

Teenage peer pressure

At a glance

- It's quite common for teenagers to be vulnerable to peer pressure and make mistakes – but most will learn from them and grow up wiser.
- Don't get pushed to the edge of your teenager's life — get to know their friends and encourage them to talk to you about their feelings.
- If you're worried your teenager is getting out of control, let them know that there is plenty of support if they need it – from you, teachers, friends or counsellors.

Peer pressure

When we're influenced by peer pressure, we often do things we wouldn't do on our own. And teenagers are particularly vulnerable to the influence of others. Peer pressure can be positive – for example, school friends meeting up to revise together. And it can be negative – giving out a message that it's cool to smoke, for example. As a parent, it's easy to feel helpless if you think your teenager is being influenced by the wrong crowd. But by understanding how they're feeling and keeping the lines of communication open between you, you can help them navigate this tricky time and make the right decisions for themselves.

Why teenagers are so vulnerable to peer pressure

- It's important for teenagers to feel that they are accepted and that they belong.
- Disagreeing with their peer group can feel very risky.
- Teenagers often test their parents' boundaries to see how much they can get away with.
- They often try to assert their independence. This may involve listening to their parents and then doing the opposite.

How to help your teenager to resist peer pressure

- Give your teenager a model for healthy relationships through your relationship with them. Set appropriate boundaries and stick to them. Encourage open and honest conversation and share your concerns.

- Get to know their friends. Learn their names and invite them to your home so you can talk and listen to them. Introduce yourself to their parents.
- Encourage your teenager to express their own thoughts and feelings. And validate them even when they're different to yours. This will help them to feel confident about their own opinions when they are different from their peers.
- Nurture your teenager's self-esteem by praising them and helping them see their positive points. This will help them to stand up for themselves when under pressure.
- Never attack their friends. This will feel like a personal attack to your teenager and may also make them more likely to spend more time with them.
- Encourage open and honest communication by trying not to react angrily or punitively when your teenager tells you things you don't like. Instead stay calm, ask them why they are behaving a certain way and be honest about why you disapprove.
- Check that your teenager feels comfortable about saying no. Ask them how they might handle certain situations, like being offered drugs at a party. It might help to role play these conversations to give your teenager a chance to practise.
- Talk to your teenager about how we know who our 'real' friends are. And how we can decide when our friends are encouraging us to do things for our own good or for their own, selfish reasons. See this as a discussion rather than a chance for you to impart your wisdom.

Remember that we all learn from mistakes, and it is likely that your teenager will make many. When this happens, encourage them to think about what went wrong and what they might do differently next time, without blaming them or punishing them. Let your teenager know that they can always come to you for help if they need to.

What to do if things go wrong

If you're worried that your teenager is out of control or that you're powerless to prevent the bad influence of their peer group, try following this advice:

- Get support from others who have been through the same situation. Ask them how they dealt with their teenager.
- If you have a partner, make sure that you are supporting each other and presenting a united front to your teenager. If you don't have a partner, it may be useful to discuss your approach with a friend or family member and get their suggestions or feedback on what you've decided.
- If your teenager continues to feel unhappy, confused or angry, consider suggesting that they talk to a counsellor at school or through their doctor. If they are reluctant, it may still help for them to know that support is there even if they don't want to take it up immediately. It might also be useful for you to seek professional help.

It's quite common for parents to feel like they're struggling with their teenager or worried about the influence of their friends. By making sure that you keep the lines of communication open between you, you can help them to resist the worst of peer pressure. And help them grow into wiser, independent adults.



Critical support when you need it

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