

No youth group can afford to ignore the subject of peer pressure and conformity. The power that one's age group has to consciously or unconsciously force others to conform to the group's thinking and behavior can be a major obstacle in your kids' spiritual development. The following study is helpful as a means of opening up discussion on the topic. It also presents some valuable tools that your kids can use to battle peer pressure.

Two Biblical Examples

In the Old Testament we read how Daniel and his three friends were taken prisoners when the Babylonian army defeated Israel in 604 B.C. (Daniel 1). Daniel was probably about 16 years old at the time. He was taken from his country, his home, his school, and his parents and carried several hundred miles away to the Babylonian capital. He and his three friends were to be trained to serve the king.

They were suddenly faced with an intense test of their values. Would they continue to worship God or bow to the Babylonian idols? Would they break the Jewish dietary laws that they knew God

decided to put God's values above the values of people. Daniel and his three friends had already set their priorities; there was no further decision to make.

In the New Testament (John 7:1-7), Jesus' brothers encouraged him to visit the believers in Judea. No doubt the argument was persuasive. Jesus, however, was in touch with the larger plan and perfect will of God the Father. Nothing, not even his brothers' pleas, could veer him from that plan.

Making Decisions

Facing peer pressure comes down to one thing—what your priorities are. What values do you place the most importance on? Jesus tells us to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). As Christians we should put God and his will for our lives first, above everything else. You can ask yourself three questions about a choice:

1. How does it affect me as an individual?
2. How will it affect others?

had given them to keep them healthy and undefiled for his service? How would they react to the immoral practices of their captors?

They could easily have gone along with the crowd and compromised their values. But years before, they had

A Quiz

Take this Peer Pressure Survey to see how you react to peer pressure:

1. When faced with a decision to act or not to act like others my age are acting, I usually:
 - a. Flip a coin
 - b. Freak out and hide under my bed
 - c. Really think it over
 - d. Pray and ask God to show me what to do
 - e. Other: _____
2. I (often/sometimes/never) feel pressured to do something that others are doing in order to be accepted.
3. There is a right and a wrong choice for each decision I must make.
 Yes No
4. All peer pressure is bad.
 Yes No
5. There is peer pressure to act a certain way in our youth group.
 Yes No

6. The pressure I face most often is...
7. A Christian writer named Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "There is a view of life which conceives that where the crowd is, there is also the truth. There is another view of life which conceives that wherever there is a crowd there is untruth."

Which view do you agree with?

8. In order of their importance to you, list five values or priorities in your life that you could use to guide you in making a decision:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3. How will it affect the cause of Christ? You can apply three tests to each choice you face:

1. The test of secrecy. Would you feel different if someone else you knew was aware of what you were doing?
2. The test of individuality. Would you still do it even if all of your friends were not?
3. The test of prayer. Can you ask God to go with you and bless you in this?

And finally, there are three sources of spiritual guidance for you:

1. From within—your conscience and the Holy Spirit.
2. From without—your parents (they do know something), Christian friends, and church leaders.
3. From above—your relationship with Jesus Christ and your understanding of what the Bible has to say.