

## Dealing With Peer Pressure

"Come on! ALL of us are cutting math. Who wants to go take that quiz? We're going to take a walk and get lunch instead. Let's go!" says the coolest kid in your class. Do you do what you know is right and go to math class, quiz and all? Or do you give in and go with them?

As you grow older, you'll be faced with some challenging decisions. Some don't have a clear right or wrong answer — like should you play soccer or field hockey? Other decisions involve serious moral questions, like whether to cut class, try cigarettes, or lie to your parents.

Making decisions on your own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressure you one way or another it can be even harder. People who are your age, like your classmates, are called peers. When they try to influence how you act, to get you to do something, it's called **peer pressure**. It's something everyone has to deal with — even adults. Let's talk about how to handle it.

### Defining Peer Pressure

Peers influence your life, even if you don't realize it, just by spending time with you. You learn from them, and they learn from you. It's only human nature to listen to and learn from other people in your age group.

Peers can have a positive influence on each other. Maybe another student in your science class taught you an easy way to remember the planets in the solar system, or someone on the soccer team taught you a cool trick with the ball. You might admire a friend who is always a good sport and try to be more like him or her. Maybe you got others excited about your new favorite book, and now everyone's reading it. These are examples of how peers positively influence each other every day.

Sometimes peers influence each other in negative ways. For example, a few kids in school might try to get you to cut class with them, your soccer friend might try to convince you to be mean to another player and never pass her the ball, or a kid in the neighborhood might want you to shoplift with him.

### **Why Do People Give in to Peer Pressure?**

Some kids give in to peer pressure because they want to be liked, to fit in, or because they worry that other kids might make fun of them if they don't go along with the group. Others go along because they are curious to try something new that others are doing. The idea that "everyone's doing it" can influence some kids to leave their better judgment, or their common sense, behind.

### **Walking Away From Peer Pressure**

It is tough to be the only one who says "no" to peer pressure, but you can do it. Paying attention to your own feelings and beliefs about what is right and wrong can help you know the right thing to do. Inner strength and self-confidence can help you stand firm, walk away, and resist doing something when you know better.

It can really help to have at least one other peer, or friend, who is willing to say "no," too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure and makes it much easier to resist. It's great to have friends with values similar to yours who will back you up when you don't want to do something.

You've probably had a parent or teacher advise you to "choose your friends wisely." Peer pressure is a big reason why they say this. If you choose friends who don't use drugs, cut class, smoke cigarettes, or lie to their parents, then you probably won't do these things either, even if other kids do. Try to help a friend who's having trouble resisting peer pressure. It can be powerful for one kid to join another by simply saying, "I'm with you — let's go."

Even if you're faced with peer pressure while you're alone, there are still things you can do. You can simply stay away from peers who pressure you to do stuff you know is wrong. You can tell them "no" and walk away. Better yet, find other friends and classmates to pal around with.

If you continue to face peer pressure and you're finding it difficult to handle, talk to someone you trust. Don't feel guilty if you've made a mistake or two. Talking to a parent, teacher, or school counselor can help you feel much better and prepare you for the next time you face peer pressure.

### **Powerful, Positive Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure is not always a bad thing. For example, positive peer pressure can be used to pressure bullies into acting better toward other kids. If enough kids get together, peers can pressure each other into doing what's right!