Drug expert blames peer pressure

By Edwina Blackwell
Post staff reporter

When someone asks a teenager, "Wanna take a hit off this joint?" or, "Here, why don't you try some of this?" the teenager faces a decision of whether to conform to peer pressure or stick to values instilled in them by parents and family.

Whether at school or at a party, being approached about drugs is something with which everyone must deal. Wednesday night, Miller Newton, author of the book "Not My Kid," talked with parents and others concerned about drugs at the Omni Netherland Plaza. The evening session closed the First Annual Kids and Drugs Seminar, sponsored by Kids Helping Kids of Hebron, Ky., The Cincinnati Post and The Kentucky Post, and a number of other agencies.

Peer pressure is the impetus for youth drug abuse today, Newton said, and parents need to teach their children how to deal with that.

"Today, the teenage peer culture is loaded with 'feel good, be cool, do drugs and get high,'" he said. "To understand this disease, the real key is to understand the feelings, not the use of drugs."

Six years ago, Newton, who is president and clinical director of KIDS of Bergen County Inc., a New York family-involved drug treatment center for troubled adolescents, learned his 15-year-old son, ███ was a drug addict. After seeing him drunk several times and finally discovering stashes of marijuana and drug parphernalia in his son's room, Newton and his family admitted ███ to a teenage drug rehabilitation program.

"I think I said for sometime, 'Hey, not my kid.' Well, it was our kid."

Now, he tells parents there are no common characteristics of teen drug addicts and that parents should be aware of any little changes, because "the loss of control is progressive . . . kids are far more vulnerable to loss of control."

When parents come to him, thinking their children may be on drugs, he asks them to tell him what they're seeing.

"The changes in drug use aren't dramatic," Newton said.

Children "don't change in miles or inches, but in quarter inches."