Say ‘No’ to Peer Pressure

The physical pressure of the water column is a force that creates challenges for divers, especially if it’s not addressed appropriately. Peer pressure, though most often discussed when we talk about our children and their friends, is another force that can have a negative effect on divers. Generally speaking, peer pressure happens when someone around your own age or background influences – or attempts to influence – your way of thinking. In teens, this might include trying to get someone to try smoking, drugs or alcohol. In diving, it might occur when a fellow diver tries to convince his buddy to make a particular dive that may be beyond the buddy’s experience or comfort level.

It’s easy to see how someone might be cajoled into scuba training; someone close to him or her, possibly a spouse, may apply pressure to join up. When at least one person in the particular buddy team has little or no interest in learning to dive, this can make the learning process even more difficult for that unwilling diver, and even perhaps for that diver’s buddy.

‘She / He Made Me’

During training, it’s not uncommon for an instructor to hear students say they decided to learn to dive because their spouse or partner “made them” sign up. Whether out of respect for their spouses or if they’re just trying to please, they reluctantly signed up for the course. A diver may not be interested in scuba for several reasons: he may feel he is a weak swimmer, for example. He may not want to deal with all the training and equipment requirements of the sport. He may feel that it’s just too expensive. He may buy into the underwater world portrayed by Hollywood: man-eating sharks and lost divers. A buddy might try to overcome all these objections by coaxing (or worse). In the end, though, if the individual still believes diving just isn’t fun, that’s fine: he may simply have no desire to go scuba diving.

Unfortunately, even well-adjusted adults can feel the need to measure up to their peers, which can lead to giving in to the wants, needs and / or desires of others. So, forcing this “I-don’t-wanna-be-adiver” into dive training can be fraught with frustrations. He may or may not excel at training; this might lead to even greater feelings of resentment for participating in the course in the first place. Even though reluctant divers may find that they enjoy diving after all, it’s unlikely that they will pursue it much after certification; after all, there’s the chance they won’t even complete training. However, a reluctant diver may also end up being at greater risk of injury if he’s not a wholly willing participant. “She made me” is not the proper motivation for learning to scuba dive.



All in the Family

Pressure to dive from a parent or sibling is also potentially dangerous. Parents who are thrilled each time they make a dive may want to share these adventures with their children. Perhaps, children will do this vicariously through stories, videos and photographs until they reach the proper age and maturity level. That can assure their chances for successful training and safe dives after they earn certification.A parent's enthusiasm for the underwater world, however, may not necessarily translate into something the children want to do. To please their parents, children still might give it a try: this is not the right motivation to learn to dive. Parents should talk openly and honestly with their children about diving, determining if they have a genuine desire to try it. They shouldn't try to "convince" their kids with "You'll love it if you just give it a try."

Who's Your Buddy?

One of the basic tenets of dive training is to follow recreational limits. In addition, you should establish your own limits: these restrictions should be no less than those recommended by the recreational dive community. This may include leaving the water with 750 psi (51 bar) in your tank rather than 500 psi (34 bar), or remaining 10 feet (3 meters) above the maximum depths allotted by your dive table or computer. This additional conservatism allows a greater buffer zone should you err in your dive plan. Experience is a great teacher, but the "discovery method" – i.e., going out and making dives beyond your training and experience- isn't the best way to develop as a diver.

On the other hand, participation in continuing dive education is an excellent way to enhance your skills and confidence to make more advanced dives. Courses designed to introduce divers to new environments, equipment and the skills necessary for making safe dives in those conditions offer a controlled setting, often in confined water initially. This is a prelude to making your way to the actual open-water site.

Training, conducted by a dive professional who stands ready to lend assistance if you need it during training, provides you with guidance on making dives using new skills.A frequent dive buddy has the greatest chance to influence your diving habits.

But even though you dive regularly with a particular buddy, don’it be lulled into overconfidence: a buddy team works most efficiently when two divers work together to assure the success of the dive. Ideally, buddies will have the same objective for a dive, whether to take photographs or video, for instance. Buddies should avoid trying to pressure their dive partners into going beyond their limits.Even something seemingly as simple as going a bit deeper than you have in the past can create new concerns. In this example, spend time working up to increasing your depth limits, rather than having your buddy say as you’re about to make your entry, “Hey, let’shoot for 130 feet (40 meters) today.” If 60 feet (18 meters) is the deepest dive you’ve made up to that point, but he is convincing in his reassurance that it’s not a big deal to go to 130 feet (40 meters), you might make the dive even though you don’t feel comfortable doing it. Once you set your personal limits, stick to them.



Just Say No

A great recreational activity, scuba diving has forever changed the lives of many of its participants. But water is an unforgiving environment with inherent risks for divers. With each new dive, these risks must be considered. One way to decrease the likelihood of these risks is to have the confidence to “Just Say No” if you don’t feel good about making a particular dive. Seek out new experiences through training with dive professionals who can orient you to these experiences in a controlled setting. Avoid the “discovery method” of gaining experience, and don’t let others choose your dive destiny. Euripides once said, “The wisest men follow their own direction.” Don’t worry about measuring up to your peers; worry more about measuring up to yourself.