



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

Coping with social pressure by being assertive

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Being assertive Dealing with social influences Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences Sheet 16 : Being a role model for others
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Exercising critical judgment Communicating appropriately Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand what social pressure is; • Recognize how social pressure influences them, their health and their well-being; • Use various strategies to better cope with social pressure; • Assert themselves calmly, respectfully, confidently and courageously.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon 

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

Materials and preparation

- Print the *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* worksheet (1 copy for you only).
- Print the *Strategies to be assertive* poster, available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Cut out the steps from the *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* worksheet
- Have a chalkboard with chalk or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

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A. Round of opinions (10 minutes)

1. Read the following scenario:
“Your friend receives a gift card to buy new clothes. She asks what you think she should buy. You show her this picture of an outfit that you like...”
2. You present the picture in the slideshow. Feel free to modify the images of the clothing items in the slideshow as you see fit for your students.
3. Still referring to the slideshow, you present various characters and their opinions about clothing:
 - Parent 1: “Clothes shouldn’t be too pricey!”
 - Parent 2: “What matters is that it’s comfortable!”
 - Grandparents: “Not too sexy, please!”
 - Friend: “Original clothing that stands out!”
 - Friend: “Plain clothes...”
 - Teachers: “Does it follow the school’s dress code?”
 - Society 1: “Trendy, latest-fashion clothing!”
 - Society 2: “Think green! Used or recycled clothing.”
4. Now ask the students these questions:
 - Do your suggested clothes meet all the criteria of all the different characters?
 - Is it possible to please everyone? If so, how? If not, why?
 - Can displeasing others affect our relationships?
5. Complete the students’ answers with the following explanations:



Whatever decisions we make, some people will always disagree with us. It’s better to accept that we can’t please everyone—just like not everyone pleases us. We can make our own choices based on our own needs, feelings, tastes, interests, values and rights. Hence the importance of getting to know ourselves well!

It’s also important to remember that the strongest relationships don’t usually break down over a simple disagreement or a difference of opinion. If this does happen, it may be a sign that it’s better to focus your energy on more positive relationships!

B. Educational clip – Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don’t squeeze me! I’m not a lemon... – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 1](#)

C. Lemon squeezer (10 minutes)

1. Based on what was covered in the video, ask students to explain what “**social pressure**” is, in their own words.

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2. Listen to a few answers, then round them out with the following explanations:



Every day, we're exposed to all different kinds of social pressure in our environment (family, friends, school, sports, the media, society, etc.). This pressure includes, for example, beauty standards, bodily norms, gendered social roles, performance culture (academic, athletic), and pressure associated with romantic and sexual experiences, risky behaviours and substance use (Dupont, 2014; Young, 2013).

These kinds of pressure can positively or negatively shape how we show up and behave, i.e., our opinions, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes and choices (Wright, 2020). Some types of social pressure can even cause us stress and anxiety (Venticinque et al., 2024). So, it's important to be aware of their presence in our lives and their impact on our health and well-being (Assor et al., 2020; Nor et al., 2025).

3. Now ask the students:

- What happens inside you when you constantly hear these messages and are subjected to this external pressure?



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4. You take a few answers and complete them as follows:



Without even realizing it, we internalize this pressure and then impose it on ourselves... and on others! **Just like squeezing a lemon can change its appearance, being subjected to social pressure can change the way we show up or behave.**

For example, we might believe we should like certain things or think a certain way... Even if it doesn't really come naturally. Social pressure influences us to **fall in line more with established norms**, i.e., to do what other people are doing and "fit in."

It's not always easy to distinguish between what really comes from us and what has been influenced by external social pressure!

5. You now present two scenarios:

- a) "During recess, your friends make insulting remarks about another student's physical appearance. You feel uncomfortable and disagree with the way they're acting, but you don't dare say so. You even end up playing along and laughing at their comments, just like everyone else. Otherwise, you might come across as being boring or too sensitive... People might laugh at you or, worse, exclude you..."
- b) "Your friends shared a video on social media where they put themselves in all kinds of risky situations, to get as many likes as possible on their post. You didn't participate, and you don't agree with any of it. Even though they insist that you share the video too, you decide to stand your ground, and you refuse to do it. You prefer to stay true to your values and integrity rather than go with the crowd and encourage risky behaviour."



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6. Now ask the students: In these two situations...

- Which situation illustrates someone giving in to pressure?
- Which situation illustrates someone resisting pressure?
- In your opinion, what things made them react differently to the pressure?



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7. You take a few answers, then complete them by explaining:



How we react depends in part on our **self-confidence**. **Lower self-confidence** leads to greater conformity or submitting to social pressures, rather than **resisting and being assertive** (Fischer, 2020; Oghounu, 2025)!



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8. You explore the concept of **assertiveness** further:



Assertiveness refers to our ability to **calmly and honestly communicate** our thoughts and feelings to others.

Assertive behaviour involves **two types of respect: self-respect** (taking into account our own needs, rights, thoughts and feelings) **and respect for others** (factoring in their needs, rights, thoughts and feelings). The more someone is able to respect others while respecting themselves, and the more clearly they are able to express themselves, the more rewarding and liberating their relationships will be (Boisvert & Beaudry, 2012; Darjan et al., 2020).



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9. You conclude by letting students know that whenever they feel pressured, they can take a “time out” and try to observe what is going on inside them (i.e., sensations, emotions and thoughts). This helps refocus on what matters to them (needs, values, interests and tastes) so they can be assertive, i.e., so they can respect themselves and others.

D. Resist the squeeze—be assertive! (15 to 25 minutes)

1. First, make sure that there are two rows of desks in the classroom so that there is a clear path (aisle) in the middle for people to walk through.
2. You tell the students that they'll be doing a role play where the challenge will be to practise making decisions and asserting themselves calmly, respectfully, confidently and courageously in the face of social pressure.
3. Ask a volunteer to go to the end of the middle path, at the back of the room (between the two rows of desks), and wait.
4. You now mention to the class that the middle path symbolically represents the course of life:
 - In life, we move forward with our goals, desires, aspirations and values, as well as our fears and doubts, with the ultimate goal of reaching the end of our own path. However, along this path, we are confronted with various kinds of pressure that can positively or negatively shape our perceptions, attitudes and choices... In short, our direction!
5. You continue with these explanations:
 - Through role-play exercises, the volunteer student will have to move from the back to the front of the middle path, which represents the course of their life.
 - Three students will be positioned around the path in order to act out different stages of the scenario.



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- When the volunteer student finds themselves in front of a student who is responsible for a stage of the role-play, that student will read the scenario aloud to the volunteer.
- Then, the volunteer student will have to perform the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause.

- a) Stop, close your eyes, and breathe;
- b) Take a moment to look within: “How is this making me feel inside (sensations, emotions and thoughts)?”;
- c) Make a decision and be assertive: “What do I decide to do about this situation that is making me feel squeezed? How can I be assertive?”

- Once the volunteer student has stated their decision to the group, they can continue along the middle path in the classroom to discover the rest of the story.
 - The situation will not necessarily evolve according to the decisions made by the volunteer student, but will illustrate how certain kinds of social pressure influence the way we make choices.
6. You now hand out stages A, B and C of the scenario that you chose from among the suggested scenarios (see *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* printable worksheet) to the three students sitting on either side of the path, starting from the back and moving toward the front of the class.
 7. You tell everyone they can start. The volunteer student then steps forward into the path. When they get to the student responsible for stage A of the scenario, the stage A student reads it out loud to them.
 8. Then you ask the volunteer student to act out the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause, and have the class to do the same. You go through the three steps of the pause.
 9. You can call on the class to help the volunteer student if necessary. However, try to encourage the volunteer student to make their own choice.
 10. You can ask the following questions to get the students thinking:
 - Do you feel obligated? Why?
 - What are the pros and cons of the different choices before you?
 - Is there a fear or “intolerance” influencing your decision? (For example, fear of other people’s judgement, exclusion, rejection or failure.)
 - Is your decision true to who you are? Do you feel that you’re respecting yourself in the choices you make?
 11. After making and stating their decision, the volunteer student moves on to the next stage, and so on.
 12. The scenario unfolds with the other students reading the next stages in the scenario (B and C).
 13. At each stage, you apply the instructions for the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause with the volunteer student, allowing the class to interact.



14. At the end of the scenario, ask the class to give the volunteer a round of applause for their bravery.
15.  For schools that have 60 minutes, repeat the exercise with another provided scenario, and with other students if possible. For schools that only have 40 minutes, conclude the activity on the final point.
16. To finish up, let the students know that it's usually easier to make choices and assert themselves calmly and respectfully in a fictional situation than in real life! But the more we practise, the more confident we become in making decisions that align with who we are, and in asserting ourselves with honesty.

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to name **strategies for better coping with social pressure and being assertive** with others (for example, their peers).
2. Round out their answers with the following strategies (inspired by Ames et al., 2017):
 - Stop, breathe, refocus (use the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause);
 - Listen to yourself first;
 - Respect yourself: needs, feelings, tastes, values and rights;
 - Respect others: needs, feelings, tastes, values and rights;
 - Ask questions, gather information, try to understand;
 - Challenge preconceived notions, don't buy into everything;
 - When you're not sure, give yourself some time before making a choice;
 - Demonstrate confidence and courage;
 - Confront the fear of displeasing others, dare to say no;
 - Communicate calmly and honestly;
 - Use humour to defuse tension without trivializing the situation.



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F. Educational video - Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don't squeeze me! I'm not a lemon... – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



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G. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, ask students to identify a situation in which they feel they experience some form of social pressure in their lives. Encourage them to use the RESIST THE SQUEEZE! pause, then to assert themselves by trying to apply at least one other strategy covered in the workshop.



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Resist the squeeze! Scenarios

	Scenario: option 1
A	Your friend Matis invites you over to his cousin's party. You don't know his cousin, but you know that he's in 10th grade and hangs out with a group of somewhat "rebellious" kids at school. You wonder if you'll feel like you fit in. Deep down, you feel it's better not to go. But another one of your friends, Juliette, insists that you tag along. She begs you, saying that if all three of you go, you'll be less awkward. What do you do?
B	You ultimately decide to go to the party, to show up for your friends and be bold. At the party that night, some people start drinking alcohol. The atmosphere shifts. Inside, you no longer feel comfortable, and part of you would prefer to leave the party. But Matis and Juliette are having fun and want to stay. What do you do?
C	You ultimately decide to stay, to avoid displeasing your friends. Matis's cousin offers everyone a drink. It's his "round"! You've never really had an alcoholic beverage before. Deep down, you feel that it's not a good idea. But your two friends accept the drink, like everyone else. You hesitate... It's his party, after all. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 2
A	It's the end of the academic semester. You have three big exams coming up. You plan to study all weekend so you're well prepared. Your friend suggests going out to the mall and the movies on Saturday instead. You're tempted! But deep down, you feel that it's not a good idea. You feel it's better to stay at home and focus on finishing the semester. Your friend insists that you're stressing too much over your exams for no reason. She says studying is a waste of time. She tells you to enjoy life! What do you do?
B	You ultimately decide to go out with your friend on Saturday and do all your studying on Sunday. When Sunday comes around, you realize that it's too much studying for one day. You feel overwhelmed and unable to do it. You turn to your parents for help, but they think you mismanaged your time and blame you for going out yesterday. They are strict: you need to study thoroughly for your exams and do well. Internally, you feel the pressure building. You don't want to disappoint your parents. You could use some help... What do you do?
C	You ultimately decide to manage on your own and study late into the night. On Monday morning, you're exhausted. Your French teacher wants to talk to you. She says you look very tired. She offers to give you extra help during the lunch hour. Deep down, you feel that you need the help your teacher is offering. But your friend is trying to convince you not to go, and to have lunch with her instead. She says that going to see your teacher will probably cause you more trouble than anything else. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 3
A	It's a school night, and you're playing online with friends. You were planning to stop playing at 8 p.m. to finish your homework and get ready for bed. But at 8 p.m., your friends start a new game and insist that you stay and play with them. What do you do?
B	You tell them that you have to go. Someone on your team says, "You're always letting us down! If we lose, it'll be your fault." The others also ask you if you can stay for a few more minutes. How do you respond?
C	Since you refuse to keep playing, a friend asks you to give them your password so they can play as your character for you. The friend promises they won't do anything else with your account. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 4
A	Some students in your class are doing a social media challenge where each person posts an awkward or embarrassing photo of themselves and then tags others to do the same. Your name has been tagged in the challenge, but you don't want to participate. What do you do?
B	The next day, several people ask you why you didn't do the challenge. Some of them say things like, "It's no fun if you don't do it!" or "Everyone else did it—you're the only one left who hasn't!" Some of them insist that you post a photo. How do you respond?
C	A few days later, you find out that a fake photo of you—created using artificial intelligence and without your consent—has been posted on social media. You feel your anger rising. What do you do?