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Saying No To Drugs Is Not Easy, So Here Is Some Help

Dear Ms. Demeanor:

I am in sixth grade. All my friends tease me because I have not smoked marijuana. They say it is the best way to cool off from all the stuff we have to do at school, like practices. They say it is not bad for you, and even that most of our parents did it, so why not. I am confused and I just do not think I want to do it, but I want to keep my friends, too.

- B.T., New Jersey

Dear B.T.:

Nothing is tougher than ear listening to that "still, small voice inside" when outside voices roar with very different messages. It is very difficult to resist the pressure friends put on us. We all want to be accepted, especially by our friends.

One thought to consider is that your friends might be looking for a different kind of leader, one who resists such pressures.

No matter what, though, you should be armed with some, facts from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Here are tips adapted from "10 Things Every Teen Should Know About Marijuana":

- Marijuana is illegal. You can get convicted of a crime, suspended, or thrown out of school for using, buying or selling it.
- Marijuana is very risky to your health.
 - It impairs psychomotor skills and may contribute to car accidents.
 - It impairs attention and memory, so you can not concentrate, solve problems, or retain new information.
 - It impairs development of healthy social relationships, possibly alienating and isolating young people from bonding with positive role models and good friends.
 - It impairs your ability to make good decisions. Studies show that a young Marijuana user is more likely to use bad drugs later in life than a person who doesn't use it.

Remember that one person's problems-lack of focus and an inability to make good decisions-affect every other member of the family!

- Keep on the right track. Marijuana reduces your ability to do things that demand concentration and coordination, like sports, acting and studying.
- You are what you wear. If you wear marijuana images on your T-shirts, jeans or jackets, you're sending a dangerous and negative signal.
- Do the right thing. Using marijuana is far from the right thing-it will hurt, if not destroy, your education, family relationships and friendships.
- Say no to peer pressure. You really can do this, even though it's hard at first. And you will be surprised that once you establish yourself as a nonuser, you will end up with followers of your own.
- You do not need it. Honest. Not one bit. No matter what you hear in the movies or on the radio, marijuana does not increase your cool quotient.
- It is not always what it seems. Marijuana can be laced with track cocaine or PCP without your even knowing it. This is a very bad scene.
- Talk about problems. Whatever problems you have before you smoke marijuana will still be there when your high is over. Marijuana is not a problem-solver.
- Everybody is not doing it. Feel better knowing this? As a matter of fact, nearly 90 percent of 12 to 17 year-olds have never tried marijuana. Only insecure bullies try to get you to believe that everybody's doing it.

The bold truth is, we all want to be happy. We all want to be popular. We all want to learn skills to help us be successful adults.

Marijuana is not the ticket to success. Instead, talk with adults, family members, and others you can trust. They will help.

Above all, remember you are not alone. Just by writing this letter, you have taken an important step in overcoming peer pressure and heading in a positive direction.

Even though perfection is impossible to achieve, go on reaching for it.

- Ms. Demeanor

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