

January 13th Counselor's Corner

Peer Pressure

Kids often give in to peer pressure because they want to fit in. They want to be liked and they worry that they may be left out or made fun of if they don't go along with the group. Peers can be positive and supportive. They can help each other develop new skills, or stimulate interest in books, music or extracurricular activities. However, peers can also have a negative influence. This pressure can happen in person or on social media.

How to help kids resist peer pressure

- **Help your child understand the difference between peer pressure and peer influence.** Teach your child to distinguish between pressure—peers trying to convince her to do something she may not want to do—and influence—peers who may inspire her to do something positive and good for others and for herself.
- **Teach your child to say no.** It's a powerful word and one that even grownups sometimes have trouble saying. It's hard to be the one to stand up and go against a group, especially if that group is comprised of your friends, classmates, or other peers. It's hard to go against the tide and be different, and it takes tremendous emotional and mental will and strength to be able to say, "I don't agree."
- **Practice with your child ways to be respectful when disagreeing.** As important as it is to feel strong and confident enough with yourself to disagree or say no, it's also important to do it in a way that's respectful to others. Go over ways your child can disagree in a friendly manner, such as by saying something like, "I know you think x and I respect your opinion but I believe y and I hope you can respect my opinion, too."
- **Highlight the many upsides of standing apart from the crowd.** Remind your child that people who are creative and successful often take a different path and think differently from everyone else. Just going along to get along isn't always the way. While it's important to learn how to work with others and cooperate, being an individual who knows how to be different is a very important skill.
- **Be sure your child knows that social dynamics and situations change all the time.** Relationships and group configurations can seem to be one way and then quickly change into something else; it happens even among grownups and can be even more fast-changing among kids. Kids who

understand this and who learn to see things with an eye toward the future are at a huge advantage because they know not to be too upset by something that's going on at one particular moment in time.

- **Show your child how to try to see things from the perspective of those who are putting pressure on other kids.** Insecurity might be the motivation behind some kids using peer pressure to try to convince others to act or think just like them. And some of the kids who seem to be part of the larger, popular group may actually want to break free and be more independent but are not confident enough to do so. For example, some kids who are constantly on social media sites like Instagram or Snapchat might secretly feel pressured to keep up and may want to quit but don't for fear of not fitting in.
- **Teach your child the power of self-confidence.** Remind your child about the importance of believing in oneself and having the courage to follow one's own personal beliefs and likes and dislikes, even if that means not always following what the majority of others are saying or doing.

Books- Read, Don't Concede!

These picture books will help your kid understand why it is important to not give in to peer pressure.

- **A Bad Case of Stripes, by David Shannon-** Kids will learn what happens when lima-bean-loving Camilla Cream allows others to change her rather than enjoy her favorite food.
- **Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes-** A little mouse is proud of her flowery name, until her classmates' mocking becomes a thorn in her side. Luckily, their favorite teacher has a secret that will return her self-confidence.
- **Riding the Tiger by Eve Bunting-** Danny thinks that he has gained the respect of this new town when he hitches a ride on the back of a tiger. But he realizes the truth in this allegory about following the wrong crowd.
- **One of Us by Peggy Moss-** Looking for a group to join, Roberta James thinks that unless she totally conforms she'll never belong. But then she encounters a group that values being individuals.