

peer pressure

Peer groups are groups of friends of about the same age. Having a group of friends is one of the most important aspects of being a teenager. It is how teenagers learn to get on in the world of their own age group and to gradually become independent.

It is important for parents to understand the value of peer groups for young people. Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life. They can also be a challenge for parents!

What peer groups can do for your teenagers

Peer groups provide:

- a sense of belonging and feeling valued
- somewhere to fit in when they feel neither like children nor adults
- increased self-confidence because they are accepted by a group
- a sense of security and of being understood by others who are going through the same experiences
- a safe place to test values and ideas
- help in the move towards becoming independent
- practice in getting along with the opposite sex



- ways to meet new people
- friendships
- practice in learning to give and take
- influence on making decisions about their life
- an experience of building relationships.

Peer groups and parents

Problems that peer groups may present to parents:

- Long hours on the telephone talking to friends. Teenagers need to spend lots of time together. If they are on the telephone they are not on the streets!
- Your house can seem to be overrun with young people. If they are at your house it says that they feel comfortable with you, and you know where they are and what they are doing.
- Some of their friends may do things that are outside your house rules. They may:
 - smoke, swear or play loud music
 - devour food from the fridge or biscuit tin
 - exert pressure to drink your alcohol
 - want to watch banned videos
 - want to have sexual activities in your home.

What parents can do

- Some parents limit the time of day that their young people can have long phone calls. Others may get 'call waiting' on their phone, so that if a call for them comes in, it can be taken.
- There are advantages when your teenagers' friends hang around at your house, but you need to set some house rules. Being humorous about it can take the sting out of your rules.
- Sometimes you can change the use of your rooms so that there is a space for teenagers, and a space for parents and any younger children in the family. This gives the teenagers some privacy.
- Keep plenty of low cost food such as bread and fruit in season. If necessary label what is to be kept for family meals and what is available for snacks.



- Be clear about what videos are allowed to be watched at your home and why. Teenagers get a thrill out of watching 'scary' videos in a group, so allow some flexibility.
- If there is peer pressure on your teenagers to raid your alcohol, make the rules clear and explain the reasoning.
- Talk with your teenagers and your partner about your values on sexual activities and the behaviour you expect in your home. There are many things that you might want to take into account e.g. the age of your teenager, the nature of the relationship, where else they would go if they were not at home, and of course your own values.
- Occasionally, try to spend time with your teenager doing something 'special' together. Go to a movie, watch a football game, take a walk or go for a swim. It takes practice to change the dynamic from parent-child to parent-adult and this will provide an opportunity to strengthen the new relationship.

Other peer group problems

You may not be comfortable about your teenager's choice of peer group. This may be because of their behaviour or because of more serious risks.

What parents can do

Remember that teenagers are often sensitive and a bit 'prickly' about their choice of friends. To criticise their friends is almost certain to weaken your relationship. Rather than put them off the friends it may have the opposite effect. Criticising their choice of friends is like attacking them personally.

- Keep the communication open. Be willing to listen. Find out why those friends are important to your teenager.

- Check whether your concerns about their friends are real and important. While you may feel uneasy about them, sometimes it is better not to spend energy worrying about things such as hairstyle, clothing and the music they enjoy.
- If you believe that your concerns are serious, talk to your teenager about the behaviour, not the friends.
- Encourage your teenager to trust their own sense of what is right. Discuss ways of saying "no".
- You have the right to let your teenager know what your concerns are and to ask them for ideas of coping strategies if pressured to make risky choices.
- Talk with your teenager about the consequences of whatever behaviour is worrying you. Look at both the immediate and future consequences such as getting a criminal conviction.
- If you can, encourage your teenager to mix with other young people through activities such as sports, but don't be disappointed if they are not interested.
- Support your teenager's healthy self-esteem. Talk about the exciting and promising possibilities for the future.
- Sometimes a young person who seems unsuitable will choose your child for a friend because your home gives a feeling of being safe and secure. This is of course a compliment to you and your teenager and perhaps an opportunity to really help someone. You may be able to offer friendship and support. If you are really uncomfortable about the friend's behaviour you need to talk to your teenager about it and explain your concerns.
- Trust your teenager. If the trust is broken find ways to earn it again. Mistakes are to be learnt from.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



Queensland Government
Department of **Communities**