. Encourage your child to talk to her doctor and look for local resources that can help her quit. Programs like N-O-T (Not-On-Tobacco), developed by the American Lung Association, and END (Ending Nicotine Dependence), developed by the Utah Department of Health, are specifically designed for teens. For more information about these programs, go to their websites:

  • www.lungusa.org
  • www.tobaccofreeutah.org/ END.html

For more ideas, see Issue 3 of this brochure series: Could your kid be smoking? (ordering information on page 14).
Resources for parents from Philip Morris USA

For more information, please visit the Parent Resource Center at www.philipmorrisusa.com, where you’ll find many tools and tips from child development experts to help you talk to your kids about not smoking.

The Parent Resource Center also has interactive versions of the activities in this brochure, links to Public Health Resources, and facts and research information about youth smoking.

Additionally, you can order or download copies of the free publications in the Raising Kids Who Don’t Smoke parent resource series, including:

Parent Brochures
- Raising kids who don’t smoke
- Peer pressure & smoking
- Could your kid be smoking? and
- Educando a los niños para que no fumen

Parent Tip Sheets
- Parenting styles and youth smoking
- Talking to pre-teens about not smoking
- Preventing kids’ access to cigarettes

These parenting publications are also available by calling, toll-free:
1-800-PMUSA-YSP (1-800-768-7297)

More resources

For more information on this important topic, please visit the suggested websites below:

GENERAL INFORMATION ON SMOKING
American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/tobacco
Office of the Surgeon General
www.surgeongeneral.gov

QUIT-SMOKING PROGRAMS
AND INFORMATION
American Cancer Society’s
Complete Guide to Quitting
www.cancer.org
Center for Tobacco Cessation
www.ctcinfo.org
CDC’s Useful Resources to Quit Smoking
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm
GottaQuit
www.gottaquit.com
QuitNet
www.quitnet.com
Smokefree.gov
www.smokefree.gov/info.html
American Council on Science and Health
www.theScooponSmoking.org
END (Ending Nicotine Dependence)
www.tobaccofreeutah.org/end.html

INFORMATION ON
YOUTH SMOKING PREVENTION

CDC’s TIPS for Youth Program
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tips4youth.htm
Smoke-Free Kids
www.sph.unc.edu/smokefreekids

NOTE: Website addresses and content are subject to change.

This brochure contains citations to a number of third-party information sources. Listed above are some websites you may wish to visit for additional information. The inclusion of these sources and websites in no way indicates their participation in the creation of this brochure or their endorsement, support or approval of the contents of this brochure or the policies or positions of Philip Morris USA Youth Smoking Prevention.

“It felt good to say no and be accepted. They didn’t treat me differently after that.”
– Allie, California
This brochure is not intended to offer individual medical or psychological advice.

This brochure was created for parents on behalf of Philip Morris USA Youth Smoking Prevention in conjunction with an expert advisory board. As the manufacturer of a product intended for adults who smoke that has serious health effects, Philip Morris USA is committed to helping prevent kids from smoking cigarettes. We have a dedicated Youth Smoking Prevention department that supports positive youth development programs, produces advertising for parents and conducts ongoing research to help prevent youth smoking.

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