

## PEER PRESSURE: EFFECTS AND COPING STRATEGIES

By

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### INTRODUCTION

What is **Peer Pressure**? People who are your age, like your classmates, are called peers. Peer Pressure is when you are encouraged by friends and people of your own age to do something that you do not feel completely comfortable with. When your friends try to influence how you act, to get you to do something, it's called **peer pressure**. It can be confusing and stressful but it's something everyone has to deal with - even adults.

Peer Pressure is not always negative. It can help in many different ways. For Example, most students get pushed by their good friends into getting good grades or take chances that have helped improve their lives and boost their self-confidence

There are some challenging issues which do not have clear right or wrong answers. Making decisions on your own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressurise you one way or another it can be even harder.

This Pressure can also be a bad thing. Just as it helps to push people to do well it can at times damage the emotional health of a person as well. For example, when you are hanging out with some friends and they begin to smoke. You know that's not a good thing but they tell you "Come on, don't worry about it, nothing is going to happen to you. We do it all the time", and they are constantly troubling you to join them. You begin to feel like "Well, let me join them to smoke because if I don't do it they won't want to relate with me".

### **Why Do People Give in to Peer Pressure?**

**Seeking for acceptance:** Some people give in to peer pressure because they want to be loved and also to fit in, or because they worry that others might make fun of them if they don't go along with the group.

**Fear of rejection:** New students may go along because they are curious to try something new which others are doing. The idea that "everyone is doing it" may influence some people to go against their better judgment, or their common sense.

**Poverty:** is a big challenge these days. There are many young students dropping out of school because of low income at home. Some students are forced to start work and put their education on hold to support their families and because of low education they are less likely to be gainfully employed so are forced to take up low paying jobs. This leads to a path of hard labour and a life of real poverty. Dealing with the financial pressures which result from an extended period of study may raise students' anxiety level and might lead them to succumb to alternative means.

### **Effects of Peer Pressure:**

**Academic pressure:** One of the most frequent pressures students deal with on an everyday bases is the academic pressure. Definitely, there is pressure on students to do well in their education. This type of pressure is not uncommon to most students and some think they can handle it. Some of them have other problems which ironically make them strive extra hard to do better. It's tough to do well in school to please others and to balance school work with peer group extracurricular activities such as going to parties.

**Support system (Positive):** As a student, academic demands might be so great that you would need a unique support system to help you through your academic quest," but the environment might not support the establishment of cordial relationships, and the various departments may be so competitive to the extent of hindering relationships from growing. Again, "You might want to take advantage of your advisor as a mentor, and they would enjoy that also," however, their research demands might force them to commit their time and energy in the direction of research and publishing.

**Lack of coherence:** You might desire coherence in your life, and that would assist you in your personal wholeness and integration of your studies, but again, there may be no time for such things. Facing these academic demands may require some critical reflection on your personal lifestyle and environment to avoid emotional fatigue.

**Burnout syndrome:** The problem of burnout, with its accompanying emotional exhaustion could lead to a feeling of low personal accomplishment. Students may in fact experience the burnout phenomenon due to learning conditions that demand excessively high levels of effort and do not provide supportive mechanisms that would facilitate effective coping.



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**Emotional exhaustion:** Emotional fatigue greatly influences students' performance and affects their personal commitment. It could be as a result of lack of felt accomplishment. However, the degree to which the student experiences emotional exhaustion is dependent on his individual flexibility, psychic durability, student-lecturer contact and involvement with peers.

### **How to Cope with Peer Pressure**

**Be yourself:** It is tough to be the only one who says "no" to peer pressure, but you can do it. Paying attention to your own feelings and beliefs about what is right and wrong can help you know the right thing to do. Having inner strength and reliance on God can help you stand firm, walk away, and resist doing something when you know it is wrong.

**Choose your friends wisely:** You have probably listened to a parent or teacher advice you to "choose your friends wisely." Peer pressure is a big reason why they say this. If you choose friends who don't get involved with drugs, absent themselves from class, smoke cigarettes, or lie to their parents, then you probably won't do these things either, even if others do. It's great to have friends with values similar to yours who would back you up when you don't want to do something negative.

**Be of help to others:** Try to help a friend who's having trouble resisting peer pressure. It can be very useful for one person to join another by simply saying, "I'm with you - let's go." It can really help to have at least one other peer, or friend, who is willing to say "no," too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure and makes it much easier to resist.

**Run for your dear life:** You can simply stay away from peers who pressurise you to do what you know is wrong. You can tell them "no" and walk away. Better yet, find other friends and classmates who have similar values to yours to move

around with. Even if you are faced with peer pressure in your hostel, there are still things you can do, such as staying more in the library to study.

**Conclusion:** Freedom from peer pressure sounds great. No one troubles you about being different. You don't have to compromise. You don't have to do things for others' approval but lack of peer pressure may contribute to unsafe practices.

- Remember the son of whom you are.
  - Decide for yourself what you think is right.
  - Be responsible for your own feelings.
  - Ask for what you need.
  - Be enlisted on the work-study programme if you are financially challenged.
  - Express your opinions, feelings, wants, needs, and desires without manipulating or hurting others.
  - Leave a situation where the pressure is too much.
- If you continue to face peer pressure and you are finding it difficult to handle, talk to someone you trust, especially a Counsellor, to help you feel much better and prepare you for a better tomorrow.
- Stay close to God and be prayerful.
- Say "no" to evil and mean it.

Thank you and God bless.

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#### PRINCIPLES

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