

HEADS UP
THE NEW ABOUT DRUGS AND YOUR BODY

THE SCIENCE OF DECISION MAKING AND PEER PRESSURE



Imagine you're with a friend at another school making fun of how you know it's funny, but you want to fit in. You laugh along... regretting it later. Or imagine a friend asking you both to audition for a play, but you feel shy. Or the student who you do it, so you agree. Later you're forced to say your name on the cast list.

Both of these scenarios are examples of how peers can influence a person's actions—both positively and negatively. As a teen, you can be especially sensitive to peer influence, better known as peer pressure. Science helps explain why.

THE BASICS OF DECISION MAKING
When you make a decision, different parts of the brain spring into action. The brain's reward system generates an emotional response, and the amygdala cortex produces rational thinking. It balances the two sides.

TEEN DECISION MAKING
This decision-making process is more complex than it seems. One reason for the difference is that teens have unique characteristics that impact their decisions. One reason for the difference is that teens have unique characteristics that impact their decisions.

More info: For additional facts about the brain and peer pressure, visit scholastic.com/headsup and teens.drugabuse.gov

HEADS UP

REAL NEWS ABOUT DRUGS AND YOUR BODY

The Science of Decision Making and Peer Pressure

One of the biggest challenges teens face is standing up to peer pressure. This article helps explain why by describing the science of how the developing teen brain reacts to both rewards and peers. We build on this understanding by highlighting teen risk taking when driving with passengers. Together, this article and lesson will help your students understand how their brains make decisions, the influence of their peers on those decisions, and what they can do to better navigate peer-pressure situations.



SUBJECT	COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS	NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS	NATIONAL SCIENCE EDUCATION STANDARDS	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Science Literacy English Language Arts Health/Life Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RI.1 Cite textual evidence RI.2 Central idea and details W.1 Write arguments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LS1.A Structure and Function LS1.D Information Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure and Function in Living Things Personal and Community Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual Development and Identity

Critical-Thinking Questions:

- Why do teens have a stronger emotional reaction to their peers than adults or children do? Cite examples from the article. *(During adolescence, the reward center of teens' brains has more dopamine receptors and is more likely to react strongly to the positive feelings produced by being around peers. Rejection by peers causes a bigger response in the areas of teens' brains that govern negative emotions.)*
- What are two pieces of evidence from the article that suggest that teens make riskier decisions when they are with their friends than when they are alone? *(In Steinberg's study, the teen drivers ran more yellow lights when their friends were watching than when they were alone. Teen drivers engage in riskier behavior if other teens are in the car.)*

Writing Prompts:

- Grades 6–8:** The decision-making process in teens is strongly affected by rewards and peers. How might this impact teens in both positive and negative ways?
- Grades 9–10:** Peer pressure can challenge teens to take beneficial risks, or it can drive them to make decisions they regret. How can teens prepare themselves to resist negative peer pressure yet remain open to positive influences?
- Grades 11–12:** Today's teens don't interact only in person. How do you think peer interaction through social media and texting might impact teens' decision making, and what positive and negative consequences could result? Consider what you have learned about how the presence of teens can impact risky behavior.

Paired Reading:

- Grades 6–12:** "6 Tactful Tips for Resisting Peer Pressure to Use Drugs and Alcohol," teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/category/340
- Grades 6–12:** "Let's Talk: How Do You Avoid Peer Pressure?" teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/lets-talk-how-do-you-avoid-peer-pressure
- Grades 6–12:** "Teen Brain, a Work in Progress," teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/teen-brain-work-progress

Additional Sources:

- Interactive Website:** "Peer Pressure," thecoolspot.gov/pressures.aspx
- Interactive Website:** "The Right to Resist," thecoolspot.gov/right_to_resist.aspx
- Poster/Teaching Guide:** "Facts on Drugs: Teen Guide to Making Smart Decisions," headsup.scholastic.com/guide-smart-decisions

Additional Tools for Lesson

Visit scholastic.com/headsup/science-peer-pressure for grade-tiered resources that support teaching this lesson and article:

- Expanded Answer Key for Critical-Thinking and Work Sheet
- Tiered Adaptations of Critical-Thinking Questions
- Academic and Domain-Specific Vocabulary Lists
- Additional Writing Prompts
- Expanded Paired-Text Reading Suggestions
- Expanded Standards Charts for Grades 6–12

Resources and Support

- Teaching resources: headsup.scholastic.com/teachers and teens.drugabuse.gov

STUDENT WORK SHEET: The work sheet on the reverse side gives students an opportunity to take what they learned from the article and apply it to a real-life peer-pressure situation they might face. An answer key is included in the "Additional Tools" document.

What Should You Say?



Peers can play a big role in how teens make decisions, in both positive and negative ways. Psychologist Laurence Steinberg says one way to make smarter decisions is to have a plan before you encounter a situation where you may feel pressured by your peers to make a poor choice. Complete the activity below to practice making a plan to help you make good decisions when facing peer pressure.



Directions:

Step 1: Read the scenario below.

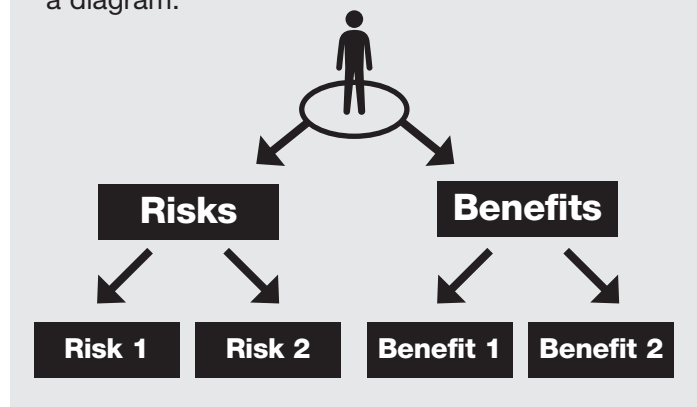
Scenario: Jesse is having a blast at a school football game. Then a friend texts and invites Jesse and his friends over to his house after the game because his parents are out of town. Jesse's friends want to go and are pressuring him to come along. Jesse knows that unsupervised parties are not okay with his parents, and they are expecting him to come home from the game. But he is struggling to make the right decision.

Step 2: Write a paragraph that explains why it may be difficult for Jesse to say no and what strategies he can use to help him stand up to peer pressure. Use facts from the article "The Science of Decision Making and Peer Pressure" to support your response.

Consider the following questions:

- What are the possible risks associated with Jesse going along with his friends?
- What are the possible benefits of him going along with his friends?
- How do the risks compare with the benefits?
- What strategies could Jesse use to help him make decisions when faced with peer pressure?

TIP: You can weigh risks and benefits using a diagram.



Step 3—Reality Check: Write a few sentences that you would actually say in a similar situation to help you stand up to peer pressure.