

# Friends and Peers

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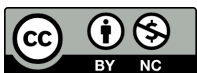
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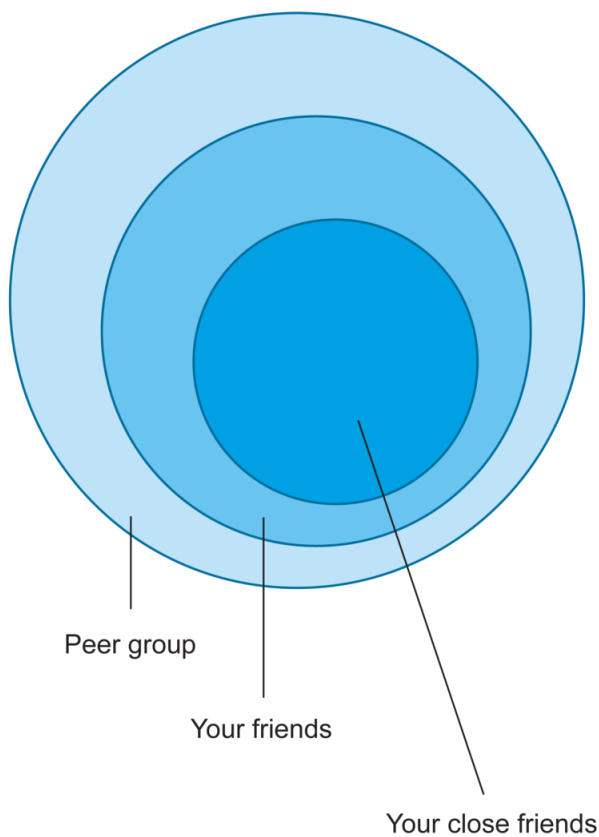
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# Friends and Peers



### Who are they and how do they affect who you are?’S’

Throughout your life, and especially during **adolescence**, many people influence who you are and how you see yourself. As a child you probably spent most of your time with family members. They were your primary source of information about the world, relationships, and yourself. As an adolescent, you may begin to spend more time with **peers**-friends and classmates in your own age group. In addition, as your thinking skills further develop during this period of change and growth, you become more capable of comparing and contrasting differing points of view. As a result, friends’ values and beliefs may influence you as much and sometimes more than your parents’ values and beliefs.



**Figure 1.1** Your friends and peers give you lots of information about yourself and the world. You should learn how to effectively analyze all the information you receive.

*“A friend is a person with whom you dare to be yourself.”*

*-Friendship*

Frank Crane

Why is your choice of companions important? It matters because people give us lots of information about ourselves and about the world. People influence us every day. During adolescence, this influence can be particularly strong as you spend more time away from home and as you become more aware of different values and morals (beliefs about right and wrong). From the clearly spoken compliment to the unspoken and subtle looks of disapproval, you receive messages about yourself all day long. You learn about acceptable behaviors, ways of dressing, relationships, and where you fit by watching others. This **socialization** is an important part of growing up. You become part of society by exposure to other people, their behavior, and values.

Who are the people with whom you spend time? They probably fall into two categories-peers (classmates you may or may not know very well) and friends (those you choose to spend time with).

*What characteristics make up the peer culture of your grade? Consider clothing, shared ideas, music, activities associated with school, and leisure-time activities.*

### **What Do You Think?**

#### **Peers**

Your peers are people like you in age or grade level. Whether you are good friends or not, peers influence or socialize you a great deal. You and your peers will have your own tastes, ideas, and ways of dressing and talking, as well as favorite music, food, and sports. These behaviors and preferences make up your **peer culture**. Some of the socialization this culture provides will reinforce that of a parent, especially if your families are similar. In other cases, the values and behaviors of your peers will differ from those of your family.



### Mini- Activity

**Family and Friends** Create a Venn diagram of the key characteristics in your peer culture (*What Do You Think?* this page) and corresponding elements in your family culture. Write a poem about the shared elements.

There are many varieties of peer cultures. Peer culture depends on your gender, your ethnicity, your local community, your friends, the activities you enjoy, the way you dress, the kinds of people with whom you mix, and many other factors.

Many adolescents are seen as belonging to a particular crowd or peer group. The kinds of groups do not change much over time or from school to school, but the names may change. In recent years, some crowds have been called jocks, brains, loners, druggies, populars, nerds, or rogues. Belonging to one of these groups is usually a result of your behaviors and interests. If you dress and behave like the people in a certain crowd, people are likely to see you as part of that crowd.

*“It seems to me that it was what you did that made you part of the group. More than if you had a lot of friends.”*

*-Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff*

Walter Dean Myers

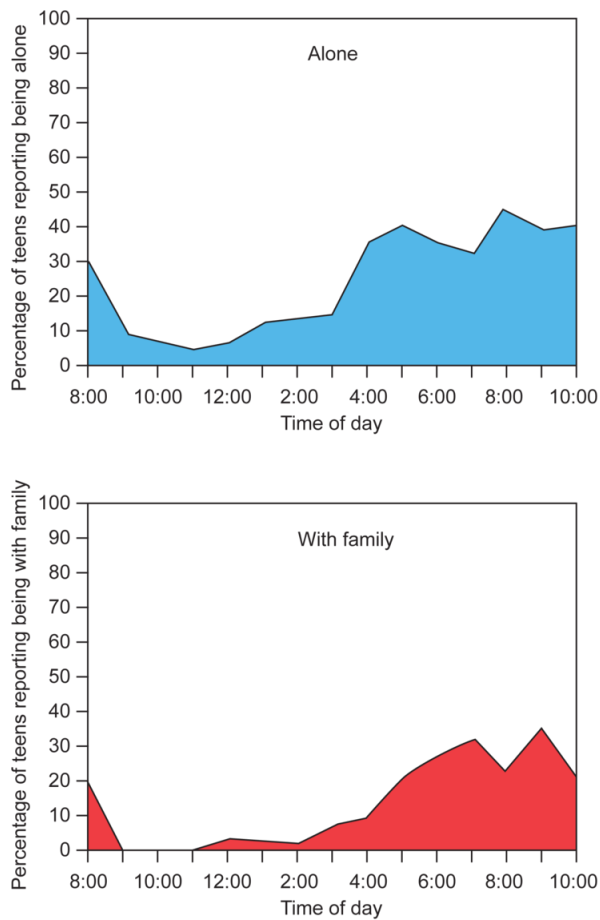
#### **Peer Pressure**

Can you think of a situation in which the people around you encouraged you to do something that you otherwise wouldn't have done? This something could be anything, such as getting your homework done, wanting to have an ear pierced, or being mean to someone you actually like. Wanting to be part of the crowd is a basic human instinct. Throughout history, humans have increased their chance for survival by being a part of a protective group. Being part of a group also helps us to define our **identity**-our sense of who we are. This desire to be part of a group makes **peer pressure** a powerful force. This force often works in very positive ways, but it can also create a lot of anxiety. Peer pressure can make you want to be someone you are not.



## Mini-Activity

**Peer Groups in Your Parents' Day** Ask a parent, teacher, or older friend if they were part of a crowd at your age. How do they describe their crowd? What other groups existed at their school when they were your age? Do you have similar groups of friends in your school? What are they?



**Figure 1.2** Percent of students spending time alone and with family throughout the day.



## Mini-Activity

**Time Spent** Over the course of a couple of school days, and at least one weekend day, chart the time you spent alone, with friends, or with family. Calculate the percentage of time spent with each group. Bring the charts to school and share them with the class.

Peer pressure can be so indirect that people do not even realize it is happening. They may think they are making conscious choices that express their own individuality, but peers have influenced them by gossip, casual comments, or facial expressions. As an example, imagine someone who wants to get into a certain group of peers. At first, the group sees the adolescent as different and may act unfriendly toward him or her. When the adolescent dresses or behaves like those peers, he or she may be accepted. In this way, the teenager is responding to peer pressure without realizing it.

*“There are some friends in school that push me to do some things that I don’t want to do. I tell myself, ‘I don’t have to do it if I don’t want to.’ They go, ‘Here do you want to smoke?’ I’m not going to smoke because my friends do. I say to myself, ‘Do what you think is right, not what other people say.’”*

-Francia, 15, Salvadoran

*New Kids on the Block*

Janet Bode

Peers can be very good coaches. They can expose you to and teach you new activities, and they can be role models for appropriate dress, activities, and behavior in social situations. You can be a good coach and help them in the same ways.

It is often easier to learn something from someone close to your own age than from an older or younger person. If you see someone similar to yourself carrying out some activity, it is easier to use the person as a model and try to do what that person is doing. In some schools, teachers depend on this fact by using students in peer-tutoring programs. When one student teaches another one, both students benefit. They gain both academically and socially.

## Activity 1-1: Peer Pressure

### Introduction

One of the best ways to avoid peer pressure is to think ahead of time about the choices you would make on your own in difficult situations. Being prepared with an answer can make you feel more confident and better able to state your position clearly and strongly. In this activity you practice responding to peer pressure in several specific situations.

### Materials

- Activity Report
- Index cards or paper

### Procedure

**Step 1** Your teacher will divide you into groups of about four people. You will take turns pressuring or being pressured in several different situations.

**Step 2** Read the first role-play situation on the Activity Report and decide who will be the person pressured.

**Step 3** The other members of the group will try to convince the fourth person (verbally, NOT physically) to do something that he or she isn’t sure should be done.

**Step 4** Before you begin the role-play, take two minutes to write down on your Activity Report the reasons that you will give for trying the activity if you are pressuring someone or the reasons you should not do the activity if you are the person being pressured.

**Step 5** When you are acting out the scene, remember to let all persons be heard.

**Step 6** After you have acted out the scene, talk about what happened as a group. Answer the questions on the Activity Report.

**Step 7** Repeat this process for each of the four role-play scenarios, choosing a different person to be pressured in each one.

**Step 8** When your group is done, write four different role-playing scenarios on the index cards or paper that you think would be good to practice. Hand these in to your teacher.

*“A lot of people talk about it and want to do it [sex] for so many reasons that seem wrong. It don’t prove nothing to me. It doesn’t make me more grown, more mature, more hip, nothing.”*

-B. B., on sexual intimacy, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff*

Walter Dean Myers

### Responding to Peer Pressure

Resisting peer pressure can be very hard, as you may have discovered from the last activity! In some cases, one person in a group may choose not to conform. For example, a boy or girl might feel unwilling to drink alcohol, while the rest of the group is beginning to do so. The situation may become more and more uncomfortable, until the person leaves the group and chooses new friends with similar views on alcohol. In this case, the person successfully resists peer pressure but has to leave the group to do so.

*Is it harder to get yourself out of an uncomfortable situation when you are with an individual, a small group, or a large group? Why?*

### What Do You Think?

Some people seem to find resisting easier than others do. Whether or not someone gives in to peer pressure usually depends on at least three characteristics—leadership skills, closeness to parents (or guardians), and maturity.

First, a person who is a leader, or someone who is looked up to by friends, is influenced less by peers than other people are. Leaders often exert peer pressure, rather than respond to it. For example, leaders exert pressure by giving followers rewards such as social status (entry into a social group).

Second, when a person feels secure about the consistent love or acceptance by parents or other significant adults, he or she is less likely to be dependent on peer acceptance. Adolescents rejected or ignored by their parents look more to their peers for acceptance and approval.

Third, as you mature, both in growing older and strengthening your beliefs and knowledge, you are less likely to accept others’ opinions without question.

When you are young, you may see peers as experts on some topics, whether they are or not. When asked about whose opinions they trust, most young adolescents indicate they trust their friends’ judgment more than their own. For example, psychologists have found that if an adolescent sees two sticks as the same length, but a friend pretends one of the sticks is longer, the adolescent’s opinion may change! In this example, the person denies his or her own senses. In most real-life situations the issue of what is correct or incorrect is less clear than this study. If you are not sure what is true or right, another person may be able to influence you easily.

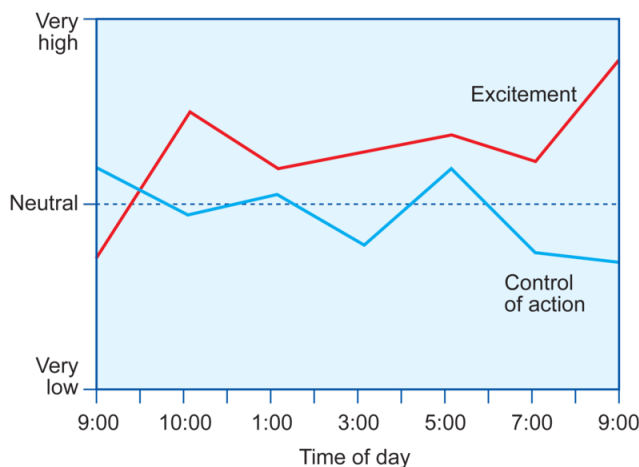


## Mini-Activity

**Recipe for Choosing a Friend** Write a recipe about the ingredients you look for in a friend. (Keep in mind relative amounts of these ingredients.) Include your own most important secret ingredient.

### The Heat of the Moment

What happens when a peer group gets together? Usually a lot of fun happens. But sometimes a good time is taken too far. When with friends, you may be having so much fun that you get very excited and don't think about the effects of your actions. Although excitement in itself is harmless, it should be balanced by self-control. A loss of self-control may result in vandalism or high-risk behavior. Substances that lower self-control, such as drugs or alcohol make risk-taking behavior, such as **sexual intimacy**, more likely. Peer pressure or group influence may increase excitement while decreasing self-control.



**Figure 1.3** Excitement and control of action during the course of a day, as reported by adolescents from a midwestern city.

Figure 1.3 shows two curves, one for excitement level and the other for control of actions, for a group of high school students on Fridays and Saturdays. At what time of day or night were they most excited? At what time of day or night were they least excited? When did they have the greatest control over their actions? When did they have the least control over their actions? What might account for the peak in excitement at 11:00 A.M.? When do you think these adolescents were most likely to do something uncontrolled, deviant (not socially acceptable), or even dangerous?

*Calculate the percentage of influence that each group has on you.*



**Who Says So?** Answer the questions below. Then create a pie chart to show the relative influences in your life.

1. What aspects of your life are most influenced by your friends? (choice of clothes, choice of entertainment, choice of values, etc.)
2. What aspects are most influenced by your family?
3. Are there aspects of your life which you wish were *not* influenced by *anyone*?

### Friends

As you get older and begin to depend less on your family, friends take on new importance. Friends give you some of the caring and support that your family gives you. As you enter adolescence and you want to be more independent, you may not want as much support from your family as they gave you when you were younger. But you need to feel you're not alone. In adolescence, you have to cope with many new situations, as well as many physical and



emotional changes. Having a friend to share experiences with and to confide in makes these new situations less scary or threatening. Friends share the changes you are going through. This sharing may be one of the most important aspects of adolescent friendships. What are some common characteristics of friendship?

*Identify three characteristics of a friendship with a boy. Identify three characteristics of a friendship with a girl. Are they the same or different? How and why are they the same or different? Draw some conclusions.*

### What Do You Think?

- In a study, 73% of a group of adolescents said they would tell everything about themselves to friends. Only 31% said they would tell that much to their parents. Who do you talk to about your family life, about your hopes and concerns for the future, or about other personal matters?
- You may have different friends for different purposes. You may have a best friend who meets most of your social and emotional needs outside the family. You also may have a larger circle of friends that help you develop your sense of identity (sense of who you are) by bringing out your varied interests and strengths.
- Good friends often share so many interests, values, and attitudes that they start to look alike—usually because they dress alike, have similar hairstyles, and participate in the same activities. Do you resemble your close friends in any way?
- Boys and girls, in general, tend to have different kinds of friendships. Boys are more likely to travel in packs, looking for activities. Girls are more likely to prefer being with fewer friends and, with them, to talk about the world, other people, and themselves.
- Throughout your life, friendships shift and change according to your interests and stage of development. For example, people who have not begun dating find that they have less in common with friends who are now dating. Or, friends who find themselves in different stages of puberty may separate for awhile, until they are back on common ground.
- Friendships may shift, but usually there are some feelings of tension, conflict, or sadness. Conflict is a normal and healthy part of any relationship. In fact, for a relationship to progress, it often has to go through stages of conflict and resolution to increase self and mutual understanding. During adolescence, you may find the nature of these conflicts changing to reflect the more difficult and complex situations of life, such as friends competing for a date or moral differences about high-risk behavior (drugs, alcohol, and sex).
- Prior to adolescence, most friends are of the same sex. During adolescence friendships with the opposite sex develop, particularly those that involve romantic attachment. It's harder to be “just friends” without wondering about some level of physical intimacy.

*List three behaviors or values that both your peers and your family encourage. List three others that your peers encourage, but a parent discourages. Why is there a difference?*

### What Do You Think?

*Who are your best friends? Is there a person you would like to be friends with but don't know how or where to start? Do you think friendships between you and members of the opposite sex are changing at this point in your life? Do you have friends of the opposite sex? Can you remain good friends or do you feel new tensions or questions coming between you?*

## Journal Writing

All of your encounters with friends and with your larger peer group affect how you see yourself, especially during adolescence when puberty changes not only you but also your relationships. Friends can be important sources of information. But as you develop your **sexual identity** (a sense of who you are sexually) and explore sexual behavior, it is important to learn more about the issues involved and to understand yourself so that you can make good decisions. The rest of this unit talks about healthy and unhealthy sexual behavior, and throughout you will be

given opportunities to consider and develop your own opinions and to practice scripts, or what to say to friends in various situations. The need for friends and peer group approval has the power to shape us, but it shouldn't have the power to control us.

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## Review Questions

1. Why is your choice of companions important?
2. What is peer pressure?
3. Why is peer pressure more influential during adolescence than other times in your life?
4. What three factors help adolescents resist peer pressure?
5. Name five characteristics common to friendships.