

The Bandwagon Test

MINI JOURNALISM

SKILL: INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT

45-60 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 8-14. Old enough to articulate reasoning, young enough that decision-making habits are still being shaped.

WHAT YOU NEED

Paper and pens for each player

A real family decision in progress

A timer

A flat surface to lay all the sheets out

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Pick a real decision.** Choose one decision your family is actually mulling: a new app, a piece of tech, a homework approach, a sport, a show. It must be real, not made up. The point is to test the muscle on something that has stakes.
- 02 Draw two columns.** Each person draws two columns on a sheet of paper. Label the left column "What Others Are Doing." Label the right column "Reasons That Stand Alone." Same sheet, two lists, ready to compare.
- 03 Fill the left column.** Set a timer for 8 minutes. Everyone fills out the LEFT column only. Write every signal you have heard about what other kids, families, or friends are doing about this decision. Speed write. No judgment yet.
- 04 Fill the right column.** Set a timer for 12 minutes. Everyone fills out the RIGHT column. Only write reasons that would still be reasons if no one else were doing it. This part is harder than it sounds. The empty space is the lesson.
- 05 Vote on the right column only.** Compare the columns out loud. Then ask: if we could only use the right column to decide, what would the answer be? Take a family vote based only on the right column, and compare the result to your gut answer before the exercise. Notice the gap. That gap is the rat race.

THE DEEPER LESSON

A Chicago Booth study showed that parents' decisions about AI for their kids shift more than 60 percent based on what other parents are doing, even when the underlying evidence has not changed. The Bandwagon Test makes that invisible pull visible. A kid who can label "what others do" as a separate column from "what holds up" has the start of the most important decision-making muscle they will need in an AI-saturated world.

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is one thing you have wanted because everyone else has it, and one thing you have wanted that nobody else does, and how can you tell the difference inside your own head?