

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is when the behaviour of some students (either good or bad) causes other students to change their own behaviour to be just like that of the others.

In a classroom this can be a positive force that the teacher can use. If the majority of the students know the classroom rules and follow them willingly, those few students who *don't can* be convinced to change. Students who model good behaviour can help those who don't to change their ways.

Little kids are just learning to socialize, and want to fit in and have friends. The ones who have trouble learning the rules will usually figure it out pretty quickly, as others in the room set them straight.

Peer pressure also works in a Jr/Sr High classroom. Jr. High students in particular usually don't want to stand out; it makes them embarrassed. When one student is forgetting the rules, it's easy for the teacher to say something like: "*Look around, Bobby ... you're the only one not sitting down. Why is that?*"

Unfortunately, peer pressure can have another effect at the Jr/Sr level, especially in a small school, and it's not a good one.

In a large high school with hundreds of students in each grade, it's easy for kids to find friends who have the same values as they do. So, for example, if a particular student values hard work and effort, and wants to do all the right things to get a good grade, it will be easy for him to find friends who think the same way. That was me when I was in high school; my friends and I did a lot of fun things, including playing pick-up baseball, camping and cross-country skiing. But when tests or exams were looming, we all wanted to do well, so we would meet and study together, helping each other learn the material. It was important to all of us, and we made those study parties fun.

There were lots of other kids who didn't feel that way, and who didn't care if they got good marks. They did their own things before tests. But we didn't care, because within our group *we were friends and all felt the same way.*

The problem small schools is that, with a small number of students in each grade, the number of students for which doing well in school is important may very small, and the choice of friends is very limited. A particular student may have friends who do not place a high value in doing well in school. At the Sr. High level, these friends are likely not in an academic program. When there's homework, or on nights before a test, or in the weeks before a final exam, they're out driving around, partying, or riding their snowmobiles and having a good time. They don't care.

There is a lot of pressure on the students who want to do well to join their friends in these activities.

It takes a lot of self-confidence and maturity for a student to say "*No thanks, I can't go out partying with you this week ... I have to study for exams!*" Some students manage it. But some don't.

Parents who care can help.

It's particularly bad when many of the most *popular* students are the ones who do poorly in school and don't care about studying. The pressure from them to 'come on over to my place and we'll play video games' in the week before an exam is often too much for a conscientious student to resist.

College students have a similar problem. They're living away from home, and there's no-one to nag them about doing homework or studying. The ones who, in high school, developed good study habits, and who care about getting good results, will have the maturity to do what is necessary to succeed. But some won't.