

22nd August 2014

US-led strike leaves 11 dead in Afghanistan  
Oklahoma City police jails officer for on-duty sex crimes  
Western support behind Takfiri terror: Iran cleric  
People in Gaza Strip urge more retaliatory attacks on Israel  
West media spin 'Iraq' yarn from Zarif's remarks on 'Arak'  
Iran's UN envoy stresses intl. campaign to head off wars  
Libya militants engage in fresh fighting  
Americans among 12,000 foreign militants in Syria, says US  
370k Gaza kids need psycho-social first aid: UNICEF  
European states mulling UN resolution on Gaza truce  
Yemenis to continue mass anti-government protests  
Pentagon chief: ISIL threat bigger than 9/11  
Malaysia receives bodies of MH17 passengers  
Myanmar: A new dawn  
Islamic State 'beheading': A challenge to US?

## Cool or Fool? - Choosing the Right Friends

**"We relate to thee their story in truth: they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We advanced them in guidance: We gave strength to their hearts: Behold, they stood up and said: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and of the earth: never shall we call upon any god other than Him: if we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity!" (Al-Kahf 18:13-14)**

**Your friends gather.** Smoke curls in thick, humid air. Laughter and slurred words swirl together as bodies twirl and vibrate in time with pounding drums. Voices glide into eager ears, lacing minds with alluring words. Red, blue, green lights blink and flash--dotting open eyes with blinding colour. Hands wave, heads toss, bodies shake into oblivion. Glasses clink, cold orangey liquid drips and pools on greasy tables.

Fear grasps your heart. You walk on the edge of a knife; your friends clasp the handle and wave it like a sword. Your faith wanders onto the chopping block. Warning bells scream. You want to stop, you want to save your faith—but you slide along the edge of the knife. Your faith is sliced and diced. You wonder why you didn't try. **Your friends disperse.**

**Friends gather.** Light flickers through shadow. Prayers flutter into the arms of a new day. Hands grip ancient texts, fingers follow curved winding letters, eyes strain to grasp meaning. Hands point towards Heaven, voices plead for hope, bodies bow in harmony in submission to the One. Peace descends.

Relief streams through your veins, nourishing your heart. You walk a wide, straight path—your friends ahead, beside and behind—catching you when you fall, pushing you forward. Your faith weakens as you climb a steep hill. Your friends tie ropes of faith around your waist and pull you over. Firm belief drips from your lips. You thank Allah (SWT). **Your friends gather.**

Our friends can either be the rope that ties us to our faith in Allah (SWT), or the knife that cuts any connection we had with our Creator. They are blessings, they are tests. **Ask yourself, who are *your* friends? And more importantly, what kind of friend are *you*?**

**“You can do it!”**

“I have faith in you!”; “C’mon don’t be a wimp”; “Here, try one”; “If you say no, people will think you’re weird”; “Don’t hang out with those boring, ‘religious’ guys!”

Whether you are in school, college, university, or working in the corporate world, these are the voices of many of the people you interact with. In our teenage culture, which exaggerates the idea of personal freedom and excessive entertainment, you *are* exposed to Peer Pressure.

## **You know You are a Victim of Peer Pressure when....**

Most teenagers fall into flirting, clubbing, smoking, cursing, cheating, stealing, bullying, gambling, drinking, drugs, pornography and other immoral practices due to negative peer pressure. You know you are a victim of this pressure when you:

- are curious to try something new because "everyone's doing it";
- want to be liked, to fit in, to look cool;
- worry that others will think you are weird or a coward if you resist;
- say and do things in the group which you would not do on your own;
- wish your parents should stay out of your 'social life';
- do something without questioning the outcome.

## **Beat the Pressure: Tips to Try!**

### **A) *Before the Pressure Strikes***

**Know your values, beliefs and limits** Ask yourself '*What are my boundaries?*' before anything happens. Know what pleases and offends Allah (SWT). He is the One who created you, sustains you, and helps you. Study your faith and clarify your limits of 'fun' so you can resist the pressure with confidence.

### **Prepare your Strategy**

Plan ahead of time what you can say and do in difficult situations. If your friend invites you to a party on a Friday night, you can imagine what you may encounter. If, at the party, someone cracks open a can of beer and offers you a swig, what will you do? Having a strategy will help you shun the pressure and keep your honour intact.

## **Steer Clear of Potential Trouble**

Usually we know with whom, when and where the pressure to do wrong can emerge. Avoid late night outings, including malls, movies, parties, and clubs, especially with friends who don't share your values. Watch out for places where gender-mixing takes place.

## **Choose who you Hang Out with**

- Don't belong to the 'popular crowd'. The quarrels, competition, fads, and deception involved in the 'popular crowd' are not worth the image. Choose your friends based on character, not popularity or status.
- Friends who are not sincere and do not love you for your principles, will gradually lure you into an artificial world of false hopes. Either help these friends change gently, or abandon their company before it's too late!

## **Participate in the Community!**

There are immense benefits of getting involved with your local food bank, seniors' home, children's programme, anti-racism group, newspaper, library, Masjid, Muslim youth group, or any other project that helps society. For instance, you:

- avoid wasting time just 'hanging out' with your friends;
- enhance your skills and talents;
- meet people who share the same values and enjoy the same activities;
- gain confidence to influence others through positive peer pressure;

## **Don't Kill your Eyes: Watch less TV!**

Yes, it's tough to escape peer pressure, especially when your friends keep talking about the clothes, the music and the stars they watch on TV. Today, TV defines teen culture. TV, with its barrage of alluring ads and captivating shows, tells you

how to dress and act, what is cool and sexy, and what is ‘in’ and ‘out’. Let Islam, not TV, decide your dress code, morals, and values.

### **‘Goofy’ Teachers, ‘Dumb’ Parents, ‘Preachy’ preachers *can* help!**

Teachers, parents, preachers, and counselors—a group of potential friends we often ignore—can be the first line of defense. When you feel weak in your relationship with Allah (SWT) or find yourself in a tough situation, be smart—consult them!

### **Make Duaa!**

Ask Allah (SWT) to help you resist the pressures around you.

### **B) When *Facing* the Pressure**

- **Think about the consequences of every action.** Use wisdom, not emotion.
- **Say ‘No’ with courage.** Make it clear how *you* feel about the situation. Explain *why*. It may be an opportunity to invite your friends to the Islamic way of life.
- **Use Humour.** Throw out a funny line to ease the tension and show how you feel! “I don’t drink. I can’t afford to kill my brain cells. Unfortunately, I only have a few left as it is!”
- **Suggest a better idea.** “Why don’t we play some hockey, instead of watching that movie? It’ll save us some money too!”

- **Remember Allah (SWT)!** He is there to help you.

***Are Your Friends Worth it?...Use the Checklist below to find out!***

Does your friend fit these traits of a sincere, loving, and true friend?

- **Does he help you become a better and productive person?** It's a mistaken belief that a 'good friend likes you for what you *are*'. A sincere friend *inspires* you, either with words or actions, to *improve* your personality and situation.

- **Is she like a mirror to you?** Like a mirror, your friend gives you an honest image. She forgives your mistakes, but does not hide or exaggerate your strengths and weaknesses.

- **Do his manners and lifestyle remind you of Allah (SWT)** Such a friend reflects qualities of love, mercy, honesty, service, patience, optimism, professionalism, and the entire lifestyle taught by Islam.

- **Do you feel comfortable and secure in her presence?** If your friend's company makes you feel guilty about the things you do and thoughts you share, you must question the benefit of this relationship. Consider the wise saying: "*Being alone is better than having an evil companion and having a sincere companion is better than being alone.*"

If your friend does not like you for the beauty of your character, intelligence, morality, and sincerity, *you deserve better!*

And keep thyself attached to those who call on their Lord, morning and evening, seeking His pleasure; and let not thy eyes pass beyond them, seeking the adornment of the life of the world; and obey not him whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his evil inclinations, and his case exceeds all bounds. (Al-Kahf 18:29 )