



Teen Safety: Balancing Joy and Peer Pressure (continued)

teenagers. While teens welcome the break from routine and view Purim as a time to enjoy freedom, the permissive atmosphere can sometimes lead to poor choices. At the heart of these choices is often peer pressure. This powerful influence propels teens to engage in behaviors they might usually avoid, whether it's drinking, reckless driving, or other unhealthy activities.

Megillah Esther provides us with an insight into the importance of responsible decision-making on Purim. In the Megillah, we see a stark contrast between two groups of Jews. Many partook in Achashveirosh's feast, succumbing to peer pressure and ignoring the dangers of assimilating into Persian culture. Their participation in the extravagant celebration came at a spiritual cost. In contrast, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, standing firm in his values despite immense pressure. His decision was not easy, but it was responsible and ultimately led to the salvation of the Jewish people. This contrast teaches us an invaluable lesson: true strength lies in making the right choices even when societal pressure pushes us in the opposite direction.

Teenagers can still have a meaningful and fun-filled Purim without the negative influence of peers and risk. Surrounding themselves with trusted friends who respect them and prioritize safety can help prevent regrettable decisions. Planning ahead—knowing the details of where one is going, how to get home safely, and whom to contact in case of an emergency—is crucial.

Parents play a central role in equipping their children with invaluable tools to positively confront peer pressure, ensuring their teens enjoy Purim safely and meaningfully. Open discussions about responsible behavior, the dangers of excessive drinking, and the importance of making wise choices should occur before Purim begins. Supervision is essential. Parents should be aware of where their teens are and the type of environment they will be in. Maintaining open lines of communication so teens feel comfortable seeking help or advice can make a significant difference. Encouraging teens to participate in Purim mitzvot, like giving *Matanot L'evyonim*, delivering Mishloach Manot, or joining community events, offers them fulfillment and joy beyond just partying. Another important component is setting a proper example by demonstrating responsible behavior during their own Purim celebrations.

As we celebrate Purim, let us follow Mordechai's example and make choices that reflect our values and long-term well-being. Happiness and excitement should never come at the expense

of our safety and dignity. True *simcha*, as emphasized in *Chazal*, is rooted in meaningful and purposeful experiences, not reckless abandon.

At Madraigos, we are committed to helping teens and their families navigate the challenges of adolescence, particularly during high-risk times like Purim. If you are interested in guidance from our clinical team, please call 516-371-3250 or info@madraigos.org. For more information about our prevention programs, intervention services, and educational resources, visit www.madraigos.org.

This Purim, let's work towards creating a safe and festive environment for our teens. Most importantly, the essence of Purim should be embraced by focusing on acts of kindness and giving to others - *megillah*, celebrating the victory of good over bad, *mishloach manot*, *matanot l'evyonim*, and the *seuda*. By recognizing the risks, setting clear expectations, and utilizing the resources available, we can ensure that Purim remains a time of true strength, pleasure, and celebration for everyone.