

Red Ribbon Week Essay: Know the Real Cost

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Imagine, you're hanging out with your friends behind the school one of your friends reaches into their pocket and pulls out a pack of cigarettes. They hand one to your other friend and then offer you one. You're confused on how to approach this. You don't want to look like a scaredy cat in front of your friends, but you also don't know if it is safe for you. Many people have been faced with situations close to this. Sadly, students have made the poor decision and were hooked onto drugs, alcohol, or other substances. This is why we need to inform students on ways to deal with certain scenarios that they may be faced with in the future.

You are sleeping over at your friends house with a bunch of your friends; you're having fun watching movies, having pillow fights, and joking around. You go down to dinner when one of your friend's (the host) older siblings stops you in the hallway. They ask you if you would like to smoke a cigarette with them. You're frightened of what they would do to you if you declined and what would happen to you if you accepted. This happens quite often and you shouldn't be frightened. One way to address this situation is to politely decline and walk away. If they continue asking you, try going to a trusted adult or to the host of the slumber party and tell them. By accepting the older siblings offer you would put yourself in a terrible position risking your health and could possibly get you addicted. It is better to decline and walk away from that situation.

Picture this, your class has finally ended. You go to use the restroom before your sixth period, wellness. You walk into the restroom and see a group of popular girls (or boys) vaping. They look over at you and offer you to join them and become popular yourself. This is a red flag!! You should not accept this offer even if they offer you something in return. Something you should do is decline the offer and walk away. As soon as you think you have gotten a safe distance, you should go to a nearby teacher and report this. You WILL NOT be considered a snitch for this act! You are just simply keeping yourself and the people around you safe. Who knows what or how many people they could have gotten hooked onto vaping if you hadn't stepped in to help.

Finally, imagine you are hanging out with a group of your friends at a bowling alley. Your parents dropped you off there previously so it was only you guys. You and a friend walk off to the game room while the rest of them continue bowling. One of your friends unzip their backpack and pull out a non-see-through water bottle. Your friend then tells you that they had snuck one of her mom's beers in their water bottle. They open the water bottle and take a drink. They then looked at you and asked if you would like a drink. They try to persuade you by telling you if you drank it they would give you money, they said if you didn't drink it then they would stop being your friend. You don't know what to do. You don't want to lose your friend, but you also don't want to drink beer because you know it's not good for you. Many people your age have fallen victim to this ultimatum. You should know that even if you lose one friend, though it might hurt, it DOES NOT even scratch the surface on what alcohol will do to you. The website cancerhealth.com states, "alcohol can harm the liver, whose job it is to break down harmful substances in the body. This can lead to hepatitis, jaundice and cirrhosis, which is the buildup of scar tissue that eventually destroys the organ." This means that alcohol can physically hurt you. This risk is worth no amount of money and you should never sell off your health for alcohol. What you should do is refuse, walk away and stay away from that person. It may matter what that friend can do to you, but what matters most is the decisions you make and what you do to yourself.

There are many more situations that people your age have to deal with that may get you addicted to alcohol, drugs, smoking/vaping, and/or other substances. All and all, middle schoolers should be educated on how to approach scenarios where they may be offered unhealthy substances that they may be faced with in the future.