

CONFERENCE PAPER

ADOLESCENTS AND PEER GROUP PRESSURE; COPING
STRATEGY AND COUNSELLING IMPLICATION.

BY

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INTRODUCTION:

Peer group is a phenomenon peculiar to the adolescent stage - (the teenage period). Young people have the tendency of wanting to associate with members of their age group. According to Durojaiye, (1972) the adolescence period is the era of identity in the growth process of the child. The child is now in the transition stage from childhood to adulthood and he begins to experience some changes physically and physiologically. Hence, the child asks such questions as "who am I? Where am I? What am I?" - (Durojaiye, 1972).

The young person wants to feel grown up having passed the childhood stage. Owuamanam (1988) refers to the stage as era of independence when the youngster struggles to set himself free from the parents and other authority figures and would rather want to act in conformity with his age mates or peers no matter how unconventional their acts may be.

The peer group is the unit of social life during adolescence. It is typically composed of equal number of boys and girls. The core of it contains six to eight members, with perhaps another half-dozen adolescents' around the fringes. Those who are steady members of the group customarily live within short driving distance of each other, attend the same socio economic background.

Traditionally in Nigeria peer group relationship is given through various initiation rites in different cultural setting. The moral values in such cultures were then emphasized and developed through such avenues.

However, with the influence of foreign cultures most of our cultural values in Nigeria are fast disappearing. Most youths are no longer linked to their roots but rather want to move with other age mates in their immediate environment particularly in urban centres. They seem to be more influenced by the foreign cultures which they copy from films and movies and no longer wish to identify with their culture.

The outcome of such a break away is the high level of indiscipline and moral laxity spreading like wild fire among our youths. Some of the vices perpetrated by the young people under the influence of peer pressure include examination malpractices and racketeering; vandalism; cultism; juvenile delinquency; armed robbery, prostitution and rape; drug use and abuse. This paper examined the effects of such peer group relationships with a view to providing coping strategies which would assist the young ones to cope with peer group pressure and divert their energy into some other rewarding activities. The two coping techniques are: Self Assertive Training and Developing the Will Power to Succeed.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ADOLESCENT PEER GROUP RELATIONSHIP

In modern times the activities of adolescent peer group vary from one season of the year to another; at almost any season they include listening to the radio, watching television, occasionally going to a movie, eating, dancing together at the home of some member, and listening to phonograph records. They also sit on someone's porch, - pavement or garden and talk or go into the home of a member to watch television etc. which to them is very exciting as an adventure into the world of

social relationships.

Although to an adult listening to the conversation of such peer group could appear to be worthless or meaningless, it is usually satisfactory to the participants. It obviously gives them an opportunity to develop their conversational powers on other people whose abilities are no better than their own. Other values obtained from such a group include experiences in getting along with other people, practice in social skills, development of loyalty to a group, practice in judging people, assistance in the emancipation - from - home procedures, and experience in love-making under circumstances in which the participants are protected from serious consequences. Moreover, the group gives its members a feeling of social security and belongingness.

The peer group plays such an important role in the lives of adolescents that a teacher should understand its nature and its values to the members. It should be noted that adolescent boys and girls are very uncertain of themselves because they are changing so rapidly. One function of the peer group is to defend the adolescent from his own, uncertainty through the security of his membership in a group. It also provides a chance for him to achieve status on his own merits - not those of his family - in terms of the values held by his age - mates. It gives him an opportunity for further developing his self-image, especially as regards the behaviour that differentiates him or her from members of the opposite sex. And, as any group can do, the peer group helps the adolescent

to develop the qualities that he will need in adult life. The group tends to have more authority over the adolescent behaviour than the adults have. It is a powerful force in setting standards of behaviour and attitudes towards various problems. As long as the individual adolescent conforms in the main to the standards and opinions of his group, he is accepted. If he does not conform, he tends to see his group as less attractive than it was earlier, and his age mates tend to reject him. However, as the years pass, the values of the group gradually mature and approach the adult norm for their social group.

EFFECT OF PEER PRESSURE

It is possible that the peer group encourages some degree of snobbery and undersirable behaviour like drug abuse, cultism, armed robbery, fraud, rape and prostitution to mention a few. Sometimes an intense rivalry springs up between two groups and leads to extremely silly behaviour and occasional outbreaks of violence in some communities under economic or social stress. Two practical cases are hereby presented for consideration. An adolescent boy and a girl having to cope with peer pressures. The boy and armed robbery; girl and prostitution).

COPING WITH PEER PRESSURE

Two techniques are hereby recommended in assisting children to cope with peer pressures. They are:

- i. Assertive Training and
- ii. Training the Will.

ASSERTIVE TRAINING

This is a technique that is used to promote occurrence of or improve assertive responses. Assertive responses. Assertive training is necessary when a person is not bold enough to initiate an action, express his feelings and stand for his right. Wolpe and Lazarus (1966) describe assertive training as consisting of the arrangement of environmental situations with the client so that certain impulses previously inhibited by anxiety can be expressed in overt behaviour. Assertive training ought to be considered as a means of behavioural change and therefore can be learned. Unassertive behaviour can be modified by imagined or actual experiences.

Many behavioural -problem children lack the ability to assert themselves in social and learning activities. The shy and the withdrawn child is usually unassertive and this behaviour can constitute lack of motivation for learning in a classroom situation. Motivation for learning in the social group-centered setting of the classroom results from less obvious influences of restricted assertive ability.

The techniques used for developing assertive behaviour follow the principles of reciprocal inhibition with a gradual learning of progressively more assertive behaviours.

ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness means standing up for our rights and expressing out thoughts and feelings in a direct, honest, and appropriate manner. When we are being assertive, we show respect for ourselves and for others. On one hand, we are not passive

and we don't allow people to take advantage of us. On the other hand we acknowledge other people's needs and attempt to relate to them in a tactful manner.

There are a number of advantages to being assertive. Assertiveness gives us a feeling of self-efficacy and internal control. This helps boost our self-esteem and confidence when we are interacting with other. Since assertiveness requires tact and negotiation, we have to be flexible and we won't always get everything we want. However, since other people also have needs, wishes, and desires, assertiveness provides the best approach for achieving mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Coping Skill: Appreciating the Benefits of Being Assertive

Examples of Assertiveness, Non-assertiveness, and Aggression:

A salesman is putting pressure on you to buy something:

Salesperson: "OK, are you ready for me to write up the sale?"

Non-assertive response: "Well, I guess so, if you think it's a good deal,"

Aggressive response: "Stop being so pushy! I'm not buying anything from you!"

Assertive response: "I'm sorry, but I'm not ready to make a purchase".

Someone tries to cut in of you in supermarket line:

Person: "You don't mind if I cut in here do you? I'm in a hurry".

Non-assertive response: "Well, OK."

Aggressive response: "Hey! What are you trying to do? Get the hell back in line!"

Assertive response: "I'm sorry, but I do mind I'm in a hurry also."

Your supervisor gives you a questionable evaluation:

Supervisor: "Here is your evaluation. You need to sign it."

Non-assertive response: "There are some things here that I'm not sure about, but I guess I can do better next time."

Aggressive response: "This is a lousy evaluation! If you are not willing to change it, I'm going to the grievance committee."

Assertive response: "I'm having trouble with some of the things you've written here. I'd like to talk with you about them".

A friend asks to borrow your car for the weekend:

Friend: "You don't mind if I borrow your car for the weekend, do you?"

Non-assertive response: "I did have some other plans, but OK. Try to let me know sooner next time."

Aggressive response: "You've got a lot of nerve asking me on such short notice! Forget it!"

Assertive response: "I've already planned to use my car this weekend, I'd be happy to lend it to you in the future if you give me enough notice".

A relative calls and says she wants to visit next weekend:

Relative: "I know this is late notice, but you don't mind if I come visit next weekend, do you?"

Non-assertive response: "Well, we did have some plans, but, OK, I guess we can work around them somehow".

Aggressive response: "Look, you can't just come and visit whenever you feel like it! We have plans too, you know".

Assertive response: "Next weekend is not a good time for you to visit. We'll have to find another time".

Your neighbours are having a very loud party:

Neighbour: "Don't worry, Everyone will leave in an hour"

Non-assertive response: "Well, OK, as long as it's no longer than an hour".

Aggressive response: "What right do you think you have to disturb the whole neighbourhood! I'll show you; I'm calling the police!"

Assertive response: "You are disturbing the whole neighbourhood. You have to keep the noise down. Otherwise I have no choice but to call the police",

PERFECTING ASSERTIVENESS

Understanding What it Means to Be Assertive

The first step in perfecting assertiveness is understanding the nature of an assertive response. When we are assertive, we stand up for our rights in an honest and forthright manner, while still showing respect for the other person. Some examples of assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive response were given above. The examples indicate that when we are assertive we don't let others take advantage of us, but we also acknowledge their need and desires.

Three Useful Skills:

Three skills that help improve assertiveness are owning our feelings, being empathic, and being tactful.

1. Owning Our Feelings:

Owning our feelings means letting other know how we feel about what they are doing. We need to avoid accusing others by saying things like "you are inconsiderate" "you are pushy", or "You are a slob". Instead, we can communicate how their

actions make us feel: "I'm sorry, but I have other plans. "I'm sorry, but I can't oblige you". "It would make me happy if you would take better care of yourself". Owning our feelings will do much to increase our self-respect and the respect others have for us.

2. Being Empathic

Empathy is powerful medicine for enhancing cordial relationships. Other people will be much more ready to accept our expression of our desires if we are willing to acknowledge their. This does not mean that we have to accept what others want. We can disagree with others and still give them the courtesy of letting them know we understand how they feel.

3. Being Tactful

Preferred and Disliked Influence Tactics;

T. Faibo (1977) has studied power strategies and found that preferred influence tactics include:

Bargaining: Reciprocating favours and making two-way exchanges

Compromise: Willingness to give up some wishes for sake of agreement

Reason: Being reasonable and rational

Expertise: Relying on knowledge and experience

On the other hand, the following influence tactics were disliked:

Threat: Making threats if person doesn't get his or her way

Deceit: Using false information, flattery and lies

Ignoring: Doing things own way while ignoring the other person's needs.

Evasion: Getting own way secretly without the other person's knowledge.

People don't like others who try to influence them with threats, deceit, ignoring or evasion. Perfecting assertiveness means being tactful.

ii. TRAINING THE WILL

The will is the rational faculty of spiritual beings; irrational beings don't possess it. It is the rational appetite or inclination that is awakened by images of things which the intellect regards as good.

Having a will power implies that the person is strongly capable of wanting and achieving good things. The will is the faculty which moves man to spend his energies on possessing the goods he needs for physical and spiritual maturity. A person with a strong and sound will, usually gets what he wants. Hence one could state that the key to success lies in the will. The will helps man acquire self-mastery and to conquer.

How to educate the will:

1. Setting a Goal and Creating Interest: Educate the mind to distinguish the real good from the false ones and to establish a correct hierarchy of values.

- Ideals need to be stimulated, through the use of models that the ^{individual} child likes or admires.

2. Reflection: The ^{individual} child must be taught to think, to consider all aspects of the matter, to get to the bottom of things and recognize its immediate and remote consequences.

3. To really "want to": Educating the will must bring about specific, firm, persistent decision-making. Teach the ^{individual} child to be very concrete in his decision: what he wants, the obstacles he may encounter, and how-when-and-where of getting to his goal.



4. Strengthening the will, through:

- i. hardwork. (an idle hand is the devil's workshop)
- ii. discipline. (to start right early in life)
- iii. saying "No" to oneself; sacrifice and self control. - self control strengthens the will. (Teach the child to control impulses). such as bad temper, loose talk etc.
- iv. What to avoid in dealing with children- the youth.
 - Giving them an easy life: spoon-feeding them. A child cannot always get what he wants!
 - Taking away any form of suffering and pain.
 - Making them feel that they are as fragile as an egg.
 - Making them avoid all obstacles.
 - Treating them like babies long after they've already grown moustache.
 - Pampering them, flattering them. (This could turn normal children into absolute useless men).

CONCLUSION:

Children with strong will power to succeed are more likely to withstand peer pressures than those without any will power. Such children will be able to assert their rights and cope adequately well with peer pressures without yielding ground. In order to achieve a balanced psychological health among our children, the importance of counselling cannot be over emphasized as an applied psychology. Hence the significance of a counsellor's role in relation to the spontaneous social life of adolescence and assisting the child to cope with peer pressures. It is important to note that the adolescents require adults as the background, adults who would remain not far away and available when wanted, without

interfering when not wanted. The counsellor is therefore well equipped with such special knowledge as would provide the adolescents with the right adjustment strategies to cope with the demands of life.

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