



Easing Peer Pressure with Love and Logic

By Charles Fay, Ph.D.

What's a parent to do or say when the kids start "hanging out" with friends who remind them more of the late-night horror show than the sweet little pals everyone hopes their children will choose?

Peer pressure is stronger than ever, and many kids are faced with life-or-death decisions about drugs, alcohol, sex, and violence starting as early as elementary school!

Out of great love for their children, some parents take the "bulldozer" approach to this problem. They rev up their engines, make a lot of noise and smoke, and try to overpower their kids: "You stay away from that. Tommy! He's bad news! He's going to get you in a world of trouble!"

Every time parents give this type of lecture, they imply that their child is a wimp! "You are so weak you can't choose good friends and think for yourself when they want you to do something that's wrong," is the underlying message sent by this approach.

Sadly, the parent-child relationship is wounded, and the child now is forced to make poor decisions to "win" the battle.

Other parents take a completely different tack. These parents try to show their love by staying away from sensitive issues such as peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, violence, and sex. "Kid, I don't care enough about you to be involved in your life," is the unintentional yet very powerful message sent by this strategy.

What's a loving parent to do? At the Love and Logic Institute, we give parents practical ideas for staying involved in our children's lives and teaching responsibility, without creating power struggles and hurt feelings! Listed below are some of these ideas:

1. Love and Logic parents know that the fastest way to get kids to spend more time with friends we don't like is to forbid them from doing so!
2. Love and Logic parents send "You are strong" messages ("Your friends are lucky to have someone like you who can show them how to make smart choices.") instead of "You are weak" messages ("Stay away from that Billy-Sue. She's trouble!").
3. Love and Logic parents help their kids take the pressure out of saying no by giving them permission to say, "No way. Last time I did that my parents really let me have it."
4. Love and Logic parents encourage responsibility by saying, "We know you are the kind of kid who is strong enough to live with the consequences of your choices."
5. Love and Logic parents send plenty of unconditional "I love you" messages. They also show their kids how much they care by asking them who they are going to be with and where they are going.



Writing a letter to your child about peer pressure is an excellent way to “get the ball rolling” in a healthy way. Here’s an example written by two Love and Logic parents:

Dear Collin,

We love you so much! Sometimes smart kids like you find out their friends aren’t making such smart decisions about drugs, alcohol, sex, or other serious things. At those times, friends are really lucky to have someone like you who can show them how to make good decisions.

Sometimes even really smart kids like you feel pressured to do things they think are wrong or dangerous just to keep their friends. They worry that other kids will think they are wimps if they don’t go along.

If you think it might help, try saying something like, “No way. Last time I did something like that, I got caught and my parents almost killed me.”

The good thing about having friends that make poor decisions is that it gives you lots of practice making good ones! We only ask one thing of you. Before you leave us to spend time with your friends, give us a hug and leave us a list of names and phone numbers.

We promise never to call these numbers and snoop on you unless we start to worry because you haven’t come home on time. If you are running late, please give us a call so we don’t worry too much.

If you ever do make a poor decision, we won’t yell, lecture, or stop loving you. We will probably feel very sad for you, but we both know you are the kind of kid who can live with the consequences of your choices.

Your friends really are lucky to have you. We are too!

Love,

Mom and Dad

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2207 Jackson St, Golden, CO 80401

800-338-4065

www.loveandlogic.com