

PEER PRESSURE

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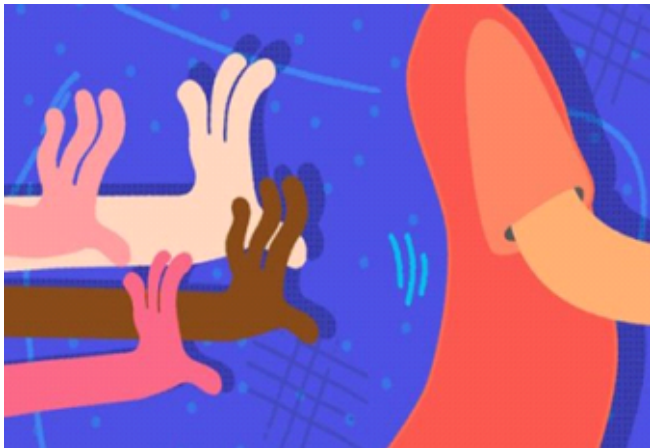
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Peer Pressure

What is 'Peer pressure'?

The word "peer" refers to those who are your equal in abilities, qualifications, age, background, or social status. We have all been there, seen it, felt it, the intense pressure that a group can impose on individuals to think and act in certain ways. Peer pressure then is nothing more than the people of your age pushing you to wear certain clothes, listen to certain music, engage in certain behavior, or to use harmful drugs, or adopt certain beliefs.

Bending to peer pressure is the easy way out. But peer pressure can be negative or positive, and it's up on us to figure that out. You can't let everybody else think for you, make your decisions, and guide your life. Having somebody else make these decisions wouldn't be half bad if the people making them were wise veterans of life, or compassions that share your personal values. But it's not a good idea to 'go with the flow' when the decision makers are on a completely different wavelength.



DEFINING PEER PRESSURE

What do peer do?

- Peer help youth explore and develop own identity.
- Cross-gender friendships become more common.
- Antisocial peer groups can increase antisocial behavior.
- If negative, then peer pressure can discourage individual's decision making skills and erode personal confidence.



Two Levels of Peer Pressure

1. College or Youth Groups: This is the setting that gets the most attention, as it directs the trends in clothing, music, entertainment, and “political correctness”. The pressure to conform varies. It is not usually a spoken or written guideline; it’s just what “everyone” is doing. The pressure can be avoided by keeping quite or by putting on the appearance of conformity.

2. Best Friends: The nature of close friends is that you care more about them and their opinions than those of anybody else. What your best friend approves of or disapproves of exerts a personal and forceful pressure which is not easy to escape. The trick is to harness this in to a positive pressure by choosing a good companion that share your value system and your sense of integrity.



Dealing with Peer Pressure

Some ways to counter peer pressure:

- It is alright to refuse offers for cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. If you are a shy individual you might be more comfortable saying “no thanks,” or “I have to go,” while those who are more outgoing might say something like, “forget it!” or “on way!”
- Avoid undesirable situations or people who break the rules. When you are not in situations where you feel the pressure to do negative actions you are far less likely to do them. Likewise, those who choose friends who do not smoke, drink, use drugs, steal, and lie to their parents are far less likely to do these things as well.
- Remember that there is strength in numbers. When young people can anticipate stressful peer pressure situations, it might be helpful if you bring friends for support.
- Nurture strong self-esteem. Strong self-esteem will help you make decisions and follow them, even if your friends do not think some choices are “cool”.



Peer influence and peer pressure

Peer influence is when you choose to do something you wouldn't otherwise do, because you want to feel accepted and valued by your friends. It isn't just or always about doing something against your will.

You might hear the term 'peer pressure' used a lot. But peer influence is a better way to describe how teenagers' behavior is shaped by wanting to feel they belong to a group of friends or peers.

Peer pressure and influence can be positive. For example, your child might be influenced to become more assertive, try new activities, or to get more involved with college studies.

But it can be negative too. Some teenagers might choose to try things they normally wouldn't be interested in, like smoking or behaving in antisocial ways.

Peer pressure and influence might result in children:

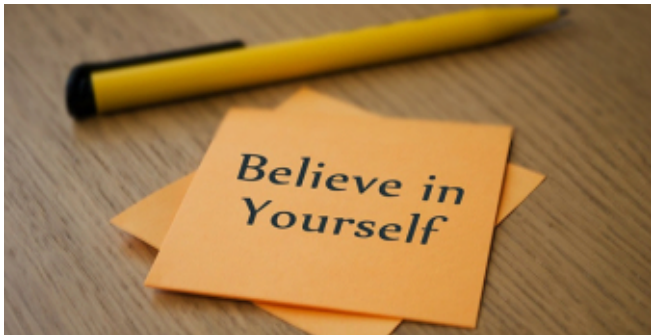
- choosing the same clothes, hairstyle or jewellery as their friends
- listening to the same music or watching the same TV shows as their friends
- changing the way they talk, or the words they use
- doing risky things or breaking rules
- working harder at school, or not working as hard
- dating or taking part in sexual activities
- smoking or using alcohol or other drugs.

Being yourself: a balance for peer pressure and peer influence

It's normal to worry that your child is being influenced too much by his peers, or that he's selling out on his values (or yours) to fit in with his friends. It's also normal to worry that your child won't be able to say no if he gets pressure to try risky things, like wagging school or smoking.

But listening to the same music and dressing in the same way as friends doesn't necessarily add up to your child then doing antisocial or risky things.

And if your child is happy with who she is and her choices and values, she's less likely to be influenced by other people. She might choose to do some things that her friends do, but not others. And your influence is important here – it's the biggest factor shaping your child's values and long-term choices.



Warning signs include:

- low moods, tearfulness or feelings of hopelessness
- aggression or antisocial behavior that's not usual for your child
- sudden changes in behavior, often for no obvious reason
- trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or waking early
- loss of appetite or over-eating

If you're concerned, start by talking with your child. The next step is to talk to your GP, who can put you in contact with your local child and adolescent health team or another appropriate professional.



Children at risk of negative peer pressure and influence

Some children are **more likely to be negatively influenced** by peers. These include children who:

- Have poor self-esteem
- Feel they have few friends
- Have special needs.

These children might feel that the only way they'll be included and accepted in social groups is by taking on the behavior, attitudes and look of a group. Also, peer pressure or influence is **strongest in early to middle adolescence**. Boys are more likely to give in to peer pressure than girls.



Is there a peer pressure in Colleges?

Yes, this peer pressure is in all forms of life ranging from academics to extra-curricular to Jobs/internships etc. Surprisingly academics is not where the extremes of peer pressure are seen. Students are burdened with the pressure of expectations from everyone. Many lose sight of their goals, many give up, and many get depressed and struggle to find meaning in their lives.

Life is a bell curve. No matter where you are, if you do not figure among the top 20–30% you are not considered to be the best. I always felt that for most of us, getting into a Good College was a victory that defeated us in life. You don't realize the value of something till you do not have it. Most people outside don't have the Good College Tag, hence the craving for it. Most Good Collegians have lost the value of exceeding expectations because we have done it once and see how futile it is, if it doesn't get us what we want.





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