

Grade 6 October Part 1

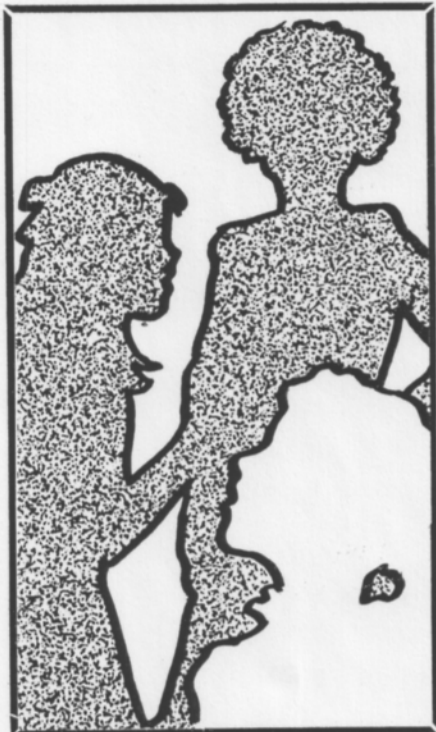
How important are peer groups?

By the time a child is in the sixth grade, the influence of her group of peers is changing.

On the one hand, a sixth grader has developed some sense of self-awareness.

She is developing greater independence from the peer group in matters where she can rely on her own judgment and self confidence.

On the other hand, in those areas where she is uncertain about new and demanding challenges, she is more likely to follow the peer group's behavior pattern.



How to encourage independence

Parents can encourage independence in a child in many ways.

- Let the child see you making decisions – everyday decisions such as what kind of soap to buy; major economic decisions like buying a new car; moral decision like what to do about grandfather who is terminally ill and in great pain. Let her see you and hear you as you consider all the options.

- Talk about pros and cons – how they affect decision making.
- Talk about the importance and satisfaction of thinking for yourself – taking responsibility for your own thoughts and actions. And don't forget to mention that everyone feels frightened sometimes of having to make important decisions.

- Some decisions are more important for independence than others. For example, deciding not to cheat on a test is important; wanting to dress like the other kids is not that important at this age.

- Give recognition and praise when a child acts on a personal conviction – instead of following the group's opinion.

Encouraging positive peer group influences

- Get to know your child's "best friends" – this group is likely to have a greater influence on some of your child's opinions than any adult.

By helping your child select her friends carefully, you can prevent many of the problems that arise from having undesirable companions.

- Be prepared to discuss and defend your own values – particularly if your values are in conflict with those of your child's friends and their parents.

- Listen to your child's opinions – particularly if they are different from your own. Your child may want you to be a "sounding board" for new ideas she is trying to examine. If she can't discuss those ideas with you, her parent, she will almost certainly discuss them with her peer group.

- Identify the positive characteristics of your child's peer group. The influence of peers on your child can be either positive or negative.

By helping your child to identify the more positive qualities in her friends, such as maturity and caring behaviors she can more readily be influenced positively by her peer group interactions.

*"Tell me what company thou keepest,
and I'll tell thee what thou art."
—Cervantes-(Don Quixote)*