



Friendships of Adolescence

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It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. (Rowling, 1999: 306)

Friendship is a critical relationship throughout the life course. Adolescence marks the period when peer interaction increases in depth and sophistication. Friendship is generally defined as a voluntary, dyadic relationship between two individuals that includes a reciprocal companionship where peers engage in mutual shared activities. A distinct feature that sets friendship apart from other relationships is that this bond is typically egalitarian in nature, unlike those with parents and sibling(s). In some cases, friends are chosen because they are dominant figures and/or role models. Close friendships during the teen years are particularly formative because they provide the context for learning the intimate relationship skills necessary to establish ties with people outside of the family.

Adolescence is a time of cognitive growth and increased independence and autonomy from parents. Close friendships become increasingly significant and involve more intimacy than past associations (Buhrmester, 1990; Crosnoe, 2000). Parental support remains relevant throughout adolescence (Bagwell and Schmidt, 2013; Flynn, Feinlee, and Conger, 2017; Way, 2013); however, youth spend more time with their friends and seek peer validation and advice now more than previously in their childhood (Bagwell and Schmidt, 2013; Buhrmester, 1990; Way, 2013). Social support from friends has significant and positive effects on well-being, including life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and coping with stress. Friendship provides a buffer against bullying and victimization from other peers.

Adolescents without friends are vulnerable to loneliness, depression, and anxiety. They are more likely to drop out of school, commit suicide, become teen parents or gang members, and use drugs (e.g., see Faris and Feinlee, 2011; Lanza, Calkins, and Bukowski 2013).

Features of Friendship

Similarity is a powerful predictor of adolescent friendship formation. Evidence indicates that individuals are more likely to become friends with those who are like them in demographic factors such as ethnicity, religion, and family background. Adolescent friends are comparable in physical attractiveness and social status levels. Teens choose friends who are similar in both prosocial and antisocial tendencies such as drug and alcohol use and delinquency. In other words, youth who use drugs choose friends who also use drugs.

Same-Sex

Gender differences exist in adolescent friendships. Adolescent girls express more positive feelings within their friendships and have higher levels of friendship quality compared with adolescent boys. Boys tend to define friendship based on shared activities and status, whereas girls characterize friendship in more intimate and expressive terms, such as emotional discussions. However, younger and early adolescent boys also value intimate, close friendships. As teen boys reach later adolescence, they become increasingly distrustful and less connected (see Way, 2013). Gender socialization theory suggests expectations for behavior and norms shape interaction and identity such that girls are encouraged to value interconnectedness and co-operation more highly than boys and that youth reinforce and reconstruct gender stereotypes in their peer friendships. These gender stereotypes shape perceptions of acceptable behavior, particularly for boys in later



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