

246 07/12/04 Plan can help teens out of a tough spot

You have been around your own peers when they began to talk about or do something that did not fit your values. If you are honest about it, you will admit that it was difficult to handle the situation.

One of the instances of peer pressure that is the most difficult for me is when I am in a group of people who begin to speak negatively about someone else. The correct response is at two levels. One, I can choose to walk away to avoid participating. Or, two, I can speak in defense of the person. That usually stops the negative talk. Knowing that at times it is difficult for me to resist peer pressure makes me aware of how difficult it can be for a teen.

It is good to have a mutually agreed upon plan for helping your teens out of tough spots. If you help them now, they will be better prepared to handle it alone when they leave home.

I know a family who has set guidelines for television viewing. When one of the teens is at someone else's house where questionable viewing is happening, she has a plan. She tells her friends that she doesn't feel well and that she is going to call her mom to come get her. Mom cooperates with the plan and comes for her. The program on the television really does make her feel bad. Her response is like the first level response mentioned above. She chooses to walk away without confronting her friends. And, her mom gives her a little help in the matter.

The second level of response involves actually confronting friends in a non-aggressive manner. In the adolescent world, that might mean using a parent as an excuse. You can teach your teen that it is okay to blame the parents by saying something like, "If my parents ever found out that I was watching this program, I would be grounded until I was twenty. I believe that I will pass on that!"

It is only with a higher level of maturity (and practice using the other responses) that a teen or young adult will be able to take full responsibility on his own. He will then learn to say, "Look, I just don't like to watch trash like this. I think that I'll head down to the Sonic. Anyone want to go with me?" That kind of response will carry him through the tight spots he will meet on a college campus and throughout his adult life. We would all like for our children to have that kind of strength.