

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Emotion Regulation, Mental Health, and Social Wellbeing in a Young Adolescent Sample: A Concurrent and Longitudinal Investigation

Chervonsky, E., & Hunt, C. (2019). Emotion regulation, mental health, and social wellbeing in a young adolescent sample: A concurrent and longitudinal investigation. *Emotion, 19*(2), 270-282. doi:10.1037/emo0000432

SUMMARY: Emotion regulation strategies have important implications for social and psychological well-being. This study investigated the role of two emotion regulation strategies, reappraisal and suppression, in the social adjustment of youth. The findings indicated that different emotional regulation strategies were related to some aspects of social adjustment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth who reported higher levels of family satisfaction tended to use reappraisal more frequently and suppression less frequently; however, these associations did not sustain into late adolescence.
- Reappraisal was not associated with satisfaction in friendship, but emotional suppression was associated with lower satisfaction in friendship among boys.
- The use of emotion regulation strategies, such as greater suppression use, was associated with social well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Create activities that teach healthy emotion regulation strategies
- Identify ways to enhance positive relationships with youth to support their social functioning

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Provide education for youth and their families about the potential consequences of poor emotion regulation skills
- Host trainings for professionals who work with youth about the differences between healthy and unhealthy emotion regulation strategies

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Encourage the development of youth programs that educate youth on emotion regulation strategies to improve mental health
- Recommend education of professionals who work with and on behalf of youth on the effects of emotion regulation strategies on positive youth development

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from five high schools across urban and semi-rural communities in Sydney, Australia.
- Participants completed questionnaires to measure emotion regulation, depression, anxiety, bullying, and life satisfaction. One year later, the participants completed the same questionnaires.
- Analyses examined relationships between two emotional regulation strategies (reappraisal and suppression) and three social outcomes: peer victimization, friendship satisfaction, and family satisfaction. Potential gender differences in these relationships were also examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 262 Grade 7 students completed the initial assessment and their ages ranged from 11 to 13 years old ($M=11.97$, $SD=0.35$). Gender breakdown of initial assessment was not provided.
- One year later, 232 of these students completed the follow-up assessment. The sample included 148 female and 84 male students and their ages ranged from 12 to 14 years old ($M=12.90$, $SD=0.43$).
- Race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of the sample were not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- The length of time between the two test phases may have limited the observable short-term effects of the regulation strategies. The emotion regulation strategies may be more pronounced during a shorter or longer time length.
- The study did not assess whether the use of reappraisal or suppression was used during specific types of social interactions; the general use of these strategies was reported instead.
- The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire used was designed for use in adults instead of youth. The language used may have not been fully understood by the youth which could have impacted the findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Investigate the associations between emotion regulation strategies and social outcomes within a shorter time period between assessments
- Expand research to other emotion regulation strategies, such as avoidance, acceptance, and attention redirection, to investigate other youth social interactions
- Utilize a questionnaire that differentiates the categories of emotional expression for individuals who are emotionally inexpressive and emotionally suppressive

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