

411



On Peer Pressure

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Identify Problem: What is peer pressure? Have you ever had to say “No” to a friend? Research has found that those who make a decision early on to not do something such as drugs and alcohol, are less likely to participate or use the substance before being asked and have a much better chance of reinstating than those who wait to make a decision until they are confronted with the choice. The early decision means they have already thought through the reasons not to use and are comfortable to resist the situation they are in, not the decision of whether or not to use. This activity will help kids understand what peer pressure is, differences between positive and negative pressures, how to avoid and cope with peer pressure and learn techniques to refuse substances.

Materials: Copy, for each person, the 411 on peer pressure, highlighter for each person.

Exercise: Take turns reading the 411 on peer pressure out loud as a group. Have the students highlight things that are interesting to them, things they didn’t know, or anything that applies to them.

Questions and Discussion:

- Have each person read and discuss what they highlighted.
- Talk about the “identify skills”.
- What is peer pressure?
- Have you ever said “No” to a friend?
- What is the difference between negative and positive peer pressure?
- What is an example of positive peer pressure?
- What is an example of negative peer pressure?
- Why do people have trouble saying “No” to friends?
- Besides drugs and alcohol, what are some other things to say “No” to?
- How can you prepare yourself for these situations?
- Would you risk losing a friend over something you felt strongly about?
- What are some factors that influence your decisions?
- Do you think of the consequences when someone tries to pressure you into doing something?
- When someone suggests doing something you don’t feel right about, what are some things you can do besides just saying “No”?
- Describe a clique or a crowd that you observe at your school. How do these affect you and your own peer group?



Identify Skills: Know what peer pressure is
Differences between negative and positive pressures
How to cope with peer pressure
How to avoid peer pressure
Refusal skills

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Peer pressure is a natural part of life. Everyone is influenced by people around them. While positive peer pressure can keep you on the right track, negative peer pressure can lead you down the wrong path. Peer pressure is the ability of people from the same social rank or age influencing another persons' decisions. Peer pressure can influence the way one dresses, music they listen to and their behavior. Peer pressure is usually associated with teens, but this type of influence can be found with adults, children and even infants can be seen doing things in order to feel as though they are the same as their peers.

Teens face many situations where others are encouraging them to do something risky, illegal or unhealthy. Unfortunately, many teens wind up "going along" not because they want to, but simply because they don't know how to respond in these situations. They are afraid of losing a friend, looking un-cool, or being left out of the crowd. The trick is learning a range of possibilities so they are prepared for any situation when the time arises.

People often think of peer pressure as "the local drug dealer pressuring an innocent kid to smoke his first joint". Although this scenario does happen, peer pressure is not always negative. There are also forms of peer pressure with constructive positive influences as teens search for independence. Teens involved in sports, student government, etc., are also being influenced by their peers. To become part of any group will cause a teenager to strive to fit in, whether it means running the fastest or being the loudest cheerleader. Positive peer pressure is when it inspires a person to do something worthwhile.

Teens are now, and always have been under extreme pressure to "fit in" with a group. As teens struggle to find their personal identity, kids get caught up in being a part of a certain group and they are willing to give up common morals and values, experimenting with activities and behaviors they might not otherwise consider, just to fit in. Unhealthy, destructive peer groups can cause much pain and suffering for teenagers. Teens whose friends are involved in risky behaviors, illegal activities or experimenting with drugs may easily be persuaded to join in, they are afraid they won't be accepted by their peers. Negative peer pressure is trying to get a person to do something by bribes, teasing and name-calling.

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How to Avoid Peer Pressure

1. **Avoid putting yourself in situations that puts you in a negative situation.** For example, if you don't smoke and you know a lot of people go to a certain spot to smoke, steer clear of that place.
2. **Be careful when choosing friends to hang around.** Look for friends with positive qualities.
3. **Start saying no to your friends when you don't want to do something.** This is perhaps the hardest thing to do. Your friends may not want to hang around you because they might say you've changed.
4. **Learn how to be an individual.** You don't have to always be in the "In Crowd". This will help you later in life too. You don't always have to be accepted by everyone.

How to Cope with Peer Pressure

Know who you are. Develop a strong sense of identity. Be clear about what you want out of life. If you are sure about your values, then you will be less likely to compromise them for someone else. It is easier to cope with negative peer pressure when it is in opposition to your beliefs.

Build your self Esteem. Feeling bad about yourself makes you more vulnerable to peer pressure. Take good care of yourself. Set goals and celebrate your accomplishments. Participate in activities that make you more confident.

Trust your instincts. No one knows what is right for you more than you. If something feels wrong, then chances are that it is wrong. Your intuition is a great too. Heed its warning to make good choices and cope with peer pressure.

Surround yourself with like-minded people. Everyone needs a support system. If your confidants are people who wouldn't steer you in the wrong direction, then that's one less source of negative peer pressure for you to worry about. Those same people will be there for you when you experience peer pressure from elsewhere.

Learn to say "No". Everyone wants acceptance, but your need for approval should not make decisions for you. Exercise your freedom of choice to cope with peer pressure and avoid creating resentment. Compromise is a part of every relationship, but people pleasing can be detrimental to your well being.

Refusal Skills:

1. Ask questions - Be sure you know what someone wants you to do. "Do you have any money for that candy bar?" "Will there be drugs at the party?" "Who's going to be at the party?"

2. Name the trouble - Tell them that this is something you don't want to do and why. "Taking the candy bar without paying - that's stealing?" "That's illegal."
3. State the Consequences - What could happen if you went against your better judgment? "If I do that I could get grounded" "If I do that I could get in an accident" "If I do that I could be arrested."
4. Suggest Realistic Alternatives - Suggest something fun and safe to do. "Instead, why don't we go to a movie" "Instead why don't we play video games."
5. Move on - Get yourself out of the situation. Move it, sell it and leave the door open: "If you change your mind, I'm going to get some friends to play basketball at the park, come over if you want" "If you change your mind, I'll be at my house watching a movie, you can come if you want."
6. Other ideas - Switch topics, use humor, walk away, use an excuse, don't pay attention.