

Youth Engagement:
**Opening the Door
to Difficult
Conversations**

Toolkit

Module 4:
**Pressures
Youth Face**



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Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit

Module 4: Pressures Youth Face

Please note, community standards should be set (see Module 1) before beginning this module.

Background

This session is a foundational piece of the program because it brings to the surface the many pressures and expectations young people face. The session will help youth explore and discuss pressures they feel about how they should look physically, what they should wear, and how they should act. Keep in mind that youth can have very different life experiences that will influence the pressures they face.

Objectives:

- Identify societal and/or family pressures together
- Foster empathy and understanding within the group
- Explore positive coping mechanisms

Materials:

- Blank papers or index cards
- Pens
- Markers or stickers
- Chairs arranged in a circle

Check-In

Ask youth to introduce themselves in the “coolest” voice they can.

Activity 1: Pressures Unmasked

Begin this activity by acknowledging that young people can feel pressure to act a certain way; to be cool – whatever that means – and to “be” a certain way. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to have honest discussions about societal pressures that youth may be facing.

Distribute papers and pens to everyone in the group. Ask participants to individually write down societal pressures they are facing. Each pressure should be written on a separate piece of paper. Collect the answers and write them down on the whiteboard or flipchart without revealing the writer’s identity.

Facilitator’s Tip: If you feel like some prompting is required, tell youth that what they write can be related to any pressure or expectation they have felt including about appearance, behaviour, school, careers, social media, relationships. As a group, read the papers on the board and combine similar ones under one group. This will make the next activity easier.

Facilitator's Tip: Remember the main topics that will be explored in this toolkit (self-understanding, identity, substance use). Try to group the identified pressures together according to these main themes. This will help in setting the stage for future discussions.

Activity 2: Shared Pressures

For this activity, provide each participant with multiple stickers or markers.

Begin by demonstrating the activity. Place a mark next to each of the societal pressure on the board that you felt when you were the same age as the participants. Instruct participants to go up to the board, when they are ready, to mark the pressures that they feel apply to them. Explain that even if they felt a tiny bit of pressure for one of them, with or without acting on it, they should mark it.

Remind participants that the more honest everyone is, the better the conversation will be. Remember, that the activities in this resource are not mandatory. If a youth doesn't want to participate, they don't have to. What happens during this part of the activity can be variable, but experience tells us that the sheets will get marked up a lot and some more than others.

Once everyone has had a turn, ask if anyone wants to add any more marks after some reflection. Ask the group if they are surprised by what they see.

Facilitator's Tip: The main goal of this activity is for youth to understand that they are not alone in the pressures they face and that their peers also experience pressures. This helps foster a feeling of empathy and mutual understanding within the group.

To debrief, ask youth some probing questions about this activity:

1. What do you notice when you look at the marked pressures?
2. What are some of the common pressures? Why do you think these exist?
3. If you could remove one of the pressures and expectations from your life now and never have to worry about it anymore, which would you remove, and why?
4. If the pressures and expectations are like a script about how you're supposed to act, where is the script coming from?
5. What can you do to lessen or prevent these expectations or pressures? Encourage youth to share any healthy coping strategies they have found useful in dealing with these pressures.

Remind the youth that the script belongs to them, and no one else. Each person gets to write their own script.

Check-Out: How did it make you feel to learn that many people feel the same pressures as you do?