

How To Help Your Teen Cope With Negative Peer Pressure

from the American Counseling Association

Peer pressure is probably the most important influence in your teenager's life. While parental opinions certainly are considered (if only because of the consequences of ignoring them), it's more often the opinions and actions of peers that help teens decide virtually everything from hairstyles to clothing choices to academic efforts.

Often, peer pressure is a good thing that can lead to involvement in sports, religious activities and academic excellence. But peer pressure can also be a negative, especially for a teen lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem yet anxious to be accepted by others. Negative peer pressure can result in trying to be part of a group rebelling against those things (such as school) about which the teen feels less confident.

As a parent, you can help your child overcome such negative peer pressure. Start by helping build your teen's self-confidence and positive self-image. Try to limit your criticism while looking for positive accomplishments and chances to praise jobs well done.

You also want to be genuinely interested in your teen's life. Go beyond the common "who, what, where" questions to find out what your teenager really is doing and feeling. Learn to respect what your teen is thinking even if it is counter to your point of view.

And yes, getting most teens to open up can be difficult but if you're persistent, and show appreciation when things are shared, your teen will eventually become more open with you.

Confronting problems as they arise can also help combat negative peer pressure. Try to understand your teen's need for certain friends but feel free to express your concerns, and your reasons for them, about such friends.

And sometimes it's simply necessary to set rules and boundaries. While "forbidding" certain friends seldom works, you can restrict the time spent with the most worrisome of them and insist on it being in supervised settings.

It also helps to strengthen the family relationship. Insist that homework and chores be done. Set curfews and stick to them. Handle small problems quickly, before they become big ones. Spend time with your teen, establish regular dinner hours and find quiet times when you can really talk with one another.

Not all peer pressure is negative, but part of your parental responsibility is helping your teen learn how to evaluate friendships. You need to help your teen identify peers who provide real friendship and positive benefits.

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