



DrugFree@WorkPlace

How to Say No When Pressured to Use Alcohol or Drugs

Choosing to not drink alcohol or use drugs is a personal decision that everyone has a right to make. There is absolutely nothing wrong with not wanting to engage in risky behavior. But too often when socializing with friends and coworkers, nondrinkers are pressured to participate in the use of alcohol or drugs in order to “fit in.” This peer pressure can be difficult for adults to deal with, but it is even more stressful for teens.

What is the best way for an adult to keep from being put on the defensive for declining to use drugs or alcohol in social settings? Many experts say that when you enter into a situation where alcohol is being served, it is best to get a nonalcoholic beverage in your hand as quickly as possible. A drink such as ginger ale with a slice of lime or sparkling water with lemon will often be enough to eliminate the insistence that you “join the party.”

Having a prepared answer delivered with polite decisiveness is the next step in avoiding continued demands that you drink or use drugs. Many people have allergic reactions and other adverse responses to the use of alcohol and/or drugs, and if that is the case you have every right to say that you must decline engaging in an activity that might make you physically ill. Some people simply do not like the taste of alcoholic beverages, and there is nothing wrong with voicing your preference for what you do and do not like to drink. Some individuals take maintenance doses of prescription medication that should not be mixed with alcohol or

other drugs, and to do so would create an unsafe health condition. Often, the phrase, “No thanks, I’m driving,” is enough to get friends to stop insisting that you “party” with them. There are many legitimate reasons for not engaging in alcohol or drug use and the decision to abstain should be socially acceptable to any reasonable person.

After clearly stating your decision to not drink or use drugs and giving the reason for your choice, the next step is to quickly change the subject. Most people would prefer to talk about their favorite subject—themselves—than to keep trying to force someone to get drunk or high. After saying (for example) that your body just does not respond well to alcohol or drugs, immediately ask a personal question or change the subject to something that you know the other person is interested in.

It is also good to remember that at any party there are going to be other people who don’t want to get drunk, stoned, or high, so don’t feel self-conscious thinking that you are the only sober person there. The people who are drinking and/or drugging are really more interested in their own drug or alcohol use and they will soon forget about whether you are participating in it with them.

Having a polite but firm reason to say no to drug or alcohol use, quickly changing the subject to a more interesting topic, recognizing that there are always others who choose not to drink or use drugs, and having an exit strategy to remove yourself from uncomfortable situations will help you engage in safe alcohol and drug free socializing.

Helping Teens Say No to Drug and Alcohol Use

Young people are intensely susceptible to peer pressure, and being able to say no to drug or alcohol use when under pressure can be difficult even for adults. When a pre-teen or teenager is offered drugs or alcohol by a friend, the tendency is for the child to say whatever he or she thinks will please that friend.

In order to empower our children to say no to alcohol and drugs, we need to help them come up with phrases that will allow the pivotal moment to pass smoothly without making the child feel uncomfortable or his or her friends feel rejected. For many young people, avoiding social awkwardness is more important than their own well-being, and saying no is much more difficult than saying yes—because saying no requires an explanation, and saying yes does not.

While it is important to teach kids about why they should say no to drug and alcohol use, it is equally important to tell them *how* to say no. When a young person is put on the spot he or she doesn't have hours to explain that decision to peers; there is usually only a second or two. Without a plan in place, most kids will default to "yes" rather than suffer the awkwardness of the situation. Many tweens and teens have said yes to drug and alcohol use not because they were being rebellious, but because they simply did not know how to say no.

It is important for parents to help their kids come up with ways to say no to

drug or alcohol use and to practice saying no through role-playing scenarios.

Parents should work with their kids in coming up with phrases that the child would feel comfortable using to say no to the offer of alcohol or drugs. The following are some tips to help get the conversation started.

1. Offer to be the designated driver. Getting your friends home safely will make everyone glad you didn't drink or take drugs.
2. If you're on a sports team, you can say you are staying healthy to maximize your athletic performance—besides, no one would argue that a hangover would help you play your best.
3. You could say: "I have to [study for a big test/go to a concert/visit my grandmother/babysit/march in a parade, etc.]. I can't do that after a night of drinking or drugs."
4. Keep a bottled drink like a soda or iced tea with you to drink at parties. People will be less likely to pressure you to drink alcohol if you're already drinking something. If they still offer you something, just say "I'm covered."
5. When all else fails...blame your parents. Explain that your parents are really strict, or that they will check up on you when you get home.