

Science AMA Series: This is Dr. Jenna Watling Neal, Dr. Emily Durbin, Allison Gornik, & Sharon Lo, psychologists at Michigan State University. We're here to discuss how preschool kids' social networks shape their personalities & vice versa. Ask us anything!

Kidspersonalities¹andr/ScienceAMAs¹

¹Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

Abstract

Hello Reddit! We are a team of researchers at Michigan State University who recently published a paper in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology examining how preschool kids' social networks and personalities affect each other over the course of a school year. Here is the link to our study abstract: <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2017-04563-001/> Emily is an associate professor in social psychology and Allison and Sharon are both graduate students in clinical psychology. They all study the development of kids' personalities and emotions. Jenna is an associate professor in community psychology who studies kids' social networks in schools. We decided to put our heads together to learn more about how kids' personalities and social networks influence each other. In a nutshell, we found that some aspects of kids' personalities (e.g., displays of positive emotion, ability to regulate behavior) are shaped by the playmates in their networks. However, we also found that some aspects of kids' personalities can shape their networks too. The results of our paper was recently featured on Reddit and you guys had a lot to say about it!: https://www.reddit.com/r/science/comments/5s73mt/when_preschoolers_spend_time_around_one_another/ We'd love to answer any questions you have about our study. We'd be happy to chat about the theories behind our work, our observational methods, the analyses we used, or what we found. We'd also be happy to answer more general questions about kids' personality development or kids' social networks. Or, if you are just interested in what it's like to be a psychology professor or graduate student, ask away! If you'd like to see the full study, you can request it here: <http://psychology.msu.edu/Faculty/FacultyMember.aspx?netid=jneal> Go to the following citation, hit the request a copy button, and enter your email to have the paper automatically send to your inbox: Neal, J.W., Durbin, C.E., Gornik, A.E., & Lo, S.L. (in press). Co-development of preschoolers' temperament traits and social play networks over an entire school year. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. We will be back at 4 pm ET to answer you questions!

[REDDIT](#)

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KIDS_PERSONALITIES [R/SCIENCE](#)

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https://www.reddit.com/r/science/comments/5s73mt/when_preschoolers_spend_time_around_one_another/

We'd love to answer any questions you have about our study. We'd be happy to chat about the theories behind our work, our observational methods, the analyses we used, or what we found. We'd also be happy to answer more general questions about kids' personality development or kids' social networks. Or, if you are just interested in what it's like to be a psychology professor or graduate student, ask away!

If you'd like to see the full study, you can request it here: <http://psychology.msu.edu/Faculty/FacultyMember.aspx?netid=jneal>

Go to the following citation, hit the request a copy button, and enter your email to have the paper automatically send to your inbox: Neal, J.W., Durbin, C.E., Gornik, A.E., & Lo, S.L. (in press). Co-development of preschoolers' temperament traits and social play networks over an entire school year. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

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CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:
March 02, 2017

DOI:
10.15200/winn.148837.79870

ARCHIVED:

As a soon-to-be parent, what does your study suggest is better for me to do for my child:

be highly involved in cultivating my child's friend group, cutting out negative influences by intrusive means (i.e. forbidding contact); or teaching my child that some people are good role models and some people are bad, and letting them make the determination who they should interact with.

Thanks,

[markscomputer](#)

March 01, 2017

CITATION:
Kids_Personalities , r/Science , Science AMA Series: This is Dr. Jenna Watling Neal, Dr. Emily Durbin, Allison Gornik, & Sharon Lo, psychologists at Michigan State University. We're here to discuss how preschool kids' social networks shape their personalities & vice versa. Ask us anything!, *The Winnower* 4:e148837.79870 , 2017 , DOI: [10.15200/winn.148837.79870](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.148837.79870)

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Our study focused on kids' social play interactions in their preschool classrooms. As a parent, it would be pretty difficult to intervene and prevent your child from playing with other kids in the classroom. Nor would this necessarily be desirable as it is important for young children to learn how to gain entry into play relationships with their peers! However, teaching your kids about good role models could be helpful.

It's important to remember that our study did not necessarily find that kids' peers have a negative influence on personality. We simply found that kids tend to become more similar to their peers in terms of their displays of positive emotion and their regulation of behavior.

Hello Dr. Neal, Dr. Durbin, Allison and Sharon. Thanks for taking the time to come here and talk about your work. I have a couple of questions I was hoping you would answer.

I read your abstract and was wondering, are Positive Emotionality (PE) and Negative Emotionality (NE) inversely related? Specifically, if one child has a high PE score, will they have a low NE? Or might a child have both a high PE and NE if they have, using layman's terms, mood swings?

Did you observe that either PE or NE had a stronger effect in 'converting' students? Or were they about equal in strength?

What is Effortful Control (EC)? I don't have a good grasp of what that means as a metric.

[PapaNachos](#)

Hello! PE and NE are not inversely related to one another - a child's level of one trait was mostly unrelated to their level of the other. So, children could be any combination of low, average, or high on each of the 2 traits. A child who happens to be high on both PE and NE would be a more 'emotionally intense' child - someone who exhibits strong emotional reactions of all varieties. In terms of the effects of peers' traits on others' traits, children's traits were not influenced by their friends' levels of NE. They were influenced by PE (kids' PE levels changed over the course of the year to become more similar to their friends' level of PE). EC refers to the child's level of attention, compliance, playfulness, and (lack of) impulsivity; kids high on EC are cautious, careful, playful, engaged in activities, and attentive. Kids who are low are impulsive, have difficulty sustaining attention, and are more noncompliant.

Hi. Thanks for doing this AMA.

What can (or what should) parents do to mitigate the negative influences of peers?

Also, longer personal questions to follow: feel free to skip these.

My older son is 2.5 years old, younger one is 1 year old.

The older son gets quite aggressive with the younger one, which I guess is not entirely unexpected but it kind of terrifies me. He will push over the young one, and sometimes hit him with things. The other day he full force whipped him in the face with an empty bag of freezer chicken nuggets. If that wasn't an empty plastic bag, it could have done some serious damage. I'm at my wits end trying to find tactics to reduce the aggression. The best I can do is try to keep them separated as much as possible unless they are under active supervision and within arms' reach. We also try to make sure the older son gets dedicated mommy/daddy time. Any tips?

Also, both kids haven't really been socialized with larger groups of strangers, other than visits to the park or play places (which are frequent, almost daily, but he's still under direct supervision of family), and family gatherings. I'm a little nervous that they need more socialization, but I really can't afford something like daycare or camp. The older one is almost potty trained, then he can join a daycare at my wife's place of work for two days a week for free. Is waiting so long a problem? Are there good low

cost options to get such socialization?

[panfist](#)

Great question. If only we knew what parents could do to mitigate the negative influences of peers!

Unfortunately, the focus of our study was not on investigating methods to decrease negative influences of peers, so we do not have evidence to support techniques that may be helpful in this domain. However, what our study does speak to is the power of children's peer relationships. Regardless of what parents may try to enforce, there is little control that parents have in the school setting in terms of the peers they encounter at all stages of development. Fortunately, our study also found that traits associated with negative emotionality were not "contagious", but rather children who displayed more negative emotionality were simply less likely to form social bonds with others (i.e., they were less likely to be chosen as a playmate).

The best recommended and evidence-based technique for the aggressive behaviors you are describing is positive reinforcement for behaviors you want to see (i.e., prosocial behaviors, non-aggressive behaviors). There are some good workbooks that you can access such as Barkley's Defiant Child and the Strong-Willed Child. It is wonderful that you are trying to implement dedicated mommy/daddy time, as it is often the case that displays of aggressive behavior serve as a function to gain rewards from one's environment - the most powerful reward for your son is your attention!

We don't believe there is any data currently to suggest that waiting until your son is older for preschool is problematic. Some good low cost options to get socialization could be researching some local community gatherings and play groups!

Hi and thanks for doing this AMA! It is fascinating that traits like extroversion were impacted, which I always thought was fairly set. It is also fascinating that the impact seems to be mostly unidirectional where kids who were more extroverted and hard working seem to encourage playmates to be the same, but anxious and easily frustrated ones didn't create "contagious" traits.

How does this change the standard view in psych regarding the extroversion/introversion trait as well as the influence of networks? Was it a big surprise or were there already studies suggesting this might be the case?

[firedrops](#)

We agree that this finding was very fascinating! Currently, there is literature to suggest that there stability in traits like extraversion over time. However, there is also substantial research to support that situations and experiences also mold traits. One example of this is in young adulthood (known as the maturation principle), where conscientiousness increases and neuroticism decreases on average compared to adolescence. When we enter a new social environment, we get social feedback on the traits we display of what is valued and not valued in that environment, sometimes in a lasting way. For the present study, it is the first time this phenomenon has been observed in young children.

What role do siblings (especially those close in age) play in your study's construct of the child's social network?

[misterblade](#)

Unfortunately we are unable to answer this question as we did not investigate the role of siblings in the present study; rather, we investigated the child's social network in the school setting.

My daughter is 7 and has ADHD and anxiety. She has emotional outbursts at school which are causing her to fall behind and other children to ostracize her this year. Is there any advice you can offer to help her control the outbursts and socialize with classmates who are beginning to pick on her? The school doesn't seem to want to deal with her and we are constantly fighting to work with them to give her the best school experience we can. Thanks!

[Sytira](#)

Our study doesn't have much to offer wrt how to help children regulate their emotions and socialize, but our findings are consistent with the idea that kids who have more intense negative emotions may have more difficulty developing friendships at school. Our participants were somewhat younger than your daughter, so we didn't observe some of what she is experiencing (getting picked on by peers), because that is less common among 3- to 5-year-olds. Other studies of peer relationships and kids' emotional health suggest that a child's number of friends is less important than having 1 or 2 close friends in whom the child can confide and with whom they can spend time. These friends might also come from outside of the classroom. So it might be useful to think about cultivating 1 or 2 solid relationships with peers.

How long lasting are the effects of the pre-school time? I hear about the whole concept of "formative years" being important, but this could all be dated urban mythology.

[nate](#)

Yes, there has been quite a lot of 'branding' of 0-5 years being formative in human development, and some of that talk has gone beyond the scientific data. We do know that some aspects of development that are important in those years - such as the development of language, attachment relationships, early temperament, and social skills - are important predictors of how kids fare later in life. So in that sense, the early years are important in that they presage individual differences in later outcomes we care about. But, there seem to be few developmental achievements (aside from the special case of language development) for which we can't 'make up for' early lags with influences that happen later in life. Depending on how serious the lags are, 'recovery' from disadvantage earlier in life may be more or less incomplete, but there is good evidence that learning and development continues well after the early years of life.

What factors cause children to enter preschool with the emotionality traits you outline (positive emotionality, negative emotionality, effortful control)?

Obviously the general answer is "some combination of nature and nurture"... but have developmental/social psychologists been able to get more specific than that?

(I would venture a guess that your paper addresses this question, but even on my university's network I can only get the abstract)

[orihhc](#)

Your instincts are right - some combination of nature & nurture explain kids' relative levels of these 3 traits relative to peers. High versus low levels of these traits are all definitely influenced by genes (behavior genetic studies demonstrate this), but the environment is also important (also shown by those same studies). That said, these 3 traits change within and across children over time as well. Most kids decrease on their level of NE and increase on their level of EC over childhood as they mature. There is evidence that some of these changes are attributable to developmental contexts (we typically provide kids with environments that help them develop these skills and we send messages that we expect more mature behaviors, and most kids rise to the occasion). For older kids (e.g.,

adolescents and young adults), there is evidence that stability in traits (the part that stays the same over time) is more attributable to genetic influences and that change is more linked to environmental influences.

You talk about social play relationships being very important for this sort of infectious personality sharing. If I could ask you to speculate, do you think that long-term non-play relationships could have the same effect? For instance pairing children up to work on schoolwork together, and having them always pair with the same child throughout a year.

[rslake](#)

Great question! While we only explored social play relationships in our study, it would be interesting to explore the effects of other types of relationships like collaboration on school work in future studies. We imagine that these other types of relationships may also play a role in personality development and social status.

For example, there are some interesting studies from the Netherlands that suggest that kids tend to become more favorable toward peers that they sit near over time.

What is your opinion on children who do not attend pre-school (for example if they are with a parent or grandparent all day)? Do you feel that the socialization they receive in pre-school is important to cultivating social intelligence, or are there other ways that kids that stay at home can benefit?

[ZeneParker](#)

Preschool definitely provides opportunities for kids to socialize with peers and learn important social skills (like gaining entry into peer playgroups). However, parents and grandparents can expose children who do not attend preschool to these opportunities in other contexts (e.g., parks, playdates)

We are interested in learning more about the role of preschool attendance in kids' peer relationship formation. In our study, we have some kids that attended school for a half-day and some kids that attended school for a full-day. As a follow-up to this study, we are hoping to explore whether length of time in preschool affects kids relationship formation with peers. This would help answer the question of whether preschool attendance plays a role in kids' socialization.

I've worked with kids for 7 years, and in almost every large group I get there are loners. Sometimes they just enjoy being on their own and don't care what others think, and sometimes they are outcast. How can I make it easier for these kids without being overbearing or even damaging to the social structure?

For example; I have one kid who is less than four and fixates on the toy cars every week. He's particularly obsessed with the numbers on them, and often lines them up in order from least to greatest and asks me to double check his work to make sure they're in order. There have been several times that another kid would try to play and crash his car into the line, and the first kid is just devastated. How should I handle this? I see a ton of intelligence for his age, so it's not any kind of disability, possibly somewhere on the autism spectrum though. I'm not sure. I want to encourage him to learn and play how he wants, but I often have 30-40 kids in a room and it's chaotic to say the least.

[_Wyse_](#)

It sounds like you're handling so much! It's difficult to monitor specific children's interactions with that many students around, and it's also difficult to provide suggestions that speak to just one child. This

study specifically looked at social play-- when two children or more children had chosen, during free play periods, to play together. It found that children were more likely to form friendships with other children who had similar levels of positive emotionality (so, similar levels of approaching, smiling, sociability, etc.), so one suggestion might be to try to pair the children who struggle more to be included with other children who have similar levels of these qualities; however, because we didn't manipulate the social networks in our study, this idea is tentative.

Hi there

Interesting study - are you going to attempt some (ethical) manipulation in further to see if such findings are possible to control?

Or just in general what are your future research plans?

[ThomasEdmund84](#)

Thanks for your interest in our study! We do not have any current plans for an intervention that would involve manipulating kids' social networks. However, we are interested in exploring some natural manipulations in our existing data. Some of the kids in our study attended school half-time and others attended school full-time. We are interested in exploring whether the length of time they spend in preschool with peers each day impacts their relationship formation and their personality development.

Hello,

Thank you for taking time out of your day to do this ama. I was wondering how much can a parents social behaviors affect a child's social behavior? Is it possible for caregivers to scaffold *positive* social behaviors, or is it all innate?

[analsaurus](#)

It is definitely not all innate. Although temperament traits have an important genetic basis and traits can influence how easily children acquire social skills, skills are just that - they can (and in many cases, must be, learned). We do know that there are positive correlations between children's social adjustment and broad markers of similar things in their parents - that is consistent with both genetic and environmental influences, so it doesn't tell us whether parents' explicit teaching explains this relationship. There are interventions that have been developed to foster children's social skills and those have beneficial results, so that suggests that modeling and teaching are effective means of increasing children's positive social behaviors.

Hi folks

Thanks for doing this AMA.

This is less scientific and more a "perspective on human development" question, so please feel free to share opinions or experience based info rather than cites.

How would the theories and ideas underlying your work extend/apply (or fail to do so) in cultures where young children are primarily raised with family or extended family? Even assuming some level of non family social interactions, surely these might be less frequent or consistent vs a pre school environment?

Thanks!

[explodingbarrels](#)

Interesting question! I am not aware of any studies similar to ours conducted in a cultural context in which children's peer networks are limited to kin. In those settings, children's options for peers will be limited to children who share some genetic relationship to them, and therefore, the children will be more similar to them in terms of temperament than they would be in a setting in which kids are interacting with peers from other families. It would be cool to see whether the same effects we observed (kids choosing friends who are similar to them on some traits) would hold when the kids were (on average, overall) more similar to one another in terms of their temperament.

Hello and thank you for doing this AMA!

I have a question with regards to how this study could be used to enact change. Now that we know that Negative Emotionality (NE) can affect child behavior, can these data be used to drive how preschool teachers act and operate during the day? Is there a way to counteract this NE through class exercises or different styles of play?

[rseasmith](#)

Great question! In our study, we found that kids who were high on NE developed fewer friendship ties with peers in the classroom. We did not find that the NE level of one's friends changed your own level of NE over the school year. One concern for educators might be how to facilitate the development of friendships for kids who are higher in NE. Our study doesn't show that the high NE kids are having difficulty because of their smaller number of friendship ties because we didn't measure that. Some of those kids might be satisfied with a smaller number of friendships (you could imagine that the anxious, shyer children might prefer a smaller network of friends). If you were concerned about the number of friendship ties for kids with high NE, 2 things could be tested to see if they work: 1) trying to reduce children's NE through other methods to see if that changed their peer networks; 2) identifying the activities or characteristics of the friends of high NE kids to determine what about those activities or friends seemed to facilitate positive interactions.

Thank you for doing this AMA! Can you suggest any guidelines to help a child strengthen their confidence & sense of self, and be less susceptible to their social networks?

For context: my 6 year old is diagnosed dyslexic. From the time she first started learning letters and sight words in preschool, it was obvious that there was a difference in her ability to retain the information she was learning about visual language (although her vocabulary is way above age/grade level). She's an incredibly bright child, and a battery of neuropsych testing shows that her reading ability does not jive with her level of intelligence, but what she's internalized through watching her peers grasp these things with so much relative ease is "I'm stupid", "I can't do that". How do we, as her parents, help her realize that isn't the case?

[dontcallmemonica](#)

Great question. Our study does not directly your question directly, so we will reference another interesting research area in psychology that might answer your question known as mindset (<http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/>). Mindset is a concept investigated by Dr. Carol Dweck at Stanford University. The basic premise is that children who are encouraged to treat failures and mistakes as challenges, and to see traits as mutable/changeable experience better academic and social-emotional outcomes later in life. It is thought that children who develop (and have environments that foster) more growth mindset (the belief that basic abilities can be changed through hard work and

dedication) also develop higher confidence and sense of self.

My Alma Mater! Go Green!

How do you think the study findings will be affected by replication?

How do you control for all of the variables involved? It seems like a large task to take on.

[Young_Zaphod](#)

Go White! We were working with a fairly small, demographically homogenous sample of kids in one preschool so it is possible that findings would be different in a different sample or different type of preschool. Context always matters!

To control for variables in our study: We used a special type of model called a stochastic actor based model implemented in the SIENA program for R. This model, developed by Tom Snijders and colleagues, allowed us to longitudinally assess changes in kids' networks and changes in kids' personalities over time. These models are powerful from distinguishing kids' selection of similar peers as friends from the influence of peers on kids' personalities.

How interesting!

Question coming from the parent of an only child: Does having (or not having) siblings impact the importance/influence of his social network in preschool? A child with siblings will also have social relationships with other kids in his or her household--but as an only child, kids like my son get their only kid-to-kid interactions with the kinds of networks you study.

[FeatofClay](#)

Hi FeatofClay! Unfortunately, we did not collect data on how many siblings the children in our sample have. Therefore, we weren't able to assess the effects of number of siblings on children's social networks in our particular study.

Hi! Thanks for doing this!

I have two strong-willed, independent children. It's been a struggle for us to watch our oldest develop friendships in school. she has struggled since starting in preschool. Now that's she's in kindergarten the challenge has only increased. We are trying to mold her behavior since she will remain with these kids through highschool. Our problem is that she doesn't seem to care about forming a bond with any one person, she just wants everyone to do what she wants to do all the time which has led to conflicts with other kids. She often ends up alone because no one wants to play with her, or because she would rather be alone than do something that wasn't her idea. It makes me incredibly angry.

I know she's young, and I know these are qualities that will help as she ages- but do you have any advice on how I can get it through her head that she is not the center of the universe and that she needs to learn to do what other people want sometimes...or do I have to let her crash and burn?

I've been working closely with her teacher and we have started a behavior chart, but I feel like this has generated surface level, insincere behavior, and that she does it for reward.

[uptoolatemama](#)

Great question! It's definitely difficult to know how to encourage kids to play and connect with others in

a prosocial way, and a lot of those aspects come with more developmental maturity; it's much easier for adults to perspective-take than kindergartners!

There is quite a bit of research evidence behind well-implemented behavior charts that provide positive reinforcement for agreed-upon behaviors. The goal here is to provide incentives to create changes in behaviors that will eventually become more normal. Behavior charts and positive reinforcement are great for motivation; think about food or drink punch-cards for adults (where you get 1 free at the end), or prizes we might give ourselves for completing tasks or going to the gym.

It might also help to check out evidence-based books like *Defiant Child* by Russell Barkley (for compliance and lowering defiant behaviors) or *You Are A Social Detective* by Michelle Winner (for teaching kids about social cues) as well!

I have an extremely social 1.5 year old. He immediately introduces himself to everyone and he'll try to play with new kids but if they shoot him down he's basically just like "okay whatever" and runs off to play alone. He shares well, he never hits anyone, he's rarely fussy (unless teething/sleepy). We have been considering homeschooling because we believe we could provide him with a more quality education than our local elementary but I worry that it might impact him negatively about on a social level. Do people overstate the social impact of homeschooling? My boy seems so charismatic and social and I'd hate to do that damage.

[WeakSleep15](#)

Unfortunately, our study can't answer this question. He sounds like a child who is high on PE and low on NE, which is generally associated with positive social adjustment. I am not aware of any studies that have compared children who are homeschooled versus not on social adjustment wherein the researchers have accounted for the many factors that might differentiate the 2 groups and could account for any differences observed between them. Families who choose homeschooling versus those who choose other avenues may differ on other factors that impact children's social adjustment. That said, PE/extraversion in children tends to have fairly high stability over time (kids who are high on PE in the preschool years tend to be high on this dimension when measured later in childhood).

I spend a lot of my time counselling parents, teachers, and "concerned adults" that social media is a vast and daunting place but it is also existing as the "social norm" for kids, and each generation gets to define it's new normal.

For all the parents out there that start with the hypothesis that "social media is bad", what is one preconception out there that you wish could be redefined?

[DijonPepperberry](#)

Unfortunately, our study can't bring anything to bear on this question. We studied social networks as defined by the observed social play relationships btw children in preschool classrooms, not children's use of social media. Thanks.

How young do you think signs of an introvert personality can show up? My son is 20 months and appears to be very introverted and prefers to play alone. I'm trying to encourage him to play with other children to boost his social and communication skills but so far he seems pretty uncomfortable. Any advice on how to encourage an introverted small child to be more social without upsetting them?

[doyouhavehiminblonde](#)

Good question. Early predictors of later traits can show up as early as the toddlerhood years, but the stability of traits (how well a child's standing on a trait predicts where they will be on that trait later in life) is higher in the preschool years than in infancy or toddlerhood. This means that the clues we get about temperament in infancy and toddlerhood are weaker indicators of kids' later traits than are measures we take during the preschool and early elementary years. We do know that kids who are inhibited (reticent, shy, tend to be fearful of novelty) are more likely to be shy and anxious later in childhood, although many inhibited toddlers and preschoolers change considerably over the ensuing years and are no longer anxious or reticent later in childhood. For kids who have been inhibited for several years, there is evidence that if parents are overprotective (e.g., they tend to shelter their child from the situations they find anxiety-provoking), kids tend to remain more inhibited. By contrast, if the parents encourage the child to approach feared situations (in a supportive way), that those children are more likely to decline in their level of inhibition over time.

Now I have been considering homeschooling because we believe we could provide insight pertaining to the social impact of homeschooling?

[sir_x2yz](#)

Sounds interesting. Unfortunately our study did not investigate the social impact of homeschooling, so we are unable to answer your question.

Do you think in the near future homeschooling all kids has merit?

They will still spend time together in their spare time but the educational material will all be all on line and more up to date and parents would be more involved with their kids learning and the content of the material.

[broeklien](#)

Also an interesting question. Unfortunately our study did not investigate the social impact of homeschooling, so we are unable to answer your question.

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[broeklien](#)

Unfortunately, our study can't speak to the effect this might have-- lots of variables to consider (especially since research on homeschooled children may or may not continue to apply, since it would mean that all children would be in the same situation, as opposed to now where there might be differences, both pre-existing and cultivated, between children who are homeschooled vs. not homeschooled).

When teaching my about to be four year old about other children's behavior, we usually say things like "different people have different rules at home." Is that the most positive way to get the message across that "it doesn't matter what your friends are doing because we say no?"

Also, she has a friend she likes to play with that cries if our daughter doesn't play with her but also hits and sets poor authority defiance examples. We try not to say "don't play with her" and instead say "if it bothers you play with someone else." Is there a positive way to get our daughter to make better choices about friendships? She has many better options for company.

[thislooksprettyfun](#)

Thanks for the question. Our study doesn't show how adults' reactions to peer behaviors influence children's choices about their friendships. It does show that these choices are partially driven by kids' temperament traits (they tend to select other kids whose level of PE is similar to theirs, for example). Our study isn't able to say what other things are driving kids' choices of friends, although we know from other studies that shared interests are important. So, kids may maintain interactions with peers who are not always prosocial if there are other benefits to the relationship (e.g., playing with toys they both like). As children age, they tend to evaluate the quality of their friendships less on shared interests & more on the way those relationships support them & make them feel.

Is there any correlation in your findings between the intelligence of a child's social networks or lack thereof and temperament traits? Specifically children with a mental disability having a positive or negative effect on another child's development.

[ClassicCarLife](#)

Hi ClassicCarLife. In our study, we did not assess the intelligence or disability status of the kids in our sample so we are unable to assess whether there is an association between the intelligence of peers in kids' networks and their personality traits.

I am actually very curious how you guys feel about charter schools. I know one of the criticisms people have is that the schools could end up being closed during the school year (sometimes with little to no warning). How could that affect kids development having their educational location, peer group, and curriculum with little to no notice? I know this is probably a bit off topic but I have always wondered what child psychologists think on this issue.

[narwhilian](#)

Hi Narwhilian!

While our particular study doesn't have implications for understanding charter schools, there is some research that suggests some potential negative impacts of charter schools on education. For example, there are some positive elements of sending kids to local public schools for neighborhood cohesion, sense of community, and community satisfaction. There is also some speculation that charter schools might increase educational inequality.

Hi guys, glad to see my home university doing an AMA!

Though not directly related to your research, I was wondering if you could provide insight pertaining to the fact that many studies in psychology fail to replicate. This has been troubling the field lately.

Thank you!!

[Guestry](#)

Go Spartans!

Yes...the failure of psychological studies to replicate is certainly troubling the field lately. It is important for researchers to provide as much information as possible about their samples, methods, and measurement to ensure that others can replicate and build on existing studies.

For our study, we suspect that the demographics of our sample and the context of the preschool may play a role in the findings. Therefore, it will be important for others to replicate these findings with different samples and in different settings.

does teaching a kid to defend himself against bullying is better than simply victimizing him and making him tell on everyone for the slightest criticism?

[foxyedman23](#)

Hi FoxEyedMan23. Our study doesn't provide any information about bullying. However, there are some researchers who have explored the effects of active bystanders on bullying. It might be best to teach your child to intervene on behalf of others when he or she sees bullying taking place. This tends to reduce the amount of bullying in a school or classroom.

Just out of my curiosity, what is a panic disorder and are there any physiological causes to it? If not, what can cause it?

[GEEZUS_956](#)

There are a lot of helpful resources online to answer your question. The National Institute for Mental Health has a helpful summary about panic disorder:
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/panic-disorder-when-fear-overwhelms/index.shtml>

Hello, and thanks for the AMA. One quick question that I have been curious about for some years now, and who better to ask than psychologists at MSU? How much does bullying really affect a child's mind? I guess you could say I was "bullied" in elementary school, but I still feel like I turned out "normal."

And Go Green!

[ferrar21](#)

Go White!

We're sorry to hear that you were bullied as a child.

Although this particular study doesn't address bullying, there are a lot of studies that suggest that children who are victims of bullying can suffer negative social and psychological consequences. For example, kids who are bullied often experience more social isolation over time and also tend to exhibit more internalizing problems like depression.

However, there are lots of protective factors that can offset the negative consequences of bullying. Some work suggests that teacher practices (e.g., high levels of emotional support) can offset some of the negative consequences of bullying. Many kids are also resilient and experience positive outcomes despite bullying.