

You Can Handle PEER PRESSURE CORRECTLY

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those who, despite negative pressure,
chose to stand out rather than blend in.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Writing a book is a bit like trying to organise a family reunion—everyone has an opinion, and somehow, you end up with more advice than you know what to do with. But just like at that reunion, there are always a few key people who make the worthwhile. So, here’s my attempt to thank them without turning this into an Oscar speech.

First and foremost, to my family—thank you for putting up with my endless rants about “peer pressure this” and “peer pressure that.” I’m sure you’ve all mastered the art of nodding politely while secretly wondering if I’ll ever stop talking. Your patience is truly unmatched.

To my friends, who have been my sounding board, my cheerleaders, and occasionally my therapists—thank you for not pressuring me to finish this book faster (even though I know you were tempted). Your support has been the positive peer pressure I needed to keep going.

To Dcn. Mrs. Folashade Ebo and my editors at Synergy Publishers, thank you for your patience and for not laughing too hard at my first drafts. Your expertise has turned my ramblings into something coherent, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

To the countless young people I’ve had the privilege of interacting with over the years—this book is for you. Your stories, struggles, and triumphs have inspired me to write this guide. I hope it helps you navigate the tricky waters of peer pressure with a little more confidence and a lot less stress.

And finally, to anyone who has ever felt the weight of peer pressure—whether you gave in or stood your ground—thank you for reminding me why this topic matters. Your experiences are the heart of this book, and I hope it serves as a reminder that you’re not alone in this journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure is an inevitable part of life. Whether you're a teenager navigating the complexities of high school, a young adult finding your place in the world, or even an adult trying to fit into a new social circle, the influence of peers is something we all encounter. But what exactly is peer pressure? Is it always negative? How can you recognise it, and more importantly, how can you handle it without compromising your values and self-respect? These are the questions this book seeks to answer.

Understanding the different types of peer pressure (positive, negative, spoken, unspoken, etc.)

- Recognising the impact of peer pressure on decision-making
- Strategies for resisting negative peer pressure
- The role of family, friends, and mentors in shaping responses to peer pressure
- Real-life stories of individuals who have successfully navigated peer pressure

Target Audience:

This book is primarily aimed at young people aged 13–25, but it's also a valuable resource for parents, teachers, and mentors who want to better understand and support the young people in their lives. Whether you're dealing with peer pressure firsthand or helping someone else navigate it, this book provides the tools and insights you need to handle it correctly.

Peer pressure is a universal experience, but it doesn't have to control your life. With the right knowledge and strategies, you can turn peer pressure into a positive force that helps you grow, achieve your goals, and stay true

to yourself. This book is your guide to doing just that.

To get you thinking, here are a few questions to ponder as you read:

1. What kind of peer pressure have you experienced in your life?

Was it positive, negative, or a mix of both? How did it shape your decisions?

2. Why do we feel the need to conform?

Is it fear of rejection, desire for acceptance, or something else entirely?

3. How can you use peer pressure to your advantage?

Can it motivate you to achieve your goals or become a better version of yourself?

4. What steps can you take to resist negative peer pressure?

Are there strategies you can use to stay true to yourself without losing friends or feeling isolated?

Peer pressure is not a monster to be feared but a force to be understood and managed. Whether you're a young person trying to find your way or an adult looking to guide others, this book will provide you with the insights and tools you need to handle peer pressure correctly. So, let's dive in and explore how you can stand tall, even when the pressure is on.

*“To be yourself in a world
that is constantly trying to
make you something else is the
greatest accomplishment.”*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

CHAPTER ONE

THE REALITY OF PEER PRESSURE

“No child is immune to peer pressure.”

– Kathi Hudson

As you journey through life, it is certain that you’ll have to make decisions. Some are serious, some trivial. Some decisions will be constant and recurrent, while others will be one-off. Some of the decisions you have to make don’t have a clear right or wrong answer—like whether you should play football or basketball, or join a music or drama club. Other decisions involve serious moral questions, such as whether to try alcohol and cigarettes or lie to your parents.

Making decisions on your own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressure you one way or another, it can be even harder. People who are your age are called peers, and when they try to influence how you act or get you to do something, it’s called peer pressure. It’s something everyone has to deal with. No wonder Kathi Hudson said, “No child is immune to peer pressure,” and I dare add, no adult is immune to pressure either.

Your peers influence your decisions and life, even if you don’t realise it. Just by spending time together and exchanging ideas, you learn from them, and they learn from you. It’s only human nature to listen to and learn from others, especially those in your age group.

You Can Handle Peer Pressure Correctly!

According to the Encarta Dictionaries, peer pressure is “a social pressure on somebody to adopt a type of behaviour, dress, or attitude in order to be accepted as part of a group.” The Encyclopedia of Children’s Health (2020) defines peer pressure as “the influence of the social group on an individual.” For the purpose of this book, I define peer pressure as “a force directed towards an individual from external sources, which seeks to influence the individual’s decisions, attitudes, and actions temporarily or permanently.”

It is therefore clear that the pressure to do or not do certain things is something everyone will encounter. I also believe the definition above captures the social media variant of pressure, which can be worse as you constantly see, hear, and read what friends and peers are doing at the moment. You see their “successes” and “gargantuan” achievements, and so you feel compelled to also “achieve” so you can have something exciting to share. SAD!

Although peer pressure is usually conceived of as primarily negative influence acting on adolescents or teens, it can also be a positive influence. It can affect children and adults of any age, depending on their level of contact with others. The sad truth is this—negative peer pressure compels people of all ethnic backgrounds to engage in at-risk behaviours such as substance abuse, rape, truancy, sexual activity, fighting, theft, and evil stunts.

I have seen that one major reason why people concede to negative peer pressure is that friends are readily available with answers and suggestions about some very critical, sometimes personal experiences, which family—parents especially—shy away from or refuse to create an environment that allows the discussion of such matters between children and parents.

Some characteristics that peer groups offer, which families may lack, are:

1. A strong belief structure;

2. A clear system of rules; and
3. Communication and discussion about taboo subjects such as drugs, sex, and religion.

The above explains why it is necessary for the family, as a social structure, to groom and shape individuals in the right way; otherwise, society will dump garbage on them.

In my few years of social interaction, right from my secondary school days, I have seen, in practical terms, the effect of a dysfunctional family on young people and how negative peer pressure comes to a sad rescue. Even as I grow older and engage with both adults and younger folks, the reality of the nexus between dysfunctional families and peer pressure keeps dawning on me, as its concomitant effect can be seen in increased social vices in our societies today.

It is therefore important to remind parents and intending couples that family and parenting are beyond the coming together of two lovers for the purpose of companionship or reliving sexual urges legally. Marriage is a great responsibility, and parenting is a huge task of producing quality individuals for society. This is because every society is a reflection of the qualities of its individuals, who are first and foremost members of a family before stepping into society. It is clear, then, that what you do with your children and wards has direct and indirect effects on our society. So, please help us raise men and women of enviable character.

Let me emphasise that peer pressure is a part of a person's routine life, commonly seen among young people. However, it can affect people's lives irrespective of their age or sex. The intensity of peer pressure generally varies with age and maturity.

To parents, please take note that the main reasons why young people give

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in to negative peer pressure are:

- A widening communication gap between parents and children;
- An intense desire to be an acceptable member of a group; and
- A highly impressionable mind that fails to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

Parents, guardians, and indeed everyone and institutions saddled with the responsibility of influencing and raising young people should find a way to consistently and effectively address the above.

Just in case you are a young person reading this, it is very important that you understand the concept of peer pressure very well and know that it will definitely come at different stages of life, from different people, at different times. You are being encouraged (by teachers, parents, guardians, etc.) not to give in to negative peer pressure, not because they don't want you to "enjoy" life, but because of their responsibility to guide you so you don't make the same mistakes they made, which affected their lives negatively.

Remember, there are some mistakes one makes in life, the consequences of which he or she may never recover from, except there is a miracle. So, why trade your future on the altar of temporary "enjoyment" offered by negative peer pressure?

As I go on, I would like to shed light on the varieties of peer pressure because, often, people tend to associate the term with negativity only. However, peer pressure has many dimensions, which include:

Varieties of Peer Pressure

- Positive Peer Pressure

- Negative Peer Pressure
- Spoken Peer Pressure
- Unspoken Peer Pressure
- Adult Peer Pressure
- Social Media Pressure

POSITIVE PEER PRESSURE

As I said above, peer pressure is not always negative. Sometimes, it inculcates new hobbies, a sporting spirit, or a tireless determination to succeed in life among people.

Positive peer pressure can also be seen in situations where a person starts imbibing the good qualities of someone they have never directly met, such as a religious or political leader, an on-air personality (OAP), a musician, or even a teacher, parent, or guardian whom they see often. Indeed, peers can have a positive influence on each other. Maybe a friend taught you how to arrange and deliver your speeches, or you might admire a friend who is always a good sportsman and try to be more like him or her. These are examples of how peers positively influence each other every day.

Peer pressure is positive when what your peers want you to do is positive and helpful in every sense. Positive in the sense that it is confident, optimistic, and focuses on good things rather than bad; beneficial, producing good results because of having an innately beneficial character; and encouraging good behaviour that is considered morally good. Young people involved in sports, student politics, or even various dance groups are also being influenced by peer pressure.

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The desire to remain or become part of any group will cause a person to strive to fit in, whether it means waking up earlier or staying after normal classes for practice. This dimension of peer pressure is what is encouraged, helpful, and desirable.

NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

Young people's minds are like soft clay, which assumes the shape of the most impressive personality around them. The impression, when bad and unpleasant, is negative peer pressure, and young people have been known to choose the wrong path in life by taking to substance abuse, excessive drinking and smoking, thieving, and shoplifting, all because of the negative influence someone had on them.

Peer pressure is negative when your peers want to influence you to act in a particular way that may not produce a positive outcome, and you should learn how to deal with negative peer pressure.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

Young people have always been and will always be under extreme pressure to “fit in” with a group that gives them the much-needed identity at this period of their lives. However, the ability to deal appropriately with such pressures to conform is necessary and is the focus of this book.

Parents, guardians, and indeed everyone and institutions saddled with the responsibility of influencing and raising young people will do well to teach them how to stand up for the good values they believe in. A young person who has been taught to stand up for his or her values is more likely to avoid situations in which they are asked to compromise them. If they stand up to the group, refusing to participate in their plans,

they will save their self-respect. The group may reject them or attempt to humiliate them; if they tell others or gravitate toward people who support them, they will avoid the difficulties of this situation.

In some cases, the young person who stands up to peer pressure ends up being the leader of the group because they are voicing concerns that others are too afraid to share. In the end, they can find a group of peers who are more in line with their value system. They can feel good about themselves and their ability to take a stand. This is the desired outcome because it strengthens them as a person.

SPOKEN PEER PRESSURE

Here, we see peers verbally influencing a teenager to behave the way they are behaving. For example, a peer might say to a teen, “Why are you wasting time studying? We still have a long time till the exams. Why don’t you come out for a smoke with us? It will be more fun!”

The teen, who would have otherwise continued with their own way of life, listens to the peers and starts believing that the lifestyle led by their peers is more attractive. At times, they may see the downside of getting influenced by their peers, but their mind is set on becoming an acceptable member of their peer group—someone who would never be made fun of or teased.

Direct, spoken, negative peer pressure puts you on the spot through direct confrontation. Your peers want to convince you to do something you shouldn’t do. When peers resort to this type of direct pressure, it takes discipline and determination for you to find an excuse to do the right thing without risking ridicule. But all the same, it is your life, and you reserve the right to do what is best for you. Hence, giving in to it is dangerous.

UNSPOKEN PEER PRESSURE

Here, we see people getting influenced by their peers without any provoking verbal communication taking place between them.

If a young person routinely watches their peers living a particular kind of lifestyle, their mind gets influenced and starts assuming that their peers are leading a better life than them and that there is nothing wrong with doing something if everybody is doing it.

Here, one's common sense and better judgment often go out the window. For example, a teen may start substance abuse or smoking if they see all their friends doing it fearlessly. When it seems like everyone else is doing something—dressing a certain way or acting a certain way—people tend to feel tremendous pressure to go along with the crowd and be like everyone else. Unfortunately, most people have not been trained and equipped to stand out as being different. Everyone wants to fit in.

Again, I would like to remind you that just because something is popular or accepted does not make it right or appropriate. Truly speaking, from my personal experience, it will take a lot of willpower and discipline to stand for what is right, but remember, you should not join the multitude to do evil.

ADULT PEER PRESSURE

This is a subtype of peer pressure that has been observed among adults and working professionals. Even though the minds of most adults are not as easily impressionable as those of teenagers, adults are often seen turning to drinking or smoking habits after their peers suggest that these are the best remedies to relieve oneself of personal and work-related stress.

Similarly, working-class adults have been known to turn corrupt after seeing their colleagues live ostentatious lifestyles above their means. It is sad to see working-class adults accumulate debt, borrow money they do not have, purchase things they can do without, and keep up with the Joneses. Often, officers who start a new career make the mistake of spending excessively on costly products like mobile phones or taking out huge loans to buy vehicles because of spoken or unspoken peer pressure and competition with their professional counterparts.

At such times, one needs to think rationally and make a conscious choice between right and wrong. It is quite natural to feel materialistic. However, it is best to purchase assets after carefully planning your finances. Some of the best ways to reduce or get rid of peer pressure are to learn to make rational decisions on your own. When a person can identify the negative implications of getting influenced by their peers, only then will they be able to protect themselves.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESSURE

This refers to the direct or unspoken pressure friends and peers exert on a person as a result of their posts, comments, and other activities on social media. Please refer to Chapter Six for an extensive discussion of this.

CHAPTER NUGGETS

1. Resorting to peer pressure is more likely when parents, guardians, and those who should provide correct guidance shy away or refuse to create an open line of communication.
2. Peer pressure is not only negative and restricted to young people; it can be positive and affects adults as well.

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3. The popularity of a line of thought or actions does not make it right. Multitudes usually flow with the easy way out.
4. With advancements in technology and access to social media platforms, many folks create a false image of a successful person online and, by this, pressure their friends into the “I must make it” mode.
5. You are not in competition with anyone, so live your life.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY I MIGHT GIVE IN TO NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

*"I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations, and
you're not in this world to live up to mine."*

- Bruce Lee

So many reasons abound as to why a lot of people, especially young ones, give in to negative pressures from their peers. However, one quite common reason is that we try to live up to the expectations of people around us, especially friends. If only these words of Bruce Lee would guide your actions: "I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you're not in this world to live up to mine," then you will know that no reason is good enough to mortgage your future because someone feels you should act in a particular way.

I would like you to pause for a moment and think about some of the wrong things you have done in the past as a result of peer influence. You will agree with me that some of the reasons below explain why you did what you did.

Some of the reasons why people give in to pressure are:

THE DESIRE TO FIT IN

Lots of young people really do not want to be left out in the "social flow." They want to feel included and go with the popular opinion. They

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want to do the common things everyone is doing. For example, “big boys” and “girls” sag their trousers, revealing their underwear because it is in vogue. Girls wear skimpy and transparent attire simply because “that is what everybody wears now.” Many young people want to own an iPhone or Android device by all means because it is in vogue. Many such examples abound all around us, all stemming from the desire to fit in.

But my dear young fellow, remember you cannot do what others do and expect a different result. Let your light so shine among men so that you will be a positive reference point.

AVOIDANCE OF JEST AND TAUNTING

This is another common reason why timid and young people who lack self-confidence give in to peer pressure. Young people who are involved in negative vices tend to ridicule and taunt others who decide to stay away from such activities by calling them names and making caustic comments about them, even to their faces. In order to avoid this “embarrassment,” many young people give in to pressure and do the wrong things. But I have learned, and you should know, that many of those who mock you really admire your guts and desire to be like you. They respect you in their minds but are only displaying a negative attitude towards you to taint and stain your life so that you will be like them and not distinct.

CURIOSITY

I know young people like to explore and try different things, which leads them into many negative acts. Many young girls are curious to know what goes on in nightclubs or what sexual intercourse feels like. Many young boys are curious about the feeling derived from using drugs, and this curiosity makes them fall for pressure. But remember, “curiosity killed the cat,” as the adage goes.

There is a time for everything—the perfect time. If you start having sex

in your first year of university and get pregnant, it will be a shame. But if you have the same pregnancy after you complete your education or training and get married, you will be celebrated and supported.

PERSONAL SELFISH GAIN

So many young people give in to peer pressure as a result of the gain they believe they will get from the people pressurising them. For some people, it is financial gain; for others, it is getting a job, promotion, girlfriend, or boyfriend. Others consider the popularity they will gain by joining a bad group. However, when we remember that all of these things are subject to change and are ephemeral, it will help us hold such personal gains in little esteem.

For instance, a young girl should not give in to the pressure of sleeping around with boys for monetary gain, which she will use to buy phones, clothes, fashion accessories, etc., because those clothes and phones will soon be out of vogue. But she could have lost her respect, self-worth, womb, value, or even her life.

I can assure you that if you follow God's principles of success, it's just a matter of time before you possess and even give away those beautiful things you desire. So, be patient.

IGNORANCE

This is also a reason for giving in to peer pressure on the part of young people. Most people in this category are naïve and get into negative traps “unknowingly.” For example, a guy who gives in to the pressure of attending a party “in town” without knowing it is actually an initiation for cult members may find himself coerced into joining the cult. The truth is this: not everything is exactly as it appears, and you have to be alert, careful, and wary of free offers, especially.

GREEDINESS

I have found that many young people are too greedy and, as a result, fall prey to negative peer pressure. “He who will be rich will fall into many temptations,” as the word of God says.

Imagine a second-year student who wants to own and drive a car around at all costs without having the money. He will definitely fall for peer pressure if he meets guys who introduce him to illegal ways of making money. Little wonder many young guys have taken to swindling, economic and financial crimes, “Yahoo Plus,” and other illegal means of making money.

May I suggest that you tame your desires, be content with what you have while aspiring to get something better the right way at the right time? It saves you a lot of stress and headaches.

WHY GIVING IN TO NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE IS BAD

Before I close this chapter, let me reiterate that giving in to negative peer pressure has too many disadvantages to count (if there are any advantages at all, as some people claim). When one gives in and participates in negative vices, putting acceptance ahead of values, one loses faith in oneself. You stop believing in your ability to stand up for yourself and your ability to live consistently with the values you want to have. Once you have compromised your values, it becomes easier to do it again the next time. And once you let go of your values, it becomes easier to further participate in situations that you otherwise would have resisted. Furthermore, lasting damage is done to your self-esteem by giving in to peer pressure, which can lead to depression or other emotional illnesses over time. Finally, participating in illegal or immoral activities can also lead to legal trouble or health problems. May I remind you that you are

not in this world to live up to the expectations of peers? It is therefore necessary for you to develop self-confidence and validation.

CHAPTER NUGGETS

1. You are not in this world to live up to the expectations of others, and others are not in this world to live up to yours. Let this guide your conduct.
2. Tame your desires. You will be more susceptible to peer pressure when you are greedy and undisciplined.
3. What do you gain when you trade your self-respect, worth, and value to acquire something that will soon become old school?
4. Just because something is common does not mean it is right. You can stand out and refuse to fit in.
5. Physical, mental, and legal damages are some of the consequences of giving in to negative peer pressure, which you don't want to experience.

*“Don’t let the noise of others’
opinions drown out your own
inner voice.”*

~ Steve Jobs

CHAPTER THREE

BEFORE PEER PRESSURE COMES...

"When you say 'YES' to others, make sure you are not saying 'NO' to yourself."

- Paulo Coelho

Just as you are expected to learn and master how to drive before you take a vehicle to the highway, you are equally expected to master the art of dealing with peer pressure before and as you face it.

I believe that it is the lack of mastery of this art on the part of individuals that prevents them from dealing appropriately with negative peer pressure and ends up saying "NO" to themselves many times, even as they say "YES" to others.

In dealing with peer pressure appropriately, I therefore suggest the following:

DEVELOP A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE AND CONFIDENCE

I can say it without fear of contradiction that many people lack confidence but are afraid to admit it because society may term them as weak. Some others desire to have more confidence but really do not know how to go about it. Let me say this, however: if you are not self-confident, it will expose you to giving in to peer pressure too often. That is why you should aspire to an undeniable, persistent, and genuine level of self-

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confidence that won't be affected by outside circumstances.

Everyone needs to develop self-confidence. However, if you experience the following, you need to build confidence immediately and urgently:

- You constantly rely on external affirmation and become sad when you get negative compliments.
- You are always reluctant to speak up and voice your opinion, even when it will affect you.
- You can't take criticism objectively and always set on edge when someone makes an unpleasant comment about you or what you do.
- You give up easily.

If you would develop a healthy self-image, you need to stop comparing yourself with others because you are unique and different. Start practising affirmation, which is saying the right words about yourself to yourself often. You will also need to eliminate perfectionist tendencies because no one is perfect. When you make mistakes, it is human, so prepare to make mistakes but learn from them. Finally, be your number one fan and celebrate yourself, whether or not anyone cheers you.

Now before pressure comes, what should you do?

DRAW BOUNDARIES

This means you should make up your mind beforehand about things you don't want to do before you face the situations. Most times, when you don't stand for something, you fall for anything. And truly, most young people have not made a strong decision not to be involved in certain things. They are indifferent to it, and when the offer to do it comes, they fall for it with little or much pressure.

For example, if you make up your mind that, for no reason, will you

engage in examination malpractice, when examination time comes near, you will be forced to study hard because you know cheating is not an option. And when the pressure to engage in it comes, you know it is a temptation that you should not give in to.

I remember making up my mind after I got admission into the university that I was never going to get involved in vices, especially drinking alcohol, smoking, premarital sex, cultism, examination malpractice, etc. Did the offer to get involved in such things come my way? Of course, yes. But since I made up my mind ahead of time against them, it was easier to say no because, for me, they were contraband goods.

Therefore, it is important that you draw your boundaries as they relate to premarital sex, cheating, substance abuse, betting, cultism, thuggery, bullying, academic excellence, etc.

PRACTISE STANDING YOUR GROUND

This means you should imagine scenarios in which peer pressure could become an issue and formulate predetermined responses. For example, as a lady, it is likely that male colleagues will want to entice you into romantic relationships, and it is helpful to have ready-made tactics to handle such situations. You could find a trusted friend with whom to role-play. Use confidence, humour, flattery, challenges, and topic changes to find ways out of undesirable situations.

When you practise these scenes beforehand, it prepares you with ready-made answers for situations when peer pressure will come up, which may be unplanned and sudden. By so doing, you won't be caught unaware.

BE SELECTIVE

This means you should watch what you expose yourself to in terms of music, movies, and magazines. It is quite unfortunate that so many musical

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clips, seasonal videos, television channels, magazines, and advertisements are heavily loaded and spiced with sexual and violent themes. Listening to and watching most of these things make you feel odd if you are not practically experiencing them, and it even stirs in you the desire to “taste” these things, which may lead to involvement in other dangerous activities. Why not stop reading or listening to things that stir up wrong emotions in you? There are so many good entertainment channels and books to read. Be selective! If you are finding it difficult to stop, then you need the help of a more mature and responsible person with whom you can discuss. Most times, having someone else aware of our challenges brings caution into our actions, and this is where older people must model good examples so that young people can see numerous examples around them to reach out to whenever the need arises.

Furthermore, I plead with parents, guardians, and older people to create a non-judgmental atmosphere that enhances neutral rapport between them and younger people. It is disturbing to see that many elderly people appear too judgmental in their speech and demeanour when relating with younger folks, but there is a way to hear them out and offer correction without condemnation.

This is the most appropriate way that will give a young person the confidence to discuss current or potential challenges with elderly folks before getting ready-made wrong counsel from peers.

KEEP THE END RESULT IN VIEW

This means you should keep reminding yourself about the possible negative consequences that can come from giving in to negative peer pressure. Most consequences are scenario-specific, but giving in to peer pressure can also result in a loss of self-respect, death, academic loss, strained relationships, trouble with authority figures, long-term regret, etc. I’m sure you don’t want to live the rest of your life regretting what

you can avoid today by resisting peer pressure. So, pause! Think of the result of what you are about to do. Would you celebrate the result or regret it? If you would not be proud of the action you want to engage in, then think and think well.

INFUSE SELF-CONFIDENCE INTO YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES

Confidence in one's own abilities and actions can naturally deter negative peer pressure since fear of shame or embarrassment is a leading reason why individuals give in to it. Therefore, on a daily basis, wherever you go and in whatever you do, let self-confidence be reflected. When you act confidently and believe in yourself, you don't need to impress other people or do what others say to feel good or accepted. Accepting yourself and having good self-confidence will always help you say no to peer pressure. Peer pressure is something that all people have to deal with—even adults. Building confidence at a young age will help you become a self-confident person later on in your future and help you stay out of bad situations in the long run.

CHOOSE FRIENDS CONSCIOUSLY

This means you should scrutinise and study people before becoming their friends since friendship is a choice. As a matter of fact, friendship is a ship on the journey of life, and you are responsible for the crew on the ship. It is entirely your duty to study and sieve the people you accept as your friends. My dear, you do not owe anybody any apology for not being their friend. Imagine two buses and their drivers: one going to Lagos State and the other going to Abuja. No matter how much the two bus drivers like to be in each other's company, they cannot afford to head towards the same route simply because their destinations are not the same, and it would be sheer stupidity on the part of either to follow the other because they will never get to their own destination.

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So it is with friendship. People who are not going the same route as you should simply not be your friends. You don't need too many friends to succeed in life. You are special, loaded with potential, and you can't afford to keep friends carelessly. One friend who will help you live right is better than ten friends who will lead you astray. A word is enough for the wise!

CUT AWAY FROM PEOPLE TRYING TO LURE YOU

Probably you have a group you walk with, or you notice a group of people always trying to invite you to dangerous places or trying to get you to do negative things. My dear, run away from them. You don't need an angel to tell you to stop your association with such people. If you discover that the groups you associate with are constantly engaging in activities that don't add any positive value to you or that you are ashamed of, it is time to bid them goodbye.

Even if you're faced with peer pressure while you're alone, there are still things you can do. You can simply stay away from peers who pressure you to do stuff you know is wrong. You can tell them "no" and walk away. Better yet, find other friends and classmates to pal around with.

OPENLY DECLARE YOUR STANCE ON ISSUES

When you openly declare your position on issues beforehand, it keeps people involved in such activities away from you. Since they know you don't like such things through what you have been saying over time, they are less likely to invite you when going for such things and may even excuse themselves from your vicinity when they want to engage in such activities.

For instance, if you have already made people around you know that you are not interested in smoking and alcoholism, they are not likely to invite you when going for such things and may even excuse themselves from

your vicinity when they want to engage in such activities.

CAREFULLY CHOOSE A CONFIDANT OR MENTOR

You need someone who has gone through the path you are currently going through and has succeeded. This kind of person serves as an example whom you can emulate, take advice and counsel from, and that is a mentor. Carefully choose a mentor who understands your situation; someone you can easily talk and discuss with; who can advise you without being afraid of your reaction; who is living the way you like; and who inspires you to do the right things.

CONNECT WITH YOUR MENTOR

It is not sufficient to pick a mentor and confidant alone; it is important that you maximise the opportunity you have by discussing with the person and making them aware of important issues in your life.

It is when you open up and rub minds that you can learn from them. So, whether physically, over the phone, or through other social media platforms, try to communicate with your mentors and tap from their wealth of ideas. If you continue to face peer pressure and you're finding it difficult to handle, talk to someone you trust. However, don't feel guilty if you've made a mistake or two. Talking to a parent, teacher, or school counsellor can help you feel much better and prepare you for the next time you face peer pressure.

ASSOCIATE AND IDENTIFY WITH PROGRESSIVE PEOPLE

Since man is a social animal, God knows perfectly that we can't live successfully without relating with people around us. So, try to identify a group in your school or neighbourhood that you can join and attend their meetings regularly so that you can contribute your own quota to your society and develop good attitudes and skills. There are so many of

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such groups. For example, Boys Brigade, Boys Scout, Girls Guild, Red Cross Society, and other volunteering groups, as well as other causes that promote safe humanity. It can really help to have at least one other peer or friend who is willing to say “no” too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure and makes it much easier to resist.

Also, it’s great to have friends with values similar to yours who will back you up when you don’t want to do something. You’ve probably had a parent or teacher advise you to “choose your friends wisely.” Peer pressure is a big reason why they say this. If you choose friends who don’t use drugs, cut class, smoke cigarettes, or lie to their parents, then you probably won’t do these things either, even if other kids do. Try to help a friend who’s having trouble resisting peer pressure. It can be powerful for one kid to join another by simply saying, **“I’m with you—let’s go.”*

CONNECT WITH PEOPLE OF LIKE MIND

This helps you let off steam and learn from others the strategies they use in overcoming similar peer pressures, which you can adapt to suit your own situation. It might be your youth organisation in your place of worship, school, or community. It may even be a television or radio programme, but as much as possible, get involved with programmes and events where you can discuss the pressure you are facing with people who have overcome such things or can provide help.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA WISELY

The social media today is a big deal. Virtually all young persons are active users of one or two of these media. However, when you use social media and the internet, remember there are different kinds of people online. Therefore, go to websites and rooms that will help you, and only click on links you find helpful. There are so many junks on the net, and you don’t

have to feed yourself on these junks because they will only contribute to you giving in to peer pressure.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS AND HAVE RESPECT FOR YOURSELF

It's important to always have respect for yourself and know your own limits when dealing with peer pressure. In order to know when to say no, you have to realise that your decisions, both good and bad, can cause benefit or harm to yourself and to others. When you have respect for yourself, you don't feel guilty or pressured into following what other people tell you to do because you know what your own morals, limits, and sense of right and wrong are.

REMEMBER THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS

Before you give in to peer pressure, realise that when trying to handle pressure from friends at school, your choices have consequences. Each action you take or do not take will have important consequences—your bad or negative decisions may hurt yourself or those you love around you. Getting yourself into bad situations to fit in, feel accepted, or impress others may have very negative consequences, such as bad relationships with parents at home, teachers at school, or even trouble with the law. So, take time to think about the consequence of your action. Will it be beneficial?

CONSTANTLY ASK GOD FOR HIS HELP

In dealing with challenges, including peer pressure, always rely on the help of God, whom you can and should connect with in prayer. He is able to help you overcome whatever pressure you will ever encounter. Don't be tempted to think God is more concerned about other "serious things." He is surely interested in you staying on the positive and right track and will surely help you when you pray to Him.

CHAPTER NUGGETS

1. Just as you are supposed to master how to drive before you take a vehicle to the highway, you are equally expected to master the art of dealing with peer pressure before you face it.
2. Friendship is a choice. You don't need to manage toxic friendships. It is time to cut away from people whose conduct leads you into negative zones.
3. Tread with caution on social media. It's a pool where junk and valuable materials are in abundance. Choose wisely.
4. If you would develop a healthy self-image, you need to stop comparing yourself with others because you are unique and different.
5. Each action you take or do not take will have important consequences on you and your loved ones. Be guided.

CHAPTER FOUR

FACED WITH PEER PRESSURE? NEVER DO THESE

“Be yourself because an original is always worth more than a copy.”

– Suzy Kassem

In Chapter Three, I talked about a few things you can do before you are faced with negative peer pressure and some steps you can take when the pressure actually comes. In this section, I would like to start by reminding you that when you give in to negative peer pressure, you lose the chance to retain your originality, become lost in the crowd, and limit the degree of positive influence you can have on others.

Therefore, it is necessary that you always learn to be yourself and refuse to join the bandwagon as I share with you some things you should not do whenever negative peer pressure comes your way.

NEVER CONSENT TO EXPERIMENT WITH A WRONG ACTION “JUST ONCE”

Just one attempt at shoplifting, smoking, examination malpractice, etc., can alter the course of a person’s life, taking them in a direction they do not want to go. Therefore, refuse the temptation to participate in a wrong activity just once. For example, you might be under pressure to

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smoke, and they will tell you, “Just one stick won’t harm you,” or while trying to get you to start drinking alcohol, they will say, “One bottle won’t kill you.”

My dear, don’t attempt to take that one bottle because it might be just that one you take, and your life changes for the worse. One night of premarital sex can make you pregnant and ruin your life forever.

DON’T ACCEPT GIFTS AND FAVOURS FROM PEOPLE WHO WANT YOU TO DO SOMETHING WRONG

Accepting gifts has a way of rendering you powerless with people who want you to do the wrong things. For example, as a young girl, if a man wants you to have sex with him and keeps buying you lovely things like clothes, perfumes, phones, and you keep collecting them, it will soon weaken your resistance and moral stance to say no because you will eventually think, “This guy has given me so much; let me allow him just once,” and your journey into prostitution or sexually transmitted diseases might begin. Do not be greedy and gullible; politely reject gifts and favours from people trying to get you to do the wrong things.

DON’T PICK A MENTOR OR CONFIDANT CARELESSLY

As it has been said in the first part, do not pick someone you cannot relate with freely as your mentor. Don’t pick someone you will have problems talking to, maybe because of distance or whatever, as your mentor. Someone whose moral life has no value or who does not live positively does not qualify to be your mentor, no matter how popular or wealthy they are. You only need people who have been tested and trusted and who have lived a positive life consistently.

DON’T KEEP QUIET WHEN YOU ARE BEING INTIMIDATED

My dear, when a handshake goes beyond the elbow, it is time to react. When people who want to influence you negatively move from taunting

and jesting to threatening and intimidation, it is not time to keep quiet. Report to the appropriate quarters, which might be your parents, spiritual authorities, teachers, principals, heads of department, deans of student affairs, or even the police. Intimidation is a major weapon they use to get you, but don't give in. Report and report on time before it is too late.

DO NOT TRY TO PLAY SMART

Many young people think they are smarter than the people trying to pressure them and feel that they can eat their cake and have it too. Don't even go near the night party, thinking you will escape when things go wrong. Don't experiment at all with a little smooching, thinking that you will stop before you go too far. You may not be as smart as the people who want to lure you into negative acts because they have already planned for you. Just stay away and don't play smart.

CHAPTER NUGGETS

1. Once is enough to get into trouble. Always resist the temptation of "just this once."
2. When people who want to influence you negatively move from taunting and jesting to threatening and intimidation, it is not time to keep quiet.
3. Do not be greedy and gullible; politely reject gifts and favours from people trying to get you to do the wrong things.
4. It is amazing and sad to see people pick as role models individuals who are heavily morally bankrupt just because they are popular. Don't join the clique of such people. Emulate worthy individuals.
5. You can't eat your cake and have it too. Playing smart with folks who have planned to get you into wrong terrains is dangerous.

*“Stand strong in your values
and beliefs, even if you stand
alone. It’s better to walk alone
than to follow a crowd going
in the wrong direction.”*

~ Unknown

CHAPTER FIVE

DEALING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA PRESSURE

“Don’t use social media to impress people; use it to impact people.”

– Dave Willis

Social media is a big deal today! There is no denying the fact that the various social media platforms have become very useful in staying in touch with friends and family. Unfortunately, they have equally become a major distraction and trigger of negative emotions and feelings such as envy, inadequacy, failure, and peer pressure because many people now use social media to impress people rather than impact them. What makes it worse is that social media is always in our faces. Wherever you are—in school, at work, at home, in a meeting, or even in religious places—notifications from social media apps are constantly being sent to you as friends and acquaintances post pictures and updates of their “perfect” activities.

As you see these posts, it is not impossible that you begin to doubt or question your beauty, achievements, and then you start comparing your life with that of your friends. Sometimes, as you see the likes, comments, and shares of your friends’ posts, you become jealous, and you may even feel obligated to post something that will make you feel just as pretty or popular—even if that means doing something unhealthy or downright dangerous. And there it comes in—peer pressure.

You Can Handle Peer Pressure Correctly!

Just like traditional peer pressure, social media peer pressure can set anyone on the path of engaging in social vices and following a negative path if care is not taken. That is why you must learn how to properly deal with social media pressure.

Be reminded that there are quite a number of things social media pressure can bring your way, and these include: cyberbullying, pressure to send nudes, receiving unwanted naked pictures, online dating, sex chatting, exposure to violent or inappropriate content, fake news, hate speech, trolling, spending too much time online, etc.

I therefore wish to emphasise that not everything you see or read on social media is true. I can make you believe whatever I wish, using many systems and tools—no thanks to technological advancement. As a result of the above, it has become easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the posts you see on social media reflect real life when most of what you see is as real as a scene from a movie.

Think about it—don't you also add a little embellishment to a picture, post, or video to describe an event as superb when it was not as splendid as you just painted it? Truly, most of us have mastered the art of creating online posts that show the best parts of our offline lives and edit the times when we were hungry, sad, and not in good shape.

The bottom line is that the pressure from social media is very real and can affect all of us, young or old. Social media can tamper with your mood, mental and physical health, and consequently influence your actions. It therefore becomes imperative for you to master the art of dealing appropriately with the pressures from social media. Thankfully, there are things you can do to minimise the negative effects of social media peer pressure.

So, whether you're young or old, a concerned parent of a child who

uses social media, or someone who has experienced social media peer pressure personally, the following will help:

1. Refuse to Put Pressure on Others with Your Posts

I consider the above as your first step in dealing with social media pressure. It is necessary to check the motive for your posts and activities. Always ask yourself why you want to post that content. Are you trying to create a sensation, massage your ego, or just keep up with the Joneses? If what you're posting online is more about keeping up a certain appearance, it's probably best not to post it. Remember, being you on social media is just as important as being yourself offline. It is better to make posts that reflect who you really are and make you feel good about yourself.

2. Get It Straight Up—Social Media Differs from Reality

Just know this: a lot of posts and comments you see and get online are far from being 100% real. For example, behind every picture post is someone taking the same picture multiple times from different angles or carefully placing things to make it look “perfect.” Most people whose pictures you see online are conscious of what they post and have their pictures professionally edited to make it appear as if everything is rosier than it really is, without letting you in on the bad and low moments.

3. Choose Your Social Media Friends Carefully

Your friends and the people you associate with affect you directly or indirectly. While you may aspire to be like the people you “follow” in some ways, always remember that a timeline or feed full of celebrities or personal friends who showcase perfect bodies, perfect parties, and overall perfect lives can do more harm than good. So, be careful when it comes to who you or your child follows. Filter the friend requests you accept and endeavour to follow and avoid people who participate in unhealthy and negative activities.

4. Use the Delete or Unfollow Button

I suggest that you do a review of the friends and accounts you follow and ask yourself if they make you feel positive or negative.

How do you feel after a few minutes of looking through your social feeds? Be honest with yourself. If negative, it is time to use the unfollow or delete button because, ideally, you should feel encouraged, motivated, and inspired. At the very least, you should feel the same as you did before you logged on. But if you feel jealous, depressed, or uneasy, it might be time to hit the “unfollow” button.

In all, be intentional about the feeds you allow into your wall and ensure that they are inspiring or reflect things that you are genuinely interested in, rather than posts that make you feel angry or bad about yourself. It's your life, and you are responsible for your mental health.

5. You Won't Die If You Turn Off Notifications, Data, or the Phone Itself

The various social media platforms are just like an endless pit. The more you go, the deeper the tunnel.

Just in case you find yourself always scrolling through your feed all day long and it is contributing to the pressure you feel, why not set a daily time to switch off for a while, turn off notifications, and use your time for something more rewarding and productive? You can always get caught up with the valuable information later.

6. Talk to Someone Physically

It is true that the pressures from social media can make you feel lonely, alone, and like everyone else is having a fantastic time, even though this may not be the case. When such thoughts begin to flow into your mind,

I suggest you talk to someone and reach out to a trusted person for help and support.

7. Connect with People of Like Mind

There are various helpful groups on social media. There are sites and groups where you can learn virtually anything at a fee or free of charge. Similarly, if you struggle with certain habits such as substance abuse, eating disorders, and the like, it may be helpful to connect with people of like mind who can offer support and encouragement.

8. Use Social Media for Positive Things

Social media is not all about negativity and bad influences. It is important that you look for ways to engage in the good and counteract the bad. Join a movement. Share an inspiring story. Even better, connect with people, events, and activities offline.

9. Take a Break

It may sound difficult or impossible, but the truth is, taking a break from social media may be the best option for you at a point in time. It has been found that permanently disconnecting from your social accounts “can positively impact your mental health in a variety of ways, from improved sleep and reduced anxiety to increased physical activity and more personal interactions.” Anecdotally, people report feeling happier and more successful without the pressure of social media to be perfect. However, if a complete disconnection from social media is not possible, you may consider reducing the time you spend online by setting a daily limit, closing down your account on some of the platforms, or just making a conscious effort to put your gadget away at certain times of the day. Most importantly, try not to make scrolling through your phone the first thing you do when you wake up or the last thing you do before you go to bed.

10. Don't Become a Social Media Addict

Without mincing words, the effect of social media is quite similar to that of addictive drugs. As time goes on, the excitement you get from every notification, like, and follow can become similar to the excitement folks get from cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs. It can therefore become equally difficult to put down the phone or shut the laptop as it is to stop a bad habit. However, remember this: whatever effect social media has on your life is what you permit, and since nothing is as important as your health and well-being, you must not allow social media pressure to affect you negatively.

So, in case social media pressure begins to threaten your state of mind, makes you question your worth, or encourages unhealthy habits, it's time to seek spiritual, mental, and/or emotional help.

CHAPTER NUGGETS

1. Social media can be addictive, just like alcohol and hard drugs. Don't let it overpower you.
2. Whatever effect social media has on your life is what you permit. You are not helpless.
3. Social media can be used to project and receive positive influence. The choice remains yours.
4. If taking a break from social media becomes imperative, never hesitate to follow that route, though less travelled. It may be the best option for you at a point in time.
5. Be intentional about the feeds you allow into your wall; they should be either inspiring or out of your face. Unfollow or delete toxic friends without apology.

CHAPTER SIX

PEER PRESSURE AS A COMMON DENOMINATORE

*"I believe more follies are committed out of complaisance
to the world than in following our own inclinations."
– Mary Wortley Montagu*

Oftentimes, many people ask the question—Why me? They ask this when they are faced with unpleasant situations. It is therefore not surprising to hear folks ask such a question when the pressure from their peers gets to them. However, it is necessary for you to know that everyone, irrespective of their age, gender, country, status, or religion, encounters the various forms of peer pressure. The intensity, mode, and effects only differ.

Peer pressure can therefore be referred to as a common denominator, which you must deal with before it deals with you. Some have successfully dealt with it, while others did not make the perfect choice. I believe it will help you to check out and learn from the good and bad experiences of young ones like you, who were faced with peer pressure just as you are facing or will face. Some of the experiences were culled from websites of organisations helping young people deal with peer pressure.

POSITIVE STORIES OF DEALING APPROPRIATELY WITH PEER PRESSURE

Sheri E. (Age 17) says:

Not too long ago, I was hanging out with my two friends at the mall. I was really excited to hang out with them outside of school because this was the first time we had hung out in a while. We walked around the mall for a while and then went by one store that sells diamonds and jewellery. When we almost walked in the door to look, four other teens started yelling, “Hey, hey you guys, come here!” We walked over to them, and they were trying to make us steal some diamonds from the store for them. They were saying stuff like, “Don’t worry, you won’t be caught!” and “Come on, don’t be a wimp!”. My friends and I looked at each other, and we all said no and no thanks. They said, “Really?! Come on!” I said, “We are not going to steal diamonds for you guys! That’s ridiculous!” They then said, “Fine. We’ll just ask someone else.” We all walked away together, and then we looked back and saw them asking more teens to do the same thing. We looked at each other and gave each other high fives. We felt proud not to give in to peer pressure. We would have gotten into so much trouble if we had been caught. From then on, we never fell into peer pressure. It might be hard, but you can overcome peer pressure too.

Sarah D. (Age 14) says:

I’ve just moved to a new city. I’m at a completely different and new school. It’s the first day of school, and I am very willing to make new friends. After second period, I had already made a new group of friends. They all seem very nice and caring. I sit next to all six of them at lunch, and we talk the whole time. I barely ate any of my lunch! Then, toward the end of lunch, they started talking about meeting behind the school after school. I said, “Sure, why not?” I didn’t really know what we were going to do, but I wanted to keep them as my friends. After school, I

walked to meet them behind the school. Then I smelled something really weird and disgusting. I turned the corner and saw all my friends. I smiled at them, but it turned almost immediately to a frown when I realised they were smoking pot. They asked me if I wanted a smoke. I then thought about my sporting career. I want to be a professional softball player, and this might ruin my ultimate dream. I can't let this one decision ruin my future dream and my future health. I said, "No. Sorry, I can't." One of them said, "Well, if you don't, we won't be your friends!" I paused but then said, "Fine." Then I walked away. I was really, really proud of myself that I walked away. But I got kind of sad because I no longer had friends. The next day, at lunch, I was looking for a seat when some girls invited me over to sit with them. This is fantastic, and I can't believe I made new friends. Now (three months later), we all are really great friends and are even talking about all of us going to college together. My coach even said that I could get a college scholarship for softball. They are a much better influence on me, and I am very happy I simply said no!

Femi (Age 17) says:

"My peer group wants to make a difference. We are all doing well at school, and we want to keep it that way. We know there are bad things out there, and we want to help each other to make the right decisions. My friends are like family to me, and we all look out for each other. It's what keeps me calm because I need them to support me when I need help. I'm there for them when they need me to. It's cool, and it works."

Now you see that resisting negative peer pressure is a possibility—something you can do if you choose to.

STORIES ABOUT INAPPROPRIATE DEALING WITH PEER PRESSURE

The Story of James

James, a 16-year-old boy from one of the southwestern states in Nigeria, finished his secondary school education quite early. He attended one of the many private secondary schools in Nigeria and, after sitting his West African Senior School Certificate Examination and writing the Universities Matriculation Examination, was fortunate to secure admission into one of the Nigerian universities. His parents were so happy; their hopes were on him being the first child of the family, and they spent all they could to get him a place and make his stay comfortable at the university. A few months into his academic journey, a course mate of his, who also happened to be his roommate, invited him to a party off-campus. Initially, he turned down the request, but after several days of pressure, he agreed to follow him. On the agreed day, the friend brought his dad's car (the friend was living with his parents in the same town), and in the car were other friends, all freshers. They got to the party, ate, danced, and drank alcohol to stupor. As expected, James was pressured to take "just two" bottles of liquor. Being his first time, he lost his senses completely. At about 1:00 a.m., they got back into the friend's car and headed back to school. The friend who was to drive was totally drunk, just like the others. Unfortunately, however, they had hardly left the venue when they drove straight into a ditch. James and the other occupants of the car died instantly! Their bodies were mangled and battered! They perished without honour! They left their parents and family members in utter sorrow! Their lives were cut short before they even started! Their destinies were snuffed out before they could achieve them! Why? Giving in to negative Peer pressure.

Mike (Age 16) says:

“I smoked my first cigarette when I was 11. I didn’t want to, but all my friends were smoking, and I didn’t want to be out of the group. Once I started, I couldn’t stop. I was addicted... I wish I hadn’t started. I knew it was wrong, and I didn’t want to.”

Elizabeth (Age 15) says:

“I went to a party with my friends from school. My mum always told me not to allow any guys to take advantage of me and to stick together with my friends when I’m at parties. All my friends said they wanted to have some fun with a guy, and most of them said they had been with a guy. I had never been with a guy and didn’t want to. But at this party, all my friends danced with guys, and I went into the garden with a guy who said he wanted to go somewhere quiet. I don’t know why I did that. He raped me in the garden while everyone was having fun at the party. The music was so loud no one could hear me. The cops came, and it was horrible. I don’t want anyone to go through what I went through.”

Corey (Age 17) says:

“I want to share this with other teens. Please don’t do what I did. I used to live upstate in the country. There were five of us friends, and we had talked about what it was like to use a shotgun. We didn’t have one, but my friend’s dad had one locked in a cabinet in his home. My friend had a key, so we took the gun outside. We were all excited and were messing around with the gun. We loaded a couple of cartridges and shot at some squirrels in a tree. We did this a lot. But the gun somehow went off, and my friend Zak got shot in the back. He nearly died. He’s okay now. We all knew it was wrong, but we did it anyway. I’ll never forget that day.”

Reading through all the stories above, I am sure it becomes obvious to you that it is up to you to give in to negative peer pressure or stand out,

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whichever, there are effects.

Remember that you are important. Your life counts, and you can make a difference in this world. If you ever need to talk about this or anything else, feel free to get in touch with us. We're here for you.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO RETRACE YOUR STEPS

"I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps."

– Mahatma Gandhi

As I come to the end of this book, I consider it necessary to speak to a category of folks who might have dealt inappropriately with peer pressure. Maybe you've done some really bad things because of the influence of friends and peers around you. It is not impossible that you are in the soup and experiencing some unpleasant consequences of giving in to peer pressure. I do not condemn you; rather, I say, you can get out of it stronger and better!

I want to state categorically that making a mistake is not strange. I, like most people, have had my own share of positive and negative dealings with peer pressure and was able to get back on the right path. Most elderly folks have done things they are not proud of, but they have been able to correct their mistakes and become ambassadors of positive causes. Who says you can't too?

Maybe you have promised yourself and loved ones never to give in to negative peer pressure, only to find yourself shamefully doing the same

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thing(s) again and again. You are not alone, friend; almost all of us have repeated some mistakes like that.

However, never feel helpless and think it's better to continue on that negative path because, with the help of God and by taking some steps, you can yet have a change of mind, retrace your steps, and begin afresh.

This story explains what I mean:

Alison (Age 18) says:

“I started doing drugs when I was 15. All my friends were into it, and I honestly felt it was okay to do the stuff with them. I now know that I shouldn't have done it, and it has taken me over a year to get back to where I'm at today. I've got drugs out of my body. I still don't feel good about it, and some days can be better than others... but I'm looking forward, not backward. I think that's important. I know it was peer pressure that got me into that stuff. We all got screwed up. My advice to anyone is if you know that you shouldn't do stuff, then don't do it—even if your friends think it's cool. It's not worth it... and your life gets messed up. I still have some of my friends, but they've changed. They're still trying to get their lives together. Don't do drugs. You only get one body, and only you can look after it.”

PRACTICAL WAYS TO RETRACE YOUR STEPS

Having read the story above, I would like to share with you some practical ways to retrace your steps:

1. Realise and Accept That You Are on the Wrong Path

It is almost impossible for anyone who thinks they are on the right path to receive help. I have had cause to engage folks who believe nothing is wrong with examination malpractice, swindling, financial crimes, and

many other vices. The truth is that you cannot have another set of rules for yourself. Whatever God and the law of society frown upon is wrong, and you ought not to be a deviant. So, consider your ways, and if you are on the wrong side of godly societal expectations under any guise, it's time to cross into the right path by doing the right things.

2. Stop the Blame Game and Accept Your Mistakes

Often, humans tend to shy away from accepting responsibility for our wrongdoings. We blame society, government, parents, friends, and everyone excluding ourselves. In a much similar way, folks tend to blame their friends for putting peer pressure on them. This is not appropriate because you won't learn any lesson until you accept responsibility for your role. So, stop the blame game and accept your mistakes as a foundation for getting things right.

3. Forgive Yourself

The trap of not forgiving oneself is one where many people have walked into and are stuck because they “really messed up and disappointed their loved ones.” However, to forgive oneself is not synonymous with seeking an escape route, weakness, or excusing wrong behaviour. To forgive yourself means that you accept responsibility for what happened and are ready to forge ahead without crying over spilt milk. So, friends, it does not really matter what you have done. It may be pretty bad, but God gives us another chance, and you should give yourself another chance.

4. Be Remorseful and Express Emotions in a Healthy Manner

When you realise that you are on the wrong path, accept your mistakes, and are ready to take responsibility, you will certainly feel some negative emotions such as sadness, anger, shame, and guilt. This is normal, and it is healthy for you to express such feelings, even if you need to cry. But your remorse should be a catalyst for positive change. For example, guilt

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may imply that you have a conscience that is alive but did something bad, while shame, if not handled well, can lead to depression and addiction.

5. Right the Wrongs You Can

As a result of giving in to negative peer pressure, you might have wronged a person, an institution, or an organisation. It is necessary to right the wrong by seeking their forgiveness and making amends in whatever way possible. This is not a show of weakness but rather an expression of strength and proof of your maturity. It further helps take care of whatever misgivings or blackmail that may arise in the future as a result of past actions. However, you should do this with a caution and counsel because certain actions in this regard may have legal implications.

6. Carry Out an Objective Review of Your Errors

One sure way to learn from a mistake and avoid repeating it is to reflect on it without dwelling on the mistake. You need to objectively pen down and consider what went wrong, at what point you slipped, what you could have prevented or done better next time, and other salient issues.

7. Evolve a Working Strategy

While it is okay to learn from how others handled peer pressure appropriately, it is equally necessary to be scenario-specific and evolve a plan to prevent a repetition of giving in to negative peer pressure based on your peculiar needs or experiences. However, you need to be flexible in your plan to allow amendments as you progress and move into different levels or terrains.

8. Eliminate Triggers

Be it human or inanimate things, it is important to identify things that pressure you into negative routes. When identified, make efforts to eliminate them by taking appropriate steps. If it is a particular friend or

programme, simply cut away and stop associating with them, no matter how painful the decision might be. It is for your well-being.

9. Get Involved in a Cause to Better Humanity

Whether virtually or physically, it helps to get involved with inspiring people and in good causes that make society a better place. When much of your energy is channeled into developing right relationships and positive activities, the likelihood of being exposed to negative peer pressure and going back to what you left is reduced. Therefore, you may want to volunteer your time, energy, and resources in establishing or partnering with organisations involved in positive activities.

10. Make Peace with God

All the nine steps above will amount to nothing if you do not make peace with God because He is the only one who can help you, strengthen you, and give you a place after your sojourn on this side of eternity is over.

*“It takes courage to grow up
and become who you really are.”*

~ E.E. Cummings

CHAPTER EIGHT

MYTHS, TRUTHS, AND QUOTES ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

"The most important thing in your life is to live your life with integrity and to not give in to peer pressure to try to be something that you're not."

– Ellen DeGeneres

There is no doubt that you have learnt some of the causes and effects of peer pressure. However, when peers come around to pressure you into doing something negative, there are common expressions and lines used in an attempt to hoodwink you.

This chapter presents to you the wise sayings of people across the world for you to learn from. It also presents the most commonly used expressions by peers to lure you into wrong actions and habits. You might be familiar with some of them, and the list is inexhaustible. An attempt is made to juxtapose these expressions with the truths about them.

"Just one bottle of alcohol won't harm you."

Truth: Half a bottle of alcohol can harm you, make you tipsy, and cause you to misbehave. What you do within the short time you are drunk may mar your life forever. Moreover, there is always a first time. Once you taste it, the desire for more is activated.

"Alcohol makes you feel high and bold."

Truth: Whatever feeling you have under the influence of alcohol is temporary and will soon wear off. So, why deceive yourself? Boldness and feeling high can be developed and acquired when you do the right things and gain knowledge, which you can get by reading and studying.

"Liquor kills worms in you."

Truth: Liquor does not deworm you. Rather, it eats up your lungs, destroys your kidneys, and gives you accumulated medical problems.

"I have been drinking liquor for a long time; it does no harm medically."

Truth: Alcohol may not harm you immediately, but it is the accumulated effect that causes cancer of the lungs, kidneys, and other diseases. It appears many people get away with this because the medical challenges associated with alcohol consumption may not manifest immediately, but it's actually postponing the evil day.

"Alcoholism and drug usage make you a big boy."

Truth: On the contrary, many drug users and alcohol-dependent individuals are suffering from inferiority complexes or trying to escape a problem in their lives. They "drink away their sorrow," but when the effects of alcohol wear off, the problem stares them in the face. It is better to tackle problems head-on than to mask them.

"Having sex will make your menstrual period less painful."

Truth: There is no medical backup for this dangerous theory. If your menstrual period is painful, talk to medical personnel.

"Your stomach ache will go if you have sex frequently."

Truth: Sex is not the medication for stomachache. If you have a stomach ache, consult a medical practitioner.

"If you are not deflowered by a certain age, you will have problems."

Truth: If you wait until you get married before you are deflowered, you will have no problems. There is no age at which you cannot start having sex. Wait until it's appropriate.

"Virginity is old school and outdated."

Truth: People who are no longer virgins say this because they don't want you to stand out. They want you to join their caucus.

"Nobody wants to marry a virgin."

Truth: Deep inside the hearts of many men, they prefer to marry a virgin because it builds trust in a relationship. Forget what they say with their mouths in public.

"Everybody is doing it."

Truth: There are so many young people out there who have "zipped up," both male and female. Don't be deceived into thinking that every young person is having premarital sex. Indeed, sex has been hyped these days, but not everyone is having sex. Moreover, others may, but you don't have to because you are not going to the same destination.

"If you don't steal or cheat, you can't make it."

You Can Handle Peer Pressure Correctly!

Truth: Very many people, both in government and private positions, have succeeded in their fields without taking bribes, changing figures, cutting corners, etc. Remember, any ill-gotten wealth does not last and can tarnish your image and reputation forever.

“You cannot pass examinations without cheating.”

Truth: The absolute truth is that so many people have passed professional, internal, and external examinations without cheating. Examination malpractice at any stage does not build the confidence needed in you, and even if you succeed in cheating, you cannot successfully defend the certificate you hold or perform optimally when the need arises. You can study and prepare for examinations without cheating, and you will succeed.

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

1. “The most important thing in your life is to live your life with integrity and to not give in to peer pressure to try to be something that you’re not.” – Ellen DeGeneres
2. “What kind of peer pressure you receive says a lot about your peer group.”
3. “Peer pressure is pressure you put on yourself to fit in!” – Jeff Moore
4. “It’s tough for parents to talk to children about heavy-weight topics such as peer pressure, drugs, and morality if they don’t already have a closeness. A parent can’t just all of a sudden pick out an hour and talk to a son about being morally clean if the parent and child haven’t

spent much time together for three or four years. I think closeness is developed more quickly by having fun together.” – David A. Bednar

5. “I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions.” – Lillian Hellman
6. “Not all peer pressure is bad. If you have peers who are pushing you to go further in life and believe in your dreams, man, you’ve got it made!” – Jeff Moore
7. “Those who stand for nothing fall for anything.” – Alexander Hamilton
8. “You would have no peer pressure if you cared less about the opinions of others.” – Jeff Moore
9. “Why fit in when you were born to stand out?” – Dr. Seuss
10. “I believe more follies are committed out of complaisance to the world than in following our own inclinations.” – Mary Wortley Montagu
11. “Be true to who you are and proud of who you’re becoming. I never met a critic who was doing better than me.” – Jeff Moore
12. “The more you give in to peer pressure, the more people will ask you to do what they want to do. The less you give in to it, the less they will ask you.”
13. “People either inspire you or they drain you—choose wisely.”
14. “The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.” – Friedrich Nietzsche

You Can Handle Peer Pressure Correctly!

15. “No one intends to make serious mistakes. They come when you compromise your standards to be more accepted by others. You be the strong one. You be the leader. Choose good friends and resist peer pressure together.” – Richard G. Scott
16. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” – Paul the Apostle
17. “You can’t blend in when you were born to stand out.” – R.J. Palacio
18. “How you handle peer pressure—the pressure your children feel as well as the pressure you feel—in the early years will play a significant role in how your children handle peer pressure when they become adolescents.” – Kevin Leman
19. “Many kids only think about the present moment and don’t realise that they are creating a digital footprint, which will follow you forever! You have to be careful about what you put on the Internet. It can even prevent you from getting a job! Other kids... especially girls... give in to peer pressure and take racy photos for boys because they think it will make the boy like them more. This NEVER works. Girls, let him like you with your clothes on.” – Tyra Banks
20. “Permissiveness, immorality, pornography, drugs, the power of peer pressure—all these and more cause many to be tossed about on a sea of sin and crushed on the jagged reefs of lost opportunities, forfeited blessings, and shattered dreams.” – Thomas S. Monson

FINAL WORDS

Make Up Your Mind and Stand Your Ground

My dear young fellow, the times we are in are very precarious and chancy!

These are times when the pressures on you to do the wrong things are on the dangerous upsurge.

These are times when doing the right and positive things make you “appear” stupid among your peers.

These are times when ridicule, taunting, and jesting are what you get for not succumbing to peer pressure.

These are times when peers make you feel wrong while standing for the right things.

These are times when morality is gradually going on exile.

These are times when immorality is brazenly taking over.

These are times when you feel alone, abandoned, and aloof.

These are indeed challenging times.

However,

These are times when you have to stand your ground.

You have to decide where you want to be.

You have to make up your mind not to join the bandwagon.

Remember, when you don't stand for something, you fall for anything.

Make up your mind on the things you won't do because of peer pressure before the pressure even comes.

Draw the boundary.

Promise yourself and the people who care about you that you won't bow to peer pressure, and stand by your promise.

Do all that is necessary, and make sure you are one of those who will stand tall and proud in this contemporary, depraved society.

You deserve the best in your lifetime! Don't allow anything or anyone to shortchange you.

Do all you can, and let's meet at the topmost top...

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LET'S RELATE

I want to sincerely thank you for coming this far in reading this book. As much as you can, put into practice the truths you have learnt here, and ensure you resist negative influence. In case you would like to share your thoughts, suggestions, or ask questions, I will be glad to connect with you via the following channels:

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