



HELPING KIDS AND TEENS DEAL WITH PEER PRESSURE

A Parent Conversation Guide



Positive Peers!

WHILE MOST PARENTS WORRY ABOUT THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF PEER PRESSURE, IT'S ALSO GOOD TO REMEMBER THAT SOMETIMES PEER GROUPS CAN HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON KIDS TOO.

Peer pressure is common – it's how you deal with it that matters.

Everybody experiences the need to fit in and belong. This is especially important for children and young people.

Growing up means being exposed to pressures from friends and people inside and outside the family. Peer pressure can come from friendship groups, classmates, teammates or even older siblings. For kids and teens, it's usually very important to their sense of belonging and acceptance that they adopt some of the beliefs and behaviours of their friendship group. This is generally what people mean when they talk about 'peer pressure'.

Peer pressure can be subtle and kids may express it through dressing, talking or behaving in a way that their friends think is acceptable. At other times, peer pressure is more direct and can involve kids feeling pressured into doing things they don't want to do.

Things you might worry about

There are times when you might notice your kids are being influenced by friends or peers in a negative way. There are some common worries and concerns that parents have when it comes to peer pressure.



They may worry their kids will:

- Adopt a negative attitude
- Change the way they dress or act
- Experiment with drugs, cigarettes or alcohol
- Do risky things or be exposed to risky situations
- Lie, cheat or be deceitful
- Have sex or be exposed to pornography
- Steal or take part in other illegal activities
- Stop being friends with peers you liked and approved of

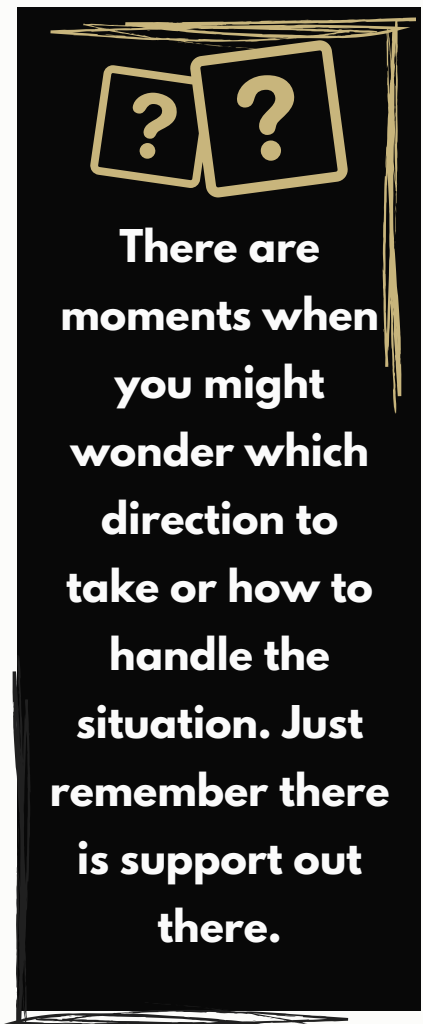
Peer pressure can be hard to stand up to.

SOME KIDS CAN CHANGE AND ADOPT NEW WAYS OF BEHAVING FAIRLY QUICKLY, WHILE OTHER KIDS MIGHT NOT CHANGE AT ALL OR ONLY A LITTLE.

Some parents might wonder why this is happening to their child. What drives kids to go along with peer pressure?

Every child is different and the only way to know for sure is to ask them directly. However, there are some common underlying reasons why kids might give into peer pressure:

- Not having any other friends to hang out with
- Fear of being rejected or criticised
- Fear of embarrassment or judgement
- The need to belong and the sense of safety that it brings
- Boosting their popularity and self-esteem
- To experiment and figure out who they are



What Parents Can Do?

Here are some ideas on how to tackle the issue of peer pressure with your kids. These are long-term strategies you can work at implementing at any time.

Keep in mind that each child and family is different so you may need to try different ways of putting these strategies in place. It may take some trial and error to figure out what works for your family. Talk to a friend, counsellor or support person if you need more help.

- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Let your kids know you're always there to listen and talk to them about what's happening in their life.
- **Build up their confidence by trusting them to make good choices.** Show them you have faith in their ability to make decisions.
- **Show interest in getting to know their friends.** Invite their friends over for dinner or just to hang out with your kids in your own home.
- **Encourage your kids to do a range of activities and meet new people.** Having friends in different settings can take the pressure off trying to fit in with a single friendship group.
- **Try to keep an open mind.** Let them know they can talk to you about things even when it might make you uncomfortable or it challenges you.
- **Understand the strong pull your kids have toward spending time with their peers.** If you can, allow them enough freedom to explore these friendships and try not to take it personally when they don't agree with you about their friends.
- **Pick your battles.** Don't stress over the small things like changes in the way they dress but take the time to talk about the big things that pose the most risks. By not focusing on the small stuff they might be more open to hearing about the big stuff.
- **Teach kids about peer pressure so they are aware of what's happening to them.** Help them understand what peer pressure looks like and how to handle it in the moment.
- **Help them find balance in their life.** Teach them how having friends is important but so is being true to oneself and expressing your own individuality.
- **Set realistic boundaries with your kids.** For example, if you can't stop them being friends with people you don't approve of, you could try negotiating where and when they hang out with their new friends.
- **Come up with a plan so they can get out of tricky situations.** For example, before attending a party, you both agree that they will text you to pick them up if they feel uncomfortable or want to leave. Remember the "X" plan!

Having Conversations About Peer Pressure...

There may be some uncomfortable conversations to be had with your kids. If you can find a good time to sit down in private with your kids, here are some topics you may find helpful to talk about with them:



Be open about your own experiences with peer pressure. Share how you handled it, what you did well, plus any mistakes you made and what you learnt from it.



Teach them how to say no. Find the ability to say no to external pressures yourself and model the behaviour for them. Talk to your kids about how you did that.



Talk to them about how the decisions they make now might impact them in the future. A gentle word or two about the future risks can be enough. If you try to be too demanding or controlling you may push them away and close down the communication.



Discuss the risks involved in underage drinking, smoking cigarettes, unplanned or unprotected sex and using drugs.



You may not have all the answers and that's ok.

It can take more than one conversation with your child to get things on track.

It can be tough guiding your child in positive ways and helping them cope with peer pressure. Remember, you and your family are not alone! If you are in need of help or assistance, please reach out to a school counselor, family physician or even your friends and family to help guide you.



It isn't easy saying 'no' when you're being pressured by your friends. You might be scared they won't like you or want to be your friend anymore. It takes practice standing up to peer pressure and being true to yourself.

Try these tips for staying strong and not giving into peer pressure:

- **A confident 'no thanks' or 'not for me'**
- **Using humour to deflect pressure or attention**
- **Move away from the situation**
- **Be direct and say you don't appreciate feeling pressured**
- **Get support and talk to someone you trust**
- **Know what you're willing to let slide and what you're not okay with**

