

**HELPING TEENS NAVIGATE PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

Peers and Peer Pressure: True or False?

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Please circle “True” or “False” for each statement. Base your answers on what you’ve learned so far in class and your own experience.

1. Teens are all the same in their susceptibility to peer influence.	True	False
2. It is normal for teens to want to spend more time with friends than with parents or other family members.	True	False
3. Peer pressure can be both positive and negative.	True	False
4. Teens are heavily influenced by their friends, even about issues where they already have existing beliefs.	True	False
5. Teens are influenced far more by their peers than by their parents on every issue.	True	False
6. A teen’s friends will typically have views opposing those of the teen’s parents.	True	False
7. Peer pressure for teens is very direct — “in your face.”	True	False
8. There is nothing parents can do to help their teen deal with peer pressure.	True	False



Peers and Peer Pressure: True or False?

Answer Key

1. Teens are all the same in their susceptibility to peer influence.

False. A teen's reaction to peer pressure is as unique as that teen and depends on many factors, including gender and age. Boys are more susceptible to peer pressure than girls, particularly in risky situations. Younger teens are more easily influenced than older teens; peer pressure seems to peak around 8th or 9th grade. Individual characteristics such as confidence level, personality, and maturity also make a difference. The situation and context in which peer pressure occurs also has an influence on a teen's susceptibility to it. For example, a teen will feel peer pressure within a closely knit group of friends more strongly than generalized peer pressure from acquaintances.

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

True. It is normal for teens to shift their focus from their parents and family to their peers. Due in part to teens' growing independence, peers become much more important than they were during childhood. This does not mean that parents and other family members are not important or that they do not influence the teen, but rather the teen is focusing more on social relationships outside the family compared to childhood.

3. Peer pressure can be both positive and negative.

True. Peers may pressure each other into negative behaviors or away from positive behaviors, but they can also push teens in positive directions. For example, peer pressure not to smoke is the best deterrent. According to Laurence Steinberg, an expert in adolescent development, "It is not a question of whether or not teens will experience peer pressure, but rather what kind of pressure."

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

False. If a teen already has strong feelings or beliefs about an issue and is comfortable with those values, he or she is more likely to stick to them regardless of their friends' influence. Teens tend to choose like-minded friends in the first place, which makes peer pressure to engage in radically different behavior less likely. Peer groups typically do not redirect or radically change group members' choices and behaviors, but tend to reinforce what was there to begin with. This is true for both positive and negative (antisocial) peer groups. As a result, it is important for parents to discuss values with their children before they become teenagers. If negative patterns are emerging or set, parents need to consider why and how their teen chose their friends and discuss this with their teen. Parents may need to seek professionals' help for this.



5. Teens are influenced far more by their peers than by their parents on every issue.
False. Teens are influenced by their peers on popular culture choices — such as music, fashion, and appearance. However, teens are influenced by parents about long-term issues, such as college and vocational choices, and political, moral, and religious beliefs and values.
6. A teen’s friends will typically have views opposing those of the teen’s parents.
False. Teens and their parents may be closer than they think on issues. Although a teen’s choice of things like clothes or music might be objectionable to a parent, other more fundamental beliefs may be quite similar. Teens and parents might share some common beliefs but each have their own opinion based on their peers and changing social practices. For example, parents and teens may both value the teen’s participation in after-school activities, but differ on the types of activities. Parents might want their teen to continue participating in activities their teen is already engaged in, such as choir. However, the teen’s friends may be on the cross country team, and the teen may want to spend more time with friends and join the cross-country team.
7. Peer pressure for teens is very direct — “in your face.”
False. Peer pressure exists in many forms. It is often more subtle, such as modeling a way to act or being supportive of what someone says or does, rather than direct or explicit, such as ordering someone to behave a certain way. Here is the way one teen described peer pressure to drink alcohol: “It’s there if you want it, but nobody gives you a hard time if you don’t. Like, no one comes up and shoves a beer in your hand and says, ‘Here, drink it!’ Of course, if everybody else is drinking you may feel a little weird just sipping a soda.”
8. There is nothing parents can do to help their teenage children deal with peer pressure.
False. Parents do influence how teens handle peer pressure. Parents can:
 - Build their teen’s self-esteem by talking to them about their strengths and talents.
 - Encourage independent thinking and decision-making skills within the family, so — those skills can extend to peer relationships.
 - Talk through challenging situations their teen might encounter with peers, and discuss ways to effectively respond in those situations.
 - Support their teen’s friendships with peers who share their family’s values.