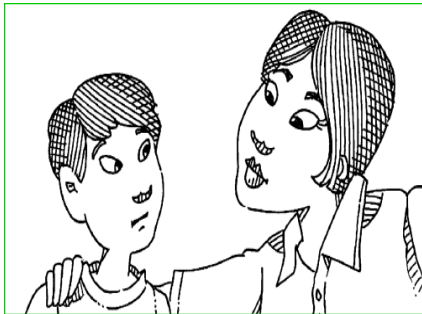


Arm your teen with five questions to help recognize peer pressure

Is your teen too susceptible to peer pressure? Does she do things she may not want to just because other teens ask? Here are five questions she can ask herself:

1. Do I often do something just because someone asks me to?
2. Do I usually let my friends decide what we are going to do?
3. Do I always call people to make sure I'm wearing the same thing they are?
4. Have I ever gone along with something I knew wasn't right just to be with my friends?
5. Do I sometimes drink, smoke or use drugs because "everybody"



else does? Even just one yes answer means your teen is being negatively influenced by her friends. The answers to these questions can help her become more aware of the peer pressure she faces. Recognizing peer pressure is the first step to combating it.

Help your teen learn the skills she needs to say no to unhealthy peer pressure.

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"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire"
—W. B. Yeats

Encourage your middle schooler to write with a little persuasion

Loves to argue. Insists he is right. Great at explaining why you are wrong. Does this sound like your middle schooler? Believe it or not, these traits, although annoying, can help your child improve his writing.

Persuasive writing is an important type of writing that seeks to bring the reader to the author's point of view. Encourage your child to practice this skill by having him:

- Write an editorial to your local newspaper about something that interests him.
- Write a letter to a candidate. He can share an opinion about one of the issues being debated.
- Write to you to persuade you to give him a certain privilege he wants.
- Write to a teacher about why there should be no homework this weekend.
- Write to a friend about why it is better to go bowling than see the new movie opening tomorrow.

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**FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE
WHEN DISCIPLINING**

Think about the things you have said to your child today. How many times did you criticize her? How often did you correct bad behavior?

On the other hand, how many times did you notice the things your child did right?

If you're like most parents, you probably find you tend to focus on the negative. Yet praising the positive can be one of the most effective tools parents have to promote good behavior.

Children need to feel loved and accepted. They also want attention. So when parents pay attention to good behavior, kids are likely to keep on doing those things!

Mark Rosen-
Discipline
crance, an Elkins, West Virginia reader and father of two, has found a great way to remember to focus on the positive. "In my house we keep a big red plus sign on the refrigerator," he says. It's a quick and easy way to remind Mom and Dad to notice all the good things their children do.

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ARE YOU SPENDING TIME WITH YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOLER?

Middle school children still need their parents, but in different ways than they used to. Are you giving your preteen the right kind of attention? Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out:

___ 1. Do you invite your child to spend time with you doing something she is interested in?

___ 2. Do you take advantage of opportunities when you have your child's undivided attention, such as when you are in the car together?

___ 3. Do you allow your preteen to invite friends to some family activities?

___ 4. Do you make a strong effort to share at least one meal a day with your child?

___ 5. Are you happy for your child when she has experiences that boost her independence, even if you are not doing the activities with her?

How well are you doing?

Mostly yes answers mean you are adapting to and accepting your child's changing needs for togetherness. Mostly no? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

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Questions and Answers

Q: My daughter is at least 40 pounds over her desired weight. She hates to go to school. She says other kids make fun of her. Her grades are slipping and she doesn't want to do anything except watch TV in her room—and eat. What can I do to help her get back on track?

A: No one can lose the weight except your daughter. But she's lucky to have a parent who is so concerned about her health. If she hasn't seen a doctor about her weight, it is important for you to take her soon. Then work with the doctor to plan a sensible weight-loss program.

In addition to the doctor's plan, you can encourage your daughter to:

- Set limits on television time. If your daughter has a TV in her room, take it out. She'll be more likely to get active—and studies show her grades will also im-

prove.

- Get rid of the high-fat snacks. If you have mostly healthy foods in the refrigerator, you will help your daughter (and the rest of the family) make better food choices.
- Get regular exercise. School PE classes are one good way to add some movement to your child's day. Talk with her PE teacher about your daughter's goals. Ask for the teacher's support.
- Volunteer—at a hospital, homeless shelter or animal shelter. As she learns she can make a difference, she'll also gain self esteem. She needs to know that her weight does not define her worth.

—Kristen Amundson, The Parent Institute. Reprinted with permission from the October 2008 issue of *Parents Still make the difference!*® (High School Edition) newsletter. Copyright © 2008 The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

Do you know what teachers really need from parents?

It's the little things that can make a big difference. Especially when it comes to supporting your child's learning. Here's what teachers say they wish parents would do:

- **Build your child's confidence.** Before he leaves for school, give your child a hug. Give him praise when he makes you proud.
- **Send your child to school with a healthy lunch.** A well-balanced diet fuels your child's brain.
- **Ask about your child's day when he comes home from school.**
- **Help your child with homework, but never do it for him!**
- **Schedule some peaceful time for your child in the evenings.** Your child can use that time to read.
- **Partner with your child's teacher.** Share concerns with the teacher in private. Never criticize the teacher in front of your child.

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Ready To Learn

ASK FOUR QUESTIONS AT YOUR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

A wise person once said, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Your parent-teacher conference can show you where the teacher wants to take your child this year—and how she plans to get there.

As you prepare for your conference, here are four questions you should ask your child's teacher:

1. **What skills will my child be expected to master this year?** If you know that he's expected to know his multiplication tables by the end of the year, you'll be prepared to help him master them. If fifth graders do a big project on ancient Egypt, you'll be prepared.
2. **How will you evaluate my child's progress?** Schools use testing in different ways. Kids who don't do well on some tests might have to go to summer school. Other tests could decide who gets into a special program.
3. **What can I do at home to help?** As a parent, you have a critical role to play in helping your child. Ask the teacher how much time your child should expect to spend on homework. Ask if there are other ways you can support learning at home.
4. **What is the best way for us to communicate with each other?** You're still the best expert on your child. You'll know the day he's sad because his goldfish died—or the day he struggled with his math homework. The more you can share those things with the teacher, the better your child's year will be.



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USE THE '5 WS AND HOW' TO MAKE NOTE TAKING EASIER

Taking notes while reading is one of the best ways to help your teen remember more of what she has studied. The "5 Ws and How" method is one way to take notes. It helps students remember the most important people, events and dates.

Have your teen create six headings on a piece of paper: **What? Who? When? Where? Why? How?** As she reads an assignment, have her try to find the answers to each of these questions.

- **What?** What were the most important things that happened?
- **Who?** Who was there? Who were the most important characters?
- **When?** When did it happen? Were there any important reasons the event happened when it did (not earlier or later)?
- **Where?** Where did this event take place?
- **Why?** What were the causes for this event? Why is it important to learn about?
- **How?** How did it happen? How did it turn out?

A news story is a good way for teens to learn how to look for the 5 W's and How. Every news story is supposed to answer those six questions in the first two paragraphs.

If your teen has trouble finding answers to these questions when she's reading, give her some more practice by reading an article or two from today's newspaper.

LEARN ABOUT SOCIAL-NETWORKING SITES TO KEEP YOUR PRETEEN SAFE

In the “olden days” (say, five years ago), kids actually had to go places to interact with other kids. Today, they just have to turn on their home computers.

Today, free sites (such as MySpace®, Xanga® and Facebook®) have actually changed the ways kids connect. Today, kids use these online sites to send messages to each other, play games and chat. Some also create their own blogs (online journals).

These sites let kids feel that they are part of a community. However, they can also be dangerous. Online predators and bullies may try to strike up a relationship in order to meet face-to-face.

Should you allow your child to register on one of these sites? The decision is up to you. But before you say yes, you need to set ground rules. For instance, your child should:

- Choose her screen name carefully. She should not use a name that makes it easy to identify who she is, where she lives, or her age.
- Limit access only to people she knows.
- Understand that nothing she posts online is ever private. Others may see what she has written.
- Agree to let you see her site from time to time.
- Not post pictures that will let viewers identify her or her friends.

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IT MATTERS WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Your child’s class needs field trip chaperones, and you can’t go again. Or the teacher asks for classroom volunteers, and you have to work. Your child is disappointed, and so are you. “How can I be part of my child’s education?” you wonder.

Thankfully, there are countless ways to engage meaningfully in your child’s learning—right at home. You can:

- Communicate with the school. Many schools have websites through which you can email the teacher and others. Keep up to date with school events and talk with the teacher about progress, questions and concerns.
- Learn with your child. Review and discuss assignments and school activities. Relate schoolwork to real-life interests and experiences, such as figuring

out how to save allowance for a toy. Try new things, such as visiting a museum or critiquing a television show.

- Set personal and family goals. What would your child like to achieve this year? Consult the



teacher for ideas and make step-by-step plans.

- Volunteer. Ask the teacher about volunteer work you can do at home. Consider how your skills might benefit the school and your child’s class. If you’re a great organizer, you might recruit or schedule other volunteers.

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PARENTS: The Key Ingredient

Parent Involvement Newsletter

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EDITOR

Daphne Nazworth
Education Specialist, Title I/SCE,
Parental Involvement

5800 Bell Street
Amarillo, TX 79109-6230
phone: 806/677-5000
fax: 806/677-5001
www.esc16.net