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Lesson 6

The Tangled Web of Peer Pressure

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

At some time, every child will face negative peer pressure.

As teachers, our role is to help our students recognize negative peer pressure and plan ahead for a healthy response.

Peer pressure can also have a profoundly positive influence on the lives of students and play an important role in encouraging them to do their best and make right choices.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. identify negative peer pressure situations and have preplanned responses to them.
2. realize peer pressure can be positive.

KEY TERMS

Peer Pressure: social pressure to take a certain action or adopt values or conform in order to be accepted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

All of your students will have to learn how to handle negative and positive peer pressure in a healthy way. This lesson will provide opportunities for productive discussions about proper responses to peer pressure.

Discuss with your students how friends can pull us down or build us up. If we do not choose our friends wisely, they could corrupt our lives. We need to remember the opposite is also true. Good friends can protect us from developing bad habits. The following optional activity could help you make this point.

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[Say to the students:] There is an old saying, “One bad piece of fruit can spoil the whole barrel.” Today, I have brought two beautiful pieces of fruit along with a few bruised pieces of fruit. The good fruit represents you and the bruised ones represent some friends you know you should probably not spend time with because you know they make poor choices. Still, you spend time with them because you think: *They are my buddies. They are not that bad.*

We are going to do an experiment. We will put one piece of beautiful fruit by itself in the closet. Then, we are going to put the other piece of beautiful fruit together with the bruised fruit. *[Place all of them in a plastic bag.]*

We are going to put the bag and this separate piece of fruit in a dark closet and come back to check on it after a couple of days. What do you think is going to happen to the good fruit? *[The beautiful piece of fruit in the bag with the bruised fruit should deteriorate quicker than the fruit by itself. In reality, all of the fruit will eventually become rotten, but the point you are trying to make with this experiment is how quickly the fruit in the bag was affected. This is a gentle reminder if we allow ourselves to be influenced by those who are making bad choices, we could quickly become just like them!]*

Your students need guidance in this area. This lesson seeks to give you some good advice on how to encourage your students to make wise choices about peer pressure. It is a hard lesson to learn.

Here are a few more thoughts to help you guide your students in this area:

- *Make sure your classroom is a harbor in the storm of life. Students need to know they are safe in your room and they will be accepted there.*
- *Don’t forget you have an important role in influencing your students for the good. They need good role models – be one!*
- *Encourage peers to exercise positive peer pressure with their friends.*
- *Help guide your students to make wise choices as they navigate life.*
- *Applaud your students when they make good choices.*

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- *When failure happens, help talk students through the situation and help them understand ways they could make a better choice the next time.*
- *Help your students realize sometimes they may have to stand alone if they make the wise choice. Even though it may be hard to stand alone, they will be better for doing so.*

Helping your students become more mature by guiding them through times of peer pressure is one of your most important roles as their teacher. Teach them by being a positive role model.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION

1. You will need a plastic bag that will zip or close tightly and two unbruised pieces of fruit and one or two bruised ones, if you choose to model the experiment in **Background Information**.
2. You will need a total of three bowls — two bowls with pre-cooked pasta noodles and one bowl with bleach. Use clear ones, if available. You will also need red food coloring or something similar for **Applying the Lesson** with **younger elementary students**. You may want to practice this experiment ahead of time.
3. Write role-play scenarios on paper for the **Applying the Lesson** section and, if you wish, provide props for the role plays.
4. Paper and crayons or markers, will be needed for **Sharing the Lesson** with **younger elementary students**.
5. In **Going Deeper** for **older elementary students**, you will need to prepare cards with the peer pressure sentences on them for the game.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

[Say to the students:] **Sometimes, our friends can influence us to do things we might not want to do. This is called negative peer pressure. Sometimes, our friends can encourage us to do the right thing. In this lesson, we will learn about both negative and positive pressure from friends. Trish, Hector and Dugan begin to discover how others can influence their lives as they see how things have influenced the Map of Wonders.**

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READINESS (5 minutes)

[Read to the students:] **Chapter 6 – The Librarian**

“I’ve never seen anything so beautiful,” exclaimed Trish as she gazed at the Map of Wonders. “It is indescribable!”

“I wish you could have seen the map in its former glory!” sighed the voice of the Librarian.

“What do you mean?” asked Trish. “It’s beautiful now!”

“True, even diminished glory can be breathtaking. But seeing it now makes me sad; for I not only see what is, I see what is no longer there,” replied the voice.

Hector frowned as he studied the map and listened to the conversation between Trish and the Librarian. He had missed it before in all the vibrant colors and gold inlay, but now he began to see. The Map of Wonders was flawed. Some of the boundaries and images were smudged or smeared. Different portions had dark blotches blocking what lay beneath and were sending out spidery tentacles to invade untroubled parts of the map. Something was happening and it wasn’t good. Hector found a feathered pointer lying next to the map, and with it he showed Dugan and Trish what he had found.

“The Librarian was right!” exclaimed Trish. “How awful to see something so beautiful being wounded and scarred.”

“Someone has to do something!” demanded Hector. “It is not right!”

“Do you wish to help?” asked the voice.

“Yes!” all three replied.



“Well and good,” said the Librarian as she stepped into view. She was neither tall nor short, fat nor thin, young nor old. “Average” fit her like a glove, but not the ordinary sort of “average.” She was the perfect blend of everything normal — she was what she was supposed to be. It is very hard to find a person who wears no masks and

has all of their defenses down. She was comfortable with who she was and just being around her awakened the students to the fact they had never

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been too comfortable with themselves. They moved toward her and found themselves hugging her. They hadn't hugged anyone in a long time.

"I don't suppose we can clean up the bad spots on the map with soap and water or touch it up with some new paint?" suggested Dugan.

"No, I'm afraid not," said the Librarian. "The damage you see happened outside the library and that is where any repairs will have to take place."

"So, the Map of Wonders shows us what is right and wrong with our world?" surmised Hector.

"Yes and no," said the Librarian. "The Map of Wonders reflects what is going on in our world, but it is more than just a mirror or representation of reality. It has a life of its own. The map is very much like you!"

"I don't understand," said Hector. "It sounds as if you're saying we are images of something besides ourselves."

"Quite true!" remarked the Librarian. "Your true self is often hidden behind people's opinions you happen to believe. What we believe has a profound influence on who we are and our abilities to influence our world for good."

EXPLORE (15 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **The Librarian told Hector, Trish and Dugan their true selves are special and they need to be careful about what influences they allow to have an impact on their lives. Each of you is special, too. We are going to discuss how we can learn to listen to positive influences and reject negative influences in our lives.**

[Read each scenario to the students, then lead the discussion questions.]

For Younger Elementary Students

Scenario 1: "It's getting dark," says John, "I better get home before my parents get worried about me." Peter said, "Wait, let's have a contest to see who can throw the best before you go. Here are some rocks. Let's hide behind these bushes and see who can hit the next car passing by. Since it is getting dark, no one will see us!" "No," said John, "I am not going to do that!" "Man, you are a chicken!" said Peter. "No one will ever know! If we hit one, we will just run away. I bet I can hit it and you can't!" John let Peter talk him into it. They crouched behind the bushes and when

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the next car came by, they both stood up and threw a rock. They heard the sickening sound of glass breaking and realized one of their rocks had broken a window in the car. The driver of the car stopped and jumped out of the car looking for the rock throwers. John and Peter ran off and the driver started running after them. John felt sick as he realized what a bad choice he had made.

[Lead a class discussion with the following questions. Have the class as a whole answer the first question after each scenario by raising their hand to indicate positive peer pressure and not raising their hand to indicate negative peer pressure. You may want to write the answers students give to question 3 on the board to help when you discuss question 4.]

1. Is the influence in this story being used in a positive or negative way? *[negative]*
2. Who is doing the pressuring? *[Peter]*
3. What words does he use? *["You are a chicken!" "No one will ever know."]*
4. What effect might those words have? *[John felt pressured to prove he wasn't afraid to do what Peter wanted him to do.]*

Scenario 2: "Students, I want you to meet our new student. This is Maria. She has just moved here and is going to be in our class. I expect you to make her feel welcome." Susie leaned over to Elizabeth and said, "Look at her dirty clothes. And she looks like she slept in them! I say we ignore her and don't let her play with us at recess." Elizabeth answered, "I think she has a nice face and she looks scared. I would be scared, too, if I just moved here. I am going to play with her and try to be her friend. Come on, let's help her get used to being in a new class." "Okay," said Susie. "I guess you are right. We can invite her to play with us."

[Lead a class discussion on the following questions:]

1. Is the influence in this story being used in a positive or negative way? *[negative; then positive]*
2. Who is doing the pressuring? *[Susie; then Elizabeth]*
3. What words do they use? *[Susie—"Let's ignore her;" Elizabeth—"Let's help her get used to being in a new class."]*

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4. **What effect might those words have?** *[Elizabeth’s influence on Susie to welcome Maria will help Maria feel a part of the class.]*

[Read each scenario to the students, then lead the discussion questions.]

For Older Elementary Students

Scenario 1: “Now!” whispered Lynne, “Quick, while the clerk’s not looking.” With her heart pounding, Susan 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 Lynne and Jill out of the store, but inside she felt panicked. “I can’t believe you made me do that,” Susan wailed. “Relax,” said Jill. “Everybody does it at some time or another. And we didn’t make you do it.” Susan said nothing, but she knew she wouldn’t have done that on her own. She had just yielded to peer pressure.

[Lead a class discussion on the following questions. You may want to write the answers the students give to question 3 on the board to help when you discuss question 4.]

1. **Is the influence in this story being used in a positive or negative way?** *[negative]*
2. **Who is doing the pressuring?** *[Lynne and Jill]*
3. **What words do they use?** *["Everybody does it at some time or another." "We didn't make you do it."]*
4. **What effect might those words have?** *[Lynne makes Susan feel left out if she doesn't participate, and then puts the blame for the action on Susan.]*

Scenario 2: “I wish you would try out for the school musical with me,” pleaded Julie. “You know I don’t sing. I play basketball,” responded Stacey. But Julie wouldn’t let it go. She said, “Who says you can’t do both? Besides, I’ve heard you sing. I know you have a great voice.” “Me? No, I don’t,” insisted Stacey. “Yes, you do. You have a beautiful voice. You just try to hide it,” said Julie. “Well, it’s embarrassing to sing in public,” admitted Stacey. “Why is it any different than making a basketball jump-shot in front of hundreds of people?” responded Julie. “I don’t know.”

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It just is,” whined Stacey. “Well, it can’t hurt to try, can it? Plus, Jane and Celia are already going. It would be so cool for all four of us to do it together,” insisted Julie. “What if I fail?” asked Stacey. “I’m pretty sure you won’t fail. But if you do, I’ll buy you a milkshake to make you feel better. Look, just think about it, okay? And stop worrying so much. It’ll be fun!” said Julie.

[Lead a class discussion on the following questions:]

1. Is the influence in the story being used in a positive or negative way? *[positive]*
2. Who is doing the pressuring? *[Julie]*
3. What words does she use? *["I’ve heard you sing. I know you have a great voice.” “You have a beautiful voice. It can’t hurt to try. Stop worrying. It will be fun!”]*
4. What effect might those words have? *[Julie is positive about the ability of others and is encouraging Stacey’s self-image.]*

Scenario 3: “I hate doing this homework,” moaned Larry. “What possible use will it be in my life to be able to know how to multiply fractions?” “I know how you feel,” replied Tom. “There must be a grand reason for having to learn this or why else would we have to endure this pain?” “I think teachers just want to torture us,” implored Larry. “I am just not going to do this. I am going out to kick a few footballs.” “You know, if you flunk math class you can’t play for the football team,” Tom reminded him. “Did you think about that? You wouldn’t want that to happen. You are the school’s best football player. We need you on the team.” “I didn’t think about that. But I just don’t get this math; it’s too hard,” complained Larry. “What if I help you with it? Maybe you will understand it then,” said Tom. “You know, passing this class is important for football, but it is important for another reason, too. I know it’s hard to think about your future right now, but you should. Even a silly math class has an effect on your future. You want to do well in school so you can get a good job when you grow up, right?” “Yeah, you are right, I didn’t think about all that stuff. I would die if I couldn’t play football!” Larry admitted. “Would you mind helping me? That would be great!”

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[Lead a class discussion on the following questions:]

- 1. Is the influence in the story being used in a positive or negative way?** *[positive]*
- 2. Who is doing the pressuring?** *[Tom]*
- 3. What words does he use?** *["You are the best football player. We need you on the team." "What if I help you with it?"]*
- 4. What effect might those words have?** *[Tom is building up Larry's confidence about being a good ball player and helping Larry to think about the future and how flunking math class might affect it.]*

[At the end of the scenarios, lead a class discussion as they respond to these questions.] **Did you ever look around to see who raised their hand or kept it down in response to question 1 for each scenario, and then, you quickly changed your response? Or did you wish you had changed it? Is that peer pressure?**

DISCOVER (5 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **Think/Pair/Share with the person sitting next to you one important lesson you learned from the scenarios we just discussed. Discuss one of the positive peer pressure situations and one of the negative peer pressure situations.**

APPLY (10 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **The friends you choose can make a difference in helping you make good choices. I want to show you how your friends can be a good or bad influence on you and how you can be a good influence on them.**

[Prepare two bowls of water and put a handful of pre-cooked pasta in each bowl.]

[Say to the students:] **These bowls represent you and your friends. One bowl of pasta will represent the friends who help you make good choices in life and the other bowl of pasta will represent people who encourage you to make bad choices. You can see all the pasta is yellow, right now. I am going to add a drop or two of red food coloring to one bowl. The red represents times when some of your friends might ask you to do**

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something you know is wrong. They may tell you no one will know if you do it. They may even say things to you like, “You are such a baby if you don’t do this!”

Watch what happens when I stir the water with the red food coloring in it. What is happening to the pasta? *[Wait for their answers.]*

Yes, it is slowly turning red. Remember, the pasta represents you and your friends, and the red coloring represents friends asking you to do something you know is wrong. You can see how the red color affects everyone in this bowl. You and your friends are being influenced by the red which represents making bad choices. The pasta in the other bowl where your friends are making good choices is still the same. Which “bowl” do you want to be part of in your life?

What if you have already made a bad choice and you want to get out of the red bowl? *[Take one of the red pasta pieces out and put it in a bowl with bleach. The red should drain out of it.]* Talk to a trusted adult to help you. You can get out of the red bowl and start making better choices! *[Be sure students do not eat the pasta.]*

For Older Elementary Students (additional activity)

[Say to the students:] One of the best things you can do is prepare a few “great escapes.” These are responses you can have ready to use if you ever find yourself in an uncomfortable situation.

[Divide the class into small groups to role play the following scenarios and come up with a “great escape” response. Or, you could have students create their own scenarios. Write these scenarios on pieces of paper or on the chalkboard. You may want to write more depending on how many groups you have.]

Scenario 1: You have a homework assignment in math you spent a lot of time completing. Your friend asks if you will let him copy from your paper before school begins. What do you do or say?

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Scenario 2: Your friend wants you to pretend to be her mom and write an excuse note to her teacher saying she is sick so she can miss school. What do you do or say?

Scenario 3: You're at a store and your friend stuffs a bag of chips into your pocket and wants you to walk out of the store without paying for them. What do you do or say?

SHARE (15 minutes)

For Younger Elementary Students

[Say to the students:] Think about a time when you made a bad choice. Draw a picture about it. Then draw a picture about a better choice you are going to make next time. You may want to share your picture with your parents or me later.

For Older Elementary Students

*[Have each group share a role play scenario from the **Apply** section in front of the class.]*

Optional: *Arrange to present the different role plays to a class of younger students.*

ENDING THE LESSON

[Review with students the effects of both negative and positive peer pressure. Encourage them to think ahead about what they might say in certain situations. Continue to practice "great escape" ideas with your students.]

GOING DEEPER (optional)

*[This **Going Deeper** includes a four-verse quote from an ancient book of wisdom, called the Book of Proverbs. The opening verse of Proverbs says, "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of the Hebrews." The Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament) presents Solomon as the wisest man who had ever lived. The reign of Solomon was about 3,000 years ago. Scholars estimate circa 970–931 B.C. A verse you may want to consider discussing is: "Don't let me want to do evil or waste my time doing wrong with wicked people. Don't let me even taste the good things they offer" (Psalm 141:4, Contemporary English Version).]*

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[Say to the students:] Last time, we heard some poems written by King David. One of David’s sons, Solomon, became king after David. Solomon wrote Proverbs, a book of wisdom for his own children. Here is one of the pieces of advice Solomon gave to his children.

“Always remember what you have learned. Your education is your life — guard it well. Do not go where evil people go. Do not follow the example of the wicked. Don't do it! Keep away from evil! Refuse it and go on your way. Wicked people cannot sleep unless they have done something wrong. They lie awake unless they have hurt someone” (Proverbs 4:13-16 God’s Word Translation).

What do you think Solomon meant when he said, “Your education is your life?” Your education, especially the things you are learning in the *DreamMakers-DreamBreakers* curriculum, will shape you and help you make your dreams come true. They also might actually save your life if they help you avoid becoming addicted to dream breakers such as dangerous drugs.

What do you think Solomon meant when he said, “Do not go where evil people go?” “Evil people” are not always murderers or other kinds of criminals. And they don’t always look scary or dangerous. An “evil” person is anyone who does dream-breaking things and might tempt you to do them, too. So, peer pressure is not new. It was a problem for children even 3,000 years ago!

[Set 10 books on your desk in a standing position with very little space between them. Invite several students to the front of the room. Say to the students:] What do you think is going to happen when one of you push on the first book? *[Allow time for answers, then continue:]* The first book should make all the other books fall down. Let’s see if that happens. *[Ask one of the students to gently push on the first book. All 10 books should easily fall down. Say to the students:]* We have been talking about peer pressure and resisting evil and wrong doing. What do you think this activity represents about peer pressure? *[Allow time for answers then say:]* We know how easy it is for peers to sometimes push us down the wrong path. How can we keep from going down the wrong path? Think about it

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in relation to our book experiment. Can you think of a way we can keep these very same books from all being knocked over? *[Allow time for all the students in the class to offer ideas. Then ask the students in the front to see if they can set up the books again, but this time figure out how to keep all of them from falling over. Hint: if you lay 5 or 6 books flat in a stack, the first few standing books cannot knock them over. It may move them a little bit but they will stay stacked. Emphasize to your students this is a good example to remember. When you stand against wrong things or wrong people together with others and resist peer pressure, you are stronger. Stronger together is a good motto.]*

[Say to the students:] **We saw in our book experiment that we can be stronger together. There is a verse in the Bible that reminds us of this concept. Let's read it together.**

"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12, New Living Translation).

Let's be stronger together and not yield to negative peer pressure!

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PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

This week, we discussed peer pressure. Peer pressure can be negative or positive. We discussed both and emphasized the value of positive peer pressure and how we can encourage people to make right choices through the use of positive peer pressure.

Questions you might ask your child:

1. Can you tell me the story your teacher read? What was happening to the Map of Wonders? What do you think it meant? (The Map of Wonders was fading in places because of bad influences. The children began to wonder if they could be influenced by others and things, too.)
2. Ask your child if he or she can define negative peer pressure and to describe any negative influence and pressure he or she might have experienced from their friends. Share with your child about a time when you were the victim of negative peer pressure. How did you handle it? Would you handle it differently now?
3. Ask your child if he or she can define positive peer pressure and to describe any positive influence and pressure he or she might have experienced from their friends. Share with your child about a time when you were the recipient of positive peer pressure.

