

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Peer Pressure

Peers play a large role in the social and emotional development of children and adolescents. Their influence begins at an early age and increases through the teenage years. It is natural, healthy and important for children to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature.

Peers can be positive and supportive. They can help each other develop new skills, or stimulate interest in books, music or extracurricular activities.

However, peers can also have a negative influence. They can encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use drugs or alcohol, or become involve in other risky behaviors. The majority of teens with substance abuse problems began using drugs or alcohol as a result of peer pressure.

Kids often give in to peer pressure because they want to fit in. They want to be liked and they worry that they may be left out or made fun of if they don't go along with the group.

The following are some tips to help kids deal with peer pressure:

- Stay away from peers who pressure you to do things that seem wrong or dangerous.
- Learn how to say "no," and practice how to avoid or get out of situations which feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Spend time with other kids who resist peer pressure. It helps to have at least one friend who is also willing to say "no."
- If you have problems with peer pressure, talk to a grown up you trust, like a parent, teacher or school counselor.

Parents can also help by recognizing when their child is having a problem with peer pressure. The following are tips for parents to help your child deal with peer pressure:

- Encourage open and honest communication. Let kids know they can come to you if they're feeling pressure to do things that seem wrong or risky.
- Teach your child to be assertive and to resist getting involved in dangerous or inappropriate situations or activities.
- Get to know your child's friends. If issues or problems arise, share your concerns with their parents.
- Help your child develop self-confidence. Kids who feel good about themselves are less vulnerable to peer pressure.

- Develop backup plans to help kids get out of uncomfortable or dangerous situations. For example, let them know you'll always come get them, no questions asked, if they feel worried or unsafe.

If your child has ongoing difficulties with peer pressure, talk to his or her teacher, principal, school counselor or family doctor. If you have questions or concerns about your child's mood, self-esteem or behavior, consider a consultation with a trained and qualified mental health professional.

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