

# Peer influence

## Learning objective

Students investigate the possible influence that peers may have on the decisions we make.

## Take Home Messages

- The influence of peers is an important part of developing relationships.
- People have the right to make their own choices and should not always have to 'fit in'.
- All decisions, choices and actions have consequences.

## Materials

- Butcher's paper
- Teaching Resource: How would you feel? [one per group]
- Student Activity Sheet: Peer influence decision-making plan [one per group]

## Before You Get Started

- Ensure [group agreement](#) are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.
- Students may have questions that they feel uncomfortable to ask. Providing a [question box](#) for students to place their questions in anonymously will ensure their questions are answered in a safe environment.
- For further content information related to this activity, refer to the Guides: [Resilience and life skills](#) and [Adolescent relationships](#), and in particular, information about peer influence and peer pressure.

## Learning Activities

### Whole Class

This activity will help students to understand the importance of 'belonging' and 'fitting in' with their peers. Prior to playing the game, it is important to establish a clear set of safety rules once the game starts, e.g. no physical contact, bumping etc.;

1. To play the Empty seat game find a space large enough to make circles with six to eight chairs (depending on class size) facing the centre of each circle. There should be enough seats for each student. Demonstrate the steps first so that all students understand the intent and the flow of the activity.
  - All students sit in a seat.
  - Choose one student to stand in the middle of the circle, leaving one chair unoccupied.
  - The person to the right of the empty seat 'quickly' moves onto it (there will always be one empty seat and the person to the right moves onto it each time it is next to them).
  - The person in the middle tries to sit on the empty seat before the person on the right does. If the middle person gets the seat first, the person they beat to the chair replaces them in the middle.
  - Continue the game until everyone has had a turn in the middle.

Note: This activity may start out as fun for some and then become quite competitive as it progresses. It is important for the teacher to intervene when needed to debrief actions that may be causing distress.

2. At the end of the game, facilitate a whole class discussion about being part of a group. It may be appropriate to use a [T or Y-chart](#) strategy to structure the conversation.

Ask:

- What is peer pressure? (it is when you feel coerced or pressured to do something because of some form of threat of put downs or social rejection. It is different to peer influence which can be a good thing, e.g. you may be influenced to wear your bike helmet while skating if all your friends do it)
  - Why do you think people your age like to feel like they belong or be similar to others? (you feel safer; you feel more likeable; you feel they understand you more)
  - Why do some students have more influence than others? (some may have better social skills or be more confident; some may intimidate others to make them do what they want because they are scared of them)
  - How was the empty seat game we just did like peer pressure?
  - How did it feel to not be allowed to join in a group? (e.g. not being able to sit down with the group and being left in the middle)
  - How would you encourage someone to join your group?
  - What groups do we most like being part of?
  - Why can't you push yourself into a group?
  - What happens if you do and you are not wanted? How do you think this would feel for that person? Can you give examples of a time when this has happened to you?
  - If you had a friend with you do you think it would be easier to resist peer pressure?
  - Why do teachers always recommend that it's helpful for someone who is being bullied to ask other kind students they know to support them?
  - Why do teachers always recommend that if someone is a bystander to bullying that they grab a friend to help them try to stop the bullying?
  - Is it easy to just 'be yourself' and still be accepted by your peers?
  - When should you trust your own judgement about how to behave when you are around other students? (when it negatively affects someone's wellbeing or feelings; when it is something unsafe or illegal)
3. Explain that by their age and stage they are able to appreciate differences in their friends rather than being critical of someone who is unlike the rest of the group. This age also tends to breed a feeling of not being 'good enough' or 'not fitting in', so it's important to identify some of their natural strengths and interests and make the most of them and not worry too much about what their peers might think of them.
4. Discuss how people like to belong to groups, how people often dress the same, go to the same places, talk alike, like the same things. Include statements such as:
- It is good to be a member of a group and have friends.
  - When we are a part of a group we are all still individuals.
  - We all want to be liked by others.
  - Sometimes we feel that we should act a certain way to stay part of the group. Is this a healthy thing? Why/why not?
  - Sometimes we may not feel good about what we are doing to stay popular in the group. What should we do in this situation?
5. Optional activities: In small groups or pairs, ask students to:
- Create a PowerPoint presentation about 'Groups'; or
  - Script a short [role-play](#), [interview](#) or video about someone joining a group and the obstacles they faced.

Independent or Small Group

This activity will help students to consider and explore a range of alternatives before making a decision about a situation involving their peers.

1. Using the Teaching Resource: How would you feel? and some butcher's paper, groups of four students consider how each situation would make them feel.
  - Assign a role to each member of the group, e.g. leader, manager, speaker and recorder.
2. As a whole class, work through one of the situations using the Student Activity Sheet: Peer influence decision-making plan. Then allocate one of the situations to each group and ask the students to use the decision-making plan to explore the options and come to a decision about what they would say or do.

### **3-2-1 Reflection**

The following reflection questions could be used in the whole class or independent/small group activities. As an activity session on its own, choose some of the following questions to discuss and/or write responses to.

- Why is it important to have friends?
- How do we try to fit in with friends?
- Why do we sometimes feel pressure to behave in certain ways to maintain friendships?
- What would you do if you felt too pressured by your friends?
- Describe times when someone's peers might be a positive influence.
- Describe times when someone's peers might be a negative influence.