

Peer Pressure

Peers

Peers are those who are similar and of the same age group

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is the direct influence on people by peers, the effect on an individual who gets encouraged to follow their peers by changing their attitudes, values or behaviours to conform to those of the influencing group or individual. This can result in either a positive or negative effect or both.

Increased Influence of Peers on Teenagers

peer influence is a better way to describe how teenagers' behaviour is shaped by wanting to feel they belong to a group of friends or peers. Adolescence is the time when a person is most susceptible to peer pressure because peers become an important influence on behaviour during adolescence, and peer pressure has been called a hallmark of adolescent experience. Children entering this period in life become aware for the first time of the other people around them and realize the importance of perception in their interactions. Peer conformity in young people is most pronounced with respect to style, taste, appearance, ideology, and values. Peer pressure is commonly associated with episodes of adolescent risk taking because these activities commonly occur in the company of peers. Affiliation with friends who engage in risk behaviours has been shown to be a strong predictor of an adolescent's own behaviour. Peer pressure can also have positive effects when youth are pressured by their peers toward positive behaviour, such as volunteering for charity or excelling in academics. The importance of peers declines upon entering adulthood. Even though socially accepted children often have the most opportunities and the most positive experiences, the social acceptance (being in the popular crowd) may increase the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour, depending on the norms in the group. Groups of popular children showed a propensity to increase risky, drug-related and delinquent behaviour when this behaviour was likely to receive approval in their groups. Peer pressure was greatest among more popular children because they were the children most attuned to the judgments of their peers, making them more susceptible to group pressures.

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 college, or not working as hard
- smoking or using alcohol or other drugs

Positive Peer Pressure

- Being encouraged to join the Debate Team can improve your self-confidence and your listening and thinking skills
- Going to college can be positive for your future

- Following the rules can keep you out of trouble and focus on what is important
- Showing up at school or college on time helps you learn discipline
- Respecting others will help you go far and will lead to people treating you well.
- Being honest helps people trust you
- Exercising is good for stress and fitness
- Avoiding drugs can keep you good health
- Working hard leads to achievement
- Listening to rap music
- Volunteering at the Boys or Girls Club lets you share your knowledge and skills
- Tutoring other students shares your knowledge

Negative Peer Pressure

- Drinking alcohol while you are underage is dangerous when you are young
- Smoking is very addictive and can result in lung cancer
- Experimenting with drugs can be deadly
- Being encouraged to fight someone can lead to an assault charge
- Stealing something on a dare can lead to imprisonment or a fine or both
- Bullying or teasing others
- Putting your health at risk with too much bodybuilding or dieting
- Skipping school or college
- Wearing clothes you don't like because it is expected
- Doing anything you don't want to do
- Driving fast or drag racing

Helping the child to manage peer pressure and peer influence

Coping well with peer influence is about getting the balance right between being yourself and fitting in **with the group**.

Here are some ideas to help the child with this.

Build up the child's self-esteem and confidences

Children who have strong self-esteem are better at resisting negative peer pressure and influence.

Parents and teachers can build the child's self-esteem and confidence by encouraging them to try new things that give their chance of success, and to keep trying even when things are hard. Parents and teachers can also be a role model for confidence too, and show the child how to act confident as the first step towards feeling confident. Praising the child for trying hard is important for building self-esteem and confidence.

Keep the lines of communication open

Staying connected can help the child feel more comfortable talking to

Suggest ways to say no

The child might need to have some face-saving ways to say no if child's feeling influenced to do something he or she doesn't want to do. For example, friends might be encouraging them

to try smoking. Rather than simply saying ‘No, thanks’, he or she could say something like, ‘No, it makes my asthma worse’, or ‘No, I don’t like the way it makes me smell’.

Give teenagers a way out

If the child feels he’s in a risky situation, it might help if he can text or phone parents or teachers for back-up. Parents and the child could even agree on a coded message for those times when your child doesn’t want to feel embarrassed in front of friends.

It is important to **talk and listen without judging**, and gently help the child see the influence his peers are having.

When to be concerned about peer influence and peer pressure

Mood and behaviour changes are normal in teenagers. But if the child seems to be in a low mood for more than two weeks, or it gets in the way of things she normally enjoys, you might start to worry about your child’s mental health.

Warning signs include:

- low moods, tearfulness or feelings of hopelessness
- aggression or antisocial behaviour that’s not usual for the child
- sudden changes in behaviour, often for no obvious reason
- trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or waking early
- loss of appetite or over-eating
- reluctance to go to school or college
- withdrawal from activities the child used to like
- Statements about wanting to give up, or life not being worth living.

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 behaviour, attitudes and look of a group.

Also, peer pressure or influence is strongest in early to middle adolescence.

How to deal with peer pressure (Tips to the students)

Having friends and feeling connected to a group gives teenagers a sense of belonging and being valued, which helps develop self-esteem and confidence. Friendships also help teenagers learn important social and emotional skills, like being sensitive to other people’s thoughts, feelings and wellbeing.

Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing; sometimes it can be good, such as when your friends stop you from doing something dumb that you'll later regret. But often peer pressure can be linked to negative stuff. The following examples of peer pressure and consider some tips for dealing with them.

Pressure to bully

Seeing friends bullying others in person or online (cyberbullying) can make you feel pressured to get involved. It might seem okay at the time, but later you might feel embarrassed, guilty or ashamed.

- Think about why your friends had such a strong influence on your actions. Was this a way for you to gain self-confidence?
- Did you feel that if you didn't join in, your friends would start to bully you?
- Reflect on whether your friends are having a negative impact on you.
- Don't label yourself a 'bully'. We all make mistakes, but they don't have to permanently define us.
- Aim to develop a stronger sense of your own values and to stop bullying.

Pressure to diet or body-build

If your friends have strict diet or workout regimens, you might feel like you also need to achieve the 'perfect' body. But worrying about your body image can leave you feeling burnt out and stressed about how you look. Are you bored with or anxious about calculating the nutritional value of everything you eat? Are your workouts feeling lacklustre, because you'd rather be doing something else? If you recognise yourself in these scenarios, maybe you're dieting or working out just to fit in with your mates.

- Focus on nourishing your body by engaging in stuff that you enjoy and that empowers you, such as singing, acting or volunteering.
- Spend time with supportive mates and family.
- See a health professional to learn ways of developing a positive body image.
- Remember that no one should pressure you to change the way your body looks; your confidence in your own body is the only thing that matters!

Pressure to take drugs/alcohol

If you've felt pressured into drinking or taking drugs, you might feel guilt and regret afterwards for 'giving in'.

- Talk to a family member or a trusted friend.
- See a counsellor or health professional.
- Remember that many people of your age have sought help, too.

Some ways to handle peer pressure

- **Pursue your own interests.** Hang out with people who like doing the same stuff you do.
- **Say 'no.'** Calmly explain why something's not for you.
- **Don't judge.** Respecting someone else's choice may help them respect yours.

- **Friends don't have to agree on everything.** Understanding that everyone has their own opinion means you can chill out and feel less defensive.

What to do if things get serious

If you're in a situation where you feel threatened, are being hurt, or feel pressured into doing something that you're really uncomfortable with, you need to get help. Tell a family member, a friend from outside the situation, a teacher or a counsellor.

Reference:

- Wikipedia
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>
- <https://au.reachout.com/>