

## Peer Pressure Age 12 Summary

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### Why Peer Pressure?

Children/Teens ages 11-14 are forming their identity, and their measuring stick is often their peers' opinions and approval. Peers influence what's acceptable and what's popular. As your child/teen gets older, they will be introduced to more significant risk-taking opportunities, which could involve alcohol, drugs, or risky sexual behaviors. Peer pressure can consume your child/teen with worries about "fitting in." Establishing a trusting connection and teaching your child/teen vital skills will help them resist unhealthy risks and make responsible choices.

**Tip:** These steps are best done when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

STEP

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### Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Find a time when your child/teen feels like talking, and you are not pressured. You might ask:
  - *"How are you feeling about your friendships? Do you feel you can trust at least one friend?"* (Friendships contribute to emotional well-being, and it only takes one trusted friend -- the number of friends does not matter.)
  - *"What are you and your friends most interested in trying that's new and different?"*
  - *"Are there times when your friends are doing things you don't want to?"*
- Listen for interests and ideas your child/teen might have for trying out healthy risks. If you observe your child/teen taking a new interest, create opportunities to experience those risks safely. Does your child/teen love animals? Could you volunteer in an animal shelter together or offer to take a group of friends to try it out together?

**Tip** Listen closely to the insights your child/teen might provide about times when they feel peer pressure. Don't expect an immediate response since it can be a sensitive issue. Raise the question and allow time and space for consideration.

**STEP  
2****Teach New Skills**

- Learn the facts about the impacts of alcohol on a child's/teen's brain development together.
- Knowing what the laws require can help provide a starting point for discussion.
- Co-create a plan. Talk non-judgmentally (no blaming or naming) about some choices your child/teen might have for leaving an unhealthy situation. You could ask:
  - *“If you feel pressured and need to get out, what truthful excuses can we come up with to leave the situation?”*
  - *“What code can we establish (use your cell phones) so I know to pick you up immediately, no questions asked?”*
- Instead of discussing alcohol, you should first talk about health and healthy development. Consider the following questions:
  - *“How do we keep healthy (diet, exercise, preventative doctor visits)?”*
  - *“How do food and drinks fit into keeping your body healthy?”*
  - *“What about the role of medicine? Do you take medication? For what and why? What is your attitude about medicine? When is it important to take it? When do you want to avoid taking it? If you take medication, what side effects have you experienced?”*
  - *“What many substances alter your body and brain, such as coffee, tea, over-the-counter medicine, prescription medicine, alcohol, energy drinks, and others?”*
  - *“How do those altering substances fit into a healthy lifestyle?”*
  - Then, you might consider the following: *“What do you or your partner or other family members believe about the role of alcohol in family life and with children? What do you want them to learn?”*

**Tip** Researchers find that allowing children/teens under the age of 21 to sip alcohol sends a clear message to children and young adults that authority figures feel drinking is acceptable for them. These children/teens are more likely to experiment with alcohol or drugs at younger ages and more frequently with friends.<sup>1</sup> Researchers advise not allowing drinking even on special occasions for those under 21.

**Tip:** Let your child/teen know that feeling peer pressure is typical. Everyone feels it at some point. The trick is knowing when to go along and when to bow out gracefully.

**STEP  
3****Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits**

- Practice assertive communication.
- When your child/teen comes to you with a relationship problem, play coach, not problem solver. *“How is it making you feel? What choices do you have? What might happen if you try that out?”*

- Offer conversation starters like “I-messages” to communicate needs in ways that do not place blame or harm anyone. *“I feel uncomfortable when you ask me to drink because I don’t want to.”*
- Respect a genuine “no” response from all in your household.
- Tell stories of your or your child’s/teen’s ability to think and act outside the social box. In other words, how has your child/teen made a decision on their own that hasn’t been popular but was right for them? Celebrate that sense of confidence and independence.
- Notice when you feel peer pressure and call it out.

**Tip:** When your child/teen comes to you with a peer pressure challenge, reflect on their feelings. Ask open-ended questions to prompt their thinking. Show your trust and support that they can solve their problems with reflection.

**STEP**  
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## Support Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions. *“How do you respond when your friends or other classmates want you to do something you don’t want to do?”*
- Reflect on outcomes. *“It seems like you are worrying about your friends and their impressions of you today. Often, it helps if you talk about it. What’s going on?”*
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child/teen is eager.
- Engage in further practice.

**STEP**  
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## Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your child/teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- You can reinforce your child’s/teen’s efforts in many ways. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three parenting behaviors impact your child’s/teen’s behavior differently.
  - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *“I notice you chose not to join in the gossip with your friends. I like how you stayed true to yourself.* Recognition can include nonverbal cues such as a fist bump, high five, or hug.
  - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child/teen knows what to expect, like *“If you check in on time, I will let you stay at your friend’s house longer”* (if you XX, then I’ll XX) The goal should be to help your child/teen to progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. Rewards can decrease a child’s/teen’s intrinsic motivation if used too often.

- Unlike a reward, bribes aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role are in a crisis (like a child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering). To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the child/teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Children/Teens constantly seek new adventures and the thrill of trying something new. Keep this in mind when considering celebrations. Could you try rock climbing as a family?

1. Donovan, J.E., & Molina, B.S. (2014). Antecedent predictors of children's initiation of sipping/tasting alcohol. *Alcohol Clinical Experimental Research*. 38(9): 2488-95.

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