

Peer pressure



Peer groups are groups of friends of about the same age, often with similar interests. We all belong to a range of peer groups at different times throughout life. Peer pressure is the influence a group has on its members to fit into a particular way of thinking and acting. The influence of peer groups increases as children move into adolescence. They can have a very positive influence, and they may also influence young people in ways you don't like.

Many parents worry about peer pressure, but peer pressure is not about a group forcing someone to do something against their will. It's more about a person choosing to do something because they want acceptance, to belong and feel valued.

It helps for parents to understand the importance of peer groups. Encouraging their positive aspects and learning how to reduce negative ones can help you provide the best support. It can reduce worry for you too!

This PEG uses 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your young person's sex.

Benefits of peer groups

For young people, a peer group is a major source of security where they form their own identity and learn to become independent from parents. In peer groups they learn to take positive risks and form their own ideas and opinions. It's where they practice how to get on in the world and gradually become adults who can make their own decisions.

It's good for parents to understand the importance of peer groups. They can be a great benefit because they help young people to:

- > Meet new people and learn to make friends
- > Feel they belong and are valued and accepted for who they're
- > Get to know their limits and what they're willing to accept
- > Improve their ability to make their own choices
- > Feel secure and increase their self confidence
- > Feel understood by others who are going through the same things
- > Have a safe place to take positive risks and test out values and ideas
- > Increase skills in becoming independent
- > Become involved in new and positive things such as music, activities and other interests

- > Practice getting along with others and learning to give and take
- > Learn about dating.

Things parents worry about

There are lots of things parents worry about during this period of development. Things can be very different as a child begins to mature and become more independent.

- > **The amount of time young people spend with friends:** Young people often spend all day with their friends at school or doing activities and then come home and spend hours on the phone or internet with them. It's normal for young people to spend more time with peers than with their families at this stage
- > **Losing your influence:** Even though the information they get isn't always correct, young people will often seek the views and advice of their peers more than parents. This is particularly so for things that are sensitive or embarrassing, or which they're scared their parents won't approve of. It could be things like smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, or having sex. If you're used to them coming to you for advice it can feel like your views are not important anymore

- > **A peer group making them do things they don't want:** It's rare a group forces a young person to act in a certain way. Peer pressure is more about a young person choosing to do things to be popular, to gain approval from peers and to be part of a group. The less confident and secure a young person is, the more they'll want this approval. Young people who have low self-esteem are more likely to be drawn to groups which see 'having fun' as taking negative risks and doing things to attract negative attention. Young people with good self-esteem are more likely to want to belong to peer groups who have fun by taking positive risks and where achieving is the 'norm'
- > **Young people not saying 'no':** Even adults find it hard to go against their peer groups. Studies show that only one in three adults speak out when they're not happy with something in their peer group. A young person is more able to say 'no' if they're confident and have more than one group of friends
- > **Young people giving up family values:** Young people are exploring values of friends and role models as well as developing values from their own independent thinking. For a while it may seem they've thrown out the important values you taught them, but they're really just testing these values out. In the end they'll form their own individual identity and take on values from a mix of all they've learned.

What you can do

Honest communication is the basis of all good relationships. It's important at this time to continue to be a positive influence in her life by building on the good communication you've developed over the years.

The best way to support her is to:

- > Let her know you understand some of the pressures on her. By recognising that fitting in is very serious and important at this stage, you're not putting pressure on her to choose between family and friends
- > Be open to discussing any issue, no matter how sensitive. This can provide a good balance to the information provided by a peer group. If she knows you'll listen without judging and will help her find her own answers, she'll be more likely to come to you
- > Take time to spend with her and show you care

- > Support her to be confident and true to herself
- > Help her understand the values that are important to her when making decisions and to think about consequences
- > Encourage her to spend time with different people and groups
- > Help her think about ways she can say 'no' when a group is doing something she's not comfortable with
- > Talk to her about how she'll cope if she feels pressure to make risky choices
- > Not take it personally that she wants to spend more time with her friends.

Avoiding problems

Phone and internet use

In our technical world, mobile phones and internet social networking sites have replaced the old ways of keeping in touch with friends. You may need to work out a way to manage the use of phone and internet that works for the whole family. For phones, this may include setting time limits for calls, having certain times when long calls are OK, using 'call waiting', and agreeing on times when mobile phones are turned off. For the internet, it's very important that young people know how to use the internet and social networking sites safely.

Hanging out at your house

There are advantages when his friends hang out at your place, but you don't want your house over-run. You might find it helpful to:

- > Rearrange rooms to provide space and privacy for young people, as well as other house members
- > Keep plenty of low cost healthy food available such as bread, cereal, cheese and fruit
- > Set some 'house rules' with his input. Discuss what to do when the rules are broken
- > Be clear about:
 - what movies are not OK in your house
 - the family rules for using the phone and computer
 - the use of alcohol. Lock alcohol away if necessary
 - sexual behaviour in the house. Remember, in South Australia the legal age of consent for sex is 17 years.



When you're worried about a peer group

You may not be comfortable with his choice of peer groups. This may be because a peer group is into risky things such as using alcohol or drugs, skipping school, shoplifting or vandalising property. Some parents try to enforce rules and monitor activities to stop their young person mixing with the 'wrong' groups. If you do this, you could risk him avoiding you, lying to you or becoming more determined to be part of the group. Criticising his friends is like criticising him and it's likely you'll lose some of your influence on him.

Here are some suggestions:

- > Keep the communication open. Be willing to listen. Get to know the friends and groups who are important to him
- > Think about whether your concerns about his friends are really important. Don't get caught up in minor things such as how they dress
- > If you believe your concerns are serious, talk to him about the behaviour in the group that worries you rather than criticising the friends
- > Talk with him about potential consequences of the behaviour. Look at both the short-term risks and consequences and also how this might affect his future, e.g. getting into trouble with Police
- > Show him you trust him. If he breaks your trust ask him to suggest ways to earn it again. We all make mistakes and need the chance to learn from them
- > Talk to someone who can help if you feel unable to change a serious situation.

Reminders

- > Keep communicating. Listen to her point of view and ask her to listen to yours
- > Let her know you're there for support, whatever happens
- > Understand the benefits of peer groups, how to encourage positive involvement and how to reduce any negatives
- > Support her to understand the values that are important for her when making choices
- > Get to know friends and make them feel welcome in your home
- > Have clear house rules for when friends are hanging out at your house
- > Agree on a way that works for the whole family for phones and the internet
- > Remember, we're all in peer groups. It can be hard to go against a peer group, even for adults who have much more confidence.



Want more information?

Police

Phone 000 if there is immediate danger
Phone 131 444 for non-urgent police attendance

Lifeline: 13 11 14

The Australian Drug Foundation

Alcohol and other drug information, research and fact sheets for parents, young people, health professionals.

www.adf.org.au

Drug Info

Facts and resources about alcohol and drugs.

www.druginfo.adf.org.au

0439 TELL ME

Text a drug name to 0439 835 563 and receive a text with information about the effects of the drug and links to further information.

The Other Talk

Talking with your children about alcohol and other drugs, safe partying and relevant laws.

www.theothertalk.org.au

Reachout

ReachOut provides practical tools and support to help young people get through everything from everyday issues to tough times.

<http://au.reachout.com>

Child Abuse Report Line

Phone 132 111, 24 hours If you are worried a child is being abused or neglected.

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52

Advice on child health and parenting.

Raising Children Network

Information on raising children

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Grog Watch

A blog about preventing alcohol-related harm in families and communities

www.grogwatch.adf.org.au

Parenting Strategies

Parenting Guidelines for Adolescent Alcohol Use; 'Preventing adolescent alcohol misuse' free online course for parents

www.parentingstrategies.net

For young people

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 55 1800

Phone, web or email counselling for children and young people 5-25 years anytime.

www.kidshelp.com.au

ReachOut Australia

Information and online support for young people under 25 on everyday issues as well as tough times.

www.au.reachout.com

The Hormone Factory

Information for young people about puberty, life, sex and the body. This site also supports parents in talking about these topics.

www.thehormonefactory.com

Healthy Minds

Phone: 1300 137 237

Healthy Minds allows people who have a health care card to access a psychologist at no cost. You will need to go to your GP and ask for a Healthy Minds referral under the 'Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS)', and your GP will have a list of participating psychologists that they can refer you to.

Local Services

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687

8am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Headspace

Phone 02 6625 0200

National Youth Mental health service for 12 - 25 year olds.

Lismore Community Mental Health

Phone 02 6620 2300

60 Hunter Street, LISMORE, 2480

Mental health Access Line

Phone 1800 011 511

Family Support Network

Emotional and practical assistance to young people seeking extra support and information to strengthen and maintain relationships. Will provide information on other local services.

Phone 02 6621 2489

Social Futures

Delivers a range of youth and family services

Phone 02 6620 1800

Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services

