

# Dear Educator:

Peer refusal skills play an important part in your students' lives. As young people become less dependent on parents, it is natural for them to turn to their peers for information, advice and reassurance that they are okay. Unfortunately, this reliance on peers often interferes with the individual's ability to make important decisions.

A young person may find it increasingly difficult to resist peer pressure and influence, sometimes going along with the crowd automatically, even when this leads to choices the individual knows are wrong for him or her. For some, getting into trouble seems preferable to the risk of losing a friend. Stephen E. Gardner of the National Institute on Drug Abuse concludes that the pressure and influence of peers is "almost always involved in the problem behaviors" of adolescents.

This study guide, part of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program, is designed to help students deal more effectively with negative peer pressure and influence. The RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program is funded by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which firmly believes that children should not smoke. Young people need to recognize that, while peer pressure often renders decision making more difficult, they can learn to cope with that pressure.

Developed for use with students in grades 6-9, the activities and teaching suggestions in this guide will help students strengthen their refusal skills. They will examine their right to resist peer pressure, analyze ways in which their decisions can have consequences for others and apply different strategies for saying No in a variety of situations.

We encourage you to share this exciting program with your colleagues. Although the materials are copyrighted, you have permission to make as many copies as you need for educational purposes.

Please take a moment to complete and return the enclosed response card. Your comments will help us to create programs that continue to meet your needs. Returning this card also ensures your continued receipt of free educational programs.

Enjoy watching your students gain in confidence and self-esteem as they complete the activities in this program and strengthen their capacity to make the right decisions right now.

REVERSE  
the pressure

Take A  
STAND

WARN ABOUT THE  
CONSEQUENCES

WALK  
AWAY

Steer  
Clear



RIGHT  
DECISIONS  
RIGHT  
NOW

## **INTRODUCTION**

This RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW study guide is part of a continuing effort to help students develop sound decision-making skills. Earlier guides were designed to help students understand the decision-making process and to analyze the immediate and the long-range consequences of the choices they make. This study guide focuses more directly on developing students' capacities for resisting peer pressure.

Normally, an individual makes decisions based on his or her own private, internal system of values. Unfortunately, young people often allow this value system to become skewed by the overriding importance placed on having—and keeping—friends. All too often, the exaggerated value placed on even the illusion of friendship shortcircuits the individual's decision-making process. He or she gives in to the pressure and may even feel powerless to act in any other way.

Students themselves are keenly aware of the power of negative peer pressure. In a major 1995 national survey on drugs, alcohol and tobacco, the majority of middle-grade students said that the most important reason for using illegal substances is to "fit in with others" or "to look older." By grade six, more than 50 percent of the students report that peers have pressured them to drink beer, wine or liquor; 50 percent have felt pressured to use marijuana or crack; and nearly 60 percent have been pressured to smoke cigarettes. Nearly half of the students claimed they had been pressured to sniff glue.

This study guide has been developed to help students deal more effectively with these negative pressures. Through its four activities, students will rate the difficulty of saying No to their peers in specific situations and discuss different ways they might say No.

They will also consider the responsibility that comes with making decisions by weighing the consequences of choices not only for the decision maker but also for family members, peers and the law.

## **INTENDED AUDIENCE**

RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW is designed for use with students in grades 6-9. It can be incorporated into social studies, health and life skills courses, or any subject area in which decision making is taught.

## **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

- To help students understand that saying No can be difficult, but they do have the right to say No.
- To teach students ways to say No and to apply them in specific situations.
- To provide a forum in which students can talk about their values and concerns.
- To help students recognize the values that guide them and establish what is most important to them in making decisions. To help students understand the need to accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.
- To encourage students to analyze the consequences of their decisions in relation to their family, their peers and the law.
- To help students develop a greater degree of self-confidence and selfworth.
- To provide an opportunity for students to practice applying their refusal skills in a wide variety of situations.

## **PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

1. Four Activity Masters to reproduce as worksheets for each student.
2. This Teacher's Guide which includes:
  - background information.
  - suggestions for introducing each activity.
  - ideas for extending each activity.
  - a list of resources for teachers.

3. A full-color poster that highlights the program's concepts.
4. A teacher response card for your comments about the program. Returning this card ensures that you will receive future free educational programs.

## **USING THE PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

### **Activity Masters**

Use a photocopier or other school equipment to make copies of each Activity Master to serve as individual worksheets for students. The activities are presented in an effective learning sequence, but you may wish to change the sequence to meet the needs of your students.

As with the other materials in the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program, it's important to establish an atmosphere of frank and open discussion. Students should see the activities as an opportunity to work together on issues that concern them rather than a test situation in which the teacher is looking for the "right" answer. Explain to students that the activities will give them the opportunity to look more closely at how peer pressure operates and how they can keep that pressure from dictating their decisions.

### **Poster**

Display the poster in a prominent place in the classroom. Draw students' attention to the catch phrases they can use when saying No. Encourage them to refer to it often as a reminder of different ways they might say No when they find themselves in difficult situations.

## ACTIVITY ONE

# SAYING NO—EASY OR HARD?

### **Objective**

To help students understand that saying No can be difficult but they have the right to say No.

### **Introduction**

Ask students to think about a situation in which friends want them to do something they know is wrong. Choose a situation that is relevant to your students' current concerns—smoking, cheating, stealing—anything that seems likely to strike a responsive chord. Discuss with them why it might be difficult to resist friends in this particular case. Use the discussion as a springboard to talk about why it's sometimes difficult to resist the pressure your friends place on you. Help students see that the fear of losing friends, or the desire to feel liked and approved, can lead a person to make a decision he or she knows is wrong.

## **PART I**

### **Presentation**

Have students complete this portion of the activity independently. Before they begin, be sure students understand that they have a "right" to say No when someone pressures them to do something they feel is wrong, and that this exercise will help them learn how difficult saying No might be for them.

As students read the situations on the activity sheet, encourage them to imagine that they are in each one described. They should rate on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most difficult, how easy or hard it would be for them to say No in each situation.

### **Discussion**

The activity should help students recognize a very real and complex conflict—they want to make decisions that are right for themselves, but this may conflict with what their friends want them to do, making the right decision more difficult. It is helpful to point out that adults face the same types of conflicts. For example, a friend who has a drug problem asks to borrow some money for food—the person wants to help out but is afraid the friend will use the money to buy drugs instead of food. Students should recognize that conflicts like these are normal, and that part of growing up is learning to make the right decision even when your friends want you to do something else.

Another important point to develop is that peer pressure can operate in positive ways. Challenge students to try to reverse some of the situations—looking for ways that positive peer pressure could lead to the right decision. For example, the kids who are smoking could be persuaded that smoking is not cool because it makes your breath smell, can make you appear awkward and clumsy and it can get you in trouble at school, with your parents or even with the law.

## **PART II**

### **Presentation**

Divide the class into groups to complete this portion of the activity. Encourage students to be as candid as possible in their responses. The important goal here is to have them consider how they feel about themselves when they say No—or when they yield to peer pressure.

### **Discussion**

Ask volunteers to share their responses. In discussing these responses, it will be helpful for you to model supportive comments rather than challenge a student's real or hypothetical rating and feelings about that rating. This will help the rest of the class feel more willing to risk talking about their experiences. Student responses should help you draw out the idea that when people make the decision that's right for them, they feel better about themselves. The class might also recognize that they rarely lose friends by making the right decision and they may even find that friends treat them with a new respect for having stood their ground.

### **Extending the Activity**

1. Divide the class into small groups to talk about difficulty in saying No in specific situations. Encourage students to see if there seems to be a commonality in situations that prove difficult. Then meet as a class to concentrate on identifying difficult situations for your students. You can concentrate on these areas throughout the program.
2. Have students watch their favorite TV sitcoms to look for incidents in which the characters either caved in to or managed to resist pressure. In discussing the episodes in class, focus on (1) how difficult it was for the person to make the decision; (2) how the person felt about his/her decision; (3) how realistic students thought the situation was.

## ACTIVITY TWO

# WAYS TO SAY NO

### **Objective**

To teach students ways to say No and to apply them in specific situations.

### **Introduction**

Describe a specific situation in which saying No is clearly the right decision. The topic can be anything that seems appropriate for this group of students—cheating, stealing, smoking, drinking, vandalism. Ask volunteers to tell how they would say No in that situation. To make the feeling of peer pressure more realistic, you might even have several pairs or groups of students role play the incident. Use this introduction to draw out the idea that there are different ways to say No. Much depends on the situation, the individuals involved and the kind of pressure that is being applied.

## **PART I**

### **Presentation**

Allow students as much time as they need to complete the activity sheet for Part I. Encourage them to think about each refusal method in terms of a specific situation in which they might be feeling pressure. You can use situations from Activity One, suggest a new situation or have the students create their own.

### **Discussion**

After students have completed the activity sheet, discuss each of the ten methods, asking volunteers to explain when and why they think a particular method would be useful. Use the following questions as a guide to discussion:

1. What do you think you might actually say in using a particular method?
2. Are some ways to say No better for certain situations? For example, if a group of kids pressures you to try sniffing paint thinner, would you use the same method as you would in a situation where a best friend wants you to lie for him or her?
3. Are there some ways to say No that wouldn't work for you? Which ones? Why?
4. Can you think of any other ways to say No that aren't on the activity sheet? What are they?

## **PART II**

### **Presentation**

This portion of the activity offers an opportunity to use role playing to provide students with a more vivid sense of what peer pressure feels like. Assign different groups of students to prepare a brief skit for each of the situations; or, you may want to alter the situations or create new ones to focus more directly on the concerns of your students.

Encourage students who are acting out the scenes to be realistic in the ways they apply pressure. They should also be advised to keep it simple—one or two sentences is enough to simulate the kind of pressure needed.

### **Discussion**

As each situation is acted out, discuss the results with the class. Use the following questions as a guide:

1. Which of the ten ways to say No was used?
2. Did the method used work? If not, what do you think went wrong?
3. Can you think of other ways to say No that would have been better in this situation?

### **Extending the Activity**

1. Divide the class into four or five groups. Have each group brainstorm ways in which students can help each other resist negative peer pressure. For example, how can a group of students work together to strengthen their refusal skills?
2. Have students interview older family members, asking them about situations in their teens when they had to resist peer pressure in order to make the right decision. This process can strengthen communication among family members while providing students with new ideas about refusal skills.



## ACTIVITY THREE

# IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

### **Objective**

To help students understand the need to accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.

### **Introduction**

Briefly review the mental steps involved in making a decision:

- Step 1: Conflict—why do you have to make a decision?
- Step 2: Goal—what do you want to have happen?
- Step 3: Alternatives—what choices do you have?
- Step 4: Consequences—what good or bad things can happen with each choice?
- Step 5: Decision—making your choice.
- Step 6: Reflection—how do you feel about your decision?

Explain that this activity focuses on two of the steps—the conflict and the consequences. Many decisions young people face involve a conflict between doing what they think is right for themselves and doing what their friends want them to do. In other words, peer pressure creates a conflict of values—friendship vs. things that are important to them (honesty, avoiding drugs, etc.).

Thinking about the consequences of a decision is one of the best ways to resolve the conflict. The consequences can often involve more than the decision maker; there are likely to be consequences involving family members, friends and sometimes even the law.

### **Presentation**

Divide the class into six small groups to work on the three scenarios.

Have half the groups fill out the conse-

quences chart on the assumption that James, Mark and Jody each give in to peer pressure; the other groups should assume that the three individuals resist the pressure. In both cases, students should use their collective imagination to consider the possible consequences.

### **Discussion**

When all groups have completed their charts, ask a spokesperson for each group to report its findings. Point out any difference in the reports that assume resistance to peer pressure and then in the reports that assume giving in to the pressure. Notice if any groups deal with how James, Mark and Jody feel about themselves once they've made a decision. Come back to this later as one of the major consequences to consider in making any decision. In discussing the ideas the groups have developed, you can draw out such points as:

1. Both James and Jody risk legal consequences if they give in to peer pressure; their friends are asking them to break the law. Mark is being asked to break rules.
2. All three situations can involve long-range consequences such as a criminal record or perhaps long-term strained relations with friends and/or family members.
3. By saying No, James, Mark and Jody risk the anger or disapproval of their friends. In fact, for Mark to report the knife to school authorities will require moral courage and might easily end a friendship. Ask the class how Mark might deal with the situation by applying positive peer pressure. For example, Mark can help his friend to think of alternatives such as just walking away, asking a teacher for advice, etc. You can

expand on this idea by having the class consider what kinds of situations might lead them to sacrifice a friendship in order to protect their own sense of self-worth or self-respect.

### **Extending the Activity**

1. Have students write an entry for a journal or diary describing an older person they feel they could talk to about a difficult decision. This could be a parent, an older sibling, a teacher or coach, a family friend, etc. Encourage students to write about the qualities this person possesses that would make him or her someone to turn to.
2. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm situations in which there is a conflict between friendship and doing what a person feels is right. The groups can then exchange situations to discuss ways of handling each situation and measuring the consequences.



**RIGHT  
DECISIONS  
RIGHT  
NOW**



## ACTIVITY FOUR

# PRACTICE MAKING DECISIONS

### Objective

To provide an opportunity for students to practice applying their refusal skills.

### Introduction

Spend a few minutes reviewing the concepts the students have learned—their right to say No, different ways to say No and measuring the possible consequences of each decision.

### Presentation

Divide the class into four groups, assigning one situation to each group. Each group should discuss ways to deal with the assigned situation and consider the possible consequences. The groups can either report their solutions to the class or present them as skits.

### Discussion

When all groups have finished, use the following questions and ideas to guide discussion:

1. Were there other ways to handle any of the situations that might have been as effective or even more effective?

2. What ways to say No were used in each case?
3. Point out that all four situations center on a conflict involving friendship. How difficult did this make the decision? What do the students think will happen to the friendship in each of these cases? You can use this last point to raise the question of the qualities a friend should have. Encourage the class to make a list of qualities that completes the statement, "A friend is someone who . . ." Conclude the discussion by asking students if there are occasions when it might be important to reconsider who they want as friends.

and you know who is at fault. Should you report it or protect the friend? Is there another choice that might be better than either of those alternatives?

2. A small group of students can start an advice column, either for the class or for the school newspaper. Students can then write to "Dear Advice" for help with difficult decisions. Letters and advice, of course, should have adequate faculty supervision.

### Extending the Activity

1. Extend the discussion of the conflict between friendship and other personal values by asking students what decision they would make in certain situations. For example, suppose some friends have cheated on a test and the teacher asks you about it. Or, there's an incident on a school bus

### Resources for Teachers

Stephen E. Gardner, *Adolescent Peer Pressure: Theory, Correlate and Program Implications for Drug Abuse Prevention*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, reprinted 1990.

*Handling Peer Pressure*, Life Skills Education, Inc., Weymouth, MA, 1989.

L.D. Johnston, *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing study of the Lifestyles & Values of Youth*, Ann Arbor Institute for Social Research, 1995.

National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Saying No*, Rockville, MD, National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information, 1989.

Sandra Lee Smith, *Coping with Peer Pressure*, Rosen Publishing Group, New York, 1993.

U.S. Department of Education, *Learning to Live Drugfree: A Curriculum model for Prevention*, Rockville, MD, National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information, 1993.

U.S. Department of Education, *Success Stories: A Guide for Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools*, Rockville, MD, National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information, 1994.

### Videos

*How To Say No Without Losing Your Friends* (60-minute video) grades 6-9, #06830-179, Guidance Associates, Mount Kisco, NY, 1988.

*Straight At Ya*, (44-minute video) grades 6-9, Scott Newman Center, 6255 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90082, 1988.

*You Can Say No: Here's How!*, (22-minute video) grades 5-9, #2310, Sunburst Communications, Inc., Pleasantville, NY, 1990.

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