

There are two fish in the ocean. One fish asks, “How’s the water?” The other looks around and says, “What is water?” This is a joke, but it describes how we are surrounded by everyday situations and pressures we take for granted. There are many kinds of pressure surrounding us all the time, just like how water surrounds fish: family pressure, pressure from your teacher or pressure from friends. This is peer pressure, when you cannot give your opinion because you are afraid of what others might think of you. However, we do not know when we are being squeezed by peer pressure. So how do we release it, and swim freely through the water? This is my topic today.

The first thing we have to realise is that peer pressure can have both positive and negative effects. The positive effect of peer pressure is that friends may be able to motivate each other by setting each other challenges. For instance, by studying together and encouraging each other, groups of friends can become motivated and learn new things. On the other hand, the negative effect of peer pressure is that it may lead to anxiety and a loss of individuality. For example, when our friends talk about something we don’t know, we may feel left out. Our friends may ask us to do something we don’t want to do, such as changing our appearance, helping them with their homework, or joining a club, but we feel like we have to do these things to keep them happy. We lose our sense of self.

So how can we navigate peer pressure? The simple thing is that we need to learn to see the “water” that surrounds us. We need to determine whether it is having a positive or negative influence on us. We need to make sure that peer pressure supports our goals. Setting small goals in your lifestyle could help you to make things more manageable, and give a greater sense of achievement. Having clear goals means that we can stay true to our values. As a result, we will be able to find “real” friends, who have similar values. Then we will be able to grow and enjoy life with friends without having to worry about negative peer pressure.

Furthermore, we have to learn to develop our self-confidence. How can we be braver? Unless you try to step out of your comfort zone, your confidence will never grow. Confidence helps us look for positive outcomes. Especially in Japan, we are all afraid of what others might think of us. I am here giving this speech now, sharing thoughts and ideas with people I do not know. This is something that requires and develops our bravery. In such ways, we should cultivate the bravery necessary to exercise our freedom of speech, which is important in order to find our own path.

Unlike in the past, in the social media world of today, peer pressure is even more prevalent. People who use social media often feel pressure to conform to the ways others look and act, to have the things they see others having, and to behave in similar ways. We must be aware of the waters we are in and look around to decide which effects the pressure is having on us. Most importantly, we are all different and we all have various ideas. We are human and we have such a nice right to say what we want to. Remember, we are all different fish and we do not have to drown in peer pressure. Always believe in yourself and that will lead to freedom. Thank you.

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Swim Free: Believe in Yourself