

PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure is when your friends persuade you to do something you would normally not do, or that you don't think it would be wise to do. We've all heard the old saying "If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" Of course you wouldn't. However, you may be surprised to hear that quite often people are strongly affected by peer pressure. You have to learn when to be influenced by your peers and when not to.

POSITIVE PEER PRESSURE

When we think of peer pressure we usually automatically think of it as a negative thing. However, sometimes friends can be a good support to encourage us to step out and take on new challenges. Perhaps we just don't have the courage to do something and friends can help support us and walk us through it.

Another positive way peer pressure influences friends is by talking them out of dangerous or foolish acts, such as drinking and driving. If the peer pressure is coming from someone you really trust and respect and it results in a positive outcome for you, than giving in to peer pressure was a good thing.

NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

This is the opposite of positive peer pressure, referring to doing something you otherwise would not do, often with negative consequences. Whether we would like to admit it or not, we have all given in to negative peer pressure at some point in our lives. Friends always seem to have an opinion and may offer it to us whether we want to hear it or not. The real issue is whether or not you have the courage to disagree with them and are able to stand up for your own opinion and for who you are. After all, you know what's best for you and no good friend would try to talk you into doing something you don't want to do. Particularly if it could be harmful to you.

COMBATING NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

The best way to fight negative peer pressure is to be prepared! Here's a list of tips to help you:

- 1.** Play a script out in your mind. Think of possible scenarios and what you could say or do.
- 2.** Educate yourself. Learn about issues like drugs so you can confidently speak your opinion knowing the facts.
- 3.** Speaking out pays off. If you hesitate, you may be pressured more.
- 4.** Respect yourself. Refuse to give up on your values.
- 5.** It's your life! Never forget you have a choice.
- 6.** Refuse. Don't let other people intimidate you.
- 7.** Don't put yourself in a situation in which you know you will be pressured to do something that you may later regret.
- 8.** Pick your friends wisely. Hanging out with people who share your values is good.

if someone is frequently pressuring you to do things you are not comfortable with, here are a few things to consider:

- 1.** What is in this relationship for you?
- 2.** Do you respect them and their opinions?
- 3.** Do you trust this person?
- 4.** If you give in to the pressure, will you regret it later?
- 5.** Does it go against your morals or values?
- 6.** Does this person respect you and your opinion?
- 7.** Do you respect yourself?
- 8.** What will you lose if you don't do it?

9. What benefit is there in doing it?

10. Is this a relationship that you need or is it more trouble than it is worth?

In the end don't worry about being rejected by not following the crowd, because if you had given in you'd be rejecting yourself and that's more important! Remember, a friend will respect you for what and who you are and will not try to force you to become someone you are not.

~~ LEARN FROM KELLY'S STORY ~~

My first semester in grade 10, I met this girl named Rhonda. She seemed really nice and we would hang out together between classes. We would go shopping a lot and get together to chat all the time. I had other friends too that I would meet up with often, but Rhonda was too shy to usually come along with all of us. So just the two of us would hang out. Anyway, one day after we were shopping we got home and laid our new clothes out on the couch to see what we bought. I only remembered Rhonda buying two shirts and a skirt, but she pulled out five shirts, a pair of jeans and three skirts from her bags. I was surprised and said, "I totally don't remember you buying that much stuff! Where was I when you got all that?" She laughed and said "I didn't, they just followed me home." I was totally shocked at her sarcasm and knew right away she stole them. She admitted that she steals all the time and that I should do it too. I really didn't want friends who are into that sort of thing, but I didn't want to lose my new best friend, so I just forced myself to laugh along with her.

What changed the situation?

The next weekend we went shopping again and she kept telling me to steal. I refused to! But she kept on bugging me; then when I wasn't looking she dropped a shirt into my bag. I went into the change room to try on something, I noticed the shirt in my bag. Obviously she put it there so I was pretty upset. What kind of friend would force me to steal after I said no!? I took the shirt out of my bag and stomped out of the store. I waited outside to cool off. When she finally came out of the store, so did the security guards, one on each side of her! That could have been me!! Was I ever relieved that I didn't listen to her. I realized she wasn't a very good friend and we don't hang out anymore.

my advice to someone under peer pressure:

Think for yourself. No friend would try to bring you down with them. Listen to your gut, it often knows best!! Besides, real friends would never try to convince you to do something illegal, especially after you say no!