



Refusal skills

Developing strong refusal skills is the best line of defense to avoid situations where you might feel pressured to participate in unhealthy activities. Here are some strategies to help you navigate these situations. It helps to practice beforehand so you have your toolkit on deck whenever you need it.

- 1) **Make a joke.** Sometimes humor is the best way to respond to a situation, as it can lighten a serious mood. **“No thanks, man, I need all the brain cells I can get.”**
- 2) **Give a reason why it’s a bad idea.** Maybe you can’t smoke because you want to be able to run the mile for the track team. Maybe you don’t want to drink because you know someone who is an alcoholic and you can see how drinking has messed up their life. Backing up your refusal with evidence gives it more power.
- 3) **Make an excuse why you can’t.** Maybe you have something else to do that will interfere, or you have to be somewhere at a specific time, or your mom will kill you. Whatever.
- 4) **Just say no, plainly and firmly.** In some situations, just saying no without a lot of arguing and explaining is the best response. Just make sure you’re “no” is a strong and determined one.
- 5) **Suggest an alternative activity.** By thinking of something better to do, you’re offering everyone an “out.”
- 6) **Ignore the suggestion.** Pretend you didn’t hear it, and change the topic to something else. Act like you don’t think the idea was even worth discussing.
- 7) **Repeat yourself if necessary.** Just because someone asks more than once, that doesn’t mean you have to do it.
- 8) **Leave the situation.** It might seem risky, but if you make the way, other kids who really don’t want to do it either just may follow you. Have an escape plan! This can be as simple as, “Where’s the bathroom?,” and you’re out. . . or you can have a plan with a parent or friend using a code where the phone rings and boom you gotta go!
- 9) **Thanks, but no thanks.** You can be polite, but you still aren’t interested. It just isn’t something you’re into. **“I’m good,”** can work here too.
- 10) **The strength in numbers.** Often, knowing that your friends will back you up can help you feel more comfortable being assertive. Sometimes **“we”** feels stronger than **“I”**.

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