

Middle School Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is the influence to go along with the beliefs and actions of one's peers. Peer pressure may be positive when it inspires a person to do something worthwhile. Positive peer pressure uses encouraging words and expressions. Negative peer pressure tries to get a person to do something harmful. It may involve threats, bribes, teasing, and name-calling (*Allred, Tiffanie, Teen Health Course 3. 2003. Prevention Dimensions "Jelly Bean Jar"*).

Friendships are an important part of life:

- They should help us to become better people.
- Good friendships bring us happiness and joy.
- Dangerous relationships where friends pressure us to make poor choices often bring us anxiety, sadness and guilt.

Peer Pressure vs. Peer Influence

We can exert a negative pressure or a positive influence upon each other, for example:

- Peer Pressure
 - Using drugs
 - Misbehaving in class
 - Stealing
 - Making fun of someone
- Peer Influence
 - Doing your best at school
 - Playing sports
 - Being inclusive
 - Helping those in need

Facing Tough Situations

Since peer pressure can be a difficult part of middle school life, here are some ways to stand up to it (adapted from: *Right decisions, Right Now* program: www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com.) It's important to be firm and confident when using these strategies:

- Suggest something else:
 - *No, thanks. I'd just rather not. Let's go talk to Alexis instead.*
- Use humor:
 - *No, thanks. I want to make sure everyone can smell my pretty perfume.*
- Talk about the consequences:
 - *No, I think that if we have a party and don't include Sarah that she will be really disappointed. I wouldn't want to be left out.*
- Stand up for yourself:

- *No, I think I'll pass. (If the person keeps pressuring you...) I'm not going to do that, and I wish you would stop pressuring me.*
- Blame your parents:
 - *No. If I do this I'm sure my parents will find out and I'll be grounded forever.*
- Change the subject:
 - *No, thanks. Did you watch that new show last night?*
- Reverse the pressure:
 - *Why would anyone want to smoke? It smells bad, it's expensive, illegal, and can give you lung cancer.*

Who are you and what do you stand for?

Students should be encouraged to look at what is important to them. It is more likely that a student who has strong faith and an understanding of their goals will be able to resist peer pressure. Knowing who you are and what you believe in will help you to find the strength to resist negative peer pressure.

- It will help you to be a force for positive peer influence.
- A strong faith protects students from giving in to peer pressure.
- You are not alone in your struggles to be important to your friends and family.

Resources

- www.lifeteen.org has video clips about peer pressure, gossip, and many other topics relevant to teens.
- <http://rightdecisionsrightnow.com/index.php> website focuses on preventing tobacco use. However, it has good resources and information relevant to resisting any type of peer pressure.

Encourage one another

St. Paul is an example to us on how to help our friends; he writes to his fellow Christians encouraging them to do the right thing because he wants what is best for them.

Philippians 1:3-11 (New Living Translation) Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

“Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and

confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.”