

Teens and Peers: *Feeling Pressured?*



Sometimes it's hard
to say no.
Being ready helps.



*You may find that
your friends respect you
for standing up
for yourself.*

A peer is a person who shares something in common with you, like school or work. Peers may be the friends that you hang out with, or even the people that you'd like to hang out with. Peer pressure is when these people (your peers) try to pressure you to do something that you don't really want to do.

Fitting in

Let's face it: Having things in common with other people is very important to all of us. Everyone wants to fit in with a group, no matter how small that group is. When you are part of a group, you can influence others and feel accepted.

Peer pressure isn't always bad. In fact, a good kind of peer pressure is called "peer influence." Peers can encourage and support one another so that you can be at your best—like being part of a team.

Sometimes, though, being part of a group can cause problems. For example, one person in the group might try to get everyone else to do something that might not feel right to you, like smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or having sex. This sort of peer pressure can be very strong when you are a teen.

Planning ahead

If you want to make choices that you are happy with, knowing peer pressure when you see it and having a plan to deal with it are often really helpful. The tips in this handout may help you do what you think is right—no matter what "everybody else is doing."

What would you do?

Mike has had the same group of friends since second grade. Since he started high school this year, he has been hanging out with a new group of friends. His new friends don't like his old friends and don't want them around. When Mike tries to get the two groups to go to the movies together, for example, his new friends give Mike a hard time and call him a loser for hanging out with his old buddies. What should Mike do? What would you do?

Maria's friends have been cutting class a lot lately. They want her to come with them to hang out at the mall. Maria is working hard in school, and she doesn't want to blow it by getting caught cutting class. She also doesn't want to disappoint her mom, but she's afraid to be left out. What should Maria do? What would you do?

Leticia's best friend, Amanda, has taken some of her older brother's cigarettes and wants Leticia to smoke them with her. Leticia really doesn't want to smoke, but she doesn't want to make Amanda angry. What should Leticia do? What would you do?

Mike, Maria, and Leticia are dealing with peer pressure.

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Tips to release the pressure

Obviously, it can be hard for you to go against a group of friends who want you to do something that you don't want to do. It can be just as hard to say "no" to just one person. Here are some ideas to help you get out of a hard situation.

- *Turn it around.* If someone says to you, "Why don't you want to do this?" you can ask, "Why do you want to do that?" For example, if you're offered a cigarette, you could say, "Why do you want to smoke? It just makes you smell bad."
- *Make yourself clear.* If someone is trying to turn you against something you believe in, you could say, "No, that's okay. You do what you want, and so will I."
- *Try something different.* Try suggesting something else that you could do that's fun and isn't going to make you uncomfortable.
- *Find the exit.* If you are not comfortable with a situation, get out of it the best way you can. Say something like, "I'm outta here. I'll catch up with you later."

If you are unsure about the choices you need to make, talk to someone you trust—like your parents, another adult, or a close friend who won't judge you. Make up your mind and stick with it, and you won't give someone else a chance to make up your mind for you.

Every choice involves some risk. You may be worried that your friends won't like you if you don't want to do what they're doing. But you don't have to be the same as your friends. In fact, most people like to do different things. You

may find that your friends respect you for standing up for yourself. And you just may end up feeling pretty good.

Be on the lookout

Be prepared in case people try to change your mind, ignore you, or tell others not to hang out with you.

Have you heard these before?

- "You don't know what you're missing."
- "What are you scared of?"
- "Quit being such a baby."

What could you say?

- "Yeah, well, I'm not interested in finding out right now."
- "It's not about being scared, it's about being smart."
- "I don't need to prove anything. That's just not my style."

Decide for yourself

Your peers may pressure you with messages they get from the media (movies, TV shows, music videos). They all show people your age smoking, drinking, doing drugs, having sex—which is not a real picture of what most young people are doing at all.

If you are being pressured to do something you don't want to do, ask yourself:

- Is this person a good friend?
- Does he or she respect me and my opinion?

Doing your own thing can be hard, but it can also be fun. Find friends who feel like you do and who support you in whatever you want to do. Remember that respect goes both ways. It is not okay to pressure anyone else. You know how bad that can make you feel, so don't put anyone else through it.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of the information or medical care you receive from your medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your physician or other medical professional.



A good friend:

- respects you
- doesn't force you to do anything
- wants you to be safe

Getting help from Kaiser Permanente

Teens can make their own appointments and come in to see a doctor, nurse, or counselor at Kaiser Permanente clinics. Some Kaiser Permanente facilities have a teen clinic with information and services especially for teens. All facilities have doctors, nurses, health educators, or mental health professionals who see teen patients.

To make an appointment or to talk with an advice nurse, call your local Kaiser Permanente facility.

Other Resources

Web sites

- **Kaiser Permanente**
www.kaiserpermanente.org
- **KidsHealth Teen Page**
www.kidshealth.org/teen/index.html
- **Planned Parenthood's Teen Page**
www.teenwire.com

Phone numbers

- **California Youth Crisis Hotline**
1-800-843-5200
- **Child Abuse Hotline**
1-800-4 A CHILD
- **National STD Hotline**
1-800-227-8922
- **National Alcohol/Drugs Helpline**
1-800-662-HELP
- **Emergency Contraception Hotline**
1-888-NOT-2-LATE
- **Kaiser Permanente Healthphone**
1-800-33-ASK ME.

Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook

Visit your local Health Education Department or Center.