

## **Standard #5: Communicating Effectively**

Clear communication skills play an important role in protecting health and safety. There are multiple opportunities Health teachers can provide for students to practice strategies for verbal and nonverbal communication and peer resistance skills.

- ☞ Have students discuss as a group, the types of pressure situations they experience. Follow up with opportunities to compare and contrast effective and ineffective use of communication skills in various situations. Do this through:
  - Pair practice in which each pair has the opportunity to practice ineffective communication skills, followed by effective skills.
  - Demonstration role-plays in the front of the class by willing participants. Have the participants remain in their roles following the role plays while the class asks them questions or “coaches” them.
- ☞ Provide journal writing opportunities where students share pressure situations they have experienced or witnessed. Have them write about what worked and didn’t work. If the communication didn’t work, have them provide suggestions for ways to improve the communication in the future.
- ☞ In small groups, have students brainstorm a list of “pressure lines” and to write “comeback lines” in response. Share as a group.
- ☞ Have students write their own role plays, or finish half-scripted role plays.
- ☞ For out of classroom projects, have students develop posters or videos that depict effective communication skills and ways to deal with pressure situations.

### **Communication between parents and children:**

At the beginning of the course, send home a note to parents about the skills being taught in Health class and some of the following ideas to specifically work on effective communication at home:

- ☞ Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences. Tell your child, "I love you and trust you, but I don't trust the world around you, and I need to know what's going on in your life so I can be a good parent to you." (from [www.ed.gov/parents](http://www.ed.gov/parents))
- ☞ When talking about a health-related issue,
  - Make sure you are emotionally ready by having a positive attitude before beginning discussion.
  - If you are nervous or embarrassed, don't be afraid to say so. Being truthful about your feelings helps to break the tension and will help your child be truthful about his/her feelings.
  - Review the facts. You do not have to be an expert on health-related issues to talk with your children. Talking about the facts with another adult prior to talking with your child will make it easier.

- Have a mutual conversation. A conversation is an exchange of ideas, not a lecture. Ask open-ended questions that encourage your child to tell you how they think and feel about the issue, rather than questions that require a simple “yes” or “no” answer.
- To follow up on health information learned at school, listen without interruption and give your child a chance to teach you something new. Your active listening to your child’s enthusiasm paves the way for conversation about topics that concern you.
- Make every conversation a “win-win” experience. Don’t try to “score points” on your child by showing how he or she is wrong. If you respect your child’s viewpoint, (s)he will be more likely to listen to you and respect yours.

(Source: adapted from *The Parent Connection* Newsletters by Health Wave, Inc. Volumes 1 and 2)

### **1. Helping your child set boundaries with others:**

Raising children to cope with peer pressure begins very early in life. More than anything, children who are able to stand up to negative peer pressure are resilient individuals with well defined beliefs and values. Children become what they see more than what they hear. The best way we can show our child a positive example of resisting negative pressure, we must stand up for ourselves. Strong children know what they believe and why they believe it.

We must keep in mind that peers also act as positive role models. Teen peers in particular, often listen to, accept, and understand the frustrations, challenges, and concerns associated with being a teenager. Peers are necessary and crucial in helping adolescents make successful transitions..

- If they are struggling with a particular peer issue, have a discussion in which they share their beliefs. List all the consequences if they acquiesce to negative pressure. The more they can learn to make rational, rather than emotional decisions in peer situations, the better able they will be to resist negative pressure and become a model in promoting positive pressure.
- Play the “pressure practice game” with them. This can be used at a wide range of ages and adapted to the developmental issues. It can be done in the car, after a discussion about a health topic that was covered in school, at bedtime, after viewing a television program, etc. Have your child come up with a scenario of a situation in which they could potentially feel negative pressure. Play the role of the peer who is trying to convince them to do something they don’t want to do. They practice giving responses. Encourage them to use rational responses and to repeat their responses. Help them by encouraging the use of powerful words as well as congruent body language.
- Have them practice situations in which they are using peer pressure in a positive way by promoting a healthy choice among their peers.
- Encourage your child to practice a variety of situations from low-risk to high-risk. For example, if a friend wants to see a movie they do not want to see, help them practice being assertive and

saying, "no thank you, it's not my thing." The more opportunities they have to practice being assertive and put in place healthy boundaries, the better able they will be to resist negative peer pressure.

- Tell them that if they are having a particularly difficult time, they can use you as the reason why they can't give in (e.g., "my parents will make me quit my team, won't allow me to get together with friends, etc."). As they continue to practice, they will need to rely on this excuse less.
- Be sure to recognize that the hardest thing is when your child takes an independent position because he believes it is the thing to do.

All children desire to belong to a group and the power of peers can be positive or negative. If we nurture and guide our children from a young age, then we can be confident that (despite the occasional misstep) they will resist bad influences and make good choices.

(Source: adapted from [www.more4kids.com](http://www.more4kids.com))