

Peers

The good

The bad

The ugly

Your opinion of yourself ... or others' opinion of you?

The good

“A person is known by the company he keeps.”

Heard this one before? Believe it or not, it's true.

Your friends have a very deep influence on you. Not only do you spend a lot of time with them; you're likely also to do a lot of things to win their approval.

So if you want approval from your friends (and who doesn't?), you might as well choose your friends wisely. What is the likelihood of straying from the right path if your friends have their act together? Simply by hanging out with the right crowd, you can avoid trouble automatically.

The reverse is also true. For example, if your friends smoke, you could be tempted to light up. If your friends try to pressure you into it, it could be very difficult to say no. Why? Because if you resist their pressure, they may think you are judging them, or you might feel not accepted. Choose nonsmokers as friends, and you probably won't light up at all.

One of the advantages of choosing wiser, smarter friends is that you can choose a winning life strategy without feeling left out. More importantly, there is strength in numbers. Choose the right circle of friends, and your other peers are less likely to pick on you.

Think of this: The ones who laugh at you might just end up working for you. While you're moving forward to success, they'll waste time risking their future, laying the foundation for failure and dependency on others.

Surround yourself with friends who do at least some of the following:

- use positive thinking
- have good manners
- have a good self-image
- do well in school
- do not smoke, take drugs, or drink alcohol (show some restraint or self-discipline)
- enjoy some hobby, sport, or other activity that interests you
- inspire you
- uplift you when you are feeling down
- make you feel good in their presence

Remember that most people prefer friends who are involved in common activities. If they smoke or take

drugs, they'll want you to do the same.

Personally, I'm glad that I hung out with the right crowd. Now most of my friends are engineers, doctors, accountants, computer specialists, professors, and so on. Like me, they are very well placed in their careers, independent, and free to enjoy life to the fullest.

You can be too.

The bad

You are bound to feel peer pressure, especially for things that are bad for you. Unless you are lucky and your peer group pressures you to study, exercise, eat well...yeah, right. It doesn't happen too often, does it?

Count on it: Peers who smoke, drink, and harass others will want you to do the same.

Why do you suppose they want you to participate in these activities?

Because if you don't, you are demonstrating a stronger willpower than they have. You are preparing yourself for a better life, one that they will probably never know. They'd prefer that you share their miserable situation.

Disassociate yourself from such "friends."

You can get involved with activities that make you a better person and prepare you for life. The world is full of possibilities. Instead of destroying yourself, you can spend your time and energies on sports, academic work, learning a new language, volunteer work, reading, and much more.

By the way, would you advise yourself to smoke, drink, and use drugs?

If you wouldn't, why let your peers influence you?



The ugly (really ugly)

Make no mistake. Anyone who asks you (or forces you) to get involved with drugs, violence, gangs, or illegal activity is really damaging your life.

Stay away from such people; they are not really your friends anyway. If you live in a neighborhood where such activities are common, avoiding them is much harder. But you can still do it.

Talk to someone older whom you trust (such as a parent, school counselor, teacher, minister, or rabbi).

To live the good life, you must avoid the ugly influences life throws in your way.

Your opinion of yourself ... or others' opinion of you?

For most teenagers, this one is difficult to handle.

Adults don't usually understand this part of their kids' lives. They forget how important it was to them

when they were young. Of course, in a perfect world you wouldn't care about your peers' opinion of you. But in the real world, it's hard not to care about it. Advice from parents to ignore peer pressure sounds pretty hollow.

Why? *Because you are the one experiencing it first hand in school.* You are the one who has to face the pressure, the insults, and the rejection.

So how do you handle people who want to drag you down with them?

Stay out of their way. Get strength in numbers. Make friends with interests similar to yours — some hobby club, sports activity, or charity. And bear this in mind: It's one thing to care about someone's opinion of you (especially if you respect that person). But should you really care about the opinions of people who really don't have your best interest in mind? Should anyone care?

You don't have to do things just to please others.

Declare your independence, and mean it. People will applaud you for it!