

Study finds friends play vital role in teenage wellbeing

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Good friendships are the key to adolescent mental health, according to a new study published by Murdoch University.

Supported by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, the study was conducted by the 'How do you feel' lab, which is part of a larger project examining how young people use technology.

Results showed that adolescents were happier and experienced lower levels of sadness, jealousy and worry, in the company of their friends than with their families or being alone. Online friends were just as important as real friends.

Murdoch PhD student Bep Uink and her team conducted an "in the moment" survey using smart phones with around 100 teenagers, monitoring factors that could affect their emotional state throughout the day.

"Most studies ask people to recall their emotions retrospectively when they answer a survey at the end of the day. We were interested in capturing a real-time snapshot of the students five times a day – how they were feeling exactly at that time, who they were with, and stressors that may have affected their mood," she said.

"During the course of the study we captured a lot of information about minor upsets affecting the adolescents, which included everything from bad marks in an assignment to a fight with a partner."

"We saw that teenagers were less likely to become as emotionally affected by these sorts of stressors if they had a friend with them after the upset. This was particularly marked with the girls involved in the study."

Ms Uink said the study demonstrated the importance of teaching teenagers how to understand and develop healthy friendships.

"Students with strong, healthy friendships are more resilient to the daily stressors of life, and it is important for teenagers to learn how to move forward after a stressor – such as a fight with a friend – and to not withdraw from people," she said.

"By building positive coping styles for emotions and stress, hopefully we can help adolescents to stay on healthy emotional trajectories as they progress into adulthood."

Ms Uink, who finishes her PhD later this year, hopes one day to develop curriculum based interventions in schools for mental health.

The study, entitled "Disadvantaged youth report less negative emotion to minor stressors when with peers: An experience sampling study" was recently published on-line and is forthcoming in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*.

More information: B. N. Uink et al. Disadvantaged youth report less negative emotion to minor stressors when with peers: An experience sampling study, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0165025416626516](https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025416626516)

Provided by Murdoch University

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