**International Friendship Day: Friendships are a necessity and a catalyst for healthy adolescent development**

*By Prof Eugene Lee Davids is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, where his research delves into the critical area of health decision-making among adolescents and emerging adults.*

Adolescence is synonymous with rapid cognitive, physical and psychosocial growth. During this crucial developmental phase, the role of friendships cannot be overstated.

Every year on July 30, the world celebrates International Friendship Day and I’d like to highlight the importance of friendships within the context of adolescent development. During this developmental phase, friendship allows young people to recognise the importance of connection and relatedness, which profoundly impacts and shapes adolescent development.

Friendships are essential for the relational well-being of adolescents.

During this phase, friendships extend beyond social interactions. They are the cornerstone of emotional health and development and assist young people in navigating the complexities of decision-making. The quality of friendships, when based on strong and supportive connections, can yield improved self-esteem, mental health and academic performance.

Friends provide opportunities for support such as offering advice, showing empathy and being a sounding board for the many ideas and decisions young people face.

When the quality of the friendship promotes positive outcomes, it yields developmentally appropriate forms of decision-making. However, we cannot dismiss the potential of less desirable outcomes too.

Many view the role of friendships as not being important when considering adolescent development and decision-making, but I view friendships as central to the decision-making of adolescents. This view is informed by the perspective that part of the healthy social development of adolescents is based on forming friendships that promote a sense of belonging and support. The friendships established help adolescents learn important social skills, which include building self-esteem, nurturing conflict-resolution skills and developing empathy. These friendships also help navigate peer influences that inform positive decision-making and aid healthy development. The role of friends and peer influence is seen when adolescents often seek the opinions or views of their friends before making a decision.

Friends can be role models who promote adaptive forms of decision-making. When friendships are based on positive relationships that foster a sense of belonging, autonomy and competence, often the outcome is improved well-being, which supports pro-social adolescent development.

Friendships during adolescence can be a catalyst for shaping positive developmental outcomes and relational well-being. We can see examples of friendships as a catalyst for development and well-being when friends act as support systems during turbulent times or when they act as role models that encourage decisions and actions that lead to healthy outcomes.

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