



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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High-Quality Adolescent Friendships May Come at a Cost for Youth With Shared Deviant Values

The types of friendships adolescents have often reflect their childhood relationships and predict how they do in the future. In a new study, researchers found that antisocial teenagers' friendships tend to involve less listening, eye contact, and responsiveness, and that these teens spend more time talking about deviant topics such as substance abuse and breaking the law. However, when these adolescents are in friendships in which they interact more closely, they tend to have higher incidences of problem behavior.

The findings, by researchers at the University of Oregon, are published in the September/October 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

In their work, the researchers observed the characteristics of friendships of three groups of adolescents representing different histories of problem behavior, such as theft, truancy, aggression toward others, and substance use. The groups included (1) persistently antisocial youth with high levels of problem behavior that began in childhood and continued throughout adolescence, (2) teenagers who had little problem behavior until middle adolescence, and (3) adolescents with low levels of problem behavior.

At age 16, each adolescent participated with a close friend in a videotaped discussion of a variety of topics. Researchers gauged the quality of the friends' interaction (e.g., how the friends responded to each other's comments and listened, and whether they maintained regular eye contact) and the conversational content of the interactions (e.g., what percentage of the time the teenagers spent discussing deviant topics or positive topics such as academic achievement and helping others).

Young people who were persistently antisocial generally demonstrated lower-quality interactions in their friendships, that is, they paid less attention to one another and did not listen very carefully, and they spent much more time discussing deviant topics than the other adolescents. Interestingly, while the amount of time the teens spent discussing deviant topics generally reflected each group's typical behavior, there were no differences between the groups in the amount of time they spent talking about positive topics, the study found.

The lower-quality relationships of these persistently antisocial youth were thought to reflect a history of poor peer relationships involving conflict and frequent rejection by others. The other adolescents, on the other hand, were more likely to have had positive early friendship experiences, allowing them to better develop the skills needed to maintain close and caring relationships with peers.

The researchers also examined how the quality of friendships and the typical topics of discussion influence problem behaviors. Looking across all the groups, those adolescents who spent a lot of time talking about deviant topics and who also had high-quality interactions with their peers were especially

likely to have high levels of problem behavior, the researchers found. This finding supports the idea that friendships that are closely bonded over deviant values may more heavily influence problem behaviors.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 5, *Interpersonal Dynamics within Adolescent Friendships: Dyadic Mutuality, Deviant Talk, and Patterns of Antisocial Behavior* by Piehler, TF, and Dishion, TJ (University of Oregon). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.