



DOING THE RIGHT THING

...and Still Keeping Your Friends

You want to do the right thing, but it's not always easy to make a choice that may be unpopular with your friends. The strategies offered below can help you do what you think is wise without hurting your friendships.

● DEALING WITH YOUR FRIENDS DIRECTLY

- > **Adults think peer pressure is about kids forcing each other to do something dangerous.** It's usually not. It may just be that you enjoy hanging out with friends even though they do some things that you feel are not safe. The problem is that if you stick around it becomes harder and harder to stay uninvolved.
- > **Also, you might want to say "no",** but you don't want to say it in a way that makes you look like you are judging your friends or being rude. So sometimes, you might say "no, I guess" or "maybe." The problem with not clearly saying "no" is that your friends might think you want a little encouragement. They might even think they are helping you out by pushing you.



Here are two strategies to be sure that you will be making your own decisions:

1. SAY WHAT YOU MEAN.

- Say "no" politely, but clearly, when you mean no. If you want to do it, say yes. Don't send confusing signals.

2. GET OUT OF THERE.

- If your instinct or "gut" tells you that there is going to be trouble or you will have trouble continuing to say "no," find an excuse to be somewhere else (see the "Code Word" section below for one strategy).
- Sometimes, your "friends" will push you. They may even use a "line" on you. A line is something a person says when they are trying to manipulate you into doing exactly what they want. They may compliment you to try to win you over. Or they may suggest that you will gain or lose his or her friendship depending on what you do.

Remember, a real friend won't force you to do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. A real friend will respect your decisions.

This three-step approach will allow you to do the right thing AND keep your friends:

- 1. YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHEN SOMEONE IS GIVING YOU A LINE.**
Don't get angry. Just be clear in your own head that you won't be manipulated.
- 2. GIVE A CLEAR, FIRM, BUT POLITE ANSWER.**
- 3. OFFER SOME DIFFERENT OPTIONS YOU ARE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH.**



Here's an example of how conversations using the three-step approach might go:

- > **Your friend says:** "If you were my friend you would give me the answers on the quiz." (That's a line!!)
 - **You say:** "I can't cheat. But, I'm not bad at biology, so if you want I'll help you get caught up. We could study together after school."
- > **He says:** "You're gorgeous. I really think I might be falling in love with you. I want to show you what making love is really about." (Whoa, that's another line!!)
 - **You say:** "I'm not ready for sex. And I won't do it until I am ready, and that's a long time from now. But I really like you too. And I'd like to get to know you better. A group of us are going to the mall Wednesday, want to come?"
- > **You say:** "I don't feel like going to school today."
 - **Your friend says:** "We're hanging at the courts today. No geeks allowed, they're all in school! Do you want to come?" (That's a line!!)
 - > **You say:** "No. I'm not cutting school. Do you want to meet up at 4:00?"

● PARTNERING WITH YOUR PARENTS

Another way to get out of a situation that might get uncomfortable is to take the pressure off of you and put it onto your parent(s)! By working with your parent(s) you can stay on good terms with your friends, and get out of tough situations without being embarrassed. Your parent(s) will be happy to take the blame if it protects you.

Suggest these strategies to your parent(s) and make sure they promise that they will not punish you if come to them to get out of trouble:

1. THE CHECK-IN RULE

- The check-in rule states that no matter what time you arrive home, you stop in and say goodnight to your parent(s). This means that you check-in with your parents even if they have already gone to sleep! Feel free to tell all of your friends that you have to live by this rule.
- At first, most teens respond to this with a *WHAT!?!?!? WHY WOULD I WANT TO DO THAT!*
 - > First, it is a really nice way of just checking in as a family so everyone knows that everybody else is okay.

- > Second, it will help your parents know that they can always trust you.
- > Maybe most importantly, you might just really want to talk to them one of those nights.
- Once your friends know this is your household policy, you can use this to help you avoid doing something you don't want to do, like drinking or staying out too late.
 - > **You might say:** *"I'm not drinking. My mom smells my breath when I get home!"*

2. CODE WORDS

- You choose a "code word" or phrase with your parent(s) that should be used to let them know you really need their help to get out of an uncomfortable or dangerous situation.
- The word has to be something you could slip into a conversation naturally, that will stand out, but not be too awkward or obvious.
- Some ideas for code words might include:
 - > Your pet's name
 - > Name of your favorite food
 - > Name of a sports team
 - > Name of a household chore

3. CONTRACT FOR LIFE

- A "Contract for Life" states that you promise to call home for a ride if there is any reason to believe driving may not be safe. Maybe the weather is bad or there are too many people to fit into the car. This especially applies when the driver has been using drugs or alcohol.
- You can feel safe and confident in calling your parent(s) for a ride and know that you will not get in trouble. You know this because part of the contract means that your parent(s) agree to give you a safe ride without any risk of punishment.
- If you suggest the contract you can be sure that your parents will be impressed and will trust your judgment. Go to <http://sadd.org/contract.htm> for more information.

Once your code word is set up, you can call or text home any time you want to get out of a situation. Follow the steps below for using a code word system:

1. Let your parent(s) know that you will be out late and insert the code.
 - > *"Yeah, I won't be home until midnight so I can't walk **Sparky.**" (Your code word is **Sparky**)*
2. When your parent hears the code word it is their job to demand that you come home.
 - > *"You must be home in the next half hour to take care of **Sparky!**"*
3. If you have a safe way home you can leave, and blame it on your ridiculous, way-too-strict, parent.
 - > *"Sorry guys, I have to run or my Dad is going to kill me."*
4. If you don't have a safe way home, reject your parent's instructions to return home.
 - > *"No way, I'm not coming home until curfew."*
5. This rejection will tell your parent to come pick you up.
 - > *"Too bad. You are coming home now and that's it. I'll be there in 5 minutes."*

TIP: To make the contract work, use it alongside a code word. This way you can call or text your parent(s) in front of your friends without them knowing that you are asking for a ride home!

As you learn these strategies you will be better able to keep close friends and only do things that you feel comfortable doing. By listening to your gut and setting up a plan with your parents you can avoid situations that are troubling or unsafe.

Thank YOU

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