



Dealing With Peer Pressure



Everybody's wearing the same trendy jeans. There's just one problem: You find them super uncomfortable. But you want to fit in. Do you wear the jeans anyway?

Everybody else has pierced their ears ... or their nose ... or their tongue. You almost faint when the doctor has to draw blood from your finger. What do you do?

Choices like these are a normal part of growing up. Of course you want to be like your friends. And whether you decide to wear the jeans or not, it won't have any long-term effect on the rest of your life.

But sometimes, peers can influence kids to make choices that do last a lifetime. They can pressure friends to try drugs or alcohol, to do poorly in school or to become sexually active.

You can deal with peer pressure in a positive way. Here are some tips.

Invite kids to your house

Turn your house into a regular hangout (with your parents' permission, of course—and only when they're home). That way, you can pretty much set the rules about what kids can and can't do. You'll always have an easy way to say *no*. "If my parents ever saw anyone drinking here, they'd ground me for the rest of my life."



Know your values and trust your feelings

Long before you're ever offered a cigarette or marijuana, think about what your values are. You know what drugs do to people's bodies and minds. Choose not to use, and be proud of your decision. And if you're in a situation that just doesn't *feel* right, pay attention to your feelings.

Practice ways to say no

Role-play situations in which you can say *no*—nicely, but and firmly. Here are some suggestions:

"The coach says that stuff will really hurt my game."

"No way—my parents would take away my phone."

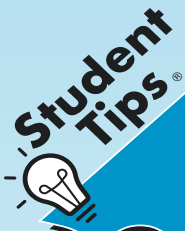
Sometimes, the shortest answer is the easiest. Simply say,

"No, I'm good."

PLAN AHEAD

Some situations are almost guaranteed to lead to trouble. An invitation to a place that will have no adults present or hanging around with a crowd that's into shoplifting is almost sure to cause problems. And phrases like, "We won't get into any trouble" or "Everybody else is doing it" should be a tip-off that this is a situation to avoid.

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Pick friends who share your interests and values

If you're a person who wants to do well in school and stay out of trouble, don't hang around with kids who break the rules and think making good grades is uncool. It's just that simple.

Where can you find friends who share your interests? Join a club or team that sounds fun to you. Kids who love acting or enjoy running track or participate in debate are usually too busy to get involved with the negative stuff.

Look for groups that promote positive behavior. Youth groups, peer mediation groups and volunteer organizations all use peer pressure in positive ways.



Have to make a tough choice? Here's how to decide

Your decisions about jeans and nose rings won't change your life. But some decisions *can* be life changing. So when you have to make a tough choice, think of the letters in the word *decide*. They spell out a process that will help you make the *right* choice.

Define the problem. Sometimes, kids get swept along with the crowd. In any situation, remember that you *always* have a choice. Even if you go to the party and everyone else is drinking, you have a choice of whether to drink or not. Seeing the problem clearly is the first step to solving it.

Examine alternatives. There's rarely just one solution to a problem. If your friends want to go drag racing or try to get into a bar, they might just be looking for excitement. Suggest alternatives: "Why don't we go to that paintball place?" "Why don't we see that new movie?"

Consider how each choice relates to your goals. Getting arrested will *not* help you get into college. Getting addicted to drugs will *not* help you finish high school.

Identify acceptable choices. Some choices that might even be okay for other people wouldn't be acceptable to you. Unacceptable choices are those that cause you to do something you know is wrong, force you to lie to your parents, are against the law or are against your moral beliefs.

Decide on one choice. Once you think through the alternatives, you'll see a choice that probably looks best. When you make *conscious* decisions, you almost always make *better* decisions.

Evaluate the results. Okay, not everything turns out as you planned. After you've made a choice, try to think back on what worked and what didn't. What would you do differently another time?

BACK-UP PLAN

Develop a back-up plan

Sometimes, you get into a situation you can't handle. With your family, work out a code that means, "Come and get me right away." Call or text your parents and say, "What's the score?" They'll know that's their cue to come get you right away—no questions asked.

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Peer pressure affects everyone. By learning these skills, you can keep your friends—and your values.

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