

Peer Pressure

By Ian Lillico



Peer pressure most affects a child's personality from 6 - 12 years old, even though evidence of the peer pressure often shows up around 14 - 15 years of age. Experts believe that the parents' role has been exaggerated in rearing their children. Research with the children of migrant parents in the USA and UK support this postulate, where these kids are not handicapped in any way. Judy Harris wrote in "The nurture assumption" that children return to the values instilled in their early years.

She and others have concluded that what children learn in one context (eg. In the home) does not necessarily transfer to situations outside the home. Children have two worlds - their home (parents) and outside home (peers). Boys (more than girls) behave quite differently within the various peer groups they belong to and often learn to compartmentalize their lives. Parents can help them to be better adjusted by getting to know as many of their friends as possible. Sleepovers are a good way to do this. We are also helping to rear those children who sleep over, as they don't look on us the same way as their parents when we give them advice.

Pretend play is far more complicated than meets the eye. Boys carve out a niche in their peer groups. At 5 - 6 years old, research shows that parents need to value academic work, or the boy doesn't in later life. This is true to a slightly lesser extent for girls. By twelve years of age (with the peer culture well established) children don't necessarily want to be like their parents. Each child selects the peer group that matches their profile. Parents will indulge and be tolerant of you, but peers do not. One mistake can stick forever. Peer groups don't push, they pull. Young people feel tense and anxious when they are different from their peers.

Peer groups have a set of group rules and loners suffer long-term consequences, including a high risk of delinquency, mental and physical ill health. Parents and teachers alike have to be very diligent in seeking out loners and helping them re-connect with their peers. Loners are often responsible for many of the tragic shootings etc that happen in schools and in society generally. If children disconnect from their peers they are at risk of becoming violent and causing harm to themselves or others.

