

Peer Pressure

Scenario one: Tonya and Kim absolutely hate their math teacher. He always gives them a hard time in class, and he is so boring. One day before math class, Kim asks Tonya to skip class so they can hang out at the park.

Scenario two: Rick just received his driver's license, and his dad is going to let him borrow his new SUV. However, in order to drive the vehicle, Rick can have no more than two friends in the SUV, is not allowed go out of town and must be home at 11 p.m. Three of Rick's friends want him to drive them to a party 30 miles away.

Scenario three: Nia and Brett have been dating for several months. They haven't discussed sex, but both of Nia's best friends have "gone all the way" with their boyfriends and tell her that most couples their age are having sex. Nia knows she isn't ready for sex, but she doesn't want her friends to think she's immature.

How would you handle peer pressure if you were involved in one of the above situations?

These scenarios are examples of some of the pressure that teens encounter in their lives. Most teens are taught right from wrong at an early age and, thus, know what to do and what not to do. However, when our friends or our peers get in the picture, our vision becomes blurred and all the morals and rules we are taught suddenly disappear.

The Role of Peers

Growing up can be stressful. For the first time in your life, you are becoming independent and are held accountable for the decisions you make. You are going through so many changes. Teens often look to their friends when making decisions. What they do and how they feel about you play an important role in how you perceive yourself.

Your friends have their own set of informal rules. Some peer groups or cliques have their own style of dress or ideas about what's cool. If you're comfortable with what your friends do and enjoy spending time with them, great. However, just because something is normal for a group doesn't mean it's the right thing for you to do. For example, if your friends think it's cool to shoplift from the mall, you should find new friends.

Most people select their friends based on common interests. But if these interests begin to change and you don't want to be a part of what your peer group is involved in, you need to make new friends.

*Tip 1: Real friends will not pressure you to do the wrong things.

*Tip 2: Real friends will not desert you for standing up for what's right.

Negative vs. Positive Peer Pressure

Negative peer pressure is not necessarily illegal. However, it can be dangerous, unhealthy and against school rules, home rules and your values. Below is a list of negative peer pressures:

- Skipping school
- Shoplifting
- Vandalizing someone's property
- Drinking
- Smoking
- Using drugs
- Speeding
- Body piercing and tattoos
- Joining gangs
- Fighting or other forms of violence
- Breaking curfew
- Having sex
- Sneaking out of the house
- Disrespecting authority figures (parents, teachers, principles etc.)

Not all peer pressure is bad. Good peer pressure may consist of studying, following the rules, helping someone in need and volunteering your time in the community. Positive peer pressure isn't usually a problem for most teens, but negative influences are a different story.

Saying No to Peer Pressure

So, how do you resist peer pressure? No one wants to feel left out or ignored. Just remember, it's better to resist peer pressure and lose sorry friends than to risk the alternative – having an unexpected child, losing your parents' trust or getting arrested for doing something illegal.

There are many ways to resist peer pressure:

- Begin by having high self-esteem
- Think about the consequences before you become involved in a negative activity with your peers
- Hang out with positive people
- Ditch the troublemakers
- Don't be afraid to be different
- Never go against your values and beliefs
- Don't do things you're not comfortable doing just to fit in
- Be yourself

Remember, it's okay to do your own thing. You don't have to do things that you don't want to do in order to make friends. Peer pressure will always be an issue for teens and even adults. You have to learn how to be strong and do what you know is right for you.