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UPDATE

Valuegenesis Information You Can Use

We've all heard it! "Come on! Everyone is ditching math today. Who wants to take that quiz? Hey, let's take a walk and get some food instead." And you'll be there because you are dying to be friends with this kid in school. After all, he is popular, and you don't think you are. Now, of course, you are faced with a crucial moral decision—do you do what you know is right and go to math class, quiz and all? Or do you give in and go with him?

Peer Pressure is the focus of this issue of UPDATE. And the *Valuegenesis*² research provides some interesting insights into the power of friendship and values. Making decisions on your own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressure you one way or another, it is even harder.

Adolescence and Peer Pressure

Just what are we talking about? A peer is someone who is about the same age as you. We interact with peers at school, church, or in the neighborhood, on the soccer team, or in a tutoring session. Peers influence our lives, whether we know it or not, simply because they are always around. And it is a human thing to listen to them and learn from them.

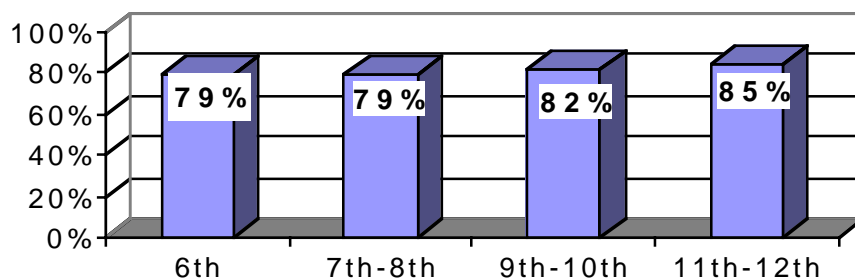
Peers can have a positive or negative influence on each other. It's positive when it keeps youth participating in religious activities, going to Pathfinder meetings or youth group and playing on sports teams. It keeps adults going and being involved too. The peer group is a source of affection, sympathy and understanding; a place for experimentation; and a supportive setting for achieving the two primary

developmental tasks of adolescence. (1) **identity**— finding the answer to the question "Who Am I?" and (2) **autonomy** — discovering that self is separate and independent from parents. It is no wonder, then, that adolescents like to spend time with their peers.¹

Let's look at the *Valuegenesis* data and see what we can learn about friends (peers) and their importance for spiritual life. The graph below shares what is "Somewhat important" and "Very important." Having friends that adolescents can talk to about spiritual things is very important. And as they get older, the percentage grows.

More often than not, peers reinforce family values, but they have the potential to encourage problems behaviors as well.

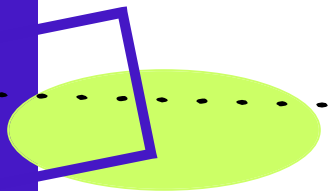
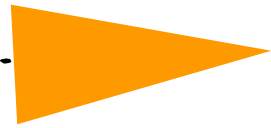
■ Friends you can talk to about spiritual things



In this UPDATE...

- Order our latest book: *Valuegenesis*²—Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations for \$19.95, 436 pgs. From hcyfm@lasierra.edu
- *New Valuegenesis*² insights
- *Defining Peer Pressure*
- * *Looking at the power of friends*
- *Understanding what parents, church members, and school personnel can do about it*

You can still order the new *Valuegenesis*² book — email hcyfm@lasierra.edu



The Power of Friends

We wondered just how important friends are and what positive influence they might be. Below is a chart that reflects the findings in our research. You can see the growing significance of good friends that provide positive role models.

When we asked them a number of questions listed below we were curious whether or not "good" friends were "very important" or not. Here is what we found

<i>"Very Important" response percentages</i>	Grades 7 & 8	Grades 9 to 12
1. Friends who bring out the best in you	62%	69%
2. Who encourage you to meet good goals	56%	59%
3. Who help keep you out of trouble	55%	48%
4. Who share your spiritual values	36%	38%
5. Who are a good influence	53%	52%
6. Who are as religious as you are	20%	17%
7. Who are as moral as you are	24%	28%
8. Friends your parents approve of	35%	21%
9. Who attend religious services regularly	18%	12%

Friends are important and there seems to be less concern about the moral and spiritual viewpoint of friends than we might hope. So, it remains to be a truism that, "who Johnny plays with is crucial."

Effective Strategies for Coping with Peer Pressure

If the negative aspects of peer pressure are to be minimized, everyone must come together to establish workable and effective strategies to help guide teen behavior and to support their transition from children to mature, responsible adults. Here are some proven strategies to consider.

1. Try not to stereotype peers as having a uniformly negative influence on our youth. While some teenage peer groups encourage negative behavior (i.e. drug use, delinquent behavior, poor school performance), others discourage this type of deviant activity in favor of positive moral and spiritual achievement and involvement in extra-curricular activities such as music, religious activities, and sports.
2. Nurture teen's abilities and self-esteem so they can be a positive peer influence for their own friends.
3. Help parents and educators provide adolescents with opportunities to succeed in constructive ways, which can be valued by the young. (Accomplishment always builds a strong, positive self-image). Do what you can to give them a chance.
4. Encourage cross-ethnic and cross-class peer interaction. The church must model appreciation for differences and support this type of interaction. Schools can make a major contribution here. Knowing others helps us value others.
5. Parents need to be better informed about the dynamics of adolescent peer groups and the demands and expectations these have on peer relationships.
6. Develop an intervention program for early teens who seem to have a tendency for low self-esteem and joining groups that are not positive.
7. Continue to model clear, biblical values in home, church, and school. Provide lots of various activities so involvement and accomplishment can be programmed into your ministry.²

¹*NebFacts*, published by Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, "Adolescence and Peer Pressure" by Herbert G. Lingren, 2004, 1.
²*Ibid*, 3.

Real ministry doesn't happen by accident.

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