

Support-seeking about social relationships with friends is associated with friendship quality, emotional support, and self-disclosure in adolescence



Journal of Social and
Personal Relationships
2025, Vol. 42(12) 3388–3410
© The Author(s) 2025
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/02654075251371391
journals.sagepub.com/home/spr



Meghan A. Costello^{1,2} , Margaret V. Brehm³ ,
Ariana J. Rivens⁴, Gabrielle L. Hunt⁵, Alison G. Nagel⁵ and
Joseph P. Allen⁵

Abstract

Adolescent friendships offer a crucial context for learning to seek social support. Through repeated social support encounters, adolescents take in social information *and* shape their own development. The current study characterizes adolescents' support-seeking discussion topics with close friends, how the topics are influenced by adolescent age and gender, and how they are related to interpersonal processes in close friendships. A community sample of 184 adolescents (85 boys, 99 girls; 58% white, 29% Black, 13% other identity groups) participated annually from age 13 to 18. Through these six waves of data collection, participants completed a total of 859 support-seeking interactions, from which 10 thematic codes were identified. Support-seeking about socially oriented topics (e.g., conflicts with peers, romantic interests) appeared consistently across adolescence, while participants increasingly discussed future-oriented topics (e.g., considering college or work plans) with their friends as they aged. Selection of socially oriented topics was more common among female dyads and was associated with higher friendship quality, self-disclosure, and emotional support in conversations between adolescent close friends.

¹Massachusetts General Hospital, USA

²Harvard Medical School, USA

³University of Pittsburgh, USA

⁴Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, USA

⁵University of Virginia, USA

Corresponding author:

Meghan A. Costello, Massachusetts General Hospital, 55 Fruit Street, Boston, MA 02114, USA.

Email: mcostello14@mgh.harvard.edu

Keywords

Adolescence, close relationships, friendship, social support, self-disclosure

In adolescence, few contexts afford as much opportunity for interpersonal exploration and rich social learning as support-seeking conversations between close friends (Allen et al., 2022; Cassidy, 2001). Social support and associated learning experiences do not simply *happen to* adolescents—rather, social support is shaped by the adolescents themselves. Research has already highlighted the role that social relationship selection plays in shaping support experiences (Bauminger et al., 2008). Here, we propose to consider a conversation-level factor—what teens actually ask their friends for support about—that sets the tone of the ensuing interaction. The current study characterizes the *content* of such support-seeking within adolescent close friendships. By understanding the topics that are salient in adolescent supportive conversations, how these topics are shaped by characteristics of the relationship and external factors, and how topics are linked to friendship behaviors over time, we may better understand how adolescents shape their own social learning experiences with friends.

Support topics and the interpersonal theory of development

The *Interpersonal Theory of Development* highlights the ways that pivotal learning about the self, others, and relationships occurs through social interactions (Sullivan, 1953/2013). The theory notes that close friendships in adolescence serve as the crucible for rich, repeated learning experiences that are both implicit and explicit, with peers providing both behavioral and verbal feedback about one another's behaviors. Importantly, this feedback is likely to shape adolescents' future interpersonal behaviors and expectations of others (Costello, Bailey, et al., 2024). One way that adolescents shape the quality of their interactions with their friends is by selecting the topics about which they will seek support from those friends. By altering the ways adolescents engage in their close friendships, their support topic choice is likely to directly influence the nature of social learning opportunities within the friendship. For example, an adolescent seeking advice about saving money would likely receive a qualitatively different type of response from their friend than an adolescent who expresses concern about a sibling's excessive alcohol consumption. Although these different responses may be situationally appropriate, they can lead to very different experiences in interactions that involve requesting and receiving social support. Over time, supportive interactions provide an experience base that guides the formation of adult-like relationships with close friends, a primary social developmental task of adolescence (Bauminger et al., 2008; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Szewedo et al., 2017). As adolescence progresses, teens are increasingly likely to seek support from their friends than other important sources, such as caregivers or teachers (Hombrosdos-Mendieta et al., 2012; Nowell et al., 2023). Although social support has been identified as an important relational process during adolescence (Costello, Pettit, et al., 2024; Nowell et al., 2023),

the intrinsically private nature of vulnerable support-seeking between adolescent close friends means that it has remained relatively unobserved.

Changes in support sources and needs with age

Individual factors outside of an adolescent's control likely play some part in shaping the focus of their support-seeking with close friends. Age may drive changes in support sources and focus over time, given that adolescent priorities shift across development along with new milestones and challenges (Vijayakumar & Pfeifer, 2020). *Developmental Tasks* theory suggests that, in adolescence, key elements of social learning must occur as a precursor to the development of independence from caregivers, equal and supportive connections with others, and an understanding of oneself and relationships (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2018). In concordance, adolescence is often marked by a shift from parents as primary sources of support to peers as primary sources of support (Del Valle et al., 2010). Cross-sectional work indicates that frequency and type of support sought from different sources (peers, parents, teachers, etc.) varies from age 13 to 18 such that teens seek increasing support from their friends over time (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012).

In addition to this shift in who adolescents seek support from, the content of their supportive conversations likely also changes. As adolescents mature, their psychological needs and skills may lend themselves to a developmentally appropriate shift in social priorities (Vijayakumar & Pfeifer, 2020). For instance, during their teenage years adolescents increasingly initiate serious romantic relationships, manage the dissolution of close friendships, begin to plan for academic and career goals, and navigate the complexities of family structure changes (e.g., caregiver divorce, family blending, mourning loss). Additionally, the emotional and cognitive development that occurs across adolescence may support an increased capacity to identify and manage challenges but also occurs in concert with increasing mental health symptomatology during this period (Blakemore, 2019). As new stressors become salient (Compas & Wagner, 2017), teens often seek support from their friends—and the nature of those stressors could lead to more or less positive experiences with support, based on how equipped a friend is to respond to the stressor.

Gender socialization and support topic selection

Gendered social perceptions and expectations also play a role in shaping adolescent social relationships and social learning opportunities with others (Colarossi, 2001). Societal pressures about stereotypical masculinity may shape adolescent boys' tendencies to avoid disclosing emotional content or to expect friends to respond negatively to emotional content (Barker et al., 2005; Rose & Asher, 2017). In contrast, girls may feel socially sanctioned and compelled to seek support from their female friends (Cheng & Chan, 2004), and girls report perceiving more support from their same-gender friends than boys do (Poulin & Pederson, 2007). Youth are exposed to gender socialization from a young age (Perry & Pauletti, 2011), and differences in expectations and comfort about support-

seeking likely contribute to differences in both what adolescents talk about and how they talk about it. Of course, receiving quality support from friends is meaningful for adolescent psychosocial well-being regardless of gender (Demaray & Malecki, 2002), and both girls and boys both report that they discuss the most intimate topics with their closest same-gender friends (Dolgin & Kim, 1994).

Friendship quality and support topics

Adolescents' emphasis on friendship closeness highlights another key component of support-seeking: the interpersonal relationship. Close friend dyads each have their own respective social micro-cultures around supportive processes that are determined both by the personalities of the adolescents involved and the nature of their interactions. Consistently, work highlights relationship quality as a key indicator of adolescents' expectations of support from friends, with high quality friendships lending themselves to more help-seeking, more responsive friends, and greater social skill development longer-term (Costello et al., 2023; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Sears et al., 2009). Adolescents tend to seek support from others that they perceive as trustworthy, familiar, mature, and friendly—all markers of a higher-quality friendship (Camara et al., 2017). By vulnerably disclosing a support need to a friend, adolescents may forge deeper connections with their friends and initiate a positive social feedback loop whereby closeness encourages vulnerability, and vulnerability develops increased closeness (Costello et al., 2023). High-quality friendships lend themselves to discussing emotionally intense topics, as both the adolescent and their friend feel relatively more secure and safe to discuss vulnerable topics; however, the things adolescents *actually talk about* within these friendships has not been examined empirically.

Social learning within supportive interactions in adolescence

The content of adolescent support-seeking, although not well understood, may meaningfully shape the supportive behaviors that they are exposed to in adolescence. Over time, this could significantly shape adolescents' benefit from support as well as their understanding and expectations about supportive interactions. Qualities of social support interactions that follow a call for support are key for adolescent well-being both in-the-moment and longer-term (Stern et al., 2021). Behavioral inputs from friends are key components of adolescent social learning processes, as they model and reinforce certain behaviors and provide implicit or explicit negative feedback about others (Van Hoorn et al., 2016). Adolescents are highly attuned to negative social evaluation (Somerville, 2013) and may feel that asking for support inherently makes the support-seeker vulnerable (Costello, Bailey, et al., 2024). On the one hand, expressing a request for support could prompt a comforting, rewarding, and connected supportive experience; on the other hand, it could initiate a conversation that is stressful and reinforces any negative expectations adolescents have about receiving support from others (Stern et al., 2021). Adolescents who receive positive input from friends may be reinforced by that behavior and

demonstrate more willingness to engage in similar behaviors in the future, facilitating social skills development across time (Borowski et al., 2018). However, when adolescents seek support and receive a negative response from friends, they not only do not benefit from that support (i.e., by getting momentary relief from their worries), but they are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors and report increased worries the following day (Arbel et al., 2018). Ultimately, negative responses from friends may reinforce the belief that vulnerable sharing is unacceptable or may be punished by friends, leading teens to refrain from future disclosure and therefore miss future opportunities for deep social connections (Stern et al., 2021).

In addition to comfort gained from supportive interactions, friends also provide important information to adolescents during supportive interactions (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012). As adolescents gather implicit information about social support through behavioral reinforcement or rejection by friends, the conversational content of the supportive conversation also provides adolescents with direct information about friends' expectations, values, and reactions. Given the emphasis on social learning as the key developmental task of adolescence (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2018), conversations about social relationships may be particularly common and of particular importance to adolescents but do not constitute the entirety of their conversation. Despite acknowledgement that close relationships shape social learning and that close friends are a critical source of social information in adolescence, research has not investigated what teens actually discuss in their close friendships, how this changes over time, and how it is related to the experiential learning that drives social development.

The current study

To investigate what adolescents discuss in support-seeking with friends and how this is related to social experiences, this mixed-methods study undertook an exploratory investigation of adolescents' support-seeking topics, observed interpersonal behaviors, and reported perceptions of relationships with close friends from age 13 to 18 (sampled from 1998 to 2005). The study used qualitative analysis to categorically analyze support topics and then quantitatively investigated associations of topics to observed and multi-reporter data regarding broader social functioning in a socio-demographically diverse community sample to assess the following hypotheses:

- (1) There will be a normative shift in support topics across adolescents' development, such that present-focused topics (sports, school) will be more common in early adolescence and future planning will be more common in later adolescence.
- (2) Across adolescence, girls will discuss socially-oriented topics more often than boys; boys will discuss activity-oriented topics more often than girls.
- (3) Socially-oriented support topics will be associated with the highest peer-rated interpersonal competence and friendship quality

- (4) Socially-oriented support topics will be associated with observable behaviors in close friend interactions, including higher levels of observed self-disclosure, emotional support, and instrumental support.

Method

Participants

This study was part of a longitudinal investigation of social development across adolescence and young adulthood from 1998 to 2005 (Kids, Lives, Friends, and Family [KLIFF] study; e.g., Allen et al., 2023). This study was originally undertaken to understand how relationships with close others (e.g., parents and peers), attachment processes, and mental health develop over time. Participants included 184 seventh- and eighth graders (85 boys and 99 girls). Participants were assessed annually; this study utilizes the age 13 ($M_{\text{age}} = 13.35$, $SD = .64$) through age 18 ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.38$, $SD = 1.04$) observational assessments with friends. Participants were originally recruited from the seventh and eighth grades of a public middle school drawing from suburban and urban populations in the Southeastern United States. Students were recruited via an initial mailing to all parents of students in the school along with follow-up contact efforts at school lunches. Families of adolescents who indicated interest in the study were contacted by telephone. Of all students eligible for participation, 63% agreed to participate either as target participants or as friends who participated in interactions tasks with the target teen. Once a student participated as a friend, they were no longer eligible to be a primary participant.

The sample was racially and socioeconomically diverse: 107 adolescents (58%) identified themselves as White, 53 (29%) as Black, 15 (8%) as Multiracial, and 9 (5%) as being from other identity groups, which approximately mirrors the distribution of the catchment area for the school from which the sample was drawn. Adolescents' parents reported an annual median family income in the \$40,000–\$59,999 range, relative to a national median household income of approximately \$39,000 at the time (US Census Bureau, 1999).

Each year, target adolescents nominated their closest friend to be included in survey and observational measures with them in the study. The same friend participated in subsequent years, on average, 42.3% of the time (min = 35.9%, max = 45.5%). In order for the same friend to participate in subsequent waves, they had to be nominated by the participant, report that they were able and willing to participate in the study, and actually attend a study visit with parental consent. All best friend dyads identified as same-gender, although this was not a requirement to participate in the study.

Procedures

In the initial introduction and throughout each session, confidentiality was explained to all participants, and adolescents were told that their parents would not be informed of any of the answers they provided. A Confidentiality Certificate issued by the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services protected all data from subpoena by federal, state, and local courts.

Topic coding

Each year from age 13 to 18, participants and their nominated close friend participated in an observed social interaction task in private rooms within a university building (total N observations = 859). Participants were instructed to discuss a problem for which they would like help, support, or advice from their best friend, and they were informed that they would be video recorded discussing that problem for 6 minutes. In order to capture topics discussed in adolescents' support-initiating statements, the first 30 seconds of each interaction was transcribed and checked by a team of research assistants. These transcriptions were then used by the lead and second author to generate and assign "support topic" codes.

The framework approach to thematic analysis (Smith & Firth, 2011) was used to analyze transcribed excerpts from annual video-recorded advice-seeking conversations between 184 adolescents and their self-nominated best friends. This approach was selected because it has been successfully applied to define topics of adolescent support-seeking from non-parental mentors in previous work (Rivens et al., 2022) and allows for the definition of codes to be driven by participants' conversations, as synthesized and interpreted by the researchers (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The first and second authors served as coders for this effort. First, the coders familiarized themselves with the interview content by independently reviewing the support-seeking statements and devising a preliminary list of topics based on these support-seeking statements and knowledge of the literature. Following the consensual coding process, the two coders agreed upon a final list of ten themes and then applied those codes to all statements (Spangler et al., 2012). Interrater reliability for the full sample upon initial coding indicated 96% agreement (i.e., both coders assigned the same topic category in 96% of the interactions coded). All codes that were not initially agreed upon (4%) were discussed, and a consensus was reached to assign final thematic codes to each statement.

Behaviorally coded measures

All observed measures are coded from the six-minute advice-seeking interaction task described above. All video-recorded interactions were double-coded by graduate student coders who trained for one semester on the manual and a set of practice videos until they attained reliability (within 1-point score on all codes) with the existing coding group. Interactions were coded for the level of Self-Disclosure made by the participant, the level of Emotional Support Provided by the friend, and the level of Instrumental Support Provided by the friend, using the Supportive Behavior Task Coding System for Adolescent Peer Dyads (Allen et al., 2001).

Self-disclosure when support-seeking. The Self-Disclosure code describes the level to which the teen shares information about themselves, particularly private information

that would make the other person in the interaction feel as though they know the speaker better. In this coding system, a single statement that contains the highest level of self-disclosure within the interaction is scored. Scores are generated based on a combination of the intensity of affect, level of vulnerability displayed, how controversial the statement might be; and are overall intended to capture how embarrassed or uncomfortable the *typical* person might feel disclosing the information that is stated, regardless of how the teen appears to feel about it in the moment. Scores range from zero = *brief or non-controversial likes and dislikes or wants and needs are expressed; teens are talking about their day in a way that doesn't capture much personal or vulnerable information*, to 4 = *conversation contains content not commonly shared between somewhat close friends; teens expressed strong feelings that are less socially acceptable, such as sadness, fear, loneliness, or anxiety*. Intraclass Correlations, which measure inter-rater reliability, ranged from .69–.75 each year, falling in the good- to excellent-range for this statistic (Cicchetti & Sparrow, 1981).

Emotional support provided by friends. The Emotional Support Provided code describes the level to which the partner attempts to understand and support the feelings raised by the participant, through processes such as sympathizing, naming the emotion, eliciting further emotion, or making a commitment to be emotionally available. Scores range from zero = *no attempt to emotionally support*; to 4 = *clear recognition of emotional distress* (as defined by attempts to draw the speaker out, and clear expressions of warmth, concern, and sympathy throughout most of the interaction). ICCs ranged from .61–.78, which is considered good- to excellent.

Instrumental support provided by friends. The Instrumental Support Provided code describes the level to which the friend attempts to instrumentally support the participant, through processes such as recognizing a problem exists and a solution is needed, problem-solving, directing the conversation and maintaining a problem-focus (including low points for useful Socratic questioning), and making a commitment to help address the problem. This code is based on how much the friend is aware of the problem and actively persists in their attempts to find a solution—their efforts to support need not be necessarily useful, but rather attuned to what the participant needs. Scores range from zero = *There is no instrumental planning of how to solve the problem* to 4 = *The supporter has made clear attempts to find a solution and is consistently incorporating the participant and their needs* (as defined by asking attuned questions, maintaining conversational focus, and repeated efforts to problem-solve or identify a solution). ICCs ranged from good (.76) to excellent (.83).

Participant-reported measures

Age. Participant age was calculated based on participants' reported date of birth at the start of the study, subtracted from the relevant visit date. Age was analyzed as a categorical variable, rounded down to the nearest whole year.

Gender. Participant gender was collected at the start of the study, and participants were asked to choose between “male” and “female” as their gender identity.

Quality of relationship with friends. Participants reported on the quality of their friendships by responding to the 40-item Friendship Quality Questionnaire annually from age 13 to 18 (FQQ; Parker & Asher, 1993). The FQQ consists of items categorized into six subscales—validation and caring, conflict resolution, conflict and betrayal, help and guidance, companionship and recreation, and intimate exchange—and includes statements such as “[Friend] cares about my feelings” and “We always tell each other our problems.” Participants responded to a total of 40 items on a Likert-type scale where 1 = *Not at all True*, 2 = *A Little True*, 3 = *Somewhat True*, 4 = *Pretty True*, and 5 = *Really True*. Composite scores were created from the sum of all items, with negatively phrased items reverse-scored such that higher scores indicate greater friendship quality. The internal consistency for friendship quality in this sample is considered excellent (Cronbach’s α = .95–.96).

Friend-reported measure

Friend-rated interpersonal competency. The Interpersonal Competency Questionnaire (Buhrmester, 1990) was annually administered to the target teen’s nominated closest friend, to assess that friend’s perception of the target teen’s interpersonal abilities. Stems were phrased such that friends were responding to items that directly described the interpersonal competencies of the target participant. Friends responded to questions such as: How good is [participant] at “making someone feel better when they are unhappy or sad” and “voicing their desires and opinions” on a scale from 1 = *Poor at this* (defined as “they would be so uncomfortable and unable to handle this situation that it would be avoided if at all possible”) to 5 = *Extremely good at this* (defined as “they would feel very comfortable and could handle this situation well”). Forty items were summed together to obtain a score of overall interpersonal competence, which captures five domains: initiating relationships, disclosing personal information, asserting displeasure with others, providing emotional support and advice, and managing interpersonal conflict. Scores have previously been found to be related to sociability, self-esteem, and reduced anxiety and depression, but are discrete from perceived intimacy in the relationship (Buhrmester, 1990). Internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach’s α ’s = .91–.95).

Attrition analysis

On average, individuals participated at 4.7 of the 6 study time points ($SD = 1.5$). Attrition at each study time point was also low, with participation rates of 89% at age 14, 88% at age 15, 88% at age 16, 90% at age 17, and 74% at age 18. Individuals who completely dropped out of the study (participated at age 13 but at no other time point) did not differ from teens who remained in the study on baseline survey measures (interpersonal competence, friendship quality) or observed measures (self-disclosure, emotional support received, instrumental support received), gender, and family income.

Results

Qualitative analyses

Generating topic themes. Support topics were assigned to a total of 859 video-recorded interactions between adolescents and their close friend from age 13 to 18, according to the generated coding system (see Table 1). Participants, on average, sought support on three different topics ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.2$), and participated in the observed support-seeking task four times in six years ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.5$). Participants mostly generated different support-seeking topics each time they participated ($M = 70.1\%$, $SD = 20.8\%$, Range = 16.7%–100%).

Discussions about romantic interests, crushes, communicating with a current romantic partner, or breakups were categorized as “romantic partner/dating” topics, and were the most common across the study period (177 interactions, 20.6%). Discussions about peer relationships, conflict with peers, advice managing concerns about a peer, and interest in developing new friendships were categorized as “peers/peer conflict” and were second-most common (161 interactions, 18.7%). Topics that were discussed too infrequently to warrant a separate category (e.g., discussing haircuts [$N = 5$], health [$N = 5$], the weather [$N = 1$], current events in politics [$N = 1$], or pop culture [$N = 1$]) were combined to

Table 1. Adolescent-generated support topics from age 13 to age 18.

Topic	Age 13	Age 14	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Total
Academic concern/Teacher conflict	25 15.7%	23 14.7%	16 12.5%	13 9.5%	12 8.5%	6 4.7%	95 11.1%
Extracurriculars/Sports	28 17.6%	16 10.3%	17 13.3%	25 18.3%	10 7.1%	9 7.0%	105 12.2%
Future planning	5 3.1%	4 2.6%	4 3.1%	15 11.0%	33 23.4%	32 25.0%	93 10.8%
Money/Jobs	14 8.8%	21 13.5%	12 9.4%	12 8.8%	19 13.5%	17 13.3%	95 11.1%
Other	13 8.2%	4 2.6%	6 4.7%	7 5.1%	12 8.5%	7 5.5%	49 5.7%
Parent/Parent conflict	6 3.8%	7 4.5%	5 3.9%	6 4.4%	4 2.8%	3 2.3%	31 3.6%
Peer/Peer conflict	37 23.3%	33 21.2%	30 23.4%	20 14.6%	22 15.6%	19 14.8%	161 18.7%
Romantic partners/Dating	27 17.0%	36 23.1%	28 21.9%	31 22.6%	25 17.7%	30 23.4%	177 20.6%
Siblings/Sibling conflict	10 6.3%	4 2.6%	5 3.9%	4 2.9%	2 1.4%	0 0.0%	25 2.9%
Trips/Travel/Logistics	4 2.5%	8 5.1%	5 3.9%	4 2.9%	2 1.4%	5 3.9%	28 3.3%
Total <i>N</i>	169	156	128	137	141	128	859

Note. Percentages reflect percent of total for column and may not add to 100 due to rounding.

comprise the ‘Other’ category. See [Table 2](#) for a summary of themes, topic content subsumed within each theme, and sample quotes from Age 13 and Age 18 study interactions.

Descriptive statistics. See [Supplemental Tables 1 and 2](#) for descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for observational and survey variables analyzed.

Quantitative analyses

Hypothesis 1. There will be a normative shift in support topics across adolescents’ development, such that adolescent-focused topics (sports, school) will be more common in early adolescence and future planning will be more common in later adolescence.

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. ANOVA indicated that adolescents’ support topics varied as a function of age ($F = 10.92, p < .001$). Follow-up pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni correction indicated that the mean age of Future Planning ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.8$ years, 95% CI [16.4, 17.1]) was significantly higher than mean ages for all other categories ($M_{\text{ages}} = 14.4\text{--}15.3$, all $ps < .001$; see [Supplemental Table 3](#)). No other significant differences in topics by age were identified.

Hypothesis 2. Across adolescence, girls will discuss socially-oriented topics more than boys; boys will discuss activity-oriented topics more than girls.

Hypothesis 2 was supported. Chi-square comparisons indicated differences in topic by gender across adolescence ($\chi^2(9) = 78.91, p < .001$; see [Table 3](#)). Adjusted residuals analysis was used to determine which topics differed significantly by gender, using the threshold of an absolute value of 1.96 to indicate significance at the .05 level. This approach indicated boys were significantly more likely to discuss two activity-based topics (i.e., extracurriculars, travel), while girls were more likely to discuss two socially-oriented topics (i.e., peers and romantic partners). No gender differences arose in discussions of money/jobs or the “other” category—both defined as activity-oriented topics. Furthermore, no gender differences arose in discussions of academic concerns/teacher conflict, future planning, parents/parent conflict, siblings/sibling conflict.

Hypothesis 3. Socially-oriented support topics will be associated with the highest peer-rated interpersonal competence and friendship quality.

Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. ANOVA indicated significant differences in friendship quality associated with topic ($F = 3.00, p = .002$), and no significant differences in peer-rated interpersonal competence. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that conversations about peers were associated with the highest friendship quality ($M_{\text{FriendshipQual}} = 160.27$) and significantly differed from the three categories

Table 2. Topic themes and sample support-seeking statements.

Theme	Topic content	Sample quote
Academic concern/ Teacher conflict	Grades, teacher punishment, school performance, test-taking, managing relationships with teachers, organizing high school coursework, advice on advanced course placement	Age 13: <i>"I think Mrs. [Teacher] has been giving us a lot of problems. She's just been telling me that I don't put forth enough effort in class, which is confusing."</i> Age 18: <i>"My question is what can I do to stay more focused while in school man? As far as school work, how to really crack down, like, just focus and get good grades like you."</i>
Extracurriculars/ Sports	Current sport performance, starting or leaving a sport or extracurricular, ideas for club involvement, band/instrument tips	Age 13: <i>"My topic is about basketball. Could you give me some advice about how to do better?"</i> Age 18: <i>"Ok my topic is whether or not you think I should quit track."</i>
Future planning	College applications, college enrollment, moving out of caregivers' home, enlisting in military, cohabitating with romantic partner, planning for career aspirations	Age 13: <i>"When I grow up, I want to be a historian because I find interest in history. So, I've decided I should take classes that pertain to this, so I wanted to take history classes, like science classes that have to do with like science history, and math classes, and technology and stuff. What else do you think I should take, and what do you think about this career choice?"</i> Age 18: <i>"Ok, my topic is what kind of advice can you give me about college? Like what schools should I go to, what should I look for in a school, and umm...that's about it."</i>
Money/Jobs	Ideas for earning money, soliciting input on current or potential job, employment challenges	Age 13: <i>"I need some money to get a CD, but I have no money. What do you think I could do to raise some money?"</i> Age 18: <i>"My topic is, oh, if I should get a new job. If I should quit my job at Whole Foods."</i>

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Theme	Topic content	Sample quote
Other	Topics that did not fall into any other category (clothing, health, weather/current events) or no direct advice topic stated (participant sharing with friend)	Age 13: "I don't know if I wanna wear a dress, you know that graduation dress that I had? The blue one?" Age 18: "Which retro video game character should I go to the [student group] party as? It's got to be something I can do easily.."
Parent/Parent conflict	House rules, caregiver disagreements, punishment, managing parent relationships, developing respect and trust with parents/caregivers	Age 13: "Don't you think I am old enough to go outside by myself? [Mom] don't let me do nothing – she don't even let me stay in the house by myself for too long. What do you think I should do about that?" Age 18: "My problem is, as you may have heard, that I recently got in a large amount of trouble with my parents after being at a party that they didn't know about...I was wondering how to deal with that."
Peers/Peer conflict	Developing healthy relationships with peers, concern for friend, conflict or fight with peer, how to manage interpersonal challenges, advice for making new friends	Age 13: "[Classmate] is being really, really mean to me and it's not nice." Age 18: "My question was what's up with [Friend] and is there any hope of anything ever happening again? I don't know what's going on, it's so weird still, 'cause I've been getting weird emails from her."
Romantic partners/ Dating	Potential romantic interests or feelings, crushes, communication in relationships, planning a date, conflict with romantic partner, breakups	Age 13: "Given the fact that I know I can trust you and expect you not to tell anybody...there's this guy at school and I don't know if I like him or not." Age 18: "My topic is, you know how last night or whatever, I broke up with [Romantic Partner], right? Do you think I did the right thing, and why?"

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Theme	Topic content	Sample quote
Siblings/Sibling conflict	Disputes or disagreements with siblings, concern for sibling safety, advice for sibling caretaking, coordinating for socializing and connecting with sibling, developing better relationship with sibling(s)	Age 13: <i>"Alright, my problem is that my little sister keeps making fun of me."</i> Age 17: <i>"Wondering whether I should be worried about it...he doesn't tell me shit about what goes on and that's probably mostly because I'm his older brother but uh, recently you know I know he goes downtown and gets drunk and stoned and is that enough of a reason for me to worry about him?"</i>
Trips/Travel/Logistics	Planning for trips, vacations, events, travel, or other logistics that does not more directly involve interpersonal content	Age 13: <i>"You know how they are going on that ski trip? ...Do you think I should go?"</i> Age 18: <i>"I wanted to go down to the Dave Matthews concert, but then...I heard 311 is in concert with the Roots and the Roots are awesome...I was just wondering what you thought because 311 is pretty hot too."</i>

associated with the lowest friendship quality: extracurriculars and sports, academic and teacher concerns, and money and jobs ($M_{\text{FriendshipQual}} = 152.32\text{--}152.34$; see [Supplemental Table 4](#)).

Hypothesis 4. Socially-oriented support topics will be associated with observable behaviors in close friend interactions, including higher levels of observed self-disclosure, emotional support, and instrumental support.

Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Participant self-disclosure and friend emotional support given differed based on participants' support topics ($F = 23.44$ and 18.58 , respectively; $ps < .001$), while friend instrumental support given did not. Follow-up pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni correction indicated significant differences in the mean self-disclosure level by topic selection (see [Supplemental Table 5](#)). Supportive conversations about peers, parents, and romantic partners were associated with significantly higher levels of observer-rated self-disclosure by the support-seeking participant, in comparison to all other topics ($M_{\text{Self-Disclosure}} = 1.51\text{--}1.73$). A sample self-disclosing statement within a socially-oriented topic includes, "Yeah I really want to go to the party, but I just don't want to drink. But then you know how people are just peer pressuring and stuff, and I don't want to feel like the one left out, so I don't know what I should do." (3). Topics related to money and jobs; future planning; trips, travel, and logistics; extracurriculars and sports; and "other" topics were associated with significantly lower levels

Table 3. Adolescent-selected support topics by gender (age 13–18).

Topic	Boys		Girls	
	N	%	N	%
Socially-oriented topics				
Peers/Peer conflict	49	30.4	112	69.6
Romantic partners/Dating	22	25.9	63	74.1
Family-oriented topics				
Parents/Parent conflict	9	29.0	22	71.0
Siblings/Sibling conflict	9	36.0	16	64.0
Activity-oriented topics				
Extracurriculars/Sports	77	73.3	28	26.7
Money/jobs	52	54.7	43	45.3
Other	23	46.9	26	53.1
Trips/Travel/Logistics	23	82.1	5	17.9
Academic topic				
Academic concern/Teacher conflict	48	50.5	47	49.5
Future topic				
Future planning	48	51.6	45	48.4
Total	401	46.7	458	53.3

Note. Percentages reflect percent of total for row. Bolded rows indicate significant differences by gender.

of self-disclosure in comparison to all other topics ($M_{\text{Self-Disclosure}} = .54-.88$). Example self-disclosures from these categories included “I just don’t want to go [to camp], period” (0.5) and “I don’t know if I should try out” (1). Follow-up pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni correction also indicated significant differences in the mean friend emotional support provided by topic selection (see [Supplemental Table 6](#)). Supportive conversations about parents and peers were associated with the highest observer-rated emotional support provided by a friend ($M = 1.49$ and 1.45). Topics related to money and jobs; “other”; trips, travel, and logistics; future planning; and extracurriculars and sports were all associated with significantly lower levels of emotional support from the friend in comparison to other topics ($M_{\text{EmotionalSupport}} = .28-.72$). No differences were identified when comparing the level of instrumental support provided by the friend based on the support topic selected.

Post hoc analyses

Given differences in topic by gender (hypothesis 2), do the identified associations among topics, friendship quality, and observed behavioral supportive processes (hypothesis 3 and 4) differ by gender?

Considering the associations between gender and topic, as well as associations between gender and friendship quality, observed self-disclosure, and observed emotional support given by friend, we considered the potential interaction of gender and topic by

Table 4. ANCOVAs predicting self-disclosure, emotional support given by friend, and friendship quality from gender and support topic.

	Self-disclosure		Emotional support given		Friendship quality	
	F	p	F	p	F	p
Intercept	6.35*	.01	2.04	.15	56.78***	<.001
Gender	0.17	.68	0.14	.14	4.09*	.04
Topic	3.13*	<.001	2.09*	.02	2.23	.02
Gender*Topic	1.47	.14	1.54	.12	1.62	.10

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

running a series of omnibus ANCOVAs. No interactions between gender and topic were identified to predict observed support behaviors or reported friendship quality (see Table 4).

Given differences by gender, do associations between topic selection and self-disclosure, emotional support given, and friendship quality remain after accounting for participant gender?

Omnibus ANCOVAs were run to evaluate the association between support topic and self-disclosure, emotional support given, and friendship quality after controlling for participant gender. After accounting for the role of gender, both self-disclosure ($F(1, 847) = 20.5, p < .001$) and emotional support given ($F(1, 847) = 15.64, p < .01$) varied by topic, but friendship quality did not ($F(1, 847) = 1.49, p = .15$).

Discussion

The content of adolescents’ discussions with close friends when seeking support appears closely linked to both the quality of the supportive interaction as well as to the overall quality of the friendship, level of self-disclosure in the interaction, and the friend’s observed supportive behaviors. In the current study, we first undertook an exploratory investigation into the topics that adolescents sought support about from their close friends. Common themes across each year included peer relationships and conflict, romantic interests and dating, parent and sibling conflict, academic concerns, employment and money, and extracurricular activities. Topic selection was significantly associated with age, gender, friendship quality, self-disclosure, and emotional support given by a friend in response.

In this sample, adolescents sought support from their friends on ten primary topics. These topics related to social concerns (peers/peer conflict, romantic partners/dating), family (parents/parent conflict, siblings/sibling conflict), interests (extracurriculars/sports, often “other”), current challenges (academic/teacher concern, money/jobs) as well as anticipated goals and actions (trips/travel/logistics, future planning). In short, when given an open-ended prompt to discuss “anything that you would like support, help, or advice

on” from a friend, adolescents initiated discussions about a wide range of topics that reflected major domains of their lives. Notably, 39.3% of the interactions coded discussed handling interpersonal relationships (peers [18.7%] and romantic partners [20.6%])—topics which remained salient across the study time period. As stated by the *Interpersonal Theory of Development*, adolescents come to understand themselves and others through their interactions with close friends. In this study, we explore how that process may play out explicitly (i.e., through direct discussions of interpersonal processes in friendships). We also suggest that these explicit discussions also allow for implicit learning regarding what, how, and why adolescents communicate with close friends, over time.

Indeed, many of the themes identified in the current study reflect major developmental milestones, challenges, and stressors that define adolescence (Núñez-Regueiro & Núñez-Regueiro, 2021)—and that participants opted to discuss these topics with their close friends when prompted. These support-seeking conversations can be understood as simultaneously advancing adolescents’ progress on several developmental tasks (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2018). Adolescence is marked by a gradual transition from reliance on caregivers to independence and autonomy (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006), and adolescents are challenged to manage and respond to new and novel emotions and stressors throughout their teenage years. Equally importantly, adolescents also must learn to navigate close relationships with peers and partners (Allen & Loeb, 2015). The capacity to seek support from close others is both necessary for long-term interpersonal health (Cassidy, 2001) and learned through repeated practice in adolescence (Costello et al., 2023). Rich discussions of stressors and challenges provide adolescents with layers of information about both how they would like to manage their stressors as well as how to leverage close relationships for support.

Building on *Developmental Tasks* theory, we suggest that adolescents shape their own social development as they progress through the task of establishing their capacities to navigate social relationships. An adolescent’s progress on the task of social development may implicitly shape their social development in the future. As adolescents aged, they sought more support from their close friend regarding future planning—appropriately, they began initiating conversations focused on steps moving toward independence from their guardians or plans for leaving high school (for example, living independently, enlisting in the military, or preparing for college). These findings are consistent with previous research about differences in adolescent priorities based on stage (Vijayakumar & Pfeifer, 2020) but now extend them by demonstrating that this shift is also associated with changes in interaction processes within close friendships.

Gender differences also arose in the content of the support topics adolescents selected. Girls were more likely to seek support around peers/peer conflict and romantic partners/dating, while boys were more likely to seek support around extracurriculars/sports and trips/travel/logistics. Across gender, higher friendship quality was associated with discussions of peers and peer conflict, while lower friendship quality was associated with discussions of extracurriculars/sports, academic/teacher concerns, and money/jobs. In this study, as in previous work, girls report higher friendship quality than boys (Colarossi, 2001). Additionally, socially-oriented topics, which were more likely to be discussed by girls, were associated with higher rates of friendship quality. *Post-hoc* analyses indicated

that, although there were no interactions between topic and gender, gender explained differences in friendship quality and topic selection did not. In this small, lab-based slice of social interactions with friends, we see evidence of the impact of gender socialization on friendships, and our findings are consistent with prior literature. Social learning with friends often occurs within the boundaries set by gender socialization, which lends itself to different experiences for boys and girls.

Self-disclosure and emotional support provided by friends also followed a similar pattern to friendship quality: Greater self-disclosure and greater emotional support tended to occur during conversations that focused on challenges with parents and peers. Adolescents themselves highlight the role of peers as both a key source of support and a primary source of stress for them (Camara et al., 2017). Adolescents reasonably consult with peers for information about peers, dating, and parents; in adolescence peers become the primary source of support and information about social relationships. Peers are likely to know more about other peers than other supportive relationships in adolescents' lives, and teens likely prefer to talk to "someone who gets it," rather than their caregivers, teachers, or other adults. However, peers may also be a risky topic of conversation for adolescents, with potential social ramifications if they are perceived as negatively gossiping about peers (Kisfalusi et al., 2019). Given adolescents' heightened sensitivity to peer rejection (Somerville, 2013), a higher-quality relationship may be necessary prior to feeling "safe" and willing to seek support about other peers. Additionally, when discussing social relationships, friends become not only an explicit source of information about social expectations, but also an implicit one, as they provide different levels of reinforcing and supportive behaviors across time. Adolescents teach one another about effective social supportive processes, skills that ultimately cascade forward across time and relationships, from adolescent friendships to adult romantic relationships (Costello et al., 2023). Through social support interactions, adolescents not only take in information, but also shape the experiences that are available to them.

Finally, it is critical to consider all the above findings in a larger socio-cultural context. These data were collected from 1998–2005, and societal forces undoubtedly shaped the topics discussed within adolescent dyads. For example, although employment and interest in employment were often discussed by this sample, jobs may have been less available to adolescents only several years later during the Great Recession, when far fewer high schoolers were employed (Morisi, 2017). As of 2024, current employment rates have remained lower than they were in the early 2000s, which may suggest that proportionally fewer adolescents may discuss work if this study were to be repeated with high schoolers today. On the other hand, although boys still play sports at a higher rate than girls, the rate of sports engagement is increasing among girls and decreasing among boys (Project Play, 2023), which could lead to greater representation of sports and extracurricular discussions among girls than were observed in the current study. Broadly, discourse around gender roles, definitions of gender, and awareness of societal impacts on gender socialization has expanded in the past twenty years (Meier, 2025), which could lead to expanded opportunity to discuss a wider range of topics for adolescents in some contexts, but could contribute to mental health strain and pressure to conform to stereotypically gendered values, in others (Schroeder & Liben, 2021). Sociological discussions (such as that about

gender) are also highly accessible to youth through technology and social media, all of which may be highly featured as components of support-seeking about social and romantic relationships among youth in the 2020s.

Limitations and future directions

Several limitations of this study also warrant consideration. Most importantly, we are unable to make causal inferences based on the interrelations observed here. Unobserved variables or processes likely underlie the predictions identified by these models. For instance, teens' relationships with other major sources of support in their lives (parents, teachers, siblings, classmates), as well as individual differences in personality traits likely influence the topics they discuss, comfort initiating supportive interactions, and maintenance of intimate friendships across time. Further, the observational measures used provide only a small window into adolescents' rich social lives, which undoubtedly vary across time, context, and interaction partners outside of the observed support task. The relationship development and support-seeking processes all certainly develop in reaction to the social learning processes that occur across *years* in adolescence. The current study operates under the assumption that these small windows into relational processes offer important, though incomplete information about how adolescents interact with their friends, an assumption validated by other findings based on this task (e.g., [Costello et al., 2023](#)).

With regard to sample, this study described gender identity on a binary and only provides observations and reports of same-gender friendships along that binary. Future work would be strengthened by a more comprehensive interrogation of societal influence on adolescent social behavior and support-seeking as related to gender identities and gender diversity. Finally, as noted above, data from this study was collected in 1998–2005. Future research may seek to replicate this study with a more current sample to understand how current historical and technological contexts may impact youth support-seeking behaviors. For example, conversational focus may differ by modality (in-person conversation vs. online spoken communication vs. online written communication); and perhaps new topics relating to technological advances or current events may be discussed by current-day adolescents.

Conclusion

Adolescents contribute to their own social development through the topics they choose to discuss with their friends. In particular, conversations about important relationships (parents, peers, and romantic partners) were associated with increased vulnerability, emotional support, and high-quality relationships. It is well-established that adolescence is a developmental period marked by social sensitivity, during which important social learning occurs ([Rubin et al., 2010](#); [Somerville, 2013](#); [Sullivan, 1953](#)). Although support from multiple sources is important for adolescents' well-being, support from friends increasingly appears as pivotal in psychosocial development ([Cavanaugh & Buehler, 2016](#); [Heerde & Hemphill, 2018](#)). Even when capturing small windows of adolescents'

social lives through observation, we are able to identify differences in social experiences associated with different support conversation content. In the realm of social development, adolescents are both the architects and the products of their social learning experiences.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was supported by grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Mental Health (R37HD058305, R01-MH58066). Support for the first author was provided by NIDA 5K12DA043490-07.

Open research statement



As part of IARR's encouragement of open research practices, the authors have provided the following information: This research was not pre-registered. The data and materials used in the research are available. The data can be obtained by emailing: mac4qe@virginia.edu.

ORCID iDs

Meghan A. Costello  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9520-4676>

Margaret V. Brehm  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4070-2789>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

- Allen, J. P., Costello, M., Kansky, J., & Loeb, E. L. (2022). When friendships surpass parental relationships as predictors of long-term outcomes: Adolescent relationship qualities and adult psychosocial functioning. *Child Development*, 93(3), 760–777. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13713>
- Allen, J. P., Costello, M. A., Hellwig, A. F., Pettit, C., Stern, J. A., & Uchino, B. N. (2023). Adolescent caregiving success as a predictor of social functioning from ages 13 to 33. *Child Development*, 94(6), 1610–1624. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13936>
- Allen, J. P., Hall, F. D., Insabella, G. M., Land, D. J., Marsh, P. A., & Porter, M. R. (2001). *Supportive behavior task coding manual*. University of Virginia.
- Allen, J. P., & Loeb, E. L. (2015). The autonomy-connection challenge in adolescent–peer relationships. *Child Development Perspectives*, 9(2), 101–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12111>

- Arbel, R., Perrone, L., & Margolin, G. (2018). Adolescents' daily worries and risky behaviors: The buffering role of support seeking. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology: The Official Journal for the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, American Psychological Association, Division 53*, 47(6), 900–911. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2016.1169536>
- Barker, G., Olukoya, A., & Aggleton, P. (2005). Young people, social support and help-seeking. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 17(4), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJAMH.2005.17.4.315>
- Bauminger, N., Finzi-Dottan, R., Chason, S., & Har-Even, D. (2008). Intimacy in adolescent friendship: The roles of attachment, coherence, and self-disclosure. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25(3), 409–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407508090866>
- Blakemore, S. J. (2019). Adolescence and mental health. *Lancet (London, England)*, 393(10185), 2030–2031. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)31013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)31013-X)
- Borowski, S. K., Zeman, J., & Braunstein, K. (2018). Social anxiety and socioemotional functioning during early adolescence: The mediating role of best friend emotion socialization. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 38(2), 238–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431616665212>
- Buhrmester, D. (1990). Intimacy of friendship, interpersonal competence, and adjustment during preadolescence and adolescence. *Child Development*, 61(4), 1101–1111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1990.tb02844.x>
- Camara, M., Bacigalupe, G., & Padilla, P. (2017). The role of social support in adolescents: Are you helping me or stressing me out? *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 22(2), 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2013.875480>
- Cassidy, J. (2001). Truth, lies, and intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Attachment & Human Development*, 3(2), 121–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730110058999>
- Cavanaugh, A. M., & Buehler, C. (2016). Adolescent loneliness and social anxiety: The role of multiple sources of support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 33(2), 149–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407514567837>
- Cheng, S., & Chan, A. C. M. (2004). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support: Dimensionality and age and gender differences in adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37(7), 1359–1369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.006>
- Cicchetti, D. V., & Sparrow, S. A. (1981). Developing criteria for establishing interrater reliability of specific items: Applications to assessment of adaptive behavior. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 86(2), 127–137.
- Colarossi, L. G. (2001). Adolescent gender differences in social support: Structure, function, and provider type. *Social Work Research*, 25(4), 233–241. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/25.4.233>
- Compas, B. E., & Wagner, B. M. (2017). Psychosocial stress during adolescence: Intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. In E. C. Mary & G. Susan (Eds.), *Adolescent stress* (pp. 67–86). Routledge.
- Costello, M. A., Allen, J. P., Womack, S. R., Loeb, E. L., Stern, J. A., & Pettit, C. (2023). Characterizing emotional support development: From adolescent best friendships to young adult romantic relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 33(2), 389–403. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12809>
- Costello, M. A., Bailey, N. A., Stern, J. A., & Allen, J. P. (2024a). Vulnerable self-disclosure co-develops in adolescent friendships: Developmental foundations of emotional intimacy. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 41(9), 2432–2454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241244821>

- Costello, M. A., Pettit, C., Hellwig, A. F., Hunt, G. L., Bailey, N. A., & Allen, J. P. (2024b). Adolescent social learning within supportive friendships: Self-disclosure and relationship quality from adolescence to adulthood. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 34(3), 805–817. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12947>
- Del Valle, J. F., Bravo, A., & Lopez, M. (2010). Parents and peers as providers of support in adolescents' social network: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(1), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20348>
- Demaray, M. K., & Malecki, C. K. (2002). The relationship between perceived social support and maladjustment for students at risk. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(3), 305–316. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10018>
- Dolgin, K. G., & Kim, S. (1994). Adolescents' disclosure to best and good friends: The effects of gender and topic intimacy. *Social Development*, 3(2), 146–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.1994.tb00033.x>
- Heerde, J. A., & Hemphill, S. A. (2018). Examination of associations between informal help-seeking behavior, social support, and adolescent psychosocial outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Developmental Review*, 47, 44–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2017.10.001>
- Hombrados-Mendieta, M. I., Gomez-Jacinto, L., Dominguez-Fuentes, J. M., Garcia-Leiva, P., & Castro-Travé, M. (2012). Types of social support provided by parents, teachers, and classmates during adolescence. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40(6), 645–664. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20523>
- Hurrelmann, K., & Quenzel, G. (2018). *Developmental tasks in adolescence*. Routledge.
- Kisfalusi, D., Takács, K., & Pál, J. (2019). Gossip and Reputation in Adolescent Networks. In F. Giardini & R. Wittek (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Gossip and Reputation* (pp. 359–379). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Meier, M. L. (2025). Coming of age, coming of gender: Studying socialization beyond the binary. *Journal of Children and Media*, 19(1), 83–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2024.2438693>
- Morisi, T. L. (2017). *Teen labor force participation before and after the great recession and beyond*. Monthly Labor Review. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2017.5>
- Nowell, C., Pfeifer, J. H., Enticott, P., Silk, T., & Vijayakumar, N. (2023). Value of self-disclosure to parents and peers during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 33(1), 289–301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12803>
- Núñez-Regueiro, F., & Núñez-Regueiro, S. (2021). Identifying salient stressors of adolescence: A systematic review and content analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(12), 2533–2556. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01492-2>
- Parker, J., & Asher, S. (1993). Friendship and friendship quality in middle childhood: Links with peer group acceptance and feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(4), 611–621. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.29.4.611>
- Perry, D. G., & Pauletti, R. E. (2011). Gender and adolescent development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 61–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00715.x>
- Poulin, F., & Pederson, S. (2007). Developmental changes in gender composition of friendship networks in adolescent girls and boys. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1484–1496. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1484>
- Project Play. (2023). *State of play 2023: Participation trends*. https://projectplay.org/state-of-play-2023/participation#:~:text=Sports_participation_is_increasing_for,of_boys_regularly_played_sports (accessed 16 May 2025).

- Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.
- Rivens, A. J., Billingsley, J. T., & Hurd, N. M. (2022). Understanding factors associated with intimate disclosure between Black youth and nonparental familial adults. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 32(3), 1210–1227. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12682>
- Rose, A. J., & Asher, S. R. (2017). The social tasks of friendship: Do boys and girls excel in different tasks? *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1), 3–8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12214>
- Rubin, K. H., Bowker, J., & Gazelle, H. (2010). Social withdrawal in childhood and adolescence: Peer relationships and social competence. In K. H. Rubin & R. J. Coplan (Eds.), *The development of shyness and social withdrawal* (pp. 131–156). The Guilford Press.
- Schroeder, K. M., & Liben, L. S. (2021). Felt pressure to conform to cultural gender roles: Correlates and consequences. *Sex Roles*, 84(3), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01155-9>
- Sears, H. A., Graham, J., & Campbell, A. (2009). Adolescent boys' intentions of seeking help from male friends and female friends. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30(6), 738–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2009.02.004>
- Smith, J., & Firth, J. (2011). Qualitative data analysis: The framework approach. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(2), 52–62. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2011.01.18.2.52.c8284>
- Somerville, L. H. (2013). The teenage brain: Sensitivity to social evaluation. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(2), 121–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096372141347651>
- Spangler, P. T., Liu, J., & Hill, C. E. (2012). Consensual qualitative research for simple qualitative data: An introduction to CQR-M. In C. E. Hill (Ed.), *Consensual qualitative research: A practical resource for investigating social science phenomena* (pp. 269–283). American Psychological Association.
- Stern, J. A., Costello, M. A., Kansky, J., Fowler, C., Loeb, E. L., & Allen, J. P. (2021). Here for you: Attachment and the growth of empathic support for friends in adolescence. *Child Development*, 92(6), e1326–e1341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13630>
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. Routledge.
- Szwedo, D. E., Hessel, E. T., Loeb, E. L., Hafen, C. A., & Allen, J. P. (2017). Adolescent support seeking as a path to adult functional independence. *Developmental Psychology*, 53(5), 949–961. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000277>
- US Census Bureau. (1999). *Money income in the United States: Current population reports. Consumer income* (pp. 0–206). US Census Bureau.
- Van Hoorn, J., van Dijk, E., Meuwese, R., Rieffe, C., & Crone, E. A. (2016). Peer influence on prosocial behavior in adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 26(1), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12173>
- Vijayakumar, N., & Pfeifer, J. H. (2020). Self-disclosure during adolescence: Exploring the means, targets, and types of personal exchanges. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 31, 135–140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.08.005>
- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Collins, W. A. (2006). *Autonomy development during adolescence* (pp. 174–204). Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence.