

They don't care how much you know,
Until they know how much you care.

Ryan, Stiller, Lynch (1994) examined early adolescents' representations of relationships to teachers, parents, and friends in relation to each other and to various measures of school adjustment, motivation and self-esteem. The relationship dimensions tapped included felt security, [emotional](#) and [school utilization](#), and [emulation](#) with respect to each target figure.

These are their findings:

- Students who feel more secure with and seek help from their parents and teachers with regards to school work or emotional problem report more positive attitudes and motivation in school.
- Students who feel secure with and supported by parents may be more apt to experience better relationships with their teachers.
- Representations of friends did not predict school motivation or adjustment.
- Friends and parents are both important predictors of self-esteem.
- Adolescents who reported emulating parents and teachers had higher self-esteem and showed more positive school adjustment and motivation, whereas those who emulated friends were related negatively.
 - It was suggested that students who emulate friends do so out of conformity or lack of self-confidence (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), and they may be more peer versus school focused. By contrast, emulation of significant adults may be associated with internalisation of the values they transmit (R. M. Ryan, Grolnick, & Deci, in press).
- Those who feel emotionally secured with teachers and turn to them for emotional and school supports experience greater sense of control, [autonomy](#), and engagement in school. On the contrary, adolescents who reported that they utilised no one when occupied with emotional and/or school concerns were likely to show poorer school adjustment, lower [self-esteem](#), and lower [identity integration](#).
- Gender and age also made a difference.
 - Boys were more likely than girls to report that they turn to no one for either emotional or school concerns and were less likely to report a willingness to utilize friends with such concerns
 - It has been suggested that the socialisation dynamics of males makes utilisation of others socially undesirable.
 - Males are less likely to report emulating figures outside the home.
 - Eight graders were more likely than seventh graders to turn to teachers and friends with school and emotional concerns, suggesting increasing connection with extra familial figures with age.

There are 2 interpretations from the study.

1. Teachers play an important role in facilitating student outcomes when they provide supportive relationships.
2. Students who are already secure and well adjusted are more prone to view teachers in a positive way.

Practical Implications

- It makes a difference in your students’ studies when you build up a good rapport with them. It is not about pleasing your students so that they would do your work, but to just let them know that you want them to do well in their studies because you care and not because of the rankings or ratings.
- Care enough to just listen to what they have to say either verbally, written or electronically.
- Adolescents who do not turn to others may be a particularly at-risk group of students because they may be interpersonally isolated and do not actively reach out for help. Teachers need to pay particular attention to such “loners”.
- Provide opportunity for students to seek help from teachers or counsellors in school by having one to one sessions, writing through journals or emails, using questionnaires to identify at-risk students, have sharing sessions about coping in school etc.

Key Definitions:

Autonomy	“A sense of being choiceful in one’s actions and experiencing oneself as the locus of initiation of those actions” (Connell & Ryan, 1987, p. 5; see also Deci & Ryan, 1985; deCharms, 1976; White, 1959). Feeling of being free from pressure. In SDT’s framework, the need for autonomy concerns the basic need to experience one’s behavior as self-endorsed or volitional (deCharms, 1968; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). In attribution terms, autonomous behaviors have an internal perceived locus of causality (Ryan & Connell, 1989); they are experienced as emanating from the self (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).
Emotional utilisation	Degree to which adolescents feel able to rely on the target figures in five emotionally salient situations e.g. “When I’m feeling bad about myself or need a boost I go to my...”
Emulation	Degree to which they emulate or strongly identify with the target figures e.g. “I try to model myself after my teachers”.
Felt security	Affective component of attachment e.g. “My... understand me”.
Identity integration	Individual’s sense of stability, cohesiveness, and purpose over time.
School utilization	Utilisation of others with respect to school problems e.g. “If I had a problem with my school work I would share it with ...”
Self-esteem	Global self-esteem measures general perceptions of self-worth.

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