



Peer Pressure Summary

Why Peer Pressure?

Children/Teens ages 11-14 are in the process of carving out their identity, and their measuring stick is often their peers' opinions and approval. Peers influence what's acceptable and what's popular. Peer pressure can consume your child/teen with worries about "fitting in." As your child/teen gets older, they will be introduced to greater risk-taking opportunities, which can involve alcohol, drugs, or risky sexual behaviors. With risks like these facing your child/teen, having a secure and open relationship with them so they feel comfortable and confident to face the daily pressures all the while knowing they can always come to you is essential.

Step 1. Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

Find a time when your child/teen feels like talking and you are not pressured. Driving in the car is ideal (when you don't have a time pressure) and your child/teen will feel less "on the spot" because you are not looking directly at them. You might ask:

- *"What are you and your friends most interested in trying that's new and different?"*
- *"Where do you like to hang out with your friends?"*
- *"Are there times when your friends are doing things you don't want to?"*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Tip Listen for interests and ideas your child/teen might have for trying out healthy risks. If you observe your child/teen taking a new interest, create opportunities to experience those risks in safe ways. (examples: rock climbing, roller coasters, water sports, hiking, working with animals, etc.)

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Learn together! It is empowering for you both to know how alcohol and marijuana impact a child's/teen's growing body and brain differently from adults as well as to be aware of the current laws surrounding underage use.
- Model healthy behaviors (and your child/teen will notice and learn!).
- Find a time to talk when your child/teen seems particularly curious, talkative, and receptive.
- Co-create a plan. *"If you are feeling pressured and need to get out, what truthful excuses can we come up with together to leave the situation?"*

- Discuss your family's values around healthy living. *"What do we do to keep healthy (diet, exercise, preventative doctor visits)?" "What are the many substances that alter your body and brain?"*

Tip Let your child/teen know that feeling peer pressure is normal. Everyone feels it at some point. The trick is knowing when to go along and when to bow out gracefully.

Trap Did you know that giving anyone under age 21 sips of alcohol sends a clear message that authority figures feel drinking is acceptable for them? These children/teens are more likely to experiment with alcohol or drugs at a younger age and more frequently with friends than those whose families did not permit sipping. Researchers advise not allowing any drinking even on special occasions for those under 21.

Tip If you are in a circumstance where relatives become obviously intoxicated, it's your responsibility to get your family to safety. Leave the situation. Let your child/teen know that the reason you are leaving is because there are adults who have made unhealthy choices and have lost their sense of control. This is modeling your own resistance to peer pressure!

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Practice assertive communication.
- When your child/teen comes to you with a relationship problem, play coach not problem solver. *"How is it making you feel? What choices do you have? What might happen if you try that out?"*
- Discuss potential scenarios and how your child/teen could handle them.
- Tell stories of your own or your child's/teen's ability to think and act outside the social box.
- Notice when you yourself feel peer pressure and call it out.
- Respect a genuine "No" response from the children/teens in your household.

Tip When your child/teen comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect back their feelings. Ask open-ended questions to prompt their thinking. Show your trust and support that they can solve their own problems with reflection.

Tip Offer conversation starters like "I-messages" to communicate needs in ways that do not place blame or harm anyone. For example, *"I feel uncomfortable when you ask me to drink, because I don't want to."*

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"How do you respond when your friends or other classmates want you to do something you don't want to do?"*

- Reflect on outcomes. *“Seems like you are worrying today about your friends and their impressions of you. Often it helps if you talk about it. What’s going on?”*
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child/teen is eager.
- Engage in further practice. Talk about times when you don’t want to go with the crowd.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice! Times when your child/teen chooses something different than what the crowd is doing are times to recognize. *“I notice you decided to study instead of skipping it to go out with friends. Yes! Excellent.”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine.

Tip Children/Teens ages 11-14 are trying to define their identity as independent people. Comments that point out how they are acting in ways that are self-sufficient will help them see how their decision making is defining who they are and what they value.

Trap Avoid bribes. A bribe is a promise for a behavior, while praise is special attention after the behavior. While bribes may work in the short term, praise grows lasting motivation for good behavior and effort. For example, instead of saying, *“If you check in on time, I will let you stay at your friend’s house longer”* (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. *“You checked in with me like we agreed. I appreciate that!”*

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child’s success today and in their future!

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