

# 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.

## **Consent: Rejection and accepting a no**

### **Learning objective**

Discussion and acknowledgement being denied permission, rejection, feelings of shame and disappointment.

### **Take Home Messages**

- Knowing how to accept a no is important for all relationships
- Rejection is normal and happens to everyone
- You can feel disappointed but it is important to process those feelings in a healthy way
- No means no. Do not try to convince someone to say yes

### **Materials**

- A4 paper and pens for each student
- Whiteboard

### **Learning Activities**

Positive life risks<sup>1</sup>. Ask class: What can you think of in life that requires taking a "positive risk". A positive risk means that the outcome is wanted, for example applying for a job or asking someone out. Write answers on the board.

(Other examples: applying for TAFE/Uni, applying for a leadership position, trying out for a team, trying to beat a score, playing in a grand final, facing a fear, performing, entering a competition).<sup>2</sup> Explain: When you take a "positive risk" and you do not get the outcome you want, that can be called being rejected. Rejection is when you try for something you want and get turned down, not accepted or are

told no. It can make you feel sad, angry, disappointed and sometimes insecure. All of these feelings are normal. Being rejected doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you, but it's important to remember that there is nothing wrong with the person who rejected you either.

## Learning Activities

### Responding to rejection

3. Put class in small groups (3-4 people)4. Tell the class that you'll be watching a video about how to respond to rejection. Ask the class to pay attention to what messages they heard and what strategies were used to look after themselves after a rejection: [Healthy Relationships: Rejection - amaze](#)5. After watching the video, ask the class to discuss in their groups, the main messages they noticed in the video. Once they've had 5-10mins to brainstorm in small groups, ask them to share back to the whole class. Main points are below in case some key points aren't picked up by the class:

- Every risk comes with a chance for rejection
- Rejection hurts but it is a normal part of life
- Accept the decision of the person/thing that rejected you and try to move on
- Focus on you – talk to someone you trust, think of what's great about you and do things that make you feel good
- Being rejected doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you or that you should stop trying

## Learning Activities

Rejection Planning Brainstorm6. Class to move back to individual seating. Everyone to receive a piece of A4 paper. Ask students to fold the paper so the page is broken up into 4 boxes (half then half again to make a cross). Students to answer 1 question per box using the front and back of the paper. Let students know that they do not have to share their answers, this is a private brainstorm but they'll be invited to share if they like. 7. Read one question out/write on board at a time:+ Can you think of a movie/TV show where someone was rejected/told no – what happened? + What do you think of how the person reacted to the no/rejection?+Think of a time that you've had to say no to someone you've loved/liked. How did you feel?+ How would you like those people to respond to your no?+ How would you not like those people to respond to your no?+ Think of a time that you were rejected – how did you feel?+ When you get rejected, who would you talk to about your feelings? + What would make you feel better about yourself after a rejection?Teaching tip: If you've run out of time for students to do this individually, ask the class to give suggestions from their small groups but change the question to be more general and less personalised i.e. what could someone do when they're rejected?

## 3-2-1 Reflection

- Why do you think learning about positive ways to deal with rejection is important?
- How can you respectfully accept a no/rejection?
- How can you look after yourself after a no/rejection?

## **Health Promoting Schools**

Partnerships with parents: Run a parent and child evening session to run these activities in family groups to open healthy discussion about rejection. Partnerships with school staff: Ask dance/drama/media/music teachers if they can incorporate this topic into their work with potential to showcase performances to the whole school. Community partnership: Host a fundraiser movie night with money raised donated to a local charity related to healthy relationships or scholarship fund. Choose a movie that tackles a topic related to positive risk taking, striving, rejection and perseverance.