



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #16

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Peer Pressure

Peer pressure: social pressure from members of your group to believe certain things or act in certain ways in order to be accepted. Peer pressure involves the efforts of a group of equals to make people "follow the rules" of the group's way of behaving. Peer pressure can be both negative and positive. *All children experience peer pressure and give into it at one time or another.* Here are some steps parents can take to minimize the negative effects:

Family is important to teens

- **Develop a close, open, and honest relationship** with your children so they will want to identify with you and work to please you. Children who have strong relationships with their parents are much more likely to come to them when they are in trouble or are having problems. Talk to children about morals and values—the best defense against negative peer pressure.
- **Help children understand peer pressure** so they will be better able to stand up to negative peer pressure and the suggestions of bad companions. Let them know peer pressure is something all children and adults experience at some time, and 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 develop close relationships with their children; thus, children are less likely to give in to peer pressure or gangs. "The family has to be the better gang." (Louis Gonzales, Ph.D.)



Stay Involved in Your Child's Life

- **Encourage friendships with positive role models** and join groups or activities which involve getting together with positive role models, (i.e. scouting, sports, church groups)
- **Get to know our children's friends and their parents** to see if they are a positive influence and have similar values.
- **Know where your children are** and what they are doing. Supervise them at home and know where they are, whom they are with, and what they are doing.
- **Don't criticize the children's friends** who might be a bad 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 and then get grounded."
- **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 their peers. (See PEN Notes #8: Responsibility)

Help Your Child Develop a Positive Self-Image

- Encourage individuality and independence by modeling those behaviors. Parents who say “no” to peer pressure are teaching their children to do the same. Discuss independence with your children and stress the importance of being an individual and doing what is morally right even if it isn't what peers approve of.
- 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. Teach them what to say to explain why they refuse to participate in a certain activity.
- Praise assertiveness since behavior that is praised is much more likely to be repeated.
- Provide appropriate discipline when children give into negative peer pressure. Enforce restitution, restrict privileges, or do not allow your child to spend time with the friend or friends with whom he/she got into trouble.
- If you think your child may have given in to negative peer pressure, try to figure out why and address it. If your child lacks self-confidence or self-esteem, then work on building those qualities.
- Seek help if a child is consistently giving in to peer pressure.

Signs of Peer Pressure:

- ✗ Excessive demands for material things his friends has
- ✗ 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 complying or conforming with friends

Show Teens We Care:

- ✗ Always take time to really listen.
- ✗ Give children privacy; teens need space.
- ✗ Be accepting of our children—don't be 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 keeps youth participating in religious activities, going to meetings and playing on sports teams, even when they are not leaders. It keeps adults going to religious services, serving on community committees and supporting worthwhile causes. 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** (self-separate and independent from parents).

Sources: Parent Education Network: Fact Sheets & Library *The Parent's Little Book of Lists*, Jane Bluestein, Ph.D., *Help Teens Cope With Peer Pressure* Parent Pointers from The Parent Institute *Dealing With Peer Pressure and Bad Companions*, Center For Effective Parenting www.parenting-ed.org

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