



Acting independently

This activity will help you to...

- Consider what psychological research has told us about why people conform to a majority
- Analyse the implications of psychological theories for human behaviour
- Apply your understanding of psychology to new situations

Conformity & independence

Recently we have looked at a range of research into majority influence and conformity including:

- The role of social groups in producing conformity (implicit and explicit norms and sanctions).
- Explanations of conformity (informational and normative influence).
- Factors that make conformity increase and decrease.
- Research studies into conformity (Asch, Jenness, Sherif, Crutchfield, Perrin & Spencer)

Taken as a whole, this research tells us quite a lot about why people may conform to a majority. By extension, it also tells us a fair amount about the possible reasons why people may resist the majority and act independently.

This task requires you to think about the research you know not in terms of what it tells us about why people conform but in terms of what it implies about how people can be helped to resist pressure from a majority group.

Resisting peer pressure

Adolescents (like everyone else) are subject to pressure from their peer group. This can be a positive thing, as when a group norm emerges about working hard, having high aspirations, being friendly or many other things. But it can also be negative as, for example, when there is pressure to drink alcohol to excess, take illegal drugs, steal or engage in bullying or other antisocial behaviour.

In your capacity as a psychologist who knows about conformity and majority influence, you have been asked to produce a leaflet containing information aimed at helping pupils in Year 10 resist negative peer pressure.

The leaflet you produce...

- **Must** contain specific advice about how peer pressure can be resisted.
- **Must** be written in a way that is suitable for the target audience.
- **Should** give background information about the nature of group influence that puts the specific advice into context.

You **could** also write a short commentary explaining, in more technical terms, why you have given the advice you have and linking it to specific psychological theories or research studies.

Your textbooks may contain information about resisting group influence. Consult them by all means, but start by trying to work out some ideas for yourself and use the textbooks to check or add to your own conclusions.