

“Thanks, but I’ve got homework to do.”
 “I don’t want to hurt myself or anyone else.”
 “Nope, I don’t want to get grounded.”
 “Sorry, I’m not willing to risk it.”
 “No way! I don’t do that kind of stuff.”
 “I don’t feel like it.”
 “Sorry, I have a bad feeling about this.”
 “I’m too tired. I’m going home.”
 “Are you nuts?”
 “It’s against my religion.”

 **IT HELPS TO PLAN AHEAD**

The best way to resist peer pressure is to have a plan. Think of the most challenging peer pressure situations that you’ve experienced so far and ask yourself these questions:

- Which situations did you resist successfully?
- Which situations did you give in to and what could you have done differently?
- What kinds of situations are most difficult for you to resist?
- Who handles peer pressure well? What can you learn by observing this person?

 **WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

American Social Health Association (www.iwannaknow.org) has some good information on handling peer pressure, and other valuable information for teens.

Many articles for teens, including an excellent one on how to handle peer pressure, can be found at www.teenshealth.org/.

Scott, Sharon. *How to Say No and Keep Your Friends*. Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, 1997.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

- Assertiveness Skills (for Teens)
- Building People Skills (for Teens)
- Building Positive Teen Relationships
- Expressing Feelings Responsibly (for Teens)
- Goal Setting (for Teens)
- How to Help a Friend through a Crisis (for Teens)
- Life Skills (for Teens)
- Listening Skills (for Teens)
- Personal Negotiation Skills (for Teens)
- Understanding Body Language (for Teens)
- What Teens Need to Know about HIV and AIDS
- Workplace Skills (for Teens)



Dealing with Peer Pressure (for Teens)

 **INTRODUCTION**

When 16-year-old Charlene came home from her friend Tamara’s house, her mother said her clothes and hair smelled like smoke. “You’ve been smoking, haven’t you,” her mom said. It was true. For the first time, Charlene had given in to Tamara’s pressure and smoked a cigarette.

Seventeen-year-old Richie was allowed to drive his parents’ car under the condition that he carry no more than one passenger at a time. While it is legal in his state to have more people in the car, his parents established this rule until Richie had more driving experience. Today, however, when his friends Todd and Manuel begged him for a ride across town, he let them in, thinking his parents would never know. As he drove through the grocery store parking lot with his two friends in the car, who did he drive past but his mom? She took one look at him and motioned him over to her.



THIS IS WHAT PEER PRESSURE SOUNDS LIKE:

“Oh, come on. Don’t worry about it so much. No one will ever find out.”
“Please, just this once? Your mom will never know.”
“Don’t you want to relax and enjoy yourself?”
“You are really turning into a boring person, aren’t you?”
“You used to be so much fun! What happened to you, anyway?”
“Do you want to lose all of your friends?”
“What are you, a baby? Can’t you think for yourself?”
“When are you going to loosen up?”

You have probably done something like this yourself at one time or another. You know what the rules are and you have the best of intentions of following them, but for some reason you go against your better judgment and do the wrong thing. Why does this happen and what can you do to prevent it?

WHY IS PEER PRESSURE SO STRONG?

Peer pressure is such an issue for teens because adolescence is a time for experimentation — trying new things, having adventures, experiencing freedom. At the same time, the teen years are a time when it is important to belong to a group and to feel accepted. Put these two factors together, and you can see why peer pressure is such an issue for teens.

SO WHAT IF I GIVE IN TO PEER PRESSURE?

It is understandable that you may be tempted to just give in to the pressure and go along with your friends when they want you to do something that is against your rules. But it’s impor-

tant to think ahead, into the future, and consider what the consequences of your actions might be. Of course, there is always a chance that no one will ever find out that you drank the alcohol, smoked the cigarettes, or let your friend drive your car. On the other hand, doing these things could lead to disaster. You have to ask yourself if the consequences would be worth the thrill. Would it still be worth it if you:

- Were arrested
- Had a police record and were unable to get certain jobs or join certain professions
- Were grounded
- Were kicked off your sports team
- Felt ashamed of yourself later, when you realize what you did
- Got into a really dangerous situation — one that is much more dangerous than you originally thought
- Were injured or killed

While it doesn’t seem likely that any of these things would happen, the fact is that you just never know. So the first step in resisting peer pressure is to stop and consider the consequences. Some people call this a *worst-case scenario* — thinking of the worst that could happen, and thinking about what that would be like. If you think it can’t happen to you, just read your

RESISTANCE STEPS

1. Pay attention to the behavior of those around you.
2. Trust your gut.
3. Stop and think it through.
4. If you decide not to participate, take firm action.

local newspaper for a few days and see that it has already happened to plenty of others, both teens and adults.

WHAT CAN I DO TO RESIST PEER PRESSURE?

There is no simple rule that will enable you to magically resist the pressure of your friends with no feelings of guilt or regret. It is not an easy thing to do. It takes a lot of courage and a strong sense of self, but you can learn to do it. Here are some things you can do:

1. Pay attention to how the people around you are behaving. If your friends are acting secretly or seem like they’re trying to persuade you to do something, there may be something going on that you’re going to want to avoid.
2. Trust your gut. If a situation sounds like trouble, it probably is. In her excellent book *How to Say No and Keep Your Friends*, author Sharon Scott advises that you avoid any situation that is against the law or that would result in a parent or other authority figure being angry.
3. Stop and think it through. Don’t let yourself be swept along in the excitement of the moment. Take a minute to stop and think about whether you really want to participate in this. Consider the consequences of saying yes or saying no.
4. If you decide not to participate, take firm action. Tell your friend what you have decided to do, and do it. Having a list of ways to say no all ready in your head is tremendously helpful. Rather than waiting until you are in a pressure situation, think about ways you can say no to your friends. Rehearse them and have them ready. Here are some examples: