



# Peer Pressure Definitions & Discussion Questions

**Social Conformity:** An innate desire to conform to the norms or behaviors of other group members, sometimes called peer pressure or influence. This desire is normal and adaptive.

**Refusal Skills:** Cognitive-behavioral skills that help youth avoid engaging in high-risk behavior such as resisting peer pressure, curtailing temptation, and being assertive with pushy people. Refusal skills are one's own, unique way of saying 'no'.



**Social Contagion:** The spread of behaviors, attitudes, and feelings through groups from one member to another via imitation and conformity.

**Iatrogenic Effects:** When negative behavior occurs in a peer group that was intended to have positive effects. For example, when youth who are at high risk for drug use are placed together in a therapy group to learn positive skills, but instead teach each other new ways of using and getting drugs. This has been referred to as 'deviancy training'.

Peers can be highly influential in negative ways, such as convincing one another to try alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and to continue using them. Conversely, positive peers have incredible influence for good when it comes to peer-bonding, staying sober, and exerting pressure to engage in prosocial activities. Having non-substance using peers predicts less substance use over time and offers support for those who are trying to stay clean.

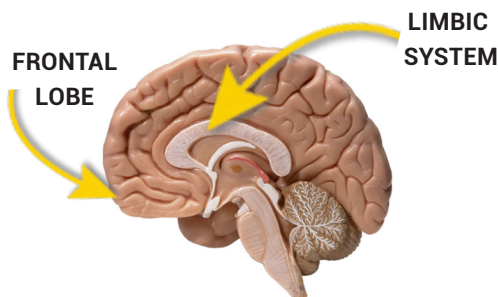
## Critical Thinking Section

### Students:

- How can conforming to what others are doing be positive and adaptive?
- Would you go along with your friends just to make them happy?
- Is what other people think of you important? Why or why not?
- How vulnerable are you to peer influence? How easy is it for other people to get you to do things?
- Would you engage in substance use because your friends were doing it?
- Do you take more risks when you are around other people? Why or why not?
- Why do some people say or do things against their values to earn respect from their peers? Have you done this? Why or why not?

### SOCIAL INFLUENCE & THE BRAIN:

Research study participants were asked to rate attractiveness of faces while undergoing a brain scan. After learning what their peer's ratings were, they changed their initial ratings while two areas of their brains showed activity: the nucleus accumbens in the Limbic System and the orbitalfrontal cortex in the Frontal Lobes. These areas are responsible for determining the value of a reward. Conforming can be a powerful reinforcer!



### Staff & Family:

- What Executive Function skills do youth need to use in order to resist social pressure?
- Are you able to resist social pressure and stick to your values and beliefs?
- How do you role model refusal skills for your students or children?
- How easy or difficult is it to stand up for your values and beliefs when you know they may differ from others?
- What situations do you find it difficult to resist social pressure?
- How do you handle social pressure when you know someone might be upset or angry with you if you say no?
- When is it healthy or adaptive to conform to a group?