

Males believe discussing problems is a waste of time, study shows

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A new University of Missouri study finds that boys feel that discussing problems is a waste of time.

"For years, popular [psychologists](#) have insisted that boys and men would like to talk about their problems but are held back by fears of [embarrassment](#) or appearing weak," said Amanda J. Rose, associate professor of [psychological sciences](#) in the MU College of Arts and Science. "However, when we asked young people how talking about their problems would make them feel, boys didn't express angst or distress about discussing problems any more than [girls](#). Instead, boys' responses suggest that they just don't see talking about problems to be a particularly useful activity."

Rose and her colleagues conducted four different studies that included surveys and observations of nearly 2,000 children and [adolescents](#). The researchers found that girls had positive expectations for how talking about problems would make them feel, such as expecting to feel cared for, understood and less alone. On the other hand, boys did not endorse some negative expectations more than girls, such as expecting to feel embarrassed, worried about being teased, or bad about not taking care of the problems themselves. Instead, boys reported that talking about problems would make them feel "weird" and like they were "wasting time."

"An implication is that parents should encourage their children to adopt a middle ground when discussing problems. For boys, it would be

helpful to explain that, at least for some problems, some of the time, talking about their problems is not a waste of time. Yet, [parents](#) also should realize that they may be 'barking up the wrong tree' if they think that making boys feel safer will make them confide. Instead, helping boys see some utility in talking about problems may be more effective," Rose said. "On the other hand, many girls are at risk for excessive problem talk, which is linked with [depression](#) and [anxiety](#), so girls should know that talking about problems isn't the only way to cope."

Rose believes that the findings may play into future romantic relationships, as many relationships involve a "pursuit-withdraw cycle" in which one partner (usually the woman) pursues talking about problems while the other (usually the man) withdraws.

"Women may really push their partners to share pent-up worries and concerns because they hold expectations that talking makes people feel better. But their partners may just not be interested and expect that other coping mechanisms will make them feel better. Men may be more likely to think talking about problems will make the problems feel bigger, and engaging in different activities will take their minds off of the problem. Men may just not be coming from the same place as their partners," Rose said.

The paper, "How Girls and Boys Expect Disclosure About Problems Will Make Them Feel: Implications for Friendships," will be published in an upcoming edition of the journal *Child Development*. The study was funded by the National Institute for Mental Health and was co-authored by current and former MU psychology graduate students Rebecca Schwartz-Mette, Rhiannon Smith, Lance Swenson, Wendy Carlson, and Erika Waller and Rose's colleague Steven Asher.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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