



Q & A

Q: I don't want to give in when my friends want me to do stuff I know I shouldn't, but I don't know how to tell them I don't want to?

A: First, lower the importance of their approval by raising your understanding of God's love for you. Second, be clear within yourself about what you believe and what you do and don't want to do. Lastly, be ready to say "no" by preparing ahead of time. In your head, have a script for the next time you're pressured to do something you know is wrong. Some short, easy phrases to remember are: *no thanks, I don't feel like it, it's not my thing*, and when nothing else has worked, *back off!*

Q: I have a really good friend, but she's always trying to convince me to do things, even when I say no. What should I do?

A: When we make our decisions clear to our friends, they'll almost always respect us and stop pressuring us. Everyone knows it's not cool to pressure someone into do something they don't want to. Once in a while though, our friends don't respect us enough to stop. That's when it's time to face the fact that they're not really being our friends. Leaving a friendship can be really difficult, but we read in Psalm 1 that God blesses us in powerful ways when we leave bad influences behind.

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- Online Resources**
- Christian Resources for Teens: <http://www.surfinthespirit.com/teens/>
 - Books:**
 - *How to Say No and Keep Your Friends:* by Sharon Scott, HRD press, 1997.
 - *Tough Problems, Real Solutions: A Q & A Book for Teens* by Jim Burns, Ph.D., Servant Publications, 2002.

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If you or someone you know is having a hard time dealing with peer pressure—listen to your gut. If you feel uncomfortable with something that's going on, even if your friends don't, it means that something about the situation is wrong for you. Don't hesitate to talk to a friend, your parents, a school counselor, or your parish priest, especially if the situation seems dangerous.

GET THE FACTS

Peer pressure has a much greater impact on teen behavior than any other factor. It's worth thinking about the role peer pressure plays in your life, since it probably plays a bigger part in your decision making process than you think.

Not all peer pressure is bad. In fact, positive peer pressure is a great help. The only difference between negative and positive peer pressure is the outcome: the positive kind helps us do things that are good for us and others, while negative peer pressure pushes us into things that hurt us.

Giving in to negative peer pressure makes people feel worse about themselves. People often give in to negative peer pressure because they think they'll feel better by pleasing their friends, but it doesn't work that way. Standing up for yourself and doing what you feel is right is the real way to feel better about yourself.

NAVIGATING THROUGH YOUR TEEN YEARS: PEER PRESSURE

KNOW THE SIGNS

Wanting acceptance by one's peers is completely normal. Some people are easily influenced by peer pressure because their self confidence is based on other people's approval. Some signs that we might be too open to others' influence include the following:

- Low self-esteem or lack of confidence.
- Uncertainty about one's place within their group of friends.
- No personal interests outside of one's own peer group.
- A feeling of isolation from peers and/or family.
- Lack of real ties to friends.
- A feeling that friends could turn on you.

THE CHURCH SPEAKS

Some religions teach that God created *us* to serve and love Him. Orthodox Christians believe the opposite: we were created so that *God* could love us. We are the "apple of His eye," the greatest of His creations. We read in Genesis that when God created heaven and earth, light and darkness, plants and creatures, He "saw that it was good," but when he created man and woman, "it was very good." What does that mean to us? When we really understand how much God loves us, we don't care so much about anyone else's approval or acceptance.

We're the most open to negative peer pressure when we forget how precious God has made each one of us to be. Jesus taught us that if we hear His words and put them into practice, we're building our life on a good, solid foundation (Luke 6:47).

Martyrs point the way. The history of the Church is full of martyrs who did the right thing in the face of powerful pressure to go down the wrong path. Our saints are our heroes, showing us how it's done. St. George, the Three Holy Youths, St. Demetrios, St. Christina and St. Marina are just a few of the saints who, like you, faced enormous pressure, but drew on the strength of God to overcome adversity.

One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch. St. Paul didn't talk about apples, but he echoes this old saying when he writes: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). While we need to work on our ability to say "no" even when it's hard to, we also need to be honest about the influence our friends have on us, and when necessary, distance ourselves from that influence.

Community in Christ. Resisting negative peer pressure is hard, especially when we are alone in our decision. While we may feel isolated from our friends, as Orthodox Christians, it's encouraging to know that salvation is granted through the Church, the community of believers. We are never really alone!