

## Upcoming Events:

### **I am Moving, I am Learning**

April 10 & April 24  
Center, Nebraska

### **NELG Science**

May 15 & May 22  
Center, Nebraska

## Peer Relationships & Friendship

**What are peer relationships and friendship?** Peer acceptance represents social status or popularity within a large group, whereas friendships represent relationships based on mutual respect, appreciation, and liking. Early adolescence is a time characterized by friendships that share more common feelings and are more supportive than when children are younger. At the same time, youth who have more mutual friends (i.e., individuals with a similar degree of affection for one another) are more likely to be accepted by their larger peer group.

Peer acceptance and friendships are distinct constructs and contribute to youth development. Peer acceptance has been shown to be associated with greater feelings of belonging and fewer behavioral problems in youth, whereas, friendships have been shown to directly influence feelings of loneliness. However, both peer acceptance and friendships similarly provide youth with self-esteem and improved psychological adjustment.

### **Why are peer relationships and friendship important?**

Peer relationships and friendships become more important as children grow into early adolescents. Research indicates that older youth interact with peers more frequently and longer than do younger youth, both within school and out of school. Developing high quality peer relationships and friendships are important because young people who have difficulties in developing or maintaining friendships are more likely to:

- Engage in aggressive behavior.
- Report low academic achievement and high unemployment later in life.
- Exhibit higher degrees of loneliness and depression.

### **Youth friendships —**

- Are associated with self-esteem and contribute to forming self-image.
- Are related to social competence and enhanced leadership skills.
- Can buffer youth from the negative impact of family troubles.
- Lesson the likelihood of experiencing peer victimization.
- Influence academic achievement.

### **How can I promote the development of peer relationships and friendship?**

Some concrete ways to promote a high quality of peer relationships/friendships in youth include—

- Nurturing social skills including anger management, fairness, and sensitivity.
- Allowing youth to develop companionship skills through literature, sports, games, and music.
- Letting youth know and practice how to express their thoughts and emotions in socially acceptable ways.
- Encourage young people to take the perspective of others.
- Teaching youth the importance of self-disclosure and responsive listening skills.
- Giving opportunities for youths to develop empathy.
- Helping youth develop the skills to resolve conflict and disagreements effectively.
- Providing youth with opportunities for peer tutoring.
- Being prepared to talk with youth about their peers/friends whenever they have trouble with their peers/friends.

Source: Jeong Jin Yu, MS; Karen Hoffman Tepper, Ph.D.; Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D., University of Arizona