



DAY IN DAY OUT

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS

Affect Your Child's Health & Well-Being

Many behaviors spread socially. Examples include how much you exercise, how much alcohol you drink, whether you smoke, and what foods you eat. People care about what others think across all different age groups—and that influences how much they value different ideas and behaviors. How social networks affect decision making is called social, or peer, influence.

Teens are especially responsive to peer influence. That's because their brains undergo changes that make them highly attuned to social situations. At the same time, the reward system in the teen brain becomes extra sensitive.

The reward system is a brain circuit that causes feelings of pleasure. It's activated by things we enjoy, like eating good food. It's also activated by social rewards, like getting a compliment. And teens are just learning to navigate the social world. Understanding other people's values and being influenced by them are important parts of socializing. Being influenced on things like clothing choices and musical taste can help teens learn to fit in and make friends. But taking part in risky behaviors, like drinking alcohol or smoking, can lead to health or legal consequences.



Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about your health.

Some people seem to be more easily influenced than others, too. They may be more sensitive to feeling included or excluded by others. Or they may be more sensitive to social signals, like the tone of someone's voice or their body language.

THE POWER OF POSITIVE PEER CONNECTIONS

Studies show that, in general, the more friends you have and the more time you spend with them, the happier you are. Friends give you people to share your feelings with, to get new perspectives from, or to just do fun activities with.

But it's the quality of those friendships—not quantity—that really makes the difference. Quality of friendships has been linked to higher life satisfaction and better mental health. High quality friendships provide understanding, support, and validation of your self-worth. These types of friendships are more stable and are more satisfying.

Parents can help guide their kids toward more positive social experiences, too. Here are a few ways to help:

Stay engaged. Talk with your children about their lives and activities. Knowing what goes on can help you better guide them toward positive, healthy experiences.

Know who your child is friends with. It's important that you know who your child is spending time with. Try to steer them toward peers who support them in healthy ways.

Encourage healthy group activities. In place of activities like playing video games, encourage healthy activities like going for a walk or hike, playing recreational sports, or volunteering. You can also try to find opportunities for kids to get involved with their community and meet new people with different perspectives.

Set a good example. Be respectful, accepting, and caring in your interactions with your kids. They can learn about healthy relationships from their family experiences.

