

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



Teen Friendships

“Adolescents need friends, and parents need to encourage these relationships”



Having a supportive group of friends is important for an adolescent. Peer groups help teenagers learn to negotiate relationships and make the journey from childhood, where they are reliant on parents, to adulthood, where they need to stand on their own two feet.

Peers give young people a sense of belonging, and an increased sense of self-confidence. They also provide young people with testing grounds for attitudes and values outside their family at a time when young people are trying to define their identity. Most modern teenagers are incredibly supportive of each other; however they can be judgemental and the cause of heartache when conflict or alienation occurs.

Resisting peer pressure

Teenagers need to learn to deal with peer pressure. We all experience some degree of pressure to conform to the behaviours and norms of our social groups, yet this pressure is heightened in adolescence, when wanting to fit in and belong is paramount. Ostracism is unthinkable, which makes teenagers susceptible to being overly influenced by their peers, who don't always make wise choices.

Parents can **help** young people deal with peer pressure by being open and frank about the subject. Let them know that while much of the influence of their friends is positive, some of it is not in their best interests.

Help young people **resist** peer pressure by giving them strategies to say no, while saving face. For instance, saying 'No, not now' is a simple face-saving strategy that all young people can learn when they are pressured by peers to engage in behaviours that aren't in their best interests.

Young people who are heavily reliant on the approval of others are particularly susceptible to peer pressure. In adolescence, adult approval is often replaced by peer approval. Help young people become self-sufficient and not dependent on others for their self-esteem.

Where do parents fit in?

Get to know your children's friends and take an interest in their lives. Make them **welcome** in your home. Enquire about their well-being, their learning and their relationships without being too nosy. Provide space and privacy for your teenager and friends in your home. Set some house rules regarding what's acceptable in your house, but don't be too heavy-handed as you want your home to be a welcoming place for young people.

Keep some **food** available and encourage them to make their own snacks and clean up their own mess. Be firm about your views about acceptable videos, alcohol use and sexual activities at home.

Negative Influences

It is common for parents to disapprove of their young person's choice of friends, because of behaviour, poor reputation or the adverse influence they have on their teenager. Young people take criticism of their friends personally so you need to be careful how you handle these issues. If you have worries about your child's choice of friends, check that your concerns are real. Try to get to know the friends you're worried about. Discuss your concerns with your young person, but talk about the behaviours that worry you, rather than the character of their friends. **Discuss** the immediate and long-term consequences of their behaviours that may concern you. It also helps to promote diversity of friendships as kids do best when they belong to more than one friendship group.

It is important for parents to understand the value of peer groups for young people and also remember that peers can be positive influences.

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