HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMBAT PEER PRESSURE

Children generally want to fit in to their various social groups so peer approval is a significant driver for their behaviour. For children resisting peer influence can mean isolation or instant ostracism so it sometimes takes great strength of will to refuse to follow the crowd.

As children move toward adolescence the need to fit in with and identify with a group of peers outside their family becomes even stronger.

While the increased influence of peers is a normal part of development children and young people can sometimes use some help to resist the pressure to conform that’s placed on them.

The following ideas may assist you to help children and young people resist unwanted peer pressure:

- Talk about peer influence with your children. Be open and frank about the subject. Let them know that while much of the influence of their friends is positive, some is not in their best interests
- Help young people say no - and still save face and status among their friends. Allow them to blame you for not letting them do something they don’t feel comfortable with but can’t admit to.
- Encourage them to think through the consequences of their decisions. When young people are put on the spot they should think about the risk factors involved and err on the side of caution. Encourage them to think “Is this behaviour smart? Is it in my best interests?”
- Avoid making your children reliant on the approval of others, including you, as the basis of their self-esteem. Allow them to feel comfortable holding opinions and views that are different to yours. Those children who constantly look for the approval of others are more susceptible to negative peer influence.
- Avoid criticising your children’s friends, as he or she may take it personally. Discuss your concerns and talk about behaviours rather than personalities when you discuss their choice of friends.

It is important for parents to understand the value of peer groups and also remember that peers often have a positive influence on children and young people.

Michael Gross- Parenting Ideas