

### Overview

Families are dynamic social units potentially made up of different and complex combinations of individuals, that may be under constant change. Young people's adolescent stage of physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth often influences, or is also associated with, changes in the nature of relationships with their family. Adolescent/parent relationships vary greatly between dependent and independent status, and between harmony and conflict. However, the need for stability, encouragement and support from family remains constant.

### Relationships

The stage of rapid physical, emotional and social development in adolescence is also associated with parallel change in the patterns and nature of relationships with family and peers.

**Pre-adolescence** - Relationships tend to be based around same-sex peer groups.

**Mid-adolescence** - Peer groups start to play an important role in helping to define the adolescent's identity, independent of the family; including the development of the sex role identity. Peers become an important source of social support and companionship and play a significant role in the shaping of thoughts and ideas. Feelings about romantic and sexual relationships begin to form.

Parents still play an important role in adolescent decision-making through continued support and advice.

**Late adolescence** - Friendships become more stable, interdependent and tolerant of differences in others. In contrast to the egocentric nature of earlier relationships, adolescents become more concerned about the impact of their behaviour on significant others.

#### Positive aspects/benefits of adolescent peer groups

#### Negative aspects/challenges of adolescent peer groups

Opportunity to develop new friendships	Individuality may be suppressed
Opportunity to learn social skills	Anxieties and psychological traumas may be caused by peer group rejection
Assist in developing concept of self and identity	Desire for peer acceptance may cause adolescents to compromise their beliefs and values
Communication skills enhanced	Conformity can lead to intolerance of those who are

# Adolescent relationships

Background Note

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## Positive aspects/benefits of adolescent peer groups

Opportunity to develop healthy sexual relationships

Forum to share and solve problems

Can provide supportive relationships

Self-esteem can be enhanced

Can share experiences, activities, etc.

## Negative aspects/challenges of adolescent peer groups

different

Desire to be seen to conform can lead to emotional isolation

## Peer influence

Peers play an integral role in adolescent mental and emotional development.

The effect that peers can have on attitudes, values or behaviour may be positive or negative. Peer pressure is a commonly used term describing the powerful expectations and influences of similar aged friends to conform to particular attitudes, beliefs or behaviour.

Remind students that positive relationships of all types are characterised by good communication and mutual respect.



## Relevant resources

### Websites

[The Line](#)

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[Healthy family relationships](#), Kids Helpline

[Handling peer pressure](#), Kids Helpline

## Fact sheets/booklets/videos

[Relationships, families and friends](#), Get the Facts

## Research and reports

[Evidence summary: Adolescent romantic relationships - why are they important? And should they be encouraged or avoided?](#)

## Postscript

**This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:**

- [Peer influence](#)
- [Respectful vs disrespectful relationships](#)

## Date printed

8 April 2020