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Helping Teens Navigate Peer Relationships



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OBJECTIVES

Following this lesson, participants will understand:

- Adolescents' normal developmental shift from parents and family to peers
- The importance of peers to teens
- The basics of peer relationships for teens
- How peer pressure influences teens
- The positives and negatives of peer pressure
- Ways parents influence their teen's attitudes, interests, and beliefs

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THINK ABOUT:

- Your teen's relationships with peers
- Changes in peer relationships as your child entered the teen years

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DEFINITION OF PEERS

The larger group of friends and acquaintances of about the same age who share similar experiences.



DEFINITION OF CLIQUES

- Smaller than a peer group
- Members feel they know each other well and appreciate each other; they are friends
- Cliques can have both positive and negative influences on a teen

DEFINITION OF CROWDS

- The reputation-based groups typically found in schools
- Crowds form for different reasons, such as similar interests or social status
- The exact nature of crowds can vary, but they exist in every school

PEERS ARE IMPORTANT TO TEENS

- For teens
 - A shift in focus from parents – and the family as a whole – to peers is normal
 - Parents and family are still important, but secondary to friends
- For parents
 - Set expectations that teens stay involved with the family

WHAT PEERS PROVIDE FOR TEENS

- Support for figuring out abilities and interests
- A place to learn how to interact with others
- Independence from adults; development of identity
- A place to learn how to deal with problems
- Emotional support
- Opportunities to develop friendships

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

If your teen:

- Appears to have no friends
- Is secretive about friends or says “you won’t like them”
- Suddenly loses interest in friends and wants to be alone for more than two weeks
- Has friends who are much older

PEERS AND PEER PRESSURE

Write down one or two words you think of when you hear the term "peer pressure."



QUESTION 1

Teens are not all the same in their susceptibility to peer influence.

True or false?

ANSWER 1: TRUE

- Susceptibility to peer pressure is unique
- Boys are more susceptible than girls, especially in risky situations
- Younger teens are more easily influenced than older ones
- Peer pressure peaks in 8th or 9th grade
- Individual characteristics make a difference
- Peer pressure varies by situation and context

QUESTION 2

It is normal for teens to want to spend more time with friends than with their parents or other family members.

True or false?

ANSWER 2: TRUE

- Teens naturally shift focus from parents and family to peers – friends and acquaintances their age
- This is due, in part, to teens' growing independence
- However . . . parents and family are still important and still influence teens

QUESTION 3

Peer pressure can be both positive and negative.

True or false?



ANSWER 3: TRUE

“It is not a question of whether or not teens will experience peer pressure, but rather *what kind* of pressure.”

Laurence Steinberg

QUESTION 4

Teens are heavily influenced by their friends, even about issues where they already have existing beliefs.

True or false?

ANSWER 4: FALSE

- A teen with strong feelings or beliefs is likely to stick to them, regardless of friends' influence
- Peer pressure is real, but teens choose like-minded friends in the first place
- This makes a switch to radically different behavior unlikely
- Parents can instill positive values in children before they become teens
- Seek professionals' help if negative patterns are emerging or already set

QUESTION 5

Teens are influenced far more by their peers than by their parents on every issue.



True or false?

ANSWER 5: FALSE

- Teens are influenced by *peers* about short-term, popular culture choices, such as music, fashion, and hairstyle
- Teens are influenced by *parents* on long-term, substantive issues, such as college and vocational choices

QUESTION 6

A teen's friends will typically have views opposing those of the teen's parents.

True or false?

ANSWER 6: FALSE

- Teens and parents may be closer than they think on issues
- Teens and parents can agree on fundamentals, but differ on approach or preferences

QUESTION 7

Peer pressure for teens is very direct – “in your face.”

True or false?



ANSWER 7: FALSE

- Peer influence exists in many forms and degrees
- It's usually more subtle than direct
- A teen's take on pressure to drink alcohol: “No one shoves a beer in your hand, [but] if everybody else is drinking, you feel a little weird sipping a soda.”

QUESTION 8

There is nothing parents can do to help their teen deal with peer pressure.

True or false?

ANSWER 8: FALSE

- Parents *do* influence how teens handle peer pressure.
- Ways parents can help:
 - Build teens' self-esteem by talking to them about their strengths and talents
 - Encourage independent thinking and decision-making skills
 - Talk through challenging situations their teen might encounter with peers

PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Keep the parent-teen relationship going and growing.

- A good relationship with parents will weather the storm of disagreement over friends and what they want to do.
- Talk with your teen about friends and activities in day-to-day conversations, not just in response to demands for information.
- Be sure your home is a comfortable place for your teen to be his or her own person.

PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Continue to share your values and standards.

- Keep talking about your family's values.
- A family's values and standards influence a teen's choice of friends.
- Teens often have similar views to their parents about substantive issues, although they might not be evident until they're older.

PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Help teens build self-esteem by discovering strengths and talents.

- As teens get older, their interests narrow and strengths begin to emerge.
- Even so, sometimes strengths are not obvious. Trying new things helps reveal them.
- Besides building self-esteem, knowing strengths can help teens find direction in life.

PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Encourage independent thinking and decision making within the family.

- Teens will learn skills to help them effectively handle peer pressure, including the ability to:
 - Respectfully voice an opinion, and
 - Say “no” to risky behavior.



PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Talk with teens about potentially risky situations they might encounter.

- Parents can help teens:
 - Imagine scenarios and anticipate ways to respond
 - Think about positive alternatives to getting involved in risky situations

PARENTS, YOU CAN HELP!

Know your teen's friends.

- Take the time to get to know them
- Look beyond appearances
- Make your home welcoming to your child's friends
- Consider inviting them to family activities

FRIENDS ARE EVERYTHING

In small classes, all participants:

- Choose two scenarios:
 - One from parents' perspective
 - One from teen's perspective
- Discuss each scenario per instructions in the discussion guide
- Present highlights per guidance from facilitator

FRIENDS ARE EVERYTHING

In large classes, participants form small groups of 2-3 people. Each group:

- Chooses two scenarios:
 - One from parents' perspective
 - One from teen's perspective
- Discusses each scenario per instructions in the discussion guide
- Present highlights to full group

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Share your ideas for helping your teens stand up for their beliefs and do what they think is right.



TRY THIS AT HOME

Engage with your teen:

- Make an extra effort to listen
- Welcome your teen's friends to your home
- Take the true or false quiz together at home (if you didn't do so in the workshop)

LET'S REVIEW

- Teens naturally shift focus from parents to peers
- Peers can have both positive and negative effects
- Peer pressure exists, but parents *still* have an influence on teens. Parents should:
 - Stay connected and listen
 - Show love and support

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EVALUATION AND WRAP-UP

Please complete the evaluation before you go:

- Survey is anonymous
- Feedback will help improve future classes

Thank you for participating and completing the evaluation!

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find more information on parenting on the University of Minnesota Extension website at www.extension.umn.edu.

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