

Ten Ways to Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure



Your six-year-old won't wear the sneakers you bought. "Everyone," your child says, "is wearing *those shoes*"—shoes you know cost \$100 a pair.

Your 10-year-old wants pierced ears "because everyone else has them."

Your teenager wants to go to a party where you think alcohol could be present. "But all the popular kids will be there," your teen says.

Peer influence begins when children are young—and increases as they grow older. It is natural and healthy for children to rely more on friends as they mature. Sometimes peer pressure can be harmless or even positive. But it can also cause kids to do poorly in school, to experiment with drugs or alcohol or to become sexually active.

Here are 10 tips for helping your child cope with peer pressure.

QuickTips

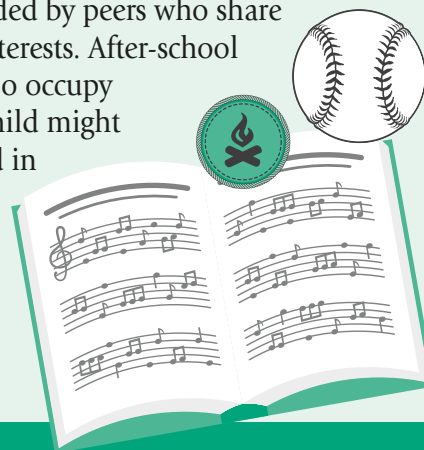
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How Can You Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure?

1. Help your child develop self-confidence. Students who feel good about themselves are less likely to give in to pressure from others. Ask for your child's opinion often. "What do you think we should do tomorrow?" "I need to decide who to vote for in the election. Help me look over these articles and figure out which candidate to support."

When parents show children that they value their opinions, children's self-confidence grows. They learn that they are capable of making good judgments for themselves and will then be less likely to be swayed by peer pressure.

2. Encourage your child to take part in positive activities. Activities like music, athletics, scouts or other youth groups can boost your child's self-esteem. Your child will be surrounded by peers who share these healthy interests. After-school activities can also occupy the time your child might otherwise spend in negative pursuits.



3. Listen to your child. You want your child to make wise decisions because it feels good to do the right thing. That means you have to help your child develop responsible attitudes about important issues. The best way is to spend time talking together. If you watch a TV show that deals with peer pressure, talk about it later. You might ask, "What would you have done in that situation?" Your willingness to listen—and not just lecture—will show that you respect your child's opinions.

4. Encourage your child to suggest other things to do. If a friend is offering alcohol or drugs, it's tough to say no. Instead, your child can make other suggestions. "Let's go see a movie." "Why don't we ride our bikes to the park?"

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5. Get to know your child's friends. Turn your house into the after-school or weekend hangout. For the price of some pizzas or popcorn, you can learn who is influencing your child. And you'll be able to make sure that your child isn't involved in risky behavior.

6. Teach your child to recognize situations that may lead to trouble. An invitation to a place that will have no adult supervision or hanging around students who use drugs can lead to sticky situations. Phrases like "We won't get into any trouble" or "Everybody else is doing it" should tip off your child that this may be a situation to avoid.

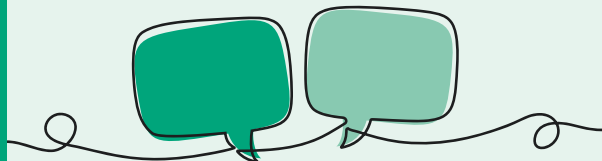
7. Develop backup plans when your child is in a difficult situation. Create a family code that means "Come and get me right away." When you hear or receive a text with this code, you'll know to pick your child up immediately—no questions asked.



8. Teach your child how to say "no." Sometimes, the shortest response is the easiest. Role-play a situation in which your child says, "No, thanks" pleasantly—but firmly. Or help your child think of, and rehearse, other ways to say "no." "I'm doing something else that night." "I could get kicked off the team." And, of course, the oldest—and still effective—reason is, "My parents would ground me for life."

9. Use peer influence as positive pressure. Your child's peers can also act as positive role models when it comes to doing schoolwork, achieving goals, using appropriate social behaviors—or just doing the right thing. To promote positive behaviors, look for opportunities for your child to join a service organization or a community youth group.

10. Talk with other parents at every opportunity. Through family meetings at school and even chats with neighbors, you'll learn that "everybody" isn't allowed to stay out all night. You'll also find out that other students do have to do chores around the house. When your child knows what is really expected of other children, it's easier to handle the sometimes exaggerated claims of peers.



Put Peer Pressure to Work

Children are influenced by their friends, just as adults are. That influence can be helpful or harmful. It can help children do better in school ... or cause real problems.

The good news is that by following the simple steps presented here, you can help your child deal with peer pressure—and even make it a positive influence.



"A friend accepts us as we are, yet helps us be what we should."

—Anonymous

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