Tools for Your Child's Success.org

Peer Pressure Age 17 Summary

Why Peer Pressure?

Teens and emerging young adults ages 15-19 are forming their identity, and their measuring stick is often their peers' opinions and approval. Peers influence what's acceptable and what's popular. The teen years introduce more significant risk-taking opportunities, which could involve alcohol, drugs, or risky sexual behaviors. Peer pressure can consume your teen with worries about "fitting in." You can help your teen learn about ways to deal with peer pressure.

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

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



- Find a time when your teen feels like talking, and you are not pressured. You might ask:
    - *"What are you and your friends most interested in trying that's new and different?"*
    - *"Where do you like to hang out with your friends?"*
    - *"Are there times when your friends are doing things you don't want to?"*
- Listen to your teen's interests and ideas for trying out healthy risks. If you observe your teen taking a new interest, create opportunities to experience those risks safely. Does your teen love animals? Could you volunteer in an animal shelter together or offer to take a group of friends to try it out together? Offer plenty of healthy outlets for exploration, and your teen and their friends will have less of a need to seek out unhealthy ones.



- Learn the facts about the impacts of alcohol on a teen's brain development together.
- Less than half a glass of alcohol in one hour is enough to change your personality and your judgment.
- Know what the laws require.

- Find a time to talk when your teen seems curious, talkative, and receptive. Start with questions rather than answers. *"Why do you think we have laws about drinking? What about alcohol do you think is important for teens to know?"*
- Co-create a plan. Talk non-judgmentally (no blaming or naming) about your teen's choices for leaving an unhealthy situation. You could ask:
    - *"What truthful excuses can we devise together to leave the situation?"*
    - *"What code can we establish (use your cell phones) so you can call me when you need me to pick you up, no questions asked?"*
- Discuss values. Instead of discussing alcohol, first, you should discuss health and healthy development. Consider the following questions:
    - *"How do you 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 are the many substances that alter your body and brain?"*
    - *"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 teens? What do you want your teen to learn?"
- Change the conversation when your young adult turns 21. If you have a 21-year-old, change the conversation to focus on choices about the healthy and safe use and non-use of alcohol.

Tip Researchers find that allowing 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.[1] Researchers advise not allowing drinking even on special occasions for those under 21.

Tip: Let your 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.



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Practice assertive communication.
- In your teen years, you needed to speak to other adults on their behalf, but now they are old enough to speak for themselves. Step back and give them that chance in private and public settings.
- When your 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.”*
- Tell stories of your or your teen’s ability to think and act outside the social box. In other words, how has your teen made a decision that wasn’t popular but right for them? Celebrate that sense of confidence and independence.
- Notice when you feel peer pressure and call it out.
- Set a family rule to respect a genuine “no” response from all in your household.

Tip: When your 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.



- Ask key questions. *“Are there times when your friends or other classmates want you to do something you don’t want to do?”*
- Reflect on outcomes. *“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 teen is eager.
- Engage in further practice.

Trap The challenge of this age range is that they may initiate a fight if they feel you view them as not fully competent. Ensure you empower them to think through the consequences of their choices. Be there if they need you, but only if they ask for your support.



- No matter how old your teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen’s efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen’s behavior.
    - **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 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 teen to progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's intrinsic motivation.
    - 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 teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering). To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for a snack on the way home if the teen stops arguing and leaves 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. 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?

References

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.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2023). Peer Pressure Age 17 Summary. Retrieved from https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org

This content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Tools for Your Child's Success communities, financial supporters, contributors, SAMHSA, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

© 2023 Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University