

Principal's Corner: Parent Tip -- Little Changes Can Signal That Your Teen is in Trouble

Sometimes, the biggest changes in your teen show up in the smallest ways. By spending time with your teen, you can notice the small signals that he/she may be in trouble.

Some parents wait until their teen brings home a report card filled with failing grades before they figure out something's wrong. However, when they stop to think about it, they know that there were little warning signs for months.

So be alert. Start with noticing what is normal for your teen—and what has changed. Some warning signals include:

- **Small changes in school work**—His/her grades drop by a half grade. The B- student earns a C+. He/she puts off work until the last minute or avoids it altogether.
- **Changes in sleep patterns**-- Your teen has trouble falling asleep or you cannot get him/her up in the morning.
- **Friends**-- Your teen has started hanging out with kids who have no interest in school.

Once you are aware of changes in your teen's behavior, talk with him. Ask what is going on and how you can help. If necessary, contact his teachers or guidance counselor.

Peer Pressure Can Often Be More Positive Than Negative

Peer pressure has a bad name. Parents worry that their children may engage in dangerous behavior, such as underage drinking and doing drugs, all in the name of "fitting in."

Of course, negative peer pressure exists. In addition, it is important for parents to help children learn to fight it. However, another kind of peer pressure—the positive kind—can have many benefits for your teen.

Here are some things your teen can gain from "positive peer pressure."

- **Responsible Behavior**-- Not all teens spend weekends getting into trouble. Many spend time doing things with their families, playing sports, babysitting, engaging in hobbies or reading. A typical weekend for your teen's friends will probably become a typical weekend for your teen, too.
- **Self-esteem**-- Many of the things teens do because of peer pressure are not harmful. They may all like a certain hairstyle or the latest pop band. Being like other kids makes them feel they belong—and that is a very important feeling to an adolescent.
- **Connection to school**-- Kids do not always fall in with the "wrong crowd." Very often, they fall in with the "right crowd"—one that cares about schoolwork, participates in activities, and tries to succeed. Such friends can motivate your teen.