

**Parenting Discussion Group Article & Questions
For Parents of Children 7 -12 yrs
Topic: Peer Pressure**

Article: Everyone else does it, Perspective Magazine, Adapted from Hacer Familia

Please read the following article and then answer the questions at the end of this document.

The Parenting Discussion group should not run for longer than an hour.
If you have any feedback about this topic or the questions used, please forward your comments to elisabeth@familyeducation.org.au

How to Manage the Small Group

- select a leader for the session
- know the time limit and organise time accordingly. Leave time for summing up at the end.
- try to include everyone without letting someone dominate
- don't let people talk too much about their own children.
- avoid unnecessary digressions. This can be done by refocusing the group's attention back on the question and using questions like:
 - "What does everyone else think?"
 - "Does everyone agree?"
 - "What about.....?" or
 - "Do you think....?"

YOUR kids



Everyone else does it!

Peer pressure is a strong influence upon how all of us behave. But we feel it far more keenly as teenagers than at any other time in our lives. There are many reasons: lack of self-confidence, insecurity, and a desire not to stand out from the crowd. The best way to hide is to pretend that you are just another pea in the pod. A group is the cosiest bolt-hole from yourself.

Adults know all about peer pressure, of course. If you are an accountant in the City, you are expected to wear a conservative dark suit. Just try showing up in jeans!

But for teenagers, the problem of conformity is far more serious. Every parent is at least dimly aware of how much their child's behaviour changes when he or she is with a group of friends. It is as if they are part of a flock of sheep. They behave as their friends behave; they think as their friends think; they dress as their friends dress...

It is important for parents to understand why peer pressure is so strong and why teenagers are so afraid of being rejected at this stage in their life. It is a natural consequence of youthful insecurity. They don't know what they want and they don't know what is going to happen to them. They can't even trust themselves: on the spur of the moment, they might pick a fight with their best friend. School can become a source of frustration rather than a challenge. They can feel terribly hurt by a former girlfriend or

boyfriend. Even their body rebels and breaks out into pimples. All of these new and unfamiliar feelings can shake someone with an unformed personality.

Not only do they feel insecure, but teenagers also feel inferior. When they feel that no one respects them and know that often they behave rather foolishly, then they become even more afraid of ridicule or rejection. They fear that the group will spurn them, that they won't be invited to a party, that they will fail... At this time of

life, their great wish is to be accepted.

And if the teenager has a defect which really makes him or her different from friends, such as big ears, shortness or obesity, the longing to be accepted can become an obsession. They are prepared to behave like sheep without realising how ridiculous they look.

Group pressure obliges them to do things to prove their loyalty and conformity. Sometimes these are unimportant stupidities; but they can also be serious moral dangers. And even though they know perfectly well what they are doing, teenagers can sometimes risk anything to keep up appearances in the group. It might even be taking drugs at a disco, binge drinking at a party, watching X-rated videos at a friend's house or vandalism.

What can parents do to coach their children in resisting peer pressure?

First of all, Mum and Dad should realise that problems with their teenagers begin in infancy and childhood. They do not come out of the blue. "Disasters" should prompt them to examine their approach to parenting—perhaps there are lessons which can be applied to younger children.

Here are some areas to look at:

– What ideals does your teenager have? If group approval is the strongest motivation in his or her life, there could be a vacuum of idealism and principles. Perhaps an unfortunate incident can be a chance to discover what really motivates your teenager.

– What group do they belong to? Peer pressure can be also be positive. If their friends are fun-loving but sensible and hard-working, they can support your child's desire to do the right thing. It is very important to know whom they associate with. If you are not happy with their friends, try to

steer them in a different direction. But be careful not to confront them over their friendships or to criticise their friends.

– Talk with them about the dangers that they might encounter. Don't be naïve and think that your child would never be tempted to misbehave. Ask them what they would do. Suggest ways to counter the pressure or escape from it.

– Help your children to understand that you trust their integrity, but not their judgment. If you have to forbid them to take part in an activity that all of their friends are participating in, make them feel that they are being treated as an inexperienced adult, not as a child.

*Adapted by Margaret-Maria
Dudley from Hacer Familia*

Peer pressure pointers

- *Yielding to peer pressure is not the same as compromising. It's only sensible, and even generous, to compromise over issues which do not involve matters of principle.*
- *Your son or daughter may have a close friend in the group who is capable of saying No when necessary. Try to foster this friendship and get to know him or her. Invite them over on the weekend, etc.*
- *It's not necessary to be informed in great detail about everything that your son or daughter is up to. Teenagers do not appreciate the third degree. Pick the right time to ask questions.*
- *It may be that your child is the one who exerts negative pressure on his or her friends. Help them to realise that genuine friendship is not compatible with exerting pressure on others through ridicule or sarcasm.*
- *No one can live in a permanent state of tension with their "friends". If the group is constantly veering towards unacceptable behaviour, the best thing is to make a clean break.*
- *It's important for kids to learn how to stand up for themselves in a group without being sanctimonious or judgemental of others.*
- *The ability of parents to restrict the influence of groups upon teenagers is limited. But they do have the power to guide their children towards the right groups.*
- *In many situations, the best way to show courage is to play the coward and beat a retreat. If your son or daughter knows that their friends will be up to some mischief, it is better not to make an appearance at an event. Encourage them afterwards to give the real reason why they didn't share in the fun – not because "Mum was sick" or "I forgot"...*

Questions:

Q1) Discuss ways to help your teenager make good choices when faced with peer-pressure.

Q2) Discuss ways to get to know your teenager's friends.

Q3) Discuss ways to help you and your teenager keep the lines of communication open.

Q4) Discuss ways in which you as parents can help your teenagers develop fortitude and will power.