

Who Influences You?



Introduction

Who influenced you when you were small? It was probably your parents, caregivers, teachers or older family members. They made decisions about the clothes you wore, the food you ate, the activities you did and the people you spent time with.

As you get older, adults will start to have less influence on you. It will become more important to fit in with people of your own age, even if those people are not your close friends. You will find that you want to do something because others in your group, school or neighborhood are doing it. These people are your *peers*.



Who are your peers?

Your peers are other people like you. They are usually your age or at your year level in school. They might be children in your class, friends from outside school or people in other groups you belong to, such as sports clubs, youth groups or scouts. The size of your peer groups can be big or small depending on where you are and who you are with.

As members of peer groups begin to make friends, they start to have more influence on each other's lives. This can be a good or a bad thing. You may share interests and become more sociable and active, but at the same time you might feel pressure to do things that make you feel uncomfortable, such as playing a game or wearing clothes you don't like.



What is peer pressure?

Peer pressure is very powerful. Peer groups can influence the way you dress, behave and think. They can influence the music you listen to, games you play and the TV programs you watch. They can even influence how you live in the future. Positive peer pressure might lead to activities like joining sports clubs or volunteer groups, but negative peer pressure might lead to behavior such as not working hard at school, being rude or making others feel bad.

Sometimes, people use peer pressure as an excuse for bad behavior. "But they made me do it!" isn't a very good excuse, is it? Now that you are older, you can make your own decisions.



How does negative peer pressure affect people?

Negative peer pressure can make people feel scared. When this happens, your body might react in different ways.



Your legs feel shaky.



You have a dry mouth.



You have butterflies in your stomach.



Your heart beats faster.



Your head feels hot.



Your hands and feet sweat.

When someone tries to influence you, it is important to recognize your feelings and how your body is reacting. In this way, you can identify situations that could lead to trouble and you will know what to do next.



Everyone does it.

I'm not talking
to you anymore!

No one will know.

You're scared,
aren't you?

Come on, let's
do it!

Maybe you aren't
my best friend.

What do you need to do?

Kids who get their friends into trouble really aren't good friends, are they? Your peers might say a number of things to make you do something, but remember that the final decision is yours.

The most important thing is to identify whether you want to do something, then think about what good or bad things

could happen. Will you feel embarrassed? Will your family be disappointed? Is the pressure making you feel annoyed or irritated?

Think about what is happening. Do you still feel uncomfortable? What are you going to do? It's time to decide how you are going to say "No!"

How do you say "no?"

It can be difficult to say "no" to your peers, but it should be the least of your problems. After all, it's better than getting into trouble! Here are a few ways you can do it:

Just say "no!" and keep on saying it.

Suggest doing something else. "That sounds boring. Should we watch a movie instead?"

Say you have other plans. "I'm going out with my parents this weekend."

Whatever you do, you should make it clear that you have made your decision and that your decision is final.



Conclusion

Members of positive peer groups have fun, get along with each other, share interests and feel confident. Think about who influences you and whether that influence is positive. Do your peer groups make you feel good?



