Dealing with peer pressure

Children are being exposed to new ideas and opportunities all the time. They are also being exposed to friends and peers whose influence can be a very powerful force in their lives. This natural part of growing up can be a good thing. For example, children whose friends are high achievers at school might be influenced towards achievement themselves.



However, when a child encounters negative peer pressure, he or she can stumble into some uncomfortable situations. The good news is that, when it comes to moral values, parents have far more influence than friends. So while it's impossible to shield your children from peer pressure, it is possible to guide them towards making decisions that can keep them out of harm's way.

Create and maintain communication. Encourage your children to be open and to share their feelings with you. Be respectful and try to avoid talking down to them. Frequent communication can have a strong impact, and demonstrate that you care about their thoughts and feelings.

Set a good example. Remember that children pay more attention to your behaviour than you may think. Child psychiatrists and authors will often point out that what children become has a lot to do with the example set by those who raise them.

Encourage assertiveness. It's difficult to speak out against popular opinion. Encourage your children to stand up for what they believe in, even if their ideas may differ from others. Let them know that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and that they can agree or disagree with someone and still be respected.

Get to know your children's friends. Encourage your children to have their friends over or invite them along on a family outing. This gives you a chance to learn more about your own children's interests and to better understand how they interact with their peers.

Praise your child for doing the right thing. Express your admiration to your children for their independent thinking and speaking out even when they know that their point of view may not be the 'popular opinion' of others.

Set ground rules. Believe it or not, children crave rules from their parents. Setting reasonable and clear boundaries concerning curfews, household chores and social activities, will show your children that you have expectations of them. Clearly discuss the rewards or consequences of following or breaking these rules.

Children can be strongly influenced by their peers when they are feeling insecure in their home life. If they are not feeling loved, accepted or are not receiving guidance from their parents, they may reach out to like minded souls. Use the tips above to make your home a comfortable, open environment where your input into your children's lives will help shape their values for the future.