

Peer Pressure with Substance Use

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Peer pressure has caused 21% of teens using an illicit drug at least once!¹ It can cause a teen to reluctantly take illicit drugs with negative effects on their physical and mental health. But, how does peer pressure feel and how can you deal with it?

Peer pressure is feeling that you need to conform to what others are doing.² If you've experienced peer pressure before, you're not alone! In fact, teens are particularly susceptible to it.³

Peer pressure might make you feel obligated to take drugs to feel like you're part of the group and not labeled as "weak" or "boring." You might feel you have to agree with what your friends say to be accepted or have social value. Even businesses take advantage of the need to fit in by advertising candy-flavored or vibrantly colored substances and products to tempt us into substance use.⁴ But keep in mind, you can control the risks you're willing to take!

There are steps you can take if you're experiencing peer pressure. It starts with **PANTS**:

- **P**repare yourself.
- **A**nswer "**N**o."
- **T**alk to someone.
- Recognize **S**ituations.

DON'T GET CAUGHT WITHOUT YOUR PANTS!

1. First, **Prepare** yourself ahead of time with a script in case you experience peer pressure. Practice at home, when you're on a walk, to your pet, in the shower, whenever works.
2. Within your script, try to directly **Answer "No"** with a short reason, so others can understand your perspective. You can be frank and straightforward with your friends if you're comfortable.
3. You can also **Talk** to a trusted adult about the pressure and discomfort you felt in the situation. Teachers, parents and school counselors are all great options. If you feel uncomfortable talking to someone you know, you can try one of the hotlines available for support like texting BRAVE to 741741, the crisis text hotline, or calling or texting 988, the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
4. Finally, avoid **Situations** where you are more likely to experience peer pressure to use substances. This might include crowded gatherings or places where substances are commonly used, such as concerts or areas near bars or places that sell tobacco. If you think one of these situations might come up, you can make other plans so you don't feel like you're missing out by not being there.

Scripts You Can Use

Some examples of scripts are "No, I can't. I'd get into so much trouble with my parents!" or "No, I don't want to risk getting suspended," or even "No thanks, I'm not interested."

If you're not comfortable with directly saying no, there are other options you could say to imply it. "I can't stay anymore. My parents are going to pick me up soon," or point out some of the harms like saying "That's really bad for you and can cause long-term addiction!" You can also switch topics in the conversation to avoid continuing to talk about drugs.

Remember that friends should understand your refusal and shouldn't coerce you into something you don't want to do. If they continue to pressure you, or won't take "no" for an answer, it may be time to spend time away from them and consider joining a new friend group. If you're looking for a new friend group, try to join one that has similar values to you, so that you can keep each other accountable and not succumbing to peer pressure.

Remember that the only opinion that matters is yours. It takes courage to say no, but it's worth it to stay true to your values.

If you ever feel peer pressured, remember **PANTS: Prepare yourself. Answer “No.” Talk to an adult and avoid possible Situations where you're more likely to experience peer pressure.**

BACKGROUND: [Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention](#) addresses the rising concern of youth substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic through the creation of a comprehensive message guide and toolkit to equip youth-serving providers with enhanced skills for delivering meaningful substance use prevention messaging.

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