

5. DON'T SQUEEZE ME! I'M NOT A LEMON...


Dealing with social pressure
by learning to assert myself



Targeted competency(ies) (ÉKIP, WHO)	TING THEMSELVES
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL EXERCISING THEIR CRITICAL JUDGMENT COMMUNICATING APPROPRIATELY COOPERATING
General workshop objectives	AT THE END OF THE WORKSHOP, THE STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize what social pressure is • understand how social pressure influences them and their choices • identify and try out different strategies for asserting themselves and resisting negative peer pressure

Total duration

60-MINUTE version, follow all steps

40-MINUTE version, DO NOT do the activities marked with the  icon

Materials and preparation

Print the *Scenarios - Don't squeeze me!* worksheet (1 copy only)

Materials required

- Scissors (to cut out the steps on the worksheet)
- Chalkboard and chalk or interactive digital board (IDB)

A. The opinions ball (10 minutes)

1. Read the following scenario out loud:

“Tomorrow is the annual masquerade ball at school! Your friend, who is pretty extroverted, loves to be the centre of attention. She asks you what you think she should wear. Here’s what you suggest...”

2. Show the picture of the friend in the PowerPoint presentation.
3. Move to the next slide, which shows different people and their opinions:

- Parent 1: “Your outfit can’t cost too much!”
- Parent 2: “The most important thing is that you’re comfortable!”
- Parent 3: “Not too sexy, please!”
- Friend: “Something original, out of the ordinary!”
- Friend: “Something very plain...”
- Teacher: “Does it respect the school dress code?”
- Society: “It needs to be trendy, edgy, fashionable!”
- Society: “Think green! Something used or recycled.”

4. Ask the students: Does the outfit you suggested for your friend meet everyone’s criteria? Add to the discussion by asking the following questions:

- Who do you think will be happy with the outfit? Unhappy?
- What about your friend? Do you think she’ll like the outfit?
- Is there a way to make everyone happy? If so, how? If not, why?
- If someone isn’t happy with the outfit, do you think this will affect your relationship with them?



Conclude by pointing out to the students that they are exposed to many types of pressure on a daily basis. No matter what decisions they make in their lives, there will always be people who disagree with their choices. It’s better to accept that we can’t please everyone, just like not everyone can please us. It’s also important to remember that the strongest relationships don’t usually break down over a simple disagreement or difference of opinions.

B. Video: Nadège and social pressure – Part 1

C. Lemon squeezer (10 minutes)

1. Review the video, commenting that Nadège obviously seems to have put some kind of pressure on Sacha, however unintentionally. Ask the students to explain, in their own words, what “**social pressure**” is. Take a few answers.
2. Draw links between their answers and the information provided in the video and in the *Digging deeper – Social pressure* bubble, then finish by reminding them:



Social pressure comes from **outside sources** (parents, school, friends, society).

3. Then ask the students: But what happens inside you when you hear these messages, feel that pressure? Take a few answers; as needed, finish by reminding them:



Without realizing it, we internalize these pressures and impose them on ourselves. As Nadège explained, we think we need to like *such-and-such a thing* or think *such-and-such a way*... But those things don't really correspond to our tastes or personal opinions. *Just like a lemon looks different after being squeezed, social pressure changes the way we are or behave.*

4. Continue by saying that social pressures often influence a person's way of being, thinking, or acting, resulting in **their choices and behaviours being more in line with the norm** (doing what others do, “fitting the mold”). Present the following two scenarios:
 - “Even though I don't like alcohol and don't want to drink, I'll probably decide to drink at my prom because everyone will be doing it. If I don't drink, they'll all think I'm boring, too scared, or a goody-two-shoes. They might make fun of me or exclude me...”
 - “Almost all my friends have already dated someone. I'm the only one who's never been with somebody. They tease me about it a lot, but I prefer to take my time and listen to my gut, instead of doing things I don't really want to do, just to be like the others. I know the time will come...”
5. Ask the students: Of these two scenarios, which one it is about a teenager who *gives in* to the pressure? A teenager who *resists* the pressure? In your opinion, what things made them react differently to the pressure?
6. Take a few answers and finish by explaining that **low self-confidence** can make us more likely to bend or give in to pressure (Fischer, 2010), rather than asserting ourselves!
7. Let the students know that if they're feeling pressured, they can always take a “timeout” to try to get their bearings. This helps them figure out what they really want, after which they can speak up!

DIGGING DEEPER

Social pressure

Adolescents face many social pressures: “They need to deal with the tyrannies of body norms, the pressures exerted by the media, fashion, advertising and the cultural industry, and the task of constructing a self-image that will pave the way to new relationships with others” (Dupont, 2014, p. 31). Adolescents are also subjected to peer pressure when it comes to their sexuality and life experiences (e.g., smoking, drugs, alcohol, etc.) (Young, 2013).

DIGGING DEEPER

Assertiveness

Assertiveness refers to our ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others, calmly and honestly. Assertive behaviour involves two types of respect: self-respect (considering your own needs, rights, thoughts, and feelings) and respect for others (considering their needs, rights, thoughts, and feelings). The more respectful a person is toward others while still maintaining their self-respect, and the more clearly they are able to express themselves, the more enriching and liberating their relationships will be

(Boisvert and Beaudry, 1979).

D. Resist the squeeze and speak up! (15-25 minutes)


1. Arrange the desks into two separate rows, with an aisle running down the middle, from the back to the front of the classroom. Choose a volunteer and ask them to stand at the back of the classroom, at the end of the path (aisle), and wait there.
2. Then, explain to the class that the path (row of desks) symbolically represents *our life's journey*. In life, we move forward with our goals, desires, values, and doubts, with the ultimate goal of reaching the end of our own path. However, along the way, we face different pressures that can positively or negatively influence our path and change our perceptions, values, choices, goals, etc.
3. Continue by telling the class that you will do two scenarios (only one scenario for schools with 40 minutes). Each scenario contains three steps that will require a firm decision before moving on. Let the students know that it's usually easier to be assertive in a fictional situation than in real life!
4. Continue by saying that as the scenarios progress, the volunteer will have to move from the back to the front of the classroom, along the path that represents their *life's journey*. Some of the students positioned along the path will be given different steps in the scenario. When the volunteer gets to a student holding a step in the scenario, they need to listen as the student reads it aloud. Then they will need to take a pause (the **DON'T SQUEEZE ME!** pause), before making a decision and moving forward.

The **DON'T SQUEEZE ME!** pause consists in:


- stopping, closing their eyes, taking three deep breaths
 - asking themselves: what am I feeling (emotions and sensations)?
 - asking themselves: what am I thinking?
5. Now, give the three steps of the first scenario to three different students who are sitting on either side of the path (see the *Scenarios - Don't squeeze me!* worksheet). Move from the back (step A) to the front (steps B and C).
 6. Give the signal to start the first scenario (duration: 10 minutes). The volunteer steps forward onto the path. When the volunteer gets to the first student, the student should read step A of the scenario aloud. Then tell the volunteer and the rest of the group to take a **DON'T SQUEEZE ME!** pause.
 7. Ask the volunteer first, then the whole class:
 - What emotions and sensations are you feeling?
 - What is your gut telling you to do in this situation, despite the social pressure you're feeling from others?
 8. If the student doesn't have an answer or is too shy to speak up, you can ask the class. However, it's the volunteer who ultimately needs to decide what to do. You can ask the following questions to get the students thinking:
 - Are you feeling forced? Why?
 - What are the pros and cons?
 - Is your decision being influenced by fear? (fear of being judged, left out, or rejected)
 - Does your decision reflect who you really are? Do you feel like your self-respect is still intact?
 9. The volunteer then continues to move forward along the path. The scenario unfolds with the other students reading the next steps in the scenario (B-C). At each step,

apply the principles of the **DON'T SQUEEZE ME!** pause. Make sure to ask for the volunteer's reaction first, followed by the rest of the class.

10. At the end of the first scenario, ask the class to give the volunteer a round of applause for their bravery.

11.  Repeat the exercise with the second scenario (see the *Scenarios - Don't squeeze me!* worksheet) in a different row, if possible, with another volunteer.

E. Strategies for resisting and asserting themselves (5-10 minutes)

1.  Lead a discussion by asking the following questions. Refer to the video (Part 1) to help students clarify their thinking and reinvest some of the content.

- What are the social pressures that young people are facing today?
- What can happen if you let yourself be influenced by social pressures?
- What can happen if you assert yourself and don't give in to social pressures?
- Why do we tend to let social pressures influence our choices and actions?
- What are the consequences (positive and negative) of resisting social pressures?
- What are your strategies for standing up to social pressures?

2. Ask the students what strategies they can use to resist negative peer pressure and stand up to social pressures. Complete by listing the following strategies (inspired by Ames, Lee and Wazlawek, 2017):

- knowing and respecting your needs, rights, thoughts, and feelings (and respecting those of others)
- taking a DON'T SQUEEZE ME! pause (stop, breathe, refocus)
- relaxing
- being open to and in touch with your feelings and those of others
- challenging preconceived ideas, not buying into everything
- asserting yourself, communicating clearly and honestly
 - clarifying your personal expectations and those of others
 - figuring out whether there's common ground between your ideas and the other person's ideas
 - making a suggestion, finding a compromise
 - facing your fear of upsetting people, standing by your decisions, and trusting yourself
 - using humour
 - asking questions
 - when in doubt, saying that you'll take some time to think about it




F. Video: Nadège and social pressure – Part 2 and REMINDER: HORS-PISTE challenge

This week, ask the students to identify a situation where they experience some form of social pressure. Encourage them to take a DON'T SQUEEZE ME! pause (take stock of how the pressure makes them feel (sensations, emotions, thoughts) and tap into who they really are, beyond the pressure they're feeling). Finally, ask them to apply at least one strategy for standing up to the pressure.



Printable worksheet
Scenarios - Don't squeeze me!

Scenario 1	
A	You're invited to your friend Mathieu's birthday. He's a good friend, but you won't know most of the guests and you're worried about not fitting in. You had decided to stay home but now your other friend, Jerome, is insisting that you go with him. What do you do?
B	In the end, you decide to go to the party with Jerome. During the evening, everyone starts talking about a girl who isn't there. They start a rumour about her that you know isn't true. What do you do?
C	Later in the evening, you're talking to your crush, and someone snaps a picture of the two of you together. He laughs and says he's going to post it online. You really don't want him to, but you're afraid of looking like a baby if you're the only one who objects to the picture being posted. What do you do?

 Scenario 2	
A	Next week is the end of the term. You need to study for three exams this weekend. You have a soccer game on Saturday morning and then you've made plans to go over to your best friend's house. You're worried you won't be able to pull it off, but you really need to take your mind off studying. What do you say to your mother when she asks if you'll be ready for your exams?
B	Exam time is over. You did okay, but your dad thinks you could have done better... These aren't your best grades ever. He wants you to work hard to keep your grades up. He offers to study with you every weekend, but you don't want to. You think your grades are good enough. What do you do?
C	It's the last term of the year. Your French teacher, who you like very much, asks to talk to you at lunch. She tells you that your grades have been slipping lately. She offers to give you extra help during the lunch hour. You're not interested and think you can figure out another solution. How do you respond to her offer?