

# Does regulating your emotions make you a better friend?

## Examining the correlation between teen's self-reported emotional regulation and peer conflict.

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### Introduction

“**Emotional regulation**” is the ability to manage emotional experience and expression (Van Lissa et al., 2023). The ability to regulate emotions healthily is crucial to the mental health and social development of adolescents. When an individual regulates their emotions unhealthily, they are at risk of experiencing “emotional dysregulation” (Van Lissa et al., 2023).

“**Emotional reactivity**” is the expression of emotional dysregulation in which adolescents are unable to calm themselves when upset or experiencing stress (Cook et al., 2018). Emotional reactivity has the potential to cause interpersonal stress in relationships, which is important to consider during adolescence, a period where friendships and romantic relationships become especially salient.

The following **hypotheses** were developed by understanding that controlling emotions and expressing them in a healthy, socially acceptable manner is important to building strong interpersonal relationships:

- Higher emotional regulation will be associated with less peer conflict.
- Higher emotional reactivity will be associated with more peer conflict.

### Methods

We used self-reported questionnaire data from a longitudinal study on adolescents to find the correlation between emotional regulation and emotional reactivity and peer conflict. The following measures were used:

**Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):** a 10-item questionnaire with related to two regulatory processes reported on a 5-point scale (Gross et al., 2003)

- **Reappraisal** scale: questions regarding cognitive change in reframing a situation to change its emotional impact
- **Suppression** scale: questions regarding the inhibition of behavior that expresses emotions

**Emotion Reactivity Scale (ERS): Arousal/Intensity Subscale:** an 8-item questionnaire related to the intensity of emotions reported on a 5-point scale (Nock et al., 2008)

**Peer Conflict (PC):** an 8-item questionnaire related to the participant's conflicts within their friendships reported on a 5-point scale (Ruiz et al., 1998)

### Results

Figure 1: Relationship between Emotional Reactivity and Peer Conflict

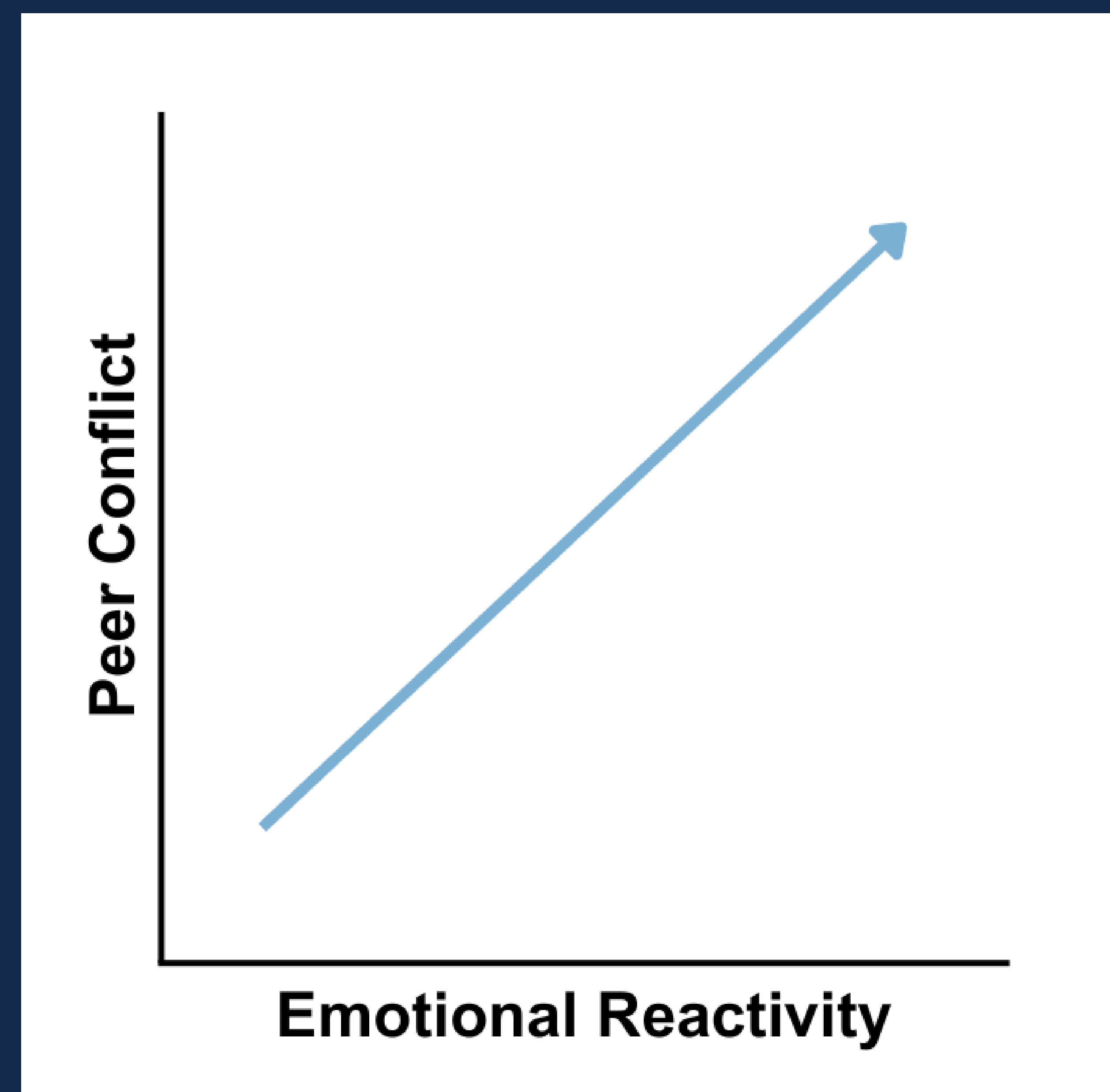


Table 1: *t*-test Results Comparing Emotional Regulation and Emotional Reactivity to Peer Conflict

Logistic Parameter	High Peer Conflict		Low Peer Conflict		<i>t</i> (143)	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
ERQ Reappraisal	1.63	0.69	1.62	0.58	0.098	0.916	97
ERQ Suppression	1.69	0.68	1.56	0.58	1.050	0.834	97
<b>ERS</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>2.671</b>	<b>0.034</b>	<b>141</b>

The 67 participants who reported high peer conflict ( $M=1.78$ ,  $SD=0.69$ ) compared to the 76 participants who reported low peer conflict ( $M=1.50$ ,  $SD=0.54$ ) demonstrated significantly higher emotional reactivity,  $t(143)=2.671$ ,  $p=0.034$ .

No significant correlation was found between peer conflict and both emotion regulation subscales.

### Discussion

The results of our study show a significant positive correlation between emotional reactivity and peer conflict, but no significant correlation between emotional regulation and peer conflict. These findings suggest that the outward expression of emotions may be more prevalent in fostering friendship than controlling emotion.

This correlation is consistent with our hypothesis and prior research on children as well. In children, emotionally reactive behavior can lead to social rejection of the child by their peers (Calkins et al., 1999). Additionally, emotional reactivity is transmitted from familial relationships to platonic and romantic relationships with peers (Cook et al., 2018). Our research supports the consensus within the current literature that emotionally reactive individuals may have difficulty building and fostering friendships.

We initially hypothesized that adolescents who reported a high ability to regulate their emotions would experience less conflict with their friends, however, the data does not support this hypothesis. Previous research states that emotional regulation, specifically reappraisal, has a moderating effect on emotional reactivity (Shapero et al., 2016). More research needs to be done on how regulation can impact adolescents' interpersonal relationships through moderation of emotional reactivity. Since this study was conducted using self-reported data, it is possible that the adolescent participants were completely thoughtful and self-aware of their emotions and regulation abilities. Emotional regulation skills develop throughout adolescence differentially for each individual (Young et al., 2019). Individual differences are difficult to identify and account for, so future research should aim to discover the specific factors in adolescence that impact the development of these skills.

### References

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