

Peer pressure (Part 2)

By: Benjie Stern, PhD

Why'd the monkey fall outta the tree?

'cause he was dead...

why'd the other monkey fall outta the tree?

'cause he was dead too...

why'd the third monkey fall outta the tree?

peer pressure...

Peer pressure is one thing that all teens have in common. They can't escape it. It is everywhere. Whether it is pressure to conform to a group norm or pressure to act, peer pressure is something everybody has to deal with at some time in his or her life.

Peer pressure may be fairly straightforward, with some teens pressuring others to take part in certain activities. In some cases, though, peer pressure is a little more subtle, with clues given to teens that they won't be "cool" if they don't participate, even without the

overt pressure to do what everyone else is doing. Here are some statistics about peer pressure:

- The Adolescent Substance Abuse Knowledge Base reports that right around 30% of teens are offered drugs in middle school and high school.
- According to the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 74.3% of high school students have tried alcohol.
- 3.1 million teenagers smoke, according to the American Lung Association.
- The Kaiser Foundation reports that about 50% of teenagers feel pressured with regard to relationships.

How successfully a teenager can handle peer pressure depends a great deal on how they feel about themselves and their place in the world. There are certain "risk factors" for peer pressure, personality traits that make them more prone to give in to peer pressure.

Some kids give in to peer pressure because they want to be liked, to fit in, or because they worry that other kids might make fun of them if they don't go along with the group.

Others go along because they are curious to try something new that others are doing. The idea that "everyone's doing it" can influence some kids to leave their better judgment, or their common sense, behind.

A study conducted by National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University demonstrated that sitting down together as a family during the evening meal

directly affected teen's grades and self-esteem. According to the study, teens that only eat dinner at home with their families twice a week or less were more likely to try marijuana, smoke a cigarette, or try alcohol compared with teens who eat at home more regularly. Even if you or your child doesn't make it home in time for a regular meal, just sitting with him or her while she eats and listening to your teen talk about his or her day can make a difference. The more you are there, the more that you show you are interested in your teen's life, the better they will feel about themselves and the less they need to go elsewhere to feel accepted; and the more likely they will be to make good choices when peer pressure is at its worst.

The key is for the parent to make the child feel that his parent is interested in him and the child is more important than the other things going on in the parent's life. A child feels safe and protected if he knows that he is the focus of his parent's world. The parent must give the child at least a little bit of "uninterrupted full attention" time.

It is not the amount of time we give our children each night that matters; rather it is the attitude and spirit with which it is given. The moment the child is in your company, the child needs to feel that in your eyes, at that moment, he is the most important person in the world, and indeed he should be. If a teenager feels understood and secure in our love, they will not have to worry about the acceptance of others with risk of making poor decisions. Unconditional love despite their imperfections is the type of love they need to get them through a day full of struggles. They will always feel secure through all the tribulations of the day, knowing that they have a safe haven, a house of refuge, which they can always run to at the end of the day. This will give our

children the resiliency to take on the challenges of life head on and be proud of the values that their family stands for.