

HELPING YOUTH HANDLE PEER PRESSURE

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When I was a boy we used to play a game called “follow the leader.” The object was that whatever the leader did, in word or action, followers had to duplicate it. If he whistled, follower had to whistle; if he hopped on one foot, follower had to hop on one foot; if he jumped over a hedge, followers had to jump over a hedge, etc. While that was an innocent and fun game, there is a form of it being played today by youth called, PEER PRESSURE.

I remember in school, my second grade teacher would use the phrase, “*monkey see, monkey do*” to correct acting-out behavior. The phrase, which I didn’t fully understand at the time, other than it referred to being a “copycat”, of someone else’s behavior without really knowing why. It implies the act of *mimicry*, usually with little or no concern about the consequences. The youth of today are under tremendous pressure by their peers to be copycats. Regardless of consequences.

Youth whose friends use vulgar language, smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs, view pornography, drive recklessly, and engage in sexual activities, are more likely to engage in such behaviors themselves. On the other side of the coin, youth whose friends have high moral and ethical values; aspire to high educational goals; engage in healthy behaviors, etc. tend to behave in that way, too. It’s the positive effect of “*monkey see, monkey do*”—*follow the leader*.

God’s Admonitions

There are numerous Scriptures that admonish Christians, including youth, to be on guard relative to the influence—peer pressure—exercised by others on us.

1. “*You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not FOLLOW A CROWD to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice*” (Exodus 23:1, 2).
2. “*Do not be deceived: ‘EVIL COMPANY corrupts good habits.’ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame*” (1 Corinthians 15:33, 34).

3. *“And do not be CONFORMED TO THE WORLD, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).*
4. *“Let no one despise your youth, but be an EXAMPLE to the believers (1) in word, (2) in conduct, (3) in love, (4) in spirit, (5) in faith, (6) in purity ... Take heed to yourself ...” (1 Timothy 4:12, 16).*
5. *“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lust of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is OVERCOME, by him also he is brought in BONDAGE” (2 Peter 2:18, 19).*

God has made it clear in His word that we must guard our choices of influences we allow to come into our minds, bodies and souls. We must teach our youth this truth.

Helping Youth Handle Peer Pressure

The first responders with the responsibility for helping youth deal with peer pressure is mom and dad—PARENTS. Next may follow schools, churches, counselors, youth ministers, relatives, etc. Here are some tips for parents to consider as they help their youth deal with peer pressure:

1. Spend convenient and quality time in sharing with your child what God’s word has said about the influence of others. Don’t preach or be dogmatic. *“Speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).*
2. Don’t launch a verbal assault on a friend; especially when you don’t know anything about the “new friend.” Listen. Ask questions. Meet the friend. Be loving.
3. Work diligently to keep all lines of communications open. Discover why “certain” friends are more important than other friends. Why the choice?
4. Before friends become an issue, spend time discussing issues relating to boundaries, curfews, acceptable behavior, etc. (Start at an early age).
5. Within reasons, encourage your teen’s independence by supporting them in making proper decisions and choices, based on what’s right, not on what others are doing or not doing. Truth is the rule (Proverbs 23:23).

6. Never attack your child's friend, it will feel like a personal attack on him or her. Calmly discuss the issues you see. Ask them for possible suggestions and solutions.
7. Make it a spiritual and positive habit to give your child time, love, patience, encouragement, and freedom within reasonable and biblical bounds. It is a powerful force in the life of a child when he or she knows they are loved and respected at home.
8. Never! Never! No never, become mad, angry, or upset beyond being in control. Be a prayerfully listener. Remember, in most cases, "This too shall pass."
9. Remember consistency on your part is very powerful and important in educating a child to practice godly behavior. Don't say one thing and then do the opposite.
10. Share in appropriate ways, not scare tactics, what has happened to other teens who have been overly or improperly influenced by their peers. Discuss openly and honestly.
11. Remember youth is challenged by the same quest we all are challenged by, and that's the desire to belong. This is the appeal of gang membership, sorority membership, church membership, etc. Be sure your home is a happy, safe, and loving "community" where your kids feel accepted. This is one of the major reasons social media is so popular.
12. Never close the door on any subject your teen wants to discuss. Listen. Think before you reply. Be honest. And always be prayerful. Truth has nothing to fear (John 8:32).

The youth of today are amazing! They are smart, alert, inquisitive, sensitive, and wanting to be involved in life in ways that really matter. One of the hurdles they continually face is peer pressure, a pressure that will not go away when they become adults. This is why we must spend time in prayer asking for wisdom relative to how we can best guide these precious treasures to safe and productive lives.

We need to educate our youth in how to be spiritual leaders so that when others are following them, they will also be following Jesus.

How will you intentionally use this lesson to help youth respond to peer pressure?