



LET'S CHAT

ONLINE SAFETY

Moray

Peer Pressure



Online Safety Tips for Parents and Carers

Peer pressure has always existed among young people but, in recent years, it's taken on a whole new, and concerning, dimension. Friends in the real world will still have a huge influence on your child's behaviour, but today, the people they meet online – whether on social media or online gaming platforms – can also exert pressure on them to act in certain ways.

Things to know about Peer Pressure

Making friends, fitting-in and feeling like you belong can be a daily challenge for young people and even more so for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), they may lack the social skills to interact with others in the real world so, socialising online offers a safer place to build those relationships. While this is a good thing, it can also present challenges. Social media and gaming can offer young people a place to connect with others who have shared interests helping them feel less lonely or isolated. However, peer pressure can change their behaviour in a positive or negative way depending on who is influencing them. According to Ofcom (2020) 66% of 8-11 year olds and 73% of 12-15 year olds say that there is pressure to be popular on social media. Alongside this people they've only met online or YouTubers can have the same influence on them as people they know in real life. Children may take risks to feel accepted and the changing nature of social norms online and their increased need to feel part of the group can push them to take risks online that they otherwise wouldn't. Such as, feeling pressured to take part in a prank and posting it on social media, sending a nude to someone, or taking part in cyberbullying. As well as this, young people may actively chase likes and followers to prove to others that they are popular and well-liked without a clear understanding of how this might put them at risk.

What is the Impact on Young People?

Normalise anti-social behaviour - Being part of an online group that encourages anti-social behaviour can negatively impact children's perception of what is also acceptable offline.

Impact on emotional wellbeing - If a child feels pressured into 'sexting' or sending sexually provocative photos or videos (nudes) it can create anxiety and stress, especially if the image is shared wider than the intended recipient. The pressure to be accepted into a group of friends may make your child feel they have to do what is asked of them, this may be humiliating and is often for the 'entertainment' of the other people in the group who are not genuine friends.

Danger to their physical health - Although some online challenges are harmless and can be done to raise money for a good cause, others that encourage them to put themselves at risk for 'a laugh' can go wrong and affect their physical health.

Influence of forums promoting extreme views - Young people are seeing online content promoting hatred, racism, and sites encouraging eating disorders. As children, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are more influenced by what they see online, there is a risk that they can be led to adopting values that can affect their behaviour and sense of self.

Why does it happen?

As adults, many of us will have experienced peer pressure when we were younger, but it can be easy to forget just how potent it can be. Here's a quick reminder of why young people can succumb:

- They want to become more popular or fit in.
- They want to look cool.
- They can't see or imagine the consequences if they say something mean from the apparent safety of being behind a screen.
- They trust the person they have sent something to, and believe they won't pass it on to anyone else.
- They are easily impressed and not always able to see the truth behind images online (filters, photo editing)



What you can do

Set out clear rules to challenge peer pressure - Create clear rules about what they should and shouldn't do online. There are resources online that can help you set up a family agreement if you think this is something that might benefit your family.

Explain what signs they could look out for - Help them recognise when they feel pressured into doing something (i.e. fear of being humiliated, losing a friendship, being isolated, FOMO [Fear of Missing Out]).

Help them build confidence - Help them feel confident about saying no if they are asked to do something that puts them or others at risk.

Encourage them to challenge anything that feels wrong - Help them understand that it's important not to take everything at face value and that it's important to challenge, check and question things that seem too good to be true or may put them or others at risk.

Make sure they know who to talk to - If they can't talk to you, make sure they are aware of organisations they can speak to for guidance, for example Childline or a trusted adult (sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent or family friend).

Share your own experience of peer pressure - Talk about your own experience to show that it's nothing new, it's just experienced differently.

Challenge myths - Dispel online myths that may cause your child to feel pressured to do something they're not ready for. Tell them that it's okay to unfriend someone online if they feel threatened.

What else can you do?

Ask their views on celebrities - Find out who they admire online, be curious about their influencers and try to understand what it is they like, so you can help them to think about whether there might be another side to the images they see.

Be proactive - Talk to your child about sexting now, rather than waiting until something happens. This is especially important if they are an older teen who is in a relationship or considering starting one: many images are sent between couples. The problems, if any, could occur later when the relationship breaks down but the images remain.

Discuss sexting and sending nudes - Make it part of a wider conversation about relationships. Let them know that it's natural to be sexually curious but that they shouldn't be pressured into doing anything they don't want to do or may regret later. Reassure them that the phrase, 'everybody does it' usually means, 'everybody says they do it, but they don't really'.

Utilise the law - Explain that it's illegal to take, hold or share indecent images of anyone under the age of 18. If they receive these kind of images and pass them on to anyone, they are breaking the law, even if they're under 18 themselves.

Report concerns - If you're concerned that sexting is taking place at your child's school, speak to a teacher. If you're concerned that someone has sent your child indecent pictures or videos or that a stranger has made inappropriate contact online, report it to your internet or mobile provider and to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk) immediately.

Seek expert advice - If your child feels pressurised, is worried or upset about something to do with a relationship they are in, or has any questions about sexuality or sex in general, there is expert support available. Point them towards a service like Brook, Youthnet or Childline, or contact them yourself to get information you can share with your child.

Look out for changes in your child's behaviour or appearance - You know your child better than anyone. Experimenting with fashion and having mood swings are all a normal part of growing up, but if you think the changes in behaviour and attitude are going further than that and you're worried, don't ignore your instincts. Find out what they're doing online, where they're going and whom they're in touch with.

Take internet breaks - If you think the internet is having a negative influence on your child's wellbeing, talk to their teachers and think about ways to help them widen their interests. Helping them to switch off and reconnect with offline groups and friends is really important.

Set boundaries - We all find it difficult to switch off and many of us have written things online that we might wish we hadn't. Your children need you to help them put down their devices, even if only to get enough sleep. A child who is texting or on social media late at night is much less likely to be thinking carefully about what they say or do.

Remember, the internet never forgets

Finally, remind your child that they need to think carefully before they post anything online or via email or on social media. A compromising image sent to a friend or a nasty comment on a message board could be there forever and your child won't be able to control who sees it. Even if an image or comment is deleted someone else could have already shared it and your child will have lost control of what they posted. Ask them how a friend, teacher or relative might feel if they saw what they were doing or saying? What about a future employer or university admissions officer? Encourage them to take time to think before sending or uploading anything.

Further help

If you are concerned about peer pressure affecting your child, don't be afraid to get advice or support from their school or a friend you trust. If you think your child may be being pressurised into doing something that could put them at risk, you can contact the NSPCC's free Online Safety Helpline (0808 800 5000), or CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk) for advice. You can also find more information and advice on the [Safer Schools Scotland](#) App or Website.

