



Resource 11

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is when a child does something he or she does not want to do as a result of being pressured by friends. All children experience peer pressure and give into it at one time or another. Consider these steps that parents can take to minimize the effects of peer pressure or gang activity.

Family is important to teens:

- Develop a close, open and honest relationship with your children so that they will want to identify with and work to please their parents. These children are much more likely to come to their parents when they are in trouble or are having problems. Talk to children about morals and values - the best defense against peer pressure.
- Help children understand peer pressure so they will be better able to make good decisions. Let them know peer pressure is something all children and adults experience at some time and that it is normal to want to fit in. Gangs are less attractive to children who get their needs met at home.
- Plan regular and frequent activities the whole family can participate in such as picnics, hiking, sports, etc. Parents who spend quality time together develop close relationships with their children; thus children are less likely to give in to peer pressure or gangs.

Stay Involved in Your Child's Life

- Encourage friendships with positive role models and join groups or activities which involve interacting with positive role models (i.e. scouting, sports, church groups).
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents to determine if they are a positive influence and have similar values.
- Know where your children are at all times. Supervise them at home, know where they are, who they are with and what they are doing.
- Don't criticize children's friends who might be a negative influence. They will become defensive and continue to be with them. Do discuss specific behaviors and actions. "It seems like every time you are with Tom you get into trouble."
- Encourage a wide variety of friends. This promotes individuality and makes it less likely for children to give in to peer pressure from any one group.
- Teach responsibility. Responsible children consider their options. They tend to cooperate more consciously than "people pleasers" (children who are motivated by approval) by considering their options rather than automatically making choices to avoid conflict or negative reactions from someone.



Help Your Child Develop a Positive Self-Image

Encourage individuality and independence by modeling or demonstrating those behaviors. Parents who resist peer pressure are teaching their children to do the same. Discuss independence with your children and stress the importance of being one's own person and doing what he or she feels is right.

Teach assertiveness through role playing so that children will be able to stand up for what they believe is right. We can also teach problem solving when children are faced with peer pressure by suggesting alternative activities or explaining why they refuse to participate in a certain activity.

Praise assertiveness—behavior that is praised is much more likely to be repeated.

Provide appropriate discipline when children give into peer pressure such as restricting privileges, or not letting the child spend time with the friend or friends with whom he got into trouble.

If you are suspicious that your child may have given into peer pressure, try to figure out the reason the child has given into peer pressure and address it. If they lack self-confidence or self-esteem, then work on building those qualities.

Seek help if a child is consistently giving into peer pressure.

Signs of Peer Pressure

- Excessive demands for material things his friends have
- Disregarding your rules in order to do things with friends
- Stealing with friends
- Any hint of alcohol or drugs
- Teens seriously misleading you about friends or whereabouts
- Doing things to avoid rejection like going along with friends who use poor judgement

Show Teens We Care

- Always take time to really listen
- Give children privacy; teens need space
- Be accepting of our children and not too critical
- Don't rush the teen years or raise false expectations
- Develop a strong sense of family unity by spending time together
- Talk about sex, drugs and alcohol

Peer pressure can be positive. It can keep youth participating in extra-curricular activities, going to meetings and playing on sports teams. The peer group is a source of affection, sympathy and understanding; it is a place for experimentation and a supportive setting for achieving the two primary developmental tasks of adolescence. These are identity (who I am) and autonomy (seeing oneself as separate and independent from parents).

Adapted from: Parents Reaching Out, www.parentsreachingout.org