

When you think of peer pressure, what first comes to mind? Doing the wrong thing? Drinking and driving? Stealing? Cheating? These negative words are all usually associated with peer pressure, but peer pressure should be a positive term. It should imply doing the right thing, and being persuaded to follow the right path. Everyone, even adults, is faced with peer pressure each day and it will always be present, good or bad. I have been faced with peer pressure many times myself, and it's hard to do the right thing.

A few years ago, a new boy joined our class. My friends were making fun of him. I wasn't comfortable doing that. They kept talking about how weird and different he was. Eventually, I joined in and made fun of him, too. After, I felt really guilty because I knew that my friends' actions had persuaded me to do something I knew was wrong and hurtful. I still feel bad about this and am friends with this boy today.

I was once able to use peer pressure to encourage others to do the right thing. I was at a friend's house for a sleepover and he wanted to watch an R rated movie without his parents knowing. I knew it was wrong; we were only 10 years old. I didn't know what to do. My mom always tells me, "Would you be doing this if I was next to you?" This was on my mind and I said out loud that we shouldn't watch the movie. A few of us were able to use peer pressure to encourage the others to make a responsible choice. We didn't watch the movie. Often, we don't think about the consequences of our actions. What if our parents found out about that movie? We wouldn't have had another sleepover for a long time and perhaps they would not have trusted us again. Negative peer pressure brainwashes us into doing something without thinking it through. Positive peer pressure encourages us to think of the consequences and make good choices.

We try to avoid negative peer pressure, but it happens anyway. Any decision, whether major or minor, could affect us in ways we don't imagine. Everyone needs to make good

decisions because the consequences can possibly affect more people than you realize. Drinking and driving is a prime example. Friends might try to coax us into drinking while underage or drinking too much even when we are over 21. Riding in a car with someone who has been drinking-the consequences are not worth the risk. Getting hurt, or hurting someone else, losing trust, or serving a prison sentence, it's not worth the false pleasure we may gain by going along with the crowd. Instead, our friends should help guide us to do the right thing, like choosing designated drivers, taking keys of people who are intoxicated, and even calling a taxi. If your friends don't want you to do the right thing, then they aren't your true friends. You have to have the courage to step up and do the right thing, whether you lose friends or not. The impact of your decisions is not worth their friendship. We should do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. It is for the betterment of our community and ourselves. Even though peer pressure may encourage us to make bad decisions, we have to do what we know is right.

I hope that peer pressure changes and people realize that it's each of our responsibility to look out for each other. If we encourage each other to do what is right, peer pressure can become a positive rather than negative term. We will all benefit and the world will be a nicer, safer and better place.