



MEDIA RELEASE

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STRONG PEER GROUP HELPS KEEP BULLIES AT BAY

Adolescents with a strong peer group and close friends are less likely to be victims of bullying, according to new research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Institute Director, Anne Hollonds said the *Growing Up in Australia* Longitudinal Study of Australian Children found the odds of being a victim of bullying for 14-15 years olds were significantly lower for those with strong friendships and who belonged to a peer group with high levels of moral behaviour.

“The research found the odds of being a victim of bullying were halved for adolescents with a strong personal attachment to their peers and where friendships were characterised by positive attitudes towards school, academic achievement and high levels of moral behaviour, such as not cheating on tests or being mean to other kids,” she said.

“It also found the chance of being a victim of bullying was reduced by 30 per cent for adolescents whose friends valued academic achievement compared to those whose friends disliked school.

“Conversely, adolescents whose friends engage in risky behaviour such as smoking and underage drinking were twice as likely to be the victims of bullying.”

Ms Hollonds said the research also found an adolescent’s peer group could increase the likelihood of a person becoming a bully.

“The research shows the odds of being a bully are twice as high for adolescents whose friends engage in risky behaviour,” she said.

“However, the chances of being a bully are reduced by 60 per cent for adolescents whose friendship group is characterised by high levels of moral behaviour. Overall girls are less likely to be perpetrators of bullying than boys.”

Institute Executive Manager, Dr Galina Daraganova said the research found almost one in five Australian children aged 14-15 years old reported being a victim of bullying in the past month and 7 per cent reported bullying others.

“The research found the most common act of bullying was someone saying mean things or name-calling,” she said.

“Boys were more likely than girls to experience physical aggression such as being hit or kicked on purpose while girls were more likely to experience social exclusion.”

Dr Daraganova said the study found up to 90 per cent of Australian children aged 12-13 years and 14-15 years old reported having good friends who they trusted and who they felt respected their feelings and listened to them.

“Peer relationships are very important in adolescence as young people begin to rely less on parents and more on their peers for social and emotional support. Positive peer relationships can promote well-being and prevent the development of mental health issues.”

To download a copy of the AIFS’ *Growing Up in Australia* Longitudinal Study of Australian Children 2017 Annual Statistical Report, Adolescents’ relationships with their peers go to:

<http://www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/media/docs/tGxliJ48sMY/LSAC-ASR-2017-Chap6.pdf>

Media contact: Luisa Saccotelli 0400 149 901 or Aileen Muldoon 0419 112 503. AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them, see aifs.gov.au