

PEER PRESSURE

Most children are greatly influenced by their parents and look to them for support and advice. As they get older and begin to widen out, many youths tend to rely less on their parents and seek advice from their peers. This may be because they feel unable to communicate with their parents or perhaps they need to talk to someone who is closer to their own age. Whatever the reason, it is true to say that your peers can exert a great influence on you. This influence can be a good thing if your friends are mature and reliable. Sadly, in many cases this influence is not good.

Sometimes young people find themselves pressurised into doing things that they know are wrong. Their desire to be accepted by others can lead them to compromise their own beliefs and standards. Some may feel they are strong enough to resist such pressure, but is this a realistic attitude?

Some may find it difficult to accept that, in certain circumstances, peer pressure can be classed as bullying. However, if someone feels pressurised into doing something or acting in a certain way because of fear of rejection or ridicule, then it is a form of bullying. We all have the right to make decisions for ourselves.

Ask the group the following:

1. What is peer pressure?
2. What can peer pressure lead to?
3. Do they feel the need to 'fit in'?
4. How far would they go in order to be accepted by their peers?
5. Do they hate to stand out as different from others?

Give out **WORKSHEET 7** and allow them approximately 10 minutes to fill it in. When they have finished, ask for comments and flipchart their replies.

Give out **WORKSHEET 8** and discuss the questions as a group, flipcharting their replies. At the end of this session, give out **WORKSHEET 9**.

WORKSHEET 7

Think about the following scenarios:

1. You are with a group of friends when one of them offers you a cigarette. You know it is bad for your health and the idea of smoking doesn't appeal to you. You also know that your parents would disapprove, but all eyes are upon you. What would you do?
2. A friend dares you to write something insulting about a teacher on the whiteboard and calls you a chicken because you don't want to do it. You know this will get you into trouble and you actually like this teacher. What would you do?
3. You are going to a party. Your parents have forbidden you to drink alcohol. At the party somebody offers you a drink. If you refuse you will be the only one not drinking. What would you do?
4. It is the night before an exam and you are busy revising. All your friends are going out and they want you to come with them. You know they will call you a swot and ridicule you if you refuse, but this exam is really important to you. What would you do?

WORKSHEET 9

Maybe you have taken part in things you regret due to peer pressure or perhaps you are doing so now. You may feel things are getting out of hand and you don't know what to do about it. This can lead to feelings of self-hatred and fear. You know you should make a stand for your beliefs and you want to stand up for yourself but it is so difficult. What can you do to help yourself?

HOW TO RESIST PEER PRESSURE

- Choose your friends carefully. This may limit your choice of friends but it is better to have only one or two reliable, trustworthy friends than a wide circle of 'friends' who are immature, reckless and irresponsible.
- Develop your own self-worth – you don't need to seek the approval of others.
- Confide in your parents – remember that they are older and more experienced than your friends and they have your best interests at heart.
- Keep yourself occupied – this will ensure that you are too busy to take part in childish and irresponsible pranks.
- Realise that compromising your standards will not make you happy or lead to anything worthwhile.

Remember that, while it is good to have friends, you should not feel forced to talk, dress or act in a way that you are not happy with.

It may be difficult to stand up for what you believe in, but you will be a happier and stronger person if you do.

WORKSHEET 11

Distressing Situations

Look at the following distressing situations. Think carefully about how you would feel about each one and give it a mark of either a, b, c or d.

a = You have no strong feelings about the situation.

b = You would be upset for a short while – hours or days perhaps.

c = You would be sad for a longer period – weeks or even a month or two.

d = You would find this very distressing and would probably be depressed for months

1. Your pet dog / cat / other per has died.
2. You failed an important exam.
3. You have been betrayed by a close friend.
4. You have deeply hurt a close friend and have lost their friendship.
5. You feel very isolated and lonely.
6. You are being picked on / bullied.
7. You have had a serious argument with your parents.
8. You lose a large sum of money.
9. You split up with your boyfriend / girlfriend.
10. Your parents are not getting along and are constantly rowing.
11. You lose your job.
12. You lose a close friend / relative in death.