Environment: Social Environment

Recall what you learned about the social environment last year:

- The social environment is the overall atmosphere created by the way people behave and interact with each other.
- Each person has an influence on the social environment.
- Just as we can pollute the physical environment, we can pollute the social environment.

---

**SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT** — In addition to the physical environment, each of us lives in a social environment, which is created by people. Each person in our lives, especially those close to us, contributes to the social environment.

**Families** — The first and most important social environment is the family. Families influence our personalities, achievements, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviour. Here is just one example — sports.

Some people are born with the genetic potential to be excellent athletes. At a very young age they show good coordination, balance, flexibility, strength, and endurance. But can we predict which, if any, of these talented people will become a great gymnast, a star basketball player, or a famous runner?

The family plays an important role in determining the answer to this question. For example, families might:

- frequently attend athletic events
- have no interest in sports
- be unable to afford sports equipment
- enjoy playing a variety of sports
- value doing well in school much more than athletic achievement
- encourage all members of the family to develop their talents.
For many people, Wayne Gretzky is the greatest player of all time. He was naturally gifted at playing hockey, but his family also played an important role in his success. Wayne put on skates for the first time before he was three. Every winter, his father, Walter, made a backyard rink, known as the “Wally Coliseum,” where he taught Wayne and his brothers how to play and where Wayne skated for hours every day. One season, when he was ten years old, Wayne scored 378 goals and 120 assists in 85 games. As Walter said, “Wayne had something extra special going for him in the hockey department, and right from the beginning, I was prepared to nurture that along in whatever way I could.”

The family, however, won’t be the only influence. Even with family support, a person may discover that he or she doesn’t like competition, or doesn’t want to spend all that time on training. It could also happen that, with very little support from the family, someone still manages to become an outstanding athlete.

**Friends** — The influence of friends is not as strong as that of families, but it becomes more important as people grow up. In fact, when teenage students are asked what their favourite activity is, most of them say: “Hanging out with friends.”

Talking and laughing, confiding worries, sharing interests, co-operating on school projects, doing things together, arguing, making up after a fight, and having a lot of fun — these are all part of the social environment created by friends. How does this environment influence you? Friends may:

- introduce you to new interests.
- affect your behaviour and your values.
Friendship is a peer relationship, which is quite different from a family relationship. Your relationship with the people in your class — your peer group — is a relationship of equals. But you come from different backgrounds, and have a variety of gifts, personalities, and interests. Peer group relationships help you learn more about yourself — your interests and personality, your strengths and weaknesses, how to stand up for yourself, and how to balance your desire to fit in and at the same time be true to yourself.
### Why are families such a powerful influence?

The family is our first social environment; it is in the family that we begin to develop our self-concept and learn how to relate to other people.

Do you think Wayne Gretzky would have become a great hockey player if he had not been encouraged by his family? Why? Why not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Might not have had the inner desire</td>
<td>Could have got rides from friends to practice at rink.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Why is Wayne Gretzky a good example of how heredity and environment interact?

He inherited a talent for athletics and his family environment encouraged him to develop his gift.

What do you think would have happened if Wayne Gretzky had not enjoyed playing hockey?

He could have been great at another sport, or he could have not played sports at all.
Why does the influence of friends become stronger as people grow up?

They spend larger amounts of time with friends; their lives outside the family become more important to them as they get older.

Do you agree that the social environment created by friends can influence your values or your attitude toward school work? Why? Why not?

Yes - people want to “fit in”

How do peer relationships influence your self-concept?

You learn how to fit in with other people; you may discover new interests; you develop new social skills; peers may not tolerate the way people behave in the same way their families might.

What does it mean to balance your desire to fit in and be liked and also be true to yourself?

Friends may encourage you to do something you know is wrong and you have to be able to stand up to this pressure.