

How to Handle Peer Pressure

What Is Peer Pressure?

People who are your age, like your classmates, are called **peers**. When they try to get you to act a certain way, or try to get you to do something, it's called peer pressure.

You might want to be like your peers, even if they're not pressuring you. It's natural to want to fit in.

It's OK to like what your friends and classmates like, or do what they do, as long as it feels right for you, too. But the best thing of all is to be yourself — even if it means being different from your peers.

How Do Peers Affect You?

Peers affect each other just by spending time together. You learn from them, and they learn from you. It's natural to listen to and learn from other people your age.

Peers can affect you in lots of ways. For example, you might see what kids in your class are wearing, like it, and wear something like that, too. It goes both ways. Your peers might watch what you do and start doing it, too.

Peers can influence each other in good ways. Maybe a kid in your science class taught you an easy way to remember the planets in the solar system. Maybe you admire a friend who is a good sport, and you try to be more like them. Maybe you got others excited about your new favorite book and now everyone's reading it.

But peers also can influence each other in ways that aren't so good. They might try to pressure you into doing something you know is wrong. For example, what if a few kids in school try to get you to cut class with them? What if your soccer teammate tries to convince you to be mean to another player and never pass them the ball? What if a kid in the neighborhood wants you to shoplift with them?

What would you do?

Would you give in and go along with peer pressure? Or would you walk away from peer pressure when you know it's not right?

Sometimes it's easier to *know* the right thing to do than it is to do it. **Thinking about it ahead of time helps you be ready to do what's right.** And when you do what's right, you might set a good example for your peers.

Why Do Some Kids Give in to Peer Pressure?

Some kids give in to peer pressure because they want to be liked or they think it helps them fit in. Some worry that other kids might tease them if they don't go along with the group. Others go along because they are curious. Maybe they want to try something that others are doing. They might go along if they think, "Everyone's doing it," even though they know better.

How to Say No to Peer Pressure

- **Know what's right.** Trust your own feelings about what's right and wrong. Ask yourself, "Is it the right thing to do?" You probably already know the answer. When you know the right thing to do, it helps you stand firm.
- **Have a friend who will stand with you.** It can really help to have at least one other peer who is willing to say "No," too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure. It's great to have friends who will back you up when you don't want to do something.
- **Choose good friends.** You've probably had a parent or teacher say, "Choose your friends wisely." Peer pressure is a big reason why they say this. If you choose friends who don't use drugs, don't cut class, don't smoke cigarettes, and don't lie to their parents, then you probably won't do these things either, even if other kids do.
- **Help a friend.** Maybe you notice that a friend is having trouble saying no to peer pressure. You can help by saying, "I'm with you — let's go."

- **Walk away.** If you're faced with peer pressure while you're alone, there are still things you can do. You can stay away from peers who pressure you to do stuff you know is wrong. You can tell them, "Nah" and walk away. Better yet, find other friends and classmates to hang around with.
- **Get advice from an adult.** If you face peer pressure that's hard to handle, get advice from an adult you trust. Talk to a parent, teacher, or school counselor. It can help you feel much better. Plus, they can help you prepare for the next time you face peer pressure.

Positive Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is not always a bad thing. For example, peers can pressure bullies into acting better toward other kids. When enough kids get together, peers can pressure each other into doing what's right!

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