

To This Day Koyczan Shane



AVID Weekly

Decades of College Dreams

Teens give their back-to-school advice for dealing with peer pressure, bullying

By Julianne Micoleta and Jimmy Loomos, youth writers

Although positive peer pressure helps you stay on the right track, negative peer pressure can put you on the wrong path. Rana Hong, a clinical social worker, therapist and founder of Playful Healing Center in Des Plaines, says teens face the most peer pressure compared to any other age group.

"Developmentally, teens are in the period of having rapid physical and psychological growth," Hong said. "They start paying more attention to others' views on themselves and searching for their sense of identity. Therefore, they get more influenced by others."

Whether it's pressure to have sex, use drugs or even cut classes, you shouldn't do something you're not comfortable with.

Follow these tips from Chicago high school students to say no to peer pressure.

Just say no. The simplest way to beat peer pressure is to just say no. Find the courage within you to say no and you'll avoid getting yourself into bad situations.

"I was pressured to try drugs," said Paul Oshana, a junior. "But I told myself no, because I wasn't going to let other people determine what I do."

Know where you stand. Have a clear idea in your mind about who you are and who you want to be. Always stay true to yourself and know what is good for you and your life. "Having strong beliefs and values has helped me overcome peer pressure," junior Dhruv Patel said.

Build your self-esteem. Be proud of yourself and what you have accomplished. Feeling bad about yourself makes you more vulnerable to peer pressure. Set goals, celebrate your accomplishments and participate in activities that make you confident.

4. Create a support system of trusted advisors. Everyone needs a strong support system, so talk to friends, family and trusted adults. Keeping it inside and carrying your worries can make things even

harder to deal with. "Caring adults can offer empathy and understanding of teenagers' peer pressure," Hong said. "Adults can be supporters and active audience for teens to get over the current journey of struggles."

- Julianne Micoleta

Surviving the jungle

Sometimes the cafeteria may feel like a jungle – or a scene from "Mean-Girls" – but the truth is, high school isn't so bad. However, many teens still have qualms about this part of their lives.

Here's a list of need-to-knows to help you conquer the social scene.

Find a strong group of friends. "Find the right friends from the get-go, and make sure they are true friends to you," says senior Joe Puma. "If they stick up for you and act as your support group throughout high school, it will be vital to your mental and emotional survival."

Understand why you're in high school. Now is the time to have fun and find yourself, but high school is also to prepare you for what's next in life. "Teens ... need to understand their main purposes of attending high school," which are preparing for college, learning study skills and setting objectives in life, says guidance counselor and athletic coach Bill Milano.

Don't be afraid to get an adult involved. According to a 2009 study by the Centers for Disease Control, 20 percent of students nationwide have been bullied on school property. A lot of the victims choose to deal with bullying on their own. But Kellie Poindexter, a senior, says this shouldn't be the case. "If a student is being bullied," she says, "tell someone as soon as possible. No one has the right to treat you with any disrespect."

Don't date just because. "Kids treat you the same whether you are in a relationship or single, and they respect your dating choices," says senior

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Kyle Richardson. So, there's no need to worry about rushing into a relationship. Make sure you have actual feelings for the person and that it feels right before taking the plunge.

Be yourself and find a niche. Don't try to be the jock, the brainiac or the cheerleader. Be who you are and do the things you love. This way, you'll meet people with similar interests. "The most important thing you can do in high school is be yourself," says senior Rachel Chambers, "because whether you realize it or not there are other people in school like you."

Don't put yourself down. "The best way for teens to be self-confident and have high-self esteem is to realize that although you may see so many flaws in yourself, other people don't really notice them," explains senior Megan Couty. "It also helps to realize that you aren't the only one who feels like that; everyone sees flaws in themselves."

7. Seek help. All schools have advisors available for teens. Evanston Township psychologist Jim Wilczynski says, "If the student is struggling with self-esteem issues, self-confidence, anxiety or relationship issues, they can seek out (psychologists, social workers or guidance counselors) within the school who can meet with the student on a regular basis to ... develop more appropriate coping skills for their issues."

- Jimmy Loomos

The Mash is a teen edition of the Chicago Tribune produced by high school students. Read more at themash.com.

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