**MODULE**

**Class Title**: Peer Pressure

**Aim of the lesson**: To understand what peer pressure is

**Category**: Personal development / Interpersonal Relationships

**Lesson Format**: Power point presentation, activity & discussion

(Greeting to students*) Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.*

*(Taooz) Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

*(Du’a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* (Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

**Note to teacher**: Begin the session with this activity

**‘Decide at Once’ activity:**

You (the teacher) be the anchor. You will give two choices. And ask students:

Choice #1: Move to one side of the room

Choice #2: Move to the other side of the room

Each student has to **quickly** choose one of them. You keep the pace very fast.

For example, say "chocolates or ice-creams", then the students in support of chocolates move to the right and those in support of ice-creams move to the left. This way, a quick decision-making ability can be inculcated in them.
As time passes, the questions can become tricky!

Examples of choices you can use: gold or silver, Netflix or HBO, praying fajr or sleeping in, dinner out or baking in, sunrise or sunset, studies or friends,

The fact that some students simply move to a side because their friends have chosen that side, is clearly observed.

Make everyone sit down and begin by asking:

Were the decisions you made in this game entirely yours?

Wait for students to respond, and then discuss how we make choices. We like to think I am my own person, I do not get influenced easily, I know what I want etc etc … But if we look into our process of making daily choices of say what to wear, is it really free and independent of outside influences?

Look what happened here, the choice they made was not entirely theirs; it was impacted by their friend’s choice and/or they chose the option wherever there was more of a crowd.

**Slides 1-2:**

Do we see what happened here?

A simple, straight forward decision of this or that was not even our independent decision completely- and was influenced by a number of things; our friends, the crowd, or the social trends that we have unconsciously learned through social media or our surroundings.

This is peer pressure.

What is peer pressure really? It is when you are directly or indirectly being influenced by your social circle (friends, society, social media etc.) to do something or make a certain choice- good or bad.

Peer influence is when **you choose to do something you wouldn’t otherwise do**, because you want to feel accepted and valued by your friends. It isn’t just or always about doing something against your will.

Ok so how many of you have done certain weird stuff? Alone? If you throw eggs at someone or something for example – yeah an extreme example, but you know some kids do that after a sporting event or when they feel let’s do something today. So if you have done that on your own, then please get help! We generally do stuff we wouldn’t otherwise do when we are with our peers – friends, or people we want to be friends with.

If we really examine our behavior and the choices we make on the regular, we will be surprised to see how much of our choices are impacted by peer pressure.

**Slides 3-4:**

But who is a peer? Someone in your own age group or generation. A peer could be friends, class mates, cousins, or even people on social media!

But why is peer pressure a bad thing, aren’t we all influenced by something or the other all the time?

To understand what peer pressure is and why it has such impact on our lives, we need to recognize the fact that fitting in and being part of a group is part of life. As it is very important for our survival that we have other people around us, we learn from a very early age to imitate others. We learn from other people and they learn from us.

There are many positive examples of how peer influence can make a person grow and develop new skills. A classmate shows you how to solve a difficult math problem or how to create a cool app. Maybe you admire your friend and you want to be more like him or her. In turn, you may influence your classmate to like the same films or shows as you do.

When we are hanging out with people who work hard at studies, take their commitments and assignments seriously, are truthful and have integrity – then we may attend school regularly, not bunk classes, stay attentive in class, do our assignments on time … list goes on – simply because of positive peer pressure.

But peers can also have a negative impact on you.

For example, friends at school may ask you to join in skipping classes with them just for fun. Another classmate might try to make you write nasty comments about someone on Facebook. You may end up bullying someone just because some friends want you to do it, although you know that it’s wrong. These situations are all examples of negative peer pressure.

One explanation of why peer pressure is so powerful is that people want to be loved and accepted by others. It is easier to be influenced to do things that you wouldn’t normally do if you’re in a crowd. The idea that “everyone else is doing it so why shouldn’t I?” can make sensible people behave in strange ways.

**Slide 5:**

Let’s look at when we make a choice out of feeling pushed or pressured, how does it make us feel?

* It makes us feel sad- we feel like we have no identity
* We feel anxious- because we don’t know if we made the correct choice
* We may feel guilty because we went against our own values and principles to do something to make others happy
* We feel like a wimp or a pushover- because we couldn’t take a stand to communicate our choice
* Lastly, you may feel disappointed for not being confident in your own self enough to take a stand for what you wished to do

**Slide 6:**

But the question is if it makes us feel so many negative things, why do we end up giving in then?

* Because we are afraid of rejection and what will happen if we say no to others
* Because as human beings we wish to be liked, and don’t want others to dislike us or lose a friend
* Often, it’s because we don’t want to say no to an idea and seem like we’re afraid or not mature enough to go ahead with it. Example: your friends are planning to play a cruel prank on a classmate, you go ahead with it even though it’s making you feel uncomfortable and guilty simply because you don’t want them to think that you are a coward (replace example with age appropriate one)
* You’re afraid of being ridiculed and made fun of- you don’t want to feel like the odd one out.
* You’re scared that if you don’t agree it might hurt someone’s feelings. Example: say your friend is throwing a party and you know you shouldn’t go because the party will be the kind that is not Islamically acceptable; however, you’re scared that if you say no to the invitation the host will think you’re judging them and acting as though you are holier than thou (replace example with age appropriate one)
* Sometimes you give in to peer pressure because you’re not really even sure of what you want! You may be feeling an uneasiness in your heart with what’s happening but you don’t have the understanding/knowledge of right and wrong to identify why, or what you should be doing instead- so you ignore that feeling of uneasiness and give in to the pressure.
* Other times; you tend to give in, because quite frankly you genuinely don’t know what else to do! How do you get out of a situation where the pressure is so strong? You don’t have the tools to resist pressure and take a stand.

**Slides 7-8:**

But how do we know that this magical thing that is peer pressure is taking place?! How do I know that I’m not doing xyz because I want to or I think its correct and instead I’m doing it because of the pressure from others?

It’s usually when people around you (or social media!) will make you feel like this is the normal thing to do, and that you’re missing out in some way or very strange for not wanting to do xyz. When you will be made to feel as though you’re missing out by avoiding it. That’s why peer pressure is not always a bad thing, sometimes that kind of pressure can push us to do the right thing. For example: when exam season is around the corner and we hear that all our class mates have completed half the syllabus or are far ahead in their revision, it gives us the pressure and boost we require to get serious and start studying ourselves!

But the negative kind of peer pressure usually starts with typical lines like (mention a few, and encourage girls to contribute one’s they have heard or experienced themselves):

“Oh, come on, it’s not a big deal, it will be so fun!

You have to join us, no one will find out

It’s our age to experiment, if not now then when?!

Don’t be such a bore, how are you going to have fun then?

You’re honestly such a baby.

Are you sure you want to wear that? You look kind of weird

Do you need to do that now? People are going to think you’re really strange”

**Slides 9-10:**

And it’s not just these verbal lines and jabs that are used to influence your choice and put pressure on you. There’s a wide range of tricks that can be used; and it’s important for us to be aware of them so that we know when to stand up and resist that pressure that is making us do something against our will and morals. The more self-aware you are the more you know how and when to respond to such pressure, and what situations suit you, and what doesn’t.

**Slide 11:**

The first of these possible tricks is the threat of rejection where you are threatening to end a friendship. This doesn’t have to be explicitly said in the form of “if you don’t do xyz, then our friendship will have to end”. It can be through other means, more subtle ways of cutting you out from their life and excluding you. For e.g.: say you are invited to someone’s birthday, and you’re not okay with what’s going to be happening there so you resist the peer pressure and say no. In the future that friend could threaten you to not do that again the future by not inviting you to plans in the future, even the plans you would come to. Or they could stop sharing their secrets, and start confiding in other friends who they say they trust more.

**Slide 12:**

Then another trick to enforce the peer pressure is by calling you names; hurtful things that upset you and make you feel pressured to do something- or at least make you fearful to resist peer pressure in the future. Those insults feel like cornering someone. Things can be said like;

* You’re not any fun
* You’re such a baby
* You’re a wimp
* Get a life
* Live a little
* Why are you being so extreme

I’ll share my own personal experience, whenever I resisted my friends to do things at my house e.g.: there was a situation where they were over, and I had a nice roof, so they would want to do things like smoke, or even drugs and I had to stand up against it and say no.

Unfortunately, during that time, I didn’t have too many friends who were similar to me religiously. When I stood up to them, they would say things like; “why are you such a bore, if you can’t live at least let us live a little. Why can’t you chill out, no one is going to know!”.

Those kinds of comments made me feel really boring as a person and as if I was too strict and there was no need to be this way. These comments are made for the very reason that you give in to pressure and feel bad; even though you’re the one who is in the right, not the other way around! (Replace anecdote with own personal experience, or any other relevant story)

Have any of you received such comments?

**Slide 13:**

Then reasoning is used; where you are constantly told- that your reasons being not wanting to partake in xyz are wrong. So, you’re made to feel as though you’re being dumb or irrational almost.

So, when that is said that you start questioning your own decisions. It could be stuff like;

 “religion doesn’t want you to stop living your life”,

“your parents won’t find out, so even if you break their trust as long as they don’t know, does it matter?”

“Why are you okay with going to a mixed school, but not a mixed party- there are boys everywhere”.

What else have you heard?

**Slide 14:**

Then there is the unspoken pressure of: the what ifs?

What if everyone stops talking to you? What if you don’t get invited to anymore hang outs? What if you have no friends anymore? What if they start to exclude you?

Many times just the fear of being excluded, not invited, side lined, not fitting in – messes up our head space.

**Slide 15:**

Then there is the huddle; where you feel like everyone is whispering without you. You can start seeing them huddled in their own little groups and as soon as you come in, they stop talking. Or they start making separate WhatsApp groups where they are discussing a party you’re not going to, and eventually that group becomes the main place for them to talk- and you feel so left out.

**Slide 16:**

Then they may start to exchange looks when you’re around, that side eye look where they’re almost saying, oh it’s her again, or be quite she’s here. Have you ever felt that?

**Slide 17:**

All these tactics can feel very isolating and horrible to be around. You end up feeling like you’re the black sheep amongst them and you stick out like a sore thumb. You feel very very alone. It’s not easy being a lone soldier.

An example of this is- let’s suppose there is a school trip happening that’s international, your parents are not comfortable to let you go because of any number of reasons and despite your desire to go with your gang, they still do not allow perhaps due to financial constraint or any other valid reason. It is quite possible that deep down you agree with their decision and know it’s the correct one, yet you feel rotten mainly because of peer pressure. You feel completely isolated from your friends, because they have this new exciting thing in their life and you’re not part of it. They’re always talking about it and that makes you feel even worse- completely alone.

As I’m giving you guys this example, I can almost feel my own emotions, and it’s not easy, is it now?

**(Note to teacher: Do a role play. Role play sheet attached)**

**Slide 18:**

Why should we be really really concerned about negative peer pressure?

Watch this video.

(Play video – Peer Pressure 1 – Psychology – How group think happens)

If we don’t bother and just go with the flow, negative peer pressure can have long-term serious consequences. Our belief system, our morality, our values can all get messed up.

How hard is it to get up and pray when no one else in the room is getting up? And on top of that you feel piercing eyes looking at you in disapproval – are you going to pray even at this friend’s get together? Snicker snicker!

(have a discussion on consequences of giving in to negative peer pressure)

Right now, I want you guys to sit with these emotions and all this information we have discussed in the class today and *in sha Allah* next time we will be discussing how we can navigate this peer pressure, and make it easier for ourselves. Agreed, it’s not easy- but it’s not impossible to handle either, so hang in there!

 *JazakAllah khair* for being an excellent audience! I’m here in case any of you want to discuss anything- feel free to reach out and we can definitely have a heart to heart *in sha Allah.* See you next time for part 2!

(Du’a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati ‘amma yasifun wa salamun ‘alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil ‘alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*