

ISSUE 33

Teens Who Smoke and Drink

The one thing teenagers do not want to be is “teens.” It is too much like being “tweens” — between infancy and maturity. They know they are no longer children, so they have to take responsibility for their actions, but they want to be treated as adults who are fully free to make choices on their own. But instead they are caught in the middle. So they often try to pretend to be adults by adopting the only adult vices they can easily get away with, like smoking and drinking.

Why do teens smoke and drink, despite the known bad effects?

- (1) They think it will make them look sophisticated.
- (2) They cave in to peer pressure.
- (3) They start out being merely curious, but then the practice becomes habitual.
- (4) They think they can stop anytime they want.
- (5) They are merely copying adults' bad habits.
- (6) They don't think about getting old or sick, or about the potentially tragic consequences of their actions.



→ **adopt** : accept and use (sth) **vice** : bad habit

→ **get away with** : manage to do (sth) bad without being punished or criticized for it

→ **sophisticated** : having worldly knowledge and confidence → **cave in** : suddenly stop opposing (sth)

→ **start out** : begin as one thing but develop into (sth) else → **potential** : possible → **consequence** : result

Sample Answers

(A) It would be wrong to blame the media for kids smoking and drinking — young people did those things long before modern communications were invented. Nonetheless, the mass marketers know the effects of image-making and are well aware that there are few things regarded as more “cool” than the young *rebel defying* the false values of an older, powerful, yet *corrupt* generation. The easiest way to *portray* that image is by showing a good-looking, charismatic actor or actress smoking or drinking or taking drugs or engaged in illicit sexual activity.

(B) Teenagers are the hope and future of the world. They are still full of energy and idealism; anything is possible. The old ways of doing things don't work, so they are *defiantly* ready to try different approaches. Their view of the world is not shaped by any long history they have lived through, so they are still open to new possibilities. But, although they may be the future, they are not yet the present. So their restlessness is often *diverted* into unhealthy habits as they experiment with activities their parents do not approve of.

Speak Your Mind

1. What do you think of teenagers who smoke and drink?
2. Do you think teenagers are genuinely aware of the dangers of smoking and drinking?
3. Do you think parents have a right to *forbid* their teenage children to smoke and drink?
4. If your teenage child refused to stop smoking or drinking, what would you do about it?
5. Are there any effective ways to avoid acting under peer pressure?
6. What should government do to keep young people from *liquor* and tobacco?
7. Are adults mainly responsible for teenagers smoking and drinking? If so, how?
8. Are the media responsible for teenagers smoking and drinking?

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. What do you think of teenagers who smoke and drink?

(A) Teenagers are like anyone else. Smoking and drinking may be bad habits, but that does not mean smokers and drinkers are necessarily bad people. Kids who *indulge* in their behaviors do so for the same reasons anyone else does, as a way to adjust to their social roles or to find some excitement in life. I agree they should be discouraged from doing so — but, then, so should every adult as well.

(B) Kids who try to act like adults by adopting bad adult behaviors are just fooling themselves. These actions do not make them “more adult,” it just makes them seem even more childish. They should *act their age* and enjoy their youth while they still have it; they will have plenty of time later on, when they would like to be kids again but can't.

2. Do you think teenagers are genuinely aware of the dangers of smoking and drinking?

(A) Almost everyone knows about the health risks involved. But they only “know” this intellectually, not in a way that affects them personally. By the time the bad physical effects begin to be obvious, most people are already well into middle age and heavily *addicted*.

(B) Most smokers and drinkers, no matter how young they are, will readily admit that they are engaging in unhealthy behavior. The problem is that people apply their statistical knowledge to other people, not to themselves. Unfortunately, we don't really learn much from the mistakes of others; usually, we learn only from our own, after much of the preventable damage has been done.

3. Do you think parents have a right to forbid their teenage children to smoke and drink?

(A) If parents don't have a right to control their children's actions, who does? Even if we give that authority to others, such as the government or schools, the restrictions will not mean much unless backed by parental enforcement.

(B) Teenagers are not really “children.” They are just not legally adults. But their moral and individual sense is fully mature. By the time anyone is a teenager, he no longer needs someone twice his age to tell him what to do; and any parental attempt to try to restrict a teen’s activities is largely *doomed to failure*.

4. If your teenage child refused to stop smoking or drinking, what would you do about it?

(A) Parents still control *the purse strings*, don’t they? So all they need to do is make sure their children don’t have money to spend on cigarettes or alcohol, and the problem is solved. For a while, the kids might be able to depend on their own friends buying these products for them, but sooner or later the other kids will get tired of *subsidizing* their buddies’ habit.

(B) The wise parent tries to avoid the micromanagement of his teenage child’s behavior. Such attempts are both *futile* and *resented*. The parent should try to put himself in his child’s position and realize how ineffective the attempts were to control his own life when he was that age. Instead, he should talk honestly to his son or daughter and say why he thinks the behavior is bad for the child. Teenagers may be naturally rebellious against adults in general and their parents specifically, but they can’t help loving and respecting them at the same time. Usually, they just need to be treated as responsible human beings and will eventually behave that way if given the chance.

5. Are there any effective ways to avoid acting under peer pressure?

(A) All people want to feel like they are an important *ingredient* in their social salad, but teenagers are generally the most dependent on others’ approval. Adults usually have the ability to choose their own fellows on the basis of shared attitudes and activities, but kids have fewer options. They are basically stuck with their neighbors, relatives, and classmates. And they are usually *insecure* in their own self-identity. So it is extremely difficult for them to behave in an independent, anti-social manner.

(B) A person needs two things to resist peer pressure: 1) an understanding of his own moral code of behavior and 2) the courage and confidence to stick to that code. Some people develop these two characteristics at a very early age and others never do.

→ **doomed to failure** : sure to fail

→ **the purse strings** : money → **subsidize** : pay part of the cost of (sth)

→ **futile** : useless; hopeless → **resent** : feel angry or upset

→ **ingredient** : element in a mixture → **insecure** : doubtful; lacking self-confidence

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

6. What should government do to keep young people from liquor and tobacco?

(A) Laws should be made and enforced that will make it hard for young people to obtain those products. Selling them in unsupervised *vending machines* should be strictly prohibited. Salesclerks and bartenders who sell these items to minors, and any adults who buy them on their behalf, should be severely punished when caught. In addition, a lot more money should be spent on educating people about the health risks involved.

(B) No matter how well-intentioned (and strict) a government is, it cannot fully control the minds and actions of young people. They will always find a way to do what they wish, no matter how severe the potential punishment. So, young people need to be persuaded that it is not in their own interest to engage in unhealthy activity.

7. Are adults mainly responsible for teenagers smoking and drinking? If so, how?

(A) It's funny. Teenagers are not only in rebellion against adult authority but they are also *keen* to *emulate* adult behavior. Because role models of all sorts (celebrities, athletes, respected relatives, teachers, religious leaders, etc.) routinely engage in bad behavior, they send out dual messages: 1) that the behavior itself is OK and 2) that they are *hypocrites* to *denounce* it. Until the responsible adult community is ready to behave uniformly like responsible adults, it should not expect its offspring to do any differently.

(B) Teenagers can't *shirk* responsibility for their own actions. They are not *gullible* little kids any more, easily manipulated and powerless to act on their own. They are not *naive* about the health risks involved. They deliberately and consciously choose to smoke and drink and could just as easily choose not to.

8. Are the media responsible for teenagers smoking and drinking?

M : Did you see that?

F : See what?

M : That commercial!

F : Mmmm. I guess I wasn't really paying close attention. Why? What happened?

M : This is what's wrong with our kids' generation.

F : I don't understand. Can you explain to me what you mean, please?

M : Absolutely. Just look at any of these tobacco and alcohol ads. These uniformly *feature* good-looking young people having a great time smoking and drinking, perhaps while *ostensibly* engaged in some other activity such as dancing or playing sports or just driving around in a fancy car.

F : Yes, that's right. So?

M : Well, kids see these ads and think, "I want to be like that. I want to have a good time. I want to be accepted by attractive, beautiful people. So I will act the same way."

F : Maybe they think so at some level, but it's not really that conscious on their part.

M : Yes! That's exactly the problem. If they were acting fully consciously, we'd be able to talk some sense into them. But instead they're like robots, programmed by Big Business to spend their money on dangerous, addictive products.

F : I think that's true, but I also think you're *exaggerating*. The media may be guilty of encouraging teens to drink and smoke, but they can't be held responsible for the basic desires people have.

M : Why not? If a married woman is "naturally" inclined to be sexually attracted to men, a man can still be punished for leading her into *adultery*.

F : Teens have always wanted to be regarded as older than they are, because they think adults have all the freedom and fun. However, by the time they have kids of their own, they want to be thought of as younger than their actual age, because they think kids have all the freedom and fun. The advertisers are happy to try to *exploit* both attitudes. That's why you dye your hair black and worry about your weight.

