

PEER PRESSURE

No matter how old they are, people care what others think and want to fit in. When you are just starting to think for yourself, the influence of your friends and people your age – your peers – can be powerful. It can affect how you feel, dress, and act. This is called peer pressure.

Peer pressure can be good and bad. Good pressure from your peers might lead you to play sports, study hard, or join clubs.

But there are often negative pressures, too – to make fun of someone, to tell a lie, or to cheat on a test. Sometimes the pressure may be about actions that have more serious results like skipping school, shoplifting, using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or having sex.

-REMEMBER-

**Make up your own mind,
even if your peers don't agree with you.
Respect your friends' choices,
even if you don't agree with them!**

It is important to think about what could happen if everyone just “goes along with the crowd” without thinking about their CHOICES.

Young people make choices every day. Some are more important than other. **There is a big difference between deciding what to wear to a party and deciding whether or not to do drugs.**

The choices you make say a lot about what kind of person you are. When you feel unsure, try talking to someone you trust: your parents, another adult who cares, or maybe a close friend you respect.

- REMEMBER -

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS.

It's okay to say “NO”

Some decisions, like those about drinking, drugs or sex, are difficult to make and have serious consequences. Be prepared to feel peer pressure and be aware that there are different kinds of pressure. It can be disguised as friendly teasing, for example. If so, you can respond in the same way. Other pressure may be more direct.

Plan to say NO if you think you might be tempted by peer pressure. Saying NO is not always easy. Saying NO to friends is especially hard, because you don't want to lose their friendship.

It's important to remember that you are in control of your choices. You do not have to explain your reason.

Try these ways to say NO: change the subject, avoid the situation, have something else to do, leave, or make it clear that you don't have to go along with other people.

If you have to say NO more firmly, here are some ways to keep in mind:

- *No! No way!*
- *I'm not ready for that yet.*
 - *That's not for me.*
 - *It's not my style.*
 - *What's your problem?*
- *Are you kidding? You've got to be kidding!*
 - *No thanks.*
 - *Sorry, I'm driving.*
- *Your parents would ground you for the rest of your life!*
 - *I don't do drugs.*
- *I have to get up early for work.*

Show your friends you have a mind of your own. When your peers see you stand by your good decisions, it may help them make better decisions in the future.

Sometimes it's easier to say NO if you are involved with other people who think like you. Many schools offer PEER SUPPORT programs where students who believe in resisting negative peer pressure offer each other support and information. Find out if there are PEER SUPPORTERS in your school.

It's okay to say "YES"

It's also okay to say YES to many activities in your life. You should enjoy your time as a young adult! Say YES to:

- Positive friendships
- Volunteering
- Family relationships
- Setting goals
- School and religious activities
- Taking positive steps to help yourself when in trouble

See THINGS TO DO, page 58.

You can get involved with others to learn about handling peer pressure at:

Boys & Girls Club 845-2582 (*Wausau location*)
or 581-7667 (*Greenheck location*)

Members of SMART MOVES at The Boys & Girls Club learn about peer pressure, the negative effects of alcohol and other drugs, decision-making skills and goal-setting.

DYG 845-2177 (*Woodson YMCA*)
or 841-1850 (*Aspirus YMCA*)

Teens who have graduated from the D.A.R.E. program meet for monthly activities with fellow D.A.R.E. graduates and friends, to continue learning and experiencing the benefits of a drug-free and active lifestyle.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution means finding ways to deal with your peers when you disagree. If you disagree with someone – even someone you really like – you might both be confused or angry at first. It's smart to know ahead of time how to deal with conflict so that when the time comes, you act out of wisdom, not out of confusion or anger.

Conflict resolution is often about "middle-grounding" – finding an area somewhere between your needs and the other person's needs. Through middle-grounding, each of you may not have all your needs met, and needs may be delayed, which can be hard to do. However, if it means preventing even bigger problems from happening, middle-grounding techniques can be useful and beneficial.

Here are four middle-grounding techniques that may help you next time conflict arises.* The examples used are simple, just to give you an idea of how middle-grounding works:

1. COMPROMISE. Using this method, you both give up something to gain something good for either. **Compromise** may involve delaying one need to meet both.

For example, if the conflict involves a choice between two activities – going to a movie and going rollerblading, for instance – a **compromise** might mean doing one activity now and the other one another time.

The hardest part about **compromise** is that someone has to take a leadership role and be the first to give something up.

2. FIND A THIRD. This technique is a lot like compromise, only instead of delaying one need to meet the other, both needs are shelved and replaced by a third.

For instance, in the example above, instead of going to the movies or rollerblading, you both drop your ideas and agree to playing video games instead.

Finding a third option guarantees that both of your needs are met equally.

3. GET HELP. This technique involves finding someone to act as a neutral third party, such as another friend, parent or teacher. But this person must be neutral and fair to both parties.

Using the same example, a third party can suggest that it would be better to go to a movie than rollerblading, because the weather forecast isn't good for being outdoors. And that's just one of the benefits of **getting help** from others – they may know something that the two of you don't.

The hardest part about getting help from someone else is reaching an agreement to follow that person's advice. That's where honor comes in: If both of you agree to turn the decision over to a third party, then you must both stick to your word.

4. PUT IT IN PERSPECTIVE. The final middle-grounding technique is by far the hardest to do. Using this technique, one of you agrees to abandon your needs to prevent things from getting out of hand.

If the two of you reach an impasse, one of you can agree to **put it in perspective** and drop your preference about which activity to do. It's a big sacrifice – *and it can't be a sacrifice that compromises your values* – but it's often better than some alternatives, like a big fight over a movie.

The problem with this technique occurs if one of you continues to do more sacrificing than the other, which is a sign of other problems. You both have a right to have your needs heard and understood, and neither of you should be made to do something that violates your principles.

* From *Helping Hand*, the CESA 9 AODA Education Network Newsletter.

Movies or blading make a simple example, just to give you an idea of how these techniques work. But remember – these 4 techniques work when you and your peers face larger issues, too. *Whose turn is it to drive? Will you work for me next Friday? I don't want to go if she's going, too.* Try conflict resolution techniques whenever there's a chance a disagreement will get in the way of your relationships.

Here are some other healthy things to remember the next time you feel conflict in your relationships:

- **Take a deep breath.** The old adage “count to ten” really does keep you from reacting impulsively.
- **Be aware that everyone handles conflict differently.** Some people get angry quickly, others simmer slowly. Some want to talk about what's bothering them, find a solution and move on. Others want to think things over and prepare a response.
- **Weigh the conflict.** What's a small issue for one person may be a large one for another. Figure out if the situation is a difference of opinion or a major disagreement.
- **Pinpoint the real issue.** Many conflicts grow larger when old hurts are stored up and emerge unexpectedly during a disagreement.
- **Don't talk around the problem.** Relationships are often stronger than we think, and most of them grow stronger, not weaker, when we communicate honestly about how we feel.
- **Look for areas of agreement.** Conflicts often get worse when you think the gap between you and the other person is widening. Identify areas where you agree, then move on to work out your differences.
- **Search for options.** Explore together possible solutions to the conflict. Be creative. Try to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone.
- **Give each other credit for caring enough to engage in respectful conflict.** Resolving conflict can be hard work. Stick with it, then give each other a pat on the back for making the effort.



Again, there may be PEER SUPPORT programs at your school, where students help each other learn how to resolve conflict. Find out!

Also see BULLYING, page 7.