



## The influence of friends on young people

### WHAT IS YOUR CHILD GOING THROUGH?

The start of adolescence is a time when young people start to construct their personalities. They also learn about who they really are through different experiences. During this time, having friends, being accepted and pleasing others becomes more important for them.

Friends play a big role in teens' lives. They talk to each other every day, go to school together, chat over the Web, text each other, talk on the phone, and share many other activities.

### The influence of friends

Friends often influence each other in different areas: language, clothing, music, sexuality, smoking, etc. These influences are not always negative; on the contrary, they are often positive, as friends can help each other discover sports, do homework together after school and share many other things together.

This influence becomes negative when young people:

- Adopt behaviour that goes against their wishes, values and beliefs.
- Feel obligated to behave in a certain way to be part of a group (they experience pressure or don't want to make others unhappy).
- Aren't comfortable saying no to how their friends want them to behave (breaking the rules, coming home later than expected) out of fear of being ridiculed or rejected.

Young people aren't always aware of the influence of their friends. A teen can often feel torn between what their friends want and the demands of their parents and school. As a parent, how can you decrease the negative impact of the influence of your teens' friends?

### Things that kids might be wondering

- How do I say no when I don't feel like doing what my friends are doing?
- Why are my parents always telling me that my friends aren't good for me?
- How can I avoid disappointing my friends... while listening to my parents?

## WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT?

### Talk to your children about their friends' influence

- “Have you ever felt forced to do something because your friends were doing it?” (e.g., skipping class, liking a style of music, etc.).
- “Can you be yourself with your friends? How do you react when a friend doesn't want to do the same things you do? How far do you think someone should go to impress other people?”
- “How do your friends react if you refuse to do something with them?” (e.g. “Seriously, you don't want to?”)

### Determine how your child would react to a friend's pressure to do something

- “What advice would you give someone who isn't comfortable doing something but who's afraid of being rejected if they don't?” (e.g., avoid the situation if possible, find allies, use humour, etc.).
- “How do you feel when you're the only one who doesn't want to do something?” (e.g., the only one who doesn't have a girlfriend or boyfriend, the only one who doesn't smoke, the only one who doesn't have the latest brand of jacket, etc.).”
- “When someone who tells you that you're too chicken to do something, how do you react?”

### Help children recognize situations in which friends are influencing them

Situations in which children experience pressure may seem obvious to you... but not to them! You can help them recognize these situations (e.g., “Did you notice how you acted in front of your friends the other night? I was surprised you did that, etc.”). Your child may ignore what you say, but you need to be patient. Your advice will eventually sink in.

#### Tips

**Talk about your own teenage years.** Did you ever experience influence or pressure from friends when you were your child's age? To better understand what your child is going through, ask yourself the following questions: “How did I react with my friends? Was I aware of their influence over me?”

**Be understanding.** It's not easy for young people to stand up to their friends. They have to be able to talk to you about what they are going through. Remind them that you are open to discussing situations that make them uncomfortable. Have a talk to help them find solutions, even if they have disobeyed a rule.

**Start with general questions.** It may seem like children don't want to talk about themselves. They may be more open if you can ask them questions that don't concern them directly. “What would you say to someone who is experiencing peer pressure?”

#### Being pressured or pressuring others: two different realities

Young people can experience peer pressure, but they can pressure others too.

It's important for them to think about the impact of the pressure they put on other people.

## WHAT CAN HELP YOU?

### Do you need a professional resource?

Call Info-Santé at 811 or the parent help line at 1-800-361-5085.

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This tool was produced thanks to funding from the Secrétariat à la jeunesse as part of the Stratégie d'action jeunesse 2009-2014.

**Page layout:** Alphatek