

# Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion®

## Why This Program?

Girls deserve healthful environments, but they face many pressures that thwart their ability to make smart choices concerning the use of legal and illicit substances. Girls often are induced to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs to become or stay slim, manage stress, appear mature, be popular with peers of both sexes, or escape overwhelming problems. Because many of these pressures are more prevalent for girls than boys, standard prevention programs can be ineffective for girls.

Consider these facts:

- Among young women who currently smoke, 92.3% believe persons can get addicted to cigarettes, and yet 23.8% think it is safe to smoke one to two years and then quit.
- In 2003, 22% of high school girls reported smoking recently.
- Of high-school-aged young women who currently smoke, 20% think smokers have more friends; 12.4% think smokers look cool.
- The percentage of 8th grade girls who use marijuana has nearly tripled in the last decade from 5% in 1991 to 14% in 2000.
- By the time girls reach their senior year in high school, 34% report periodic heavy drinking.
- The use of diet pills is dramatically higher among young women than it is among young men. In 2000, 27% of young women in grade 12 reported some experience with diet pills.
- More adolescent girls than boys reported feeling a lot of stress, and more say they use cigarettes (66% versus 49%) and alcohol (38% versus 27%) to deal with stress.

## About the Program

Friendly PEERsuasion responds to the needs of girls ages 11 to 14 because it approaches drug abuse prevention as a peer issue, using the positive influence of young people modeling healthy behavior. The program begins by helping girls deal with the influences of peers. Participants build communication skills, learn to recognize stress, and practice responding to stress in healthy ways—three abilities that form the basis upon which decision-making and resistance skills are built. Girls learn about tobacco, alcohol, prescription and over-the-counter medications, nutritional supplements, and illicit drugs. They analyze media messages that glamorize substance use.

Participants also plan and implement substance use prevention activities for groups of younger children ages 6 through 10. This opportunity to serve as leaders and mentors reinforces the older girls' commitment to avoiding substance use.

Friendly PEERsuasion is also available in Spanish (*Persuasión positiva*).

## Evaluation Results

Girls who participated in Friendly PEERsuasion were more likely to avoid situations where peers were smoking, drinking, or using drugs.

After participating in Friendly PEERsuasion, only 22% of girls ages 11 to 12 reported smoking, drinking, or using other drugs, compared with 34% of girls who did not participate. One month after completion of the program, the same

**"If you're the leader, you can't just sit back and hope others will do it...you've got to do it first."**

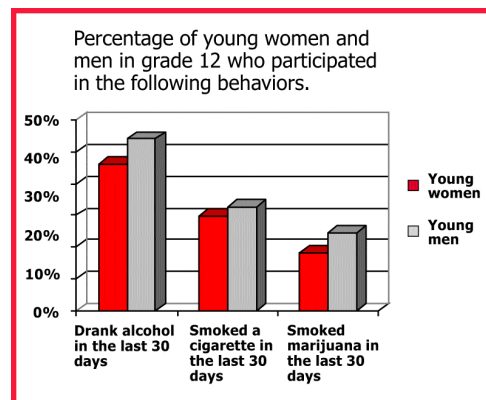
—Wanda, age 11

group of participants showed no increase in substance use, while those who did not participate increased substance use by 6 percentage points, from 34% to 40%.

Only 4% of girls ages 11 and 12 who participated in Friendly PEERsuasion reported staying in situations where peers were smoking, drinking, or using other drugs; 14% of girls who did not participate reported staying in situations where peers engaged in such behavior.

Nonparticipants in Friendly PEERsuasion were more likely than participants to approve of drinking alcohol and more likely to stay in situations in which others were drinking.

Friendly PEERsuasion was named an Effective Program by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in their 2001 Exemplary Program Awards.



## Funders

The following grant makers are among the many generous contributors who have supported the Friendly PEERsuasion program and related initiatives:

MetLife Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Nancy Reagan Foundation, The William T. Grant Foundation

## Girls Incorporated

Girls Incorporated® is a nonprofit organization that inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold<sup>SM</sup>. With local roots dating to 1864 and national status since 1945, Girls Inc. has responded to the changing needs of girls through research-based programs and public education efforts that empower girls to understand, value, and assert their rights. In 2004, Girls Inc. reached nearly 800,000 girls through Girls Inc. affiliates, our website, and educational publications.

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