

# Courage

Lesson ideas: <http://www.goodcharacter.com/ISOC/Courage.html>

## Talk About It

What does COURAGE mean to you?

- Doing the right thing even if it is difficult.
- Facing your fears with confidence - being brave.

What are ways you can show COURAGE?

Do the right thing, even if others are not.  
Being willing to try new things, even if you might fail.  
Face your fears and work to overcome them.  
Do not give into peer pressure.

## Think About It

Can you name some people who have shown courage?

Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Sacagawea, Medgar Evers, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, George Washington, John Hancock, Ghandi, Christopher Columbus, Anne Frank, Jane Goodall, Helen Keller, Soldiers, Police Officers, Firefighters.

### Kindergarten

The Brave Little Bird, Scott Beck  
Rainbow Fish to the Rescue, Marcus Pfister  
Brave Irene, William Steig

### First Grade

Nessa's Fish, Nancy Luenn  
There's a Monster Under My Bed, James Howe  
Brave Potatoes, Roby Speed

### Second Grade

The Bravest Dog Ever, The True Story of Balto, Natalie Standiford  
Dogzilla, Dav Pilkey  
Pets to the Rescue, Andrew Clements

### Third Grade

The Children's Book of Virtues, William Bennett  
The Boy Who Held Back the Sea, Thomas Locker  
Brave as a Mountain, Ann Herbert Scott

### Fourth Grade

The Children's Book of Heroes, William Bennett  
Chicken Soup for Kids, Stories of Courage, Jack Canfield  
Saint George and the Dragon, Margaret Hoages

### Fifth Grade

The Big Wave, Parl Buck  
Kids with Courage, Barbara Leaks  
Secret of the Peaceful Warrior, Dan Millman

# Courage

September

- **Definition:** bravery; knowingly facing a difficult, scary, or new experience
- **Ways to show COURAGE:**
  - Courage is the discovery that you may not win, and trying when you know you can lose. Always try your best—you'll never know what you can achieve unless you take some chances.
  - The greatest roadblock to success is the fear of failure. Show some courage and see what you can achieve.
  - "If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it, I know I can achieve it."
  - "If you wait to do everything until you're sure it's right, you'll probably never do much of anything." Show some courage!
  - "Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." -Christopher Robin to Winnie the Pooh
  - "A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for." Unless you take a chance and show some courage, you will never come close to reaching your dreams.
  - "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying: 'I will try again tomorrow.'"
  - Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.
  - "Each time we face our fear, we gain strength, courage, and confidence in the doing."
  - Think about a time when you showed courage. Be proud of yourself for facing something difficult, scary, or new. You are brave. Keep it up!

# Dilworth Elementary Character Education

## Courage - March

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**Pre-teach:** Greet the students and tell them that today you will be discussing the trait courage. Ask the following questions and call on different students for answers. Listed below each question are examples of the types of responses you are looking for. You may need to rephrase students' answers or guide them along.

(Ask) **What does courage mean?**

1. Doing the right thing even if it is difficult.
2. Facing your fears with confidence – being brave.

(Ask) **What are some ways you can show courage?**

1. Do the right thing, even if others are not.
2. Bravely deal with your daily challenges.
3. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail.
4. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences.
5. Face your fears and work to overcome them.
6. Admit your mistakes and learn from them.
7. Do not give into negative peer pressure

(Ask) **Name some people who have shown courage?**

1. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, soldiers, police officers, fire fighters

**Book:** Read and discuss a story that teaches a lesson about the trait courage.

(Ask) **Which action is courageous and which is foolish?**

1. Fighting or walking away from a fight
2. Doing something dangerous that others are doing or not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
3. Teasing and bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
4. Blaming others for your mistakes or accepting responsibility
5. Ignoring a new student or making friends with a new student
6. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
7. Following the crowd or doing what's right
8. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult

**Activity:** Complete an activity to go along with your lessons. (Activity suggestions are attached) Remember, you can incorporate your activity at any time during your lesson.

**Closing comment:** It takes courage to do the right thing. Stand up for what is right, even if you stand alone.

**"Courage conquers all things." ~Ovid**

## Courage Activities

**The Courageous Egg** (Suggested for all grades) – All Dilworth 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Classes

**Materials:** Wide mouthed glass or jar, uncooked rice, egg

Place the egg in the middle of the glass completely covered by rice. Explain that the egg represents someone who hanging with the crowd. One day the group starts making fun of other people, the egg doesn't like it so he tells them to stop (tap the top of the rim, the egg will rise up from the rice with each tap). Next, the group of friends starts excluding others from their games (tap the rim) and they start telling lies. Each time the egg refuses to go along with his friends and stands up for what's right (tap again). Continue until the egg has completely risen above the rice. Tell the students it takes courage to do the right thing when others are not. A courageous person will rise to the top and stand out from the rest!

**The Courage to be Different** (Suggested for all grades) – All Dilworth 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Classes

**Materials:** Food or clothing from a different culture

Share the food or clothing with the class. Encourage them to try the food or have someone put on the clothing. Discuss that it takes courage to try something new or wear clothes that are different from what others are wearing. Talk about how it takes courage to do many things in life, like making friends with a new student or admitting a mistake. Ask the students to share examples of their own acts of courage.

**On a Roll** (Suggested for all grades) – All Dilworth 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Classes

**Materials:** One sheet of copy paper, small book

Show the class the piece of paper and ask them if there is any way the paper can hold up the book, using only one hand to hold the paper. You can ask for several volunteers to try; soon they will realize there is no way. Now take the paper and roll it tightly into a tube, the diameter of about 1 to 1/2 inches. Hold the tube in one hand and carefully place the book on top of the open end of the tube. It should support the book. Relate this to the ability we all have to turn our weaknesses into strengths and show courage. The paper at first is flimsy, weak, lacking backbone and character- easy to crush and overwhelm. This might be compared to some people who are faced with a problem or obstacle, they may lack the courage to confront the problem or stand up to the opposition. But, with determination we can turn our weaknesses into strengths. Just as the paper can be rolled into a sturdy tube, we can work to add muscle to our weaknesses if we have the courage to persist. We will then develop backbone to hold up under pressure. Ask the students to give examples of what someone could do to turn a weakness into strength. Examples: Marty has to give a presentation in class and he is afraid to speak in front of his classmates. Jackie loves to play basketball but she is extra short for her age. She is afraid to sign up for the team because her skills might not measure up. (10-Minute Life Lessons, by Jaime Miller)

**Act it out!** (Suggested for grades 3 – 5) - All Dilworth 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Classes

**Materials:** None

Have students work in small groups to role play situations in which a person shows courage. You may want to write possible scenarios on note cards and distribute one to each group. Allow each group to perform their skit for the rest of the class. Remind students to be a respectful while others are performing.

**Gone Fishin'** (Suggested for all grades) – All Dilworth 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Classes

**Materials:** Paper, hole punch, paper clips, wooden dowel, string, magnet, and a can

Give each student a small piece of paper. Have them fold it in half. On the upper half, have them write down something they are, or were, afraid of. On the lower half, have them write what they did or can do to get over this fear. They do not need to put their name on the paper. Punch a hole through the top of both pieces of paper near the fold, then attach a paper clip. Have students place the pieces of paper in a can. Give students a "fishing pole," a wooden dowel with string and a magnet attached to the end. Have the students take turns dropping the end of the pole into the can. The magnet will attach to the paper clip. Then students "reel in" the clip of paper and read what is on the paper. Discuss how it takes courage to overcome our fears. (The Best of Character, Duane Hodgins)

**What Does Courage Look Like?** (Suggested for all grades) - All Dilworth Kindergarten Grade Classes

**Materials:** Drawing paper

Have students draw a picture of courage in action. Have them title their picture by completing the sentence "Courage is...." If possible, display the pictures in the classroom.

**A Quote To Ponder** (Suggested for grades 3 -5)

**Materials:** None

Write this quote on the board and discuss it with the students: "Courage is being scared to death...and saddling up anyway." ~John Wayne~ Next, ask the students to write and illustrate their own quote for courage. Display in the classroom.

# **CHOICES**

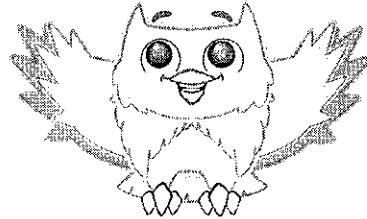
## **Lesson on Courage**

**Goal:** Kindergarten students will learn and understand what the word Courage means.

**Activity:** Creating a Courageous Story!

**Materials:**

Color Crayons and Paper



**Group Project:**

Let your students know you are going to draw a picture of an animal you find courageous. Draw a mouse and show it to your students.

Remind your students courage is not about size or muscle strength but courage is about one's inner strength to face adversity and difficulty in their life.

Ask them when are times a mouse has to show courage?

Have your students, as a class, create a story about how a mouse showed courage. They can even create a play to act out the story they created.

**Individual Project:**

Ask your students to draw a picture of 3 animals they feel are courageous and to name each animal.

Ask the students to explain what qualities make the animals they drew courageous.

Now ask each student to talk about a time when they were afraid. How did they feel? What were they afraid of?

Following this, ask each student to choose one of the animals they have drawn and explain how that animal would have helped them have courage in a time when they were afraid.

In the future you can remind students that when they are afraid to remember the animals they drew in class and think of those animals to give them courage.

## TeensHealth.org

A safe, private place to get  
doctor-approved information  
on health, emotions, and life.



## Peer Pressure

"Now!" whispered Suki. "Quick, while the clerk's not looking."

Heart pounding, Leah leaned against the store's unattended makeup display and slid two tubes of lipstick into her purse. She looked bored and detached as she followed her friends Suki and Jill out of the store, but inside she felt panicked.

"I can't believe you made me do that," Leah wailed.

"Relax," said Jill. "Everybody does it sometimes. And we didn't make you do it."

She said nothing, but Leah knew she wouldn't have done that on her own. She'd just had a big dose of peer pressure.

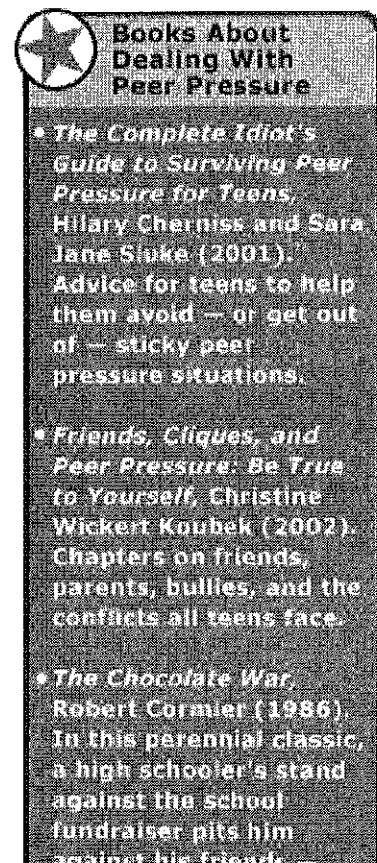
### Who Are Your Peers?

When you were a little kid, your parents usually chose your friends, putting you in playgroups or arranging playdates with certain children they knew and liked. Now that you're older, you decide who your friends are and what groups you spend time with.

Your friends — your peers — are people your age or close to it who have experiences and interests similar to yours. You and your friends make dozens of decisions every day, and you influence each other's choices and behaviors. This is often positive — it's human nature to listen to and learn from other people in your age group.

As you become more independent, your peers naturally play a greater role in your life. As school and other activities take you away from home, you may spend more time with peers than you do with your parents and siblings. You'll probably develop close friendships with some of your peers, and you may feel so connected to them that they are like an extended family.

Besides close friends, your peers include other kids you know who are the same age — like people in your grade, church, sports team, or



## **Character Trait: Courage**

Here are choices for classroom lessons. If you need them tweaked a little, please let me know.

1. **On a roll (1-3):** Students will learn how to turn their weaknesses into strengths by showing courage.
2. **Heroes (3-5):** Students will hear the poem "Our Heroes" by Alice and Phoebe Cary and will discuss how people show courage in day to day life.
3. **Role Play (3-5):** Students will be broken into small groups to come up with skits about courage and will present them to the class.
4. **A new Goldilocks (K-3):** Students will hear the story about Goldilocks and the three bears and will discuss an alternative ending to the story if the main character had the courage to seek good advice before making a poor choice.
5. **Positive vs. Negative Peer Pressure (4-5):** Students will hear a quick story about a negative peer pressure situation and will discuss how peer pressure can affect how we dress, act, speak, etc. Then, will incorporate how showing courage could help make the right choices in life.
6. **Sharkie saves the day (K-1):** Students will hear the story The Shark Who Was Afraid of Everything by Brian James and will discuss how Sharkie showed courage.

**Please sign up for a date a time by putting your name and lesson number on the calendar below.**

**If a time change is necessary please see me!!**

**Thank you! 😊**

### **Lesson Outline (On A Roll)**

- I. Introduction: Self and Character trait
- II. What does it mean to have courage?
  - a. Doing the right thing even if it is difficult
  - b. Facing your fears with confidence-being brave
- III. What are some ways to show courage?
  - a. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail
  - b. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences
  - c. Admit your mistakes and learn from them
  - d. Do not give into negative peer pressure
- IV. Who are some people who have shown courage?
  - a. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., police officers, fire fighters, soldiers
- V. Which action is foolish and which is courageous?
  - a. Fighting or walking away from a fight
  - b. Doing something dangerous that others are doing or not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Demonstrate with small book and one sheet of copy paper how the sheet is flimsy, weak, lacking backbone is easy to crush and overwhelm (compare to person facing an obstacle). BUT we can turn our weaknesses into strengths (roll paper) if we have the courage to persist.
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. Just as the paper can be rolled into a sturdy tube, we can work to add muscle to our weaknesses if we have the courage to do so.
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.



### Lesson Outline (A New Goldilocks)

- I. Introduction: Self and Character trait
- II. What does it mean to have courage?
  - a. Doing the right thing even if it is difficult
  - b. Facing your fears with confidence-being brave
- III. What are some ways to show courage?
  - a. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail
  - b. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences
  - c. Admit your mistakes and learn from them
  - d. Do not give into negative peer pressure
- IV. Who are some people who have shown courage?
  - a. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., police officers, fire fighters, soldiers
- V. Which action is foolish and which is courageous?
  - a. Fighting or walking away from a fight
  - b. Doing something dangerous that others are doing or not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Tell the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Goldilocks made several poor choices. How would the stories be different if you added a good friend or adult with good advice? What would be different if the character sought advice about how to have the courage to make the right choices before acting?
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. Sometimes we make poor choices, but we can demonstrate courage by asking a friend or adult about how to make good choices in the future.
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.

"Our Heroes" By Alice and Phoebe Cary

Here's a hand to the boy who has courage  
To do what he knows to be right;  
When he falls in the way of temptation,  
He has a hard battle to fight.  
Who strives against self and his comrades  
Will find a most powerful foe;  
All honor to him if he conquers—  
A cheer for the boy who says "No!"

There's many a battle fought daily  
The world knows nothing about;  
There's many a brave little soldier  
Whose strength puts a legion to rout.

And he who fights sin single-handed  
Is more of a hero, I say,  
Than he who leads soldiers to battle,  
And conquers by arms in the fray.

Be steadfast, my boy, when you're tempted  
And do what you know to be right;  
Stand firm by the colors of manhood,  
And you will overcome in the fight.  
"The Right" be your battle-cry ever,  
In waging the warfare of life;  
And God, who knows who are the heroes,  
Will give you the strength for the strife.

## The Story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Goldilocks. She went for a walk in the forest. Pretty soon, she came upon a house. She knocked and, when no one answered, she walked right in.

At the table in the kitchen, there were three bowls of porridge. Goldilocks was hungry. She tasted the porridge from the first bowl.

"This porridge is too hot!" she exclaimed.

So, she tasted the porridge from the second bowl.

"This porridge is too cold," she said

So, she tasted the last bowl of porridge.

"Ahhh, this porridge is just right," she said happily and she ate it all up.

After she'd eaten the three bears' breakfasts she decided she was feeling a little tired. So, she walked into the living room where she saw three chairs. Goldilocks sat in the first chair to rest her feet.

"This chair is too big!" she exclaimed.

So she sat in the second chair.

"This chair is too big, too!" she whined.

So she tried the last and smallest chair.

"Ahhh, this chair is just right," she sighed. But just as she settled down into the chair to rest, it broke into pieces!

Goldilocks was very tired by this time, so she went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay down in the first bed, but it was too hard. Then she lay in the second bed, but it was too soft. Then she lay down in the third bed and it

was just right. Goldilocks fell asleep.

As she was sleeping, the three bears came home.

"Someone's been eating my porridge," growled the Papa bear.

"Someone's been eating my porridge," said the Mama bear.

"Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up!" cried the Baby bear.

"Someone's been sitting in my chair," growled the Papa bear.

"Someone's been sitting in my chair," said the Mama bear.

"Someone's been sitting in my chair and they've broken it all to pieces," cried the Baby bear.

They decided to look around some more and when they got upstairs to the bedroom, Papa bear growled,

"Someone's been sleeping in my bed,"

"Someone's been sleeping in my bed, too" said the Mama bear

"Someone's been sleeping in my bed and she's still there!" exclaimed Baby bear.

Just then, Goldilocks woke up and saw the three bears.

She screamed, "Help!" And she jumped up and ran out of

the room. Goldilocks ran down the stairs, opened the door, and ran away into the forest. And she never returned to the home of the three bears.

## Lesson Outline (Heroes)

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- II. What does it mean to have courage?
  - a. Doing the right thing even if it is difficult
  - b. Facing your fears with confidence-being brave
- III. What are some ways to show courage?
  - a. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail
  - b. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences
  - c. Admit your mistakes and learn from them
  - d. Do not give into negative peer pressure
- IV. Who are some people who have shown courage?
  - a. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., police officers, fire fighters, soldiers
- V. Which action is foolish and which is courageous?
  - a. Fighting or walking away from a fight
  - b. Doing something dangerous that others are doing or not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Listen to the poem "Our Heroes" by Alice and Phoebe Cary. Discuss what is happening within poem. Is the main character in the poem a soldier, police officer or firefighter? Can we be courageous without having one of those jobs?
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. People show courage when they say no to things they do not wish to do, and for following their dreams.
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.

## Lesson Outline ~~(Heroes)~~ <sup>Role Play</sup>

- I. Introduction: Self and Character trait
- II. What does it mean to have courage?
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- III. What are some ways to show courage?
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  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Break the class into small groups for Role Play. Situations:
  - a. You see someone taking something that is not his or hers
  - b. You are in class but you do not understand what the teacher is saying. You want to ask a question but you're afraid everyone else knows the answer.
  - c. There are tryouts for a sports team, school play or talent contest
  - d. People are constantly picking on another person in class.
  - e. You want to become more active in gym class but you are not as competitive as the other members of class.
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. People show courage when they try new things and overcome their fears
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.

### Lesson Outline (Sharkie)

- I. Introduction: Self and Character trait
- II. What does it mean to have courage?
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  - b. Facing your fears with confidence-being brave
- III. What are some ways to show courage?
  - a. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail
  - b. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences
  - c. Admit your mistakes and learn from them
  - d. Do not give into negative peer pressure
- IV. Who are some people who have shown courage?
  - a. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., police officers, fire fighters, soldiers
- V. Which action is foolish and which is courageous?
  - a. Fighting or walking away from a fight
  - b. Doing something dangerous that others are doing or not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Read the story The Shark Who Was Afraid of Everything. Discuss how Sharkie demonstrated courage in the story, even when everyone knew he was scared.
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. Everyone if we are scared, we can show courage to do the right thing.
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.



### **Lesson Outline (Peer Pressure)**

- I. Introduction: Self and Character trait
- II. What does it mean to have courage?
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  - b. Facing your fears with confidence-being brave
- III. What are some ways to show courage?
  - a. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail
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  - c. Teasing or bullying someone or standing up for someone who is being mistreated
  - d. Only looking out for yourself or helping others
  - e. Following the crowd or doing what's right
  - f. Quitting when things get tough or working hard, even when it's difficult
- VI. Students will hear a very brief story demonstrating a negative peer pressure situation. As a class, will discuss the differences between positive and negative peer pressure. Then, will discuss how that is seen in day to day life.
- VII. Summarize lesson by saying:
  - a. Have the courage to say what you believe and believe what you say. Don't let others negatively influence your decisions.
- VIII. Life goal: Wherever you go, there will always be people who say that you are not good enough. Prove them wrong. Show some courage and go for your goals.

community. These peers also influence you by the way they dress and act, things they're involved in, and the attitudes they show.

It's natural for people to identify with and compare themselves to their peers as they consider how they wish to be (or think they should be), or what they want to achieve. People are influenced by peers because they want to fit in, be like peers they admire, do what others are doing, or have what others have.

### Peer Influence Isn't All Bad

You already know that the teen years can be tough. You're figuring out who you are, what you believe, what you're good at, what your responsibilities are, and what your place in the world is going to be.

It's comforting to face those challenges with friends who are into the same things that you are. But you probably hear adults — parents, teachers, guidance counselors, etc. — talk about peer pressure more than the benefits of belonging to a peer group.

You might not hear a lot about it, but peers have a profoundly positive influence on each other and play important roles in each other's lives:

- **Friendship.** Among peers you can find friendship and acceptance, and share experiences that can build lasting bonds.
- **Positive examples.** Peers set plenty of good examples for each other. Having peers who are committed to doing well in school or to doing their best in a sport can influence you to be more goal-oriented, too. Peers who are kind and loyal influence you to build these qualities in yourself. Even peers you've never met can be role models! For example, watching someone your age compete in the Olympics, give a piano concert, or spearhead a community project might inspire you to go after a dream of your own.
- **Feedback and advice.** Your friends listen and give you feedback as you try out new ideas, explore belief, and discuss problems. Peers can help you make decisions, too: what courses to take; whether to get your hair cut, let it grow, or dye it; how to handle a family argument. Peers often give each other good advice. Your friends will be quick to tell you when they think you're making a mistake or doing something risky.
- **Socializing.** Your peer group gives you opportunities to try out new social skills. Getting to know lots of different people — such as classmates or teammates — gives you a chance to learn how to expand your circle of friends, build relationships, and work out differences. You may have peers you agree or disagree with, compete with, or team with, peers you admire, and peers you don't want to be like.
- **Encouragement.** Peers encourage you to work hard to get the solo in the concert, help you study, listen and support you when you're upset or troubled, and empathize with you when they've experienced similar difficulties.

- **New experiences.** Your peers might get you involved in clubs, sports, or religious groups. Your world would be far less rich without peers to encourage you try sushi for the first time, listen to a CD you've never heard before, or to offer moral support when you audition for the school play.

### **When the Pressure's On**

Sometimes, though, the stresses in your life can actually come from your peers. They may pressure you into doing something you're uncomfortable with, such as shoplifting, doing drugs or drinking, taking dangerous risks when driving a car, or having sex before you feel ready.

This pressure may be expressed openly ("Oh, come on — it's just one beer, and everyone else is having one") or more indirectly — simply making beer available at a party, for instance.

Most peer pressure is less easy to define. Sometimes a group can make subtle signals without saying anything at all — letting you know that you must dress or talk a certain way or adopt particular attitudes toward school, other students, parents, and teachers in order to win acceptance and approval.

The pressure to conform (to do what others are doing) can be powerful and hard to resist. A person might feel pressure to do something just because others are doing it (or say they are). Peer pressure can influence a person to do something that is relatively harmless — or something that has more serious consequences. Giving in to the pressure to dress a certain way is one thing — going along with the crowd to drink or smoke is another.

People may feel pressure to conform so they fit in or are accepted, or so they don't feel awkward or uncomfortable. When people are unsure of what to do in a social situation, they naturally look to others for cues about what is and isn't acceptable.

The people who are most easily influenced will follow someone else's lead first. Then others may go along, too — so it can be easy to think, "It must be OK. Everyone else is doing it. They must know what they're doing." Before you know it, many people are going along with the crowd — perhaps on something they might not otherwise do.

Responding to peer pressure is part of human nature — but some people are more likely to give in, and others are better able to resist and stand their ground. People who are low on confidence and those who tend to follow rather than lead could be more likely to seek their peers' approval by giving in to a risky challenge or suggestion. People who are unsure of themselves, new to the group, or inexperienced with peer pressure may also be more likely to give in.

Using alcohol or drugs increases anyone's chances of giving in to peer pressure. Substance use impairs judgment and interferes with the ability to make good decisions.

### **Pressure Pointers**

Nearly everyone ends up in a sticky peer pressure situation at some point. No matter how wisely you choose your friends, or how well you think you know them, sooner or later you'll have to make decisions that are difficult and could be unpopular. It may be something as simple as resisting the pressure to

spend your hard-earned babysitting money on the latest MP3 player that "everybody" has. Or it may mean deciding to take a stand that makes you look uncool to your group.

But these situations can be opportunities to figure out what is right for you. There's no magic to standing up to peer pressure, but it does take courage — yours:

- **Listen to your gut.** If you feel uncomfortable, even if your friends seem to be OK with what's going on, it means that something about the situation is wrong for you. This kind of decision-making is part of becoming self-reliant and learning more about who you are.
- **Plan for possible pressure situations.** If you'd like to go to a party but you believe you may be offered alcohol or drugs there, think ahead about how you'll handle this challenge. Decide ahead of time — and even rehearse — what you'll say and do. Learn a few tricks. If you're holding a bottle of water or a can of soda, for instance, you're less likely to be offered a drink you don't want.
- **Arrange a "bail-out" code phrase** you can use with your parents without losing face with your peers. You might call home from a party at which you're feeling pressured to drink alcohol and say, for instance, "Can you come and drive me home? I have a terrible earache."
- **Learn to feel comfortable saying "no."** With good friends you should never have to offer an explanation or apology. But if you feel you need an excuse for, say, turning down a drink or smoke, think up a few lines you can use casually. You can always say, "No, thanks, I've got a belt test in karate next week and I'm in training," or "No way — my uncle just died of cirrhosis and I'm not even looking at any booze."
- **Hang with people who feel the same way you do.** Choose friends who will speak up with you when you're in need of moral support, and be quick to speak up for a friend in the same way. If you're hearing that little voice telling you a situation's not right, chances are others hear it, too. Just having one other person stand with you against peer pressure makes it much easier for both people to resist.
- **Blame your parents:** "Are you kidding? If my mom found out, she'd kill me, and her spies are everywhere."
- **If a situation seems dangerous, don't hesitate to get an adult's help.**

It's not always easy to resist negative peer pressure, but when you do, it is easy to feel good about it afterward. And you may even be a positive influence on your peers who feel the same way — often it just takes one person to speak out or take a different action to change a situation. Your friends may follow if you have the courage to do something different or refuse to go along with the group. Consider yourself a leader, and know that you have the potential to make a difference.

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