

## Dealing With Peer Pressure- Part 1

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A reporter interviewed a 104-year-old man.

"And what do you think is the best thing about being 104?" the reporter asked.

"No peer pressure," he replied.

For teenagers, it can seem very important to "fit in." Teens are very concerned about their images, and they are worried about what others think about them. As a result, peer pressure is very influential in many teens' lives. Peer pressure is basically the influence that people your age have on you. For teenagers, it is the influence that other teens have on their behavior, dress, attitude and practices. Often, teenagers do what others are doing so that they can fit in - or at least not stand out. Teens like to do what their friends are doing, and be accepted. This peer pressure, though, can lead to undesirable behaviors.

How can concerned parents know if their children are ready to deal with the intense pressure they face to participate in unhealthy behavior? Peer pressure is a very tricky subject between parent and teenager. Each parent tries to find a way to discuss the matter, but many times the way the subject is discussed causes the situation to get worse. Leah wants to go out late with her friends on Saturday night. Mom is doubtful that her daughter is prepared to handle the inevitable challenges of peer pressure. Leah whines to mom that she is being overprotective. "You always treat me like a baby. I know some of my friends might do things that they are not supposed to do. However, you do not have to worry about me. I know how to have control. I am 14 years old. Stop treating me like a baby".

Dr. Fay says that the best technique parents can use in order to avoid an argument and to get a better sense that their teen is ready to handle the challenges of peer pressure is the "What's your plan" technique. Mom should start asking her daughter, "What's your plan if your friends want you to go somewhere inappropriate. Or hang out with other teens that will be doing things that you would never want to be involved with. I'll know you're ready to handle these kinds of situations once you have a good plan."

### "I'm Not Ready" Indicators

1. "Oh, mom. You know I don't do stuff like that. I'm a good kid." Beware! This youngster has not developed a plan for handling peer pressure and is trying to say what is expected.
2. "Don't you trust me? Why can't you just trust me?" Uh oh! This is probably a manipulative statement designed to put the parent on the defensive. Many kids learn at an early age that defensive parents are more likely to give in.
3. "Oh, mom. I just do what you told me. I just say "No." Watch out! Most teens and even many adults are not comfortable saying "No" to a good friend. This kid is not ready.

4. "I'll just tell them doing drugs is stupid." A teenager probably is not going to say this. It is very rare for a child to risk his or her standing in the peer group with this kind of statement. This statement usually is made only to impress the parent.

#### "I'm Ready" Indicator

A teenager who is ready to handle the pressure usually indicates a well thought out plan. For example:

"You know, Mom, if a kid wants me to drink alcohol, I'll tell him I like him and want to do things with him, but alcohol really isn't my thing. And then I'll thank him and suggest something else we could do."

Another teen, also prepared with a plan, has a script when asked to drink with his friends. I've got a big time problem with my parents. They just aren't very "with it." If they knew I tried anything, they'd take all of my college money and put me in a rehab program even if I didn't need one. They're so unreasonable I can't take a chance. But thanks anyway."

This teen has a plan and his odds for successful dealing with peer pressure are much higher than someone without a plan.

Parents can help their kids develop a plan to handle peer pressure. Once it's in place, parents should practice with their teenagers. Have fun with some surprise "dry run" practice sessions: "Hey dude, I've got some really good stuff. Want some?"

In the event a youngster hesitates, say, "Uh oh. Not ready for the next Saturday night hang out. I hope the next practice session goes better for you."

Fay, J. (2003) Parenting with love and logic: Make Your Kids Responsible For their Actions.