

Risk Behaviours and Pressures on Teens

As your teen negotiates high school, he or she will struggle with the pressure to fit in and will likely be exposed or pressured to experiment with risk behaviours, such as sexual activity, alcohol or drug use, or violence. The connection between adolescent risk behaviours and peer or dating relationships is often overlooked. Unhealthy or abusive peer or dating relationships almost always add to the pressure to participate in risk behaviours. It will often be the teen's skills in negotiating, decision-making, and problem-solving in the context of relationships that will determine his or her degree of risk.

Healthy relationships can protect teens from the pressures to engage in risk behaviours. As parents, we need to teach our teens the skills needed to identify and develop healthy relationships before they are exposed to pressures to engage in risk behaviours.

Pressure to conform to what other teens decide is acceptable is one of the strongest pressures faced by teens. Teens want to be accepted for who they are, but it can be difficult, if not impossible, if they are worried about being humiliated, bullied, threatened, or even hurt. These pressures are particularly real for teens who seek more individuality, have unusual interests, come from different cultures, have a different sexual orientation, or who are noticeably different in any way.

For many teens, the pressure to change their beliefs, values, or boundaries in order to keep a boyfriend or girlfriend is tremendous. Teens face much more pressure today to be "racy" and sexually active than ever before. Both genders report feeling these pressures.

Teens need to know the difference between dating and sex. Dating is not an avenue to sex; it is an opportunity to get to know someone better. Sex should be discussed openly before dating starts (even group dating), and teens should recognize that abstinence is always an option. It is important that you share your values and concerns before your teen starts dating.