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Topic of Segment: Parent Tips for Helping Children Manage Peer Pressure

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Segment Summary:

Fall is here. School and extracurricular activities are in full swing. It's an exciting time for adolescents entering middle school and high school—new friends, new challenges and new experiences. But with that also come tests—both in and out of the classroom. The desire to fit in and feel like you are part of a group is normal, and most people feel this way at some point or other, especially in the middle school and teen years.

Why this Segment is Relevant:

Even when trying to do their best academically and socially, it can be hard for teenagers to resist peer pressure. With the pressures of wanting to fit in many seek approval of their peers and begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Surprising Information Our Audience Will Learn:

The Facts:

- Only 10 percent of teenagers surveyed said that they had not been influenced by peer pressure. In that same group, 28 percent of teenagers agreed that giving in to peer pressure improved their social standing and nearly half of those surveyed admitted to picking on someone only after a friend picked on that person.
- Drug and alcohol use is one of the biggest concerns when it comes to peer pressure. Even if parents have taught their teenagers about the dangers of drinking and using drugs, peer pressure may influence them to take part in these activities.
- 19% of teens report that they would give up using a cell phone while driving if

their friends did the same.

- 23% of teen girls feel pressured to have sex.
- 33% of teen boys ages 15-17 feel pressured to have sex.

Myths of peer pressure:

- **Bullying is normal.** Often times there is a belief that because we went through it ourselves, it is a normal part of growing up. This could not be further from the truth, bullying can cause anxiety, depression, and additional stress at school.
- **Peer pressure is always negative.** Think about this, when we are around people who are positive we say that they are positive influences, right? This is a form of peer pressure, though we don't think of it like this because peer pressure can have a negative connotation.
- **Peer relationships don't affect learning.** School is not just about academics, but about learning to handle and navigate different types of people, this prepares children for adulthood. If peer relationships are negative i.e. bullying, a child may not feel safe in their learning environment. If a child does not feel safe then their natural instincts of survival and need for safety will take over, which may become distracting to the child.
- **Adults don't play a role.** Often times adults will minimize how a child is feeling, when doing this they are enabling the bullying or peer pressure to continue, children look to adults to take the lead when they are in need of guidance.
- **Peer pressure doesn't happen until children become teenagers.** Children are encouraged to and want to fit in from an early age, as they grow older the pressure seems more intense, and this could be due to the fact that they are working on defining their identity and who they are as a person, social media is also more involved the older we get.

Questions to ask that will help you differentiate peer pressure from normal stressors:

- Is your child feeling uncomfortable? What is their gut telling them? Are they okay with the way things are going? If not, do they have ways of saying no that they are comfortable with.
- How are your child's friendships? Who are your child's friends and what are their values? If they're not the same, or if the person seems more advanced in certain social areas than your child, this could lead to some peer pressure.
- Does your child talk to you about what is going on with them and their friends? The more you know, from your child's point of view, the more you can help prepare them for if the pressure comes.
- Does your child know who to talk to if they are feeling uncomfortable with something?

Key Points for the Audience Takeaway:

If kids are surrounded by people with similar values, managing peer pressure is usually not that difficult. But it can be difficult in a school environment when they are surrounded by people with a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors. They may know just

what to do one minute but then feel completely overwhelmed and pulled to go against their better judgement the next.

Here are some tips for helping children manage peer pressure as they return to school:

- Encourage your children to spend time with people who have similar values and won't put them in uncomfortable situations.
- Help children set boundaries and give them permission to avoid people or situations that don't feel right. It's OK to leave a situation that feels uncomfortable.
- Tell your children that it's not OK for others to force or pressure them into anything. They can tell others to stop pressuring them and choose to avoid spending time with people who make them feel pressured.
- Remind children that they don't have to be liked by or please everyone they meet.
- Teach your children about delay tactics. When other people or situations make them feel pressured, they can try using responses like: "Let me think about that" or "Can I get back to you?"
- There are going to be times when your children can't avoid or delay a pressure-filled situation. Remind them it's OK to say, "No Thanks" or "I can't."
- It's OK to use an excuse if the truth is too challenging. If someone offers them a drink and they don't want to take it, tell them to use phrases like "I have to get up early" or "I'm on medication so I can't."
- It's OK for children to ask themselves "How am I feeling about this?" "Does this seem right to me?" Listening to our guts is important.
- Practice the buddy system. When your children think they may be in a pressure-filled situation, tell them to take someone with them. Someone who will support and respect their intentions to not drink or stay sober.

For more information for segment viewers:

For more information about helping your children manage peer pressure, visit the Southwest Behavioral & Health Services website at www.sbhservices.org.