

Peer influence

Peer groups are important for young people as they prepare for the adult world. They help them learn how to get along with others, work out their own values and identity and develop skills towards independence.

Parents can help young people form positive peer groups and resist negative peer influence. This involves supporting children from a young age to understand the values that are important in your family, make their own decisions and build self-esteem.

What impact do peer groups have?

Peer group influence can be positive or negative. On the positive side, they help young people:

- make new friends with similar interests
- test out their ideas, values and boundaries
- become more confident as they try out new things including positive experiences, eg a group may value showing leadership
- practise making choices and trusting their own judgement.

Parents often worry about the negative influence of peer groups, particularly when it comes to things like alcohol and drug use. A young person is more able to say 'No' to harmful risks if they are confident in making their own decisions, know when something is 'going too far' for them and have healthy self-esteem.



What you can do

- Start early to help children understand your family's values and model these yourself.
- Encourage them to make day-to-day decisions at each stage of their development and to think about the outcomes of their actions as they get older.
- Talk often and really listen to what they say. Try not to judge. Problem solve together but let them work out their own solutions.
- Spend time with your young person just to have fun and enjoy them.
- Help strengthen their belief in themselves by praising their efforts rather than results, eg 'You worked really hard to get those grades'.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for positive risk-taking.
- Encourage building a wide social network by spending time with different people and groups.

Parents are the most important influence in children's lives, even in adolescence. When you stay involved, interested and emotionally connected, young people tend to make better choices.



Some other strategies include:

- helping your young person practise how to say 'No' when something doesn't feel right
- being open to discussing any issue, no matter how sensitive. Make sure they have access to accurate information about safe sex, consent, drugs and alcohol, sexuality and gender
- agreeing on rules about safe and appropriate mobile phone and social media use
- getting to know their friends/peer groups, and their parents too if you can
- being a good role model.

Help children and young people understand that self-worth comes from the inside rather than from 'things', achievements or the opinions of others.

If you are worried about a peer group

- Talk about the behaviour that worries you rather than criticising their friends. Help them think about potential consequences and how this might affect their future, eg negative images on social media.
- Keep communicating even if you disagree. Be willing to listen rather than tell them what to do.
- Show you trust them. If they break this, ask them to suggest ways they could rebuild it. Help them learn from mistakes rather than dwell on their error of judgement.

- Have an agreement that they can call you using a code word for 'no-questions-asked' help if they are feeling unsafe and need to exit a situation quickly. If they do call try to stay calm, don't criticise and let them know you are willing to listen if they want to talk.

Getting help

If you are worried about negative peer influence you could:

- help your young person find groups with similar interests, eg hobby clubs
- encourage them to talk with another trusted adult if they don't want to talk with you
- talk to someone who can help, eg your GP or a counsellor. It's important you feel supported too.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

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Parenting SA

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Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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