

EVERYDAY CHALLENGES:

## CHILDREN AND PEER PRESSURE

Children today are feeling bombarded by peer pressure as they strive to 'belong' and journey into their search to find their true selves. Not a new issue, but certainly a pervasive one, peer pressure requires our children to arm themselves with the tools to recognize and address the feelings, emotions and actions involved.

Research tells us that peer pressure is a contributing factor to just about every issue in kids' lives, including:

- substance abuse;
- bullying;
- low self-esteem.

As our children move into adolescence, their peers take on a more influential role in their lives. Friendships and relationships become more important, and our children are faced with the need to make choices. By arming them with the strategies to deal effectively with negative peer pressure, we can help them to assess their options, avoid potentially dangerous situations and develop assertiveness skills that will help them as they move through the teen years.

The following tips will help you as you work with your child to develop the skills to resist negative peer pressure.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS:

# HELPING YOUR CHILD DEAL WITH NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

Some suggestions to add to your 'tool kit'...

- You know your children better than anyone else does. If you notice that they seem to be exhibiting any of the following characteristics, sit down and find out what is going on. Keep probing until you get some answers. Look for:
  - changes in self-confidence levels;
  - new friends with new and 'secret meeting places';
  - rapid weight change;
  - sudden sleep disturbances;
  - a hesitance to go to school or out to play;
  - an unwillingness to share or discuss activities or plans;
  - sadness, withdrawal.
- Go through the 'Tips to Help Kids Learn to Resist Negative Peer Pressure' (on the following page) with your children. Make sure they understand the variety of options they have to say "no". Add what has worked for you!
- Try role playing the part of the 'Pusher' as you have your child try out the various suggested tips. They will find it amusing that you can play 'the bad person' and you will be helping them to see what works for them.
- Encourage your child that when they feel strongly about something and they are being pressured to go against what they know to be right, they need to be assertive and specific about the reasons why they don't want to do it.
- It is helpful for your children to know that you experienced peer pressure when you were growing up, too. (Maybe you still do!) Tell them about it and how you avoided unsafe and unhealthy situations.
- Children today hear the term 'harassment' all the time, but they may not make the direct connection between harassment and peer pressure. Clarify that peer pressure is certainly the most common form of harassment and that they don't have to stand for it from their peers.

Please note that the above list could describe any 'normal' child going through predictable and expected changes as they experience adolescence. It could also be a warning sign that your child is having difficulties. Think of these as 'touch points' for you as you watch your children grow to become healthy, happy young adults!



TIPS FOR KIDS:

## DEALING WITH NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

Kids, here are some tips for dealing with uncomfortable situations. Remember, there isn't one answer that works for everyone. Do what is right for you!

- **Just Say No!**  
This good old standby still works in certain situations. Say it clearly, say it once, and stick to it.
- **Change the Subject.**  
If the subject starts to turn to something that you find threatening or uncomfortable, try changing the subject.
- **Walk Away.**  
If you find yourself in a situation that is uncomfortable and it is safe for you to leave, get up and go. Don't stop. Keep walking until you are far enough away to feel unthreatened.
- **Make Up an Excuse.**  
In some situations, try making an excuse for not trying something that you feel might harm you. Some favourites are 'Sorry. I'm allergic!', 'Are you kidding! My parents would kill me!' and 'I can't – I have to baby-sit in five minutes'.
- **Tell it Like it Is!**  
When you feel strongly about something and you are being pressured to go against what you know to be right, try simply telling them that you will not participate because... Be specific about the reasons why you don't want to do it. Then walk away.
- **Find an Ally.**  
If you find yourself being the target of peer pressure, seek out someone who shares your thoughts and feelings. Make a pact to stand up for each other and leave together when either of you is uncomfortable.
- **Silly Statements.**  
One of the most popular (and successful) ways to resist negative peer pressure is to respond by saying something totally unrelated and silly, like – 'Sorry. I have to walk my giraffe.' 'Have you ever seen a purple blue jay?' 'I can't. I had an alligator in my lunch.' Have fun!!!
- **Tell Someone.**  
Peer pressure is plain and simple harassment. If you feel that someone is constantly trying to get you to do something against your will, tell a trusted adult: your parent, your teacher, your youth group leader, your coach. Don't stop until someone listens and makes a move to help you.