NAVIGATING PEER PRESSURE AND SEXUAL COERCION

What Are Peer Pressure and Sexual Coercion?

Peer pressure happens when someone feels pressured to act in a certain way because of influence from their friends or social group. This can lead to risky behavior, especially in social or romantic situations.

Sexual Coercion involves pressuring, manipulating, or forcing someone into sexual activity without their full consent and without a physical threat (Basile et al. 2021). Research shows that coercion often occurs in carious ways, such as:

- Verbal Pressure: Using guilt, manipulation, or emotional appeals to gain compliance
- Substance Use: Exploiting someone who is intoxicated or impaired
- Group Influence: Peer groups encouraging risky behaviors or normalizing coercive attitudes (Albert et al. 2024).

Who Does This Effect?

Peer pressure and sexual coercion are very comparable. The Healthline describes coercion as an unwanted verbal or emotional pressure, noting that sexual coercion often stems from this. Healthline also emphasizes that while romantic relationships are the most common for sexual coercion, it can happen between acquaintances, co workers, friends, and even family (Raypole, 2020). Peer pressure is more common than sexual coercion but both are far too prevalent. there are many consequences to these two issues but mental health consequences, such as anxiety and depression, are among the most recorded.

What Ages are Most Vulnerable?

- Due to the ever rising use of social media and technology, adolescents, that spend the most time on social media, are becoming more and more susceptible to both peer pressure and sexual coercion. The Youth Medical Journal emphasizes that social media has a stronghold on pushing peer pressure and this idea that “their life is better than mine”. This kind of thinking leads young adults into poor decision making and increases vulnerability to peer pressure due to them not wanting to be left out or left behind (Yelishala, 2022).
- The NIH also found that viewing online pornography and sexually oriented reality television more frequently were associated with higher odds of sexual coercion perpetration, whereas viewing others’ “sexy” social media posts more frequently was associated with higher odds of sexual coercion victimization (Brown & Endendijk 2024).

PREVENTION

How To Talk About Peer Pressure and Sexual Coercion

We want to help you explore the challenging topics of peer pressure and sexual coercion with your loved ones. Here you will find some helpful information about how to approach it in a way thats best for you.

Ask open-ended questions

Ask age appropriate questions

Validate their feelings and create a safe space

Find a calm setting and avoid pressuring for answers

Approach the Topic with Young Children

Focus on teaching kids about personal boundaries and their right to say "no."

- Explain that no one has the right to make them feel uncomfortable, even friends or people they trust

Relevant Research:

- Childhood trauma and unhealthy peer dynamics, as explored in **Jewkes et al. 2016**, can create patterns that persist into adulthood.

Approaching This Topic with Teens and Students

Teenagers face unique challenges, as peer influence and risky behaviors increase during adolescence.

Make It Relevant

- Use examples from movies, social media, or news to highlight the importance of setting boundaries

Talk About Consent Directly

- Discuss what consent means and emphasize that it must be clear, enthusiastic, and ongoing

Create Safe Exit Strategies

- Help your teen brainstorm ways to exit uncomfortable situations without feeling judged by their peers

Intervening in your Community

- *Interrupt or distract.* **When you witness the altercation, simply pretend to ask for directions or act as if you know the victim and start a conversation.**
- *Confront the perpetrator.* **You can interfere by respectfully telling the harasser that their actions are not okay.**
- *Request assistance from others.* **The more people who can assist you in stopping the situation, the more likely the violence will end.**
- *Make a scene.* **Sometimes attention to the situation can delay an escalation.**
- *Call in professionals.* **If the situation is threatening your safety or the safety of others, it is best to contact law enforcement to assist.**
- *Familiarize yourself with local domestic violence shelters* (Woody, 2024)
- **Stay alert and keep yourself safe**

Resources

- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):** Support for survivors and resources for parents
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)