

SOCIAL SOURCES

Alarming, 80% of regular smokers start smoking before the age of 18. On average, most youth try their first cigarette at age 11. Young people start smoking more during the summer months than at any other time of year. Also, youth are particularly vulnerable during periods of change or transition in their lives. It is during these times they demonstrate increased interest in starting smoking and tobacco products. The reasons why youth start smoking are varied and complex. Youth that have family and friends who smoke are more likely to start smoking themselves. For many young people, the first cigarette is provided by friends and smoking is considered a social activity.

SO WHAT WORKS?

Reducing smoking among youth has been a challenge for health professionals for a longtime. It has been proven that campaigns that train young people to *resist* the social influences that encourage them to smoke are the most effective. Facilitating the development of refusal skills is key! Youth need to know how to say “NO” effectively when offered tobacco products by peers. For parents, educators and health professionals one universal strategy that seems to make a difference when talking to youth is *brief advice* reinforcing the health risks posed by tobacco use.

YOUTH ACCESS

Although youth access laws have been created that *prohibit* the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 18, some retailers continue to sell to anyone who has the money to pay for it. This is very unfortunate for our youth since they are unaware of how quickly addiction occurs with the dangerous drug nicotine. Educating retailers and actively enforcing laws governing youth access to tobacco are essential parts of a comprehensive tobacco-control approach to reduce youth access to tobacco products. Interestingly, 70% of adolescent smokers wish they had never started!

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Do not purchase or give youth candy or gum that resembles cigarettes, cigars or smokeless tobacco.
- Never purchase tobacco products for a minor – it’s against PA law.
- Keep your tobacco products out of sight and out of reach.
- Do not offer tobacco products to your children or their friends.
- Do not ask minors to “go to the store” to purchase tobacco for you – that’s also illegal.
- Do not ask them to light or handle your tobacco products.
- Know your children’s friends and their families.
- Know where your children “hang out” and how they spend their money.
- Consider quitting if you smoke and enlist your family’s help to support you.
- Share the hardships of your addiction with your family.
- Consider the effects of your tobacco use and it’s devastating consequences on your family.

Sources:

“Got A Minute? Give it to Your Kid” Drug Prevention Through Parenting – CDC
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

MMWR Weekly, 10/11/02 “Usual Sources of Cigarettes for Middle and High School
Students”