

**POSITIVE PEER-PRESSURE
NEEDED FOR CHILDREN**

In response to Southwood Middle eighth-grader Lauren Astigarra's "Fresh Ink" essay [*Substance abuse is not OK*, March 7], I support and encourage the way she is challenging her peers.

Lauren's example is what I call "positive peer-pressure." Children today need a large dose of this. Research has shown that teaching adolescents what they can say to their peers whom invite or pressure them to smoke (or to drink) is more effective than teaching them the harmful effects of cigarette (or marijuana) smoking. Purely educational approaches have been particularly effective at reducing alcohol and drug use among teens.

Additionally, students with better refusal skills have higher levels of alcohol knowledge, less susceptibility to peer pressure, greater internal health focus of control and self-esteem and less alcohol abuse.

Still other studies have found that the pressure from the reference group, or peer group, is expected to play a central role in the choices made by any individual especially the "adolescent." This challenge is associated with curiosity, risk-taking, and the search for new experiences. Curiosity is accepted as the most common motive for embarking on drug use.

As a licensed psychotherapist specializing in adolescent addictions for the past 12 years, I believe it is crucial for this type of challenge among peers to take place especially on the heels of increased alcohol abuse among teens. Lauren states, "Peer pressure is the leading cause of teens getting hooked on some type of illegal substance." However, my advice to Lauren and to other teens is this: continue being a positive influence among your peers. Who says peer-pressure has to be negative?

**MARINO E.
CARBONELL
CORAL GABLES**

SUNDAY 03.28.04

www.herald.com

NEIGHBORS

EDITOR: MARIKA LYNCH mlynch@herald.com 305-671-4343

EAST

The Herald

3 EAST