# Child and Adolescent Peer Relations (Psy 493, Sec. 008)

# Fall 2025

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| Instructor: Jennifer Watling Neal, Ph.D. | Class: Tues/Thurs 10:20 -11:40am |
| Office: 242 Psychology Building | Location: Business College Complex N124 |
| Contact: [jneal@msu.edu](mailto:jneal@msu.edu) | Readings: D2L |
| Office Hours: Tuesdays 1 – 2pm or by appointment | **Zoom:** <https://msu.zoom.us/j/99703087474>  (Note: You must use your MSU account to join the Zoom link) |

# Course Description

Peers play a critical role in developmental processes during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This course will examine theories and methods in the field of peer relations. Specifically, we’ll begin the class by focusing on research on dyadic relationships such as friendships and romantic relationships. Next, we’ll expand to consider research on broader social networks, peer status, peer crowds, and digital communications. We’ll end by considering research on the role of peer relations in various behaviors including aggression, bullying, prosocial behaviors, and health behaviors. Throughout the course, we will also cover topics to designed to build your writing skills *(these topics are listed in italics on the class schedule)*.

# Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

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| --- |
| 1. Describe several key theoretical approaches to understanding peer relations in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood |
| 2. Identify several key methodological approaches to understanding peer relations in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood |
| 3. Describe how different peer contexts including friendship, romantic relationships, social networks, and social media play a role in child and adolescent development |
| 4. Clearly and concisely apply the concepts you learned about in class in writing |

# Course Materials and Website

There is no required textbook for this course. All required readings are available on the course website at: (<https://d2l.msu.edu/>). On this page, you’ll also find other important course information including materials from class lectures and grades.

# Prerequisites

Prerequisites for this course include the completion of PSY 101, PSY 295 or STT 231, and the completion of the Tier I writing requirement.

# Course Grading

There are **100 points** available to earn in this class. The breakdown of course points and % of final grade by activity are provided below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Points** | **% of Final Grade** |
| Top 2 (out of 3) Exams | 20 points each (40 total points) | 40% |
| 2 Papers | 25 points each (50 total points) | 50% |
| 5 Discussion Questions | 2 points each (10 total points) | 10% |
| **Total** | **100 points** | **100%** |
| Extra Credit | up to 4 points (up to 2 additional discussion questions at 2 points each) | up to 4% |

Your final grade will be based on the number of points you have earned on course activities:

| **Grade** | **Points** |
| --- | --- |
| 4.0 | 90 – 100 points |
| 3.5 | 85 – 89.9 points |
| 3.0 | 80 – 84.9 points |
| 2.5 | 75 – 79.9 points |
| 2.0 | 70 – 74.9 points |
| 1.5 | 65 – 69.9 points |
| 1.0 | 60 – 64.9 points |
| 0.0 | Less than 60 points |

**I will adhere strictly to these cut-offs for grades.** Extra credit is the only way to increase your point total if you are concerned about falling on the wrong side on one of these cut-offs. At the end of the semester, if you believe that I made an error in calculating your grade, please let me know. I will check your grade, and I will change it if I have made an error. **This is the only circumstance under which I will change a grade.**

# Course Activities

**(1) Exams**

Three multiple choice exams will be given in person, in class throughout the semester. Each exam is non-cumulative and will emphasize material covered in the readings and course lectures since the previous exam. Only 2 of your exam scores (the 2 highest scores) will be included in your final grade and will account for 40% of your final grade.

**All exams will begin promptly at 10:20am on their scheduled date.** Exams will be handed out until 10:35am. However, if you arrive more than 15 minutes late, you will not be able to take the exam and it will count as a missed exam. **During exams, you may have one 8.5 X 11-inch piece of paper with your own handwritten notes for reference.** These must be your own original notes and you will hand them in at the end of the exam. You can also have pencils and erasers at your desk.

**Missed Exam Policy:** Make-up exams will only be granted in cases that are formally approved by the university (e.g., religious observances, grief absence). If you need to make-up an exam for a religious observance or other foreseeable approved reason, you must let me know at least 2 weeks in advance of the exam date so that we can schedule an alternative date. If you miss an exam for any other reason (e.g., illness, concussion, family emergency, computer issues), it will not count against your grade because only 2 of 3 exam scores in the course will be included in your final grade. You do not need to provide any documentation for the first missed exam. Please do not ask me to make up an exam if it is the first one you’ve missed. If you miss a second exam, you can take a makeup exam only if you have a valid, documented excuse (e.g., a note from the dean, a note from your doctor recommending that you not attend class). Any notes must explicitly state that “This student was unable to take the exam on <scheduled days of exam> because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” The note cannot come from someone in your family. **You must notify me that you have a valid excuse within 2 business days of the scheduled date of the exam or you will not be allowed to take the makeup exam.**

**(2) Papers**

Two 3–5-page papers are due during the semester. Papers should be turned into the appropriate D2L folder by 10:20am on the date indicated on the course schedule below.

Each paper will require you to respond to a writing prompt where you will apply theories and concepts that you have learned in class. For all assignments that involve writing or presenting results, a more detailed assignment sheet and grading rubric is available on D2L. **By carefully reviewing and following these rubrics, you can increase your probability of success on these assignments.**

**Late Paper Policy:** Late papers will not be accepted except in cases that are formally approved by the university (e.g., grief absence). Therefore, please make sure to stay on top of the deadlines for each paper.

**(3) Weekly Discussion Questions (10% of grade; 10 points)**

You are responsible for submitting 5 weekly discussion questions during the semester. Specifically, you have the opportunity to submit one weekly discussion question per week about the course materials during Weeks 2 - 15. Discussion questions should focus on concepts relevant to the particular week’s lectures or readings that you didn’t understand (e.g., *Can you explain what a mesosystem is in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory? I had trouble understanding that particular system*). For exam or break weeks, please feel free to ask questions that are relevant to the topics covered throughout the course. I will use these discussion questions to help determine what materials should be reinforced during lectures and exam reviews. **Discussion questions are due no later than 5pm on Friday each week and should be submitted through D2L. Go to Communication 🡪 Discussions 🡪 Weekly Discussion Questions, and then the appropriate week for submission. Click the “Start a Thread” button, write your question, and hit the “Post” button. Discussion questions submitted via email to me will not be counted for course credit.** Discussion questions are worth 10% of your grade.

**Missed Discussion Question Policy:** Because there are more than 5 weeks during the semester, you do not need to submit discussion questions every week to receive full credit. Therefore, there will be no make-ups granted for missed discussion questions.

**(4) Extra Credit**

You can receive up to 4 points extra credit by submitting up to 2 additional weekly discussion questions beyond the five required ones. You will not receive extra credit for any additional discussion questions submitted beyond this amount. This is the only way to receive extra credit in the course.

# Course Policies

**Attendance**

I will not be taking attendance, and attendance is not part of your grade.

However, attending class provides an opportunity to ask questions and participate in discussion, which can help you understand the material better. In addition, I will be presenting materials in class that will be important for your success on the class papers and exams.Therefore, it is in your best interest to regularly attend class.

**Lecture Notes, Note Taking, and Recording**

I will post slides from my course lectures on D2L by the end of each week. However, I make no guarantees that the posted slides will cover everything that comes up in my lectures. Having access to slides doesn’t mean that you should skip lectures (see above). Attending lectures will help reinforce course content that you need to understand to do well on assignments, your survey project, and the exams.

Additionally, you are encouraged to take notes on the lecture and are permitted to tape-record class sessions for your own purposes. However, you are not permitted to take notes, tape-record, or use any provided course materials (including course slides) for purposes of sale and distribution.

### **Academic Honesty**

[Article 2.III.B.2](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/academic-freedom-for-students-at-michigan-state-university/article-2-academic-rights-and-responsibilities) of the SRR states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Psychology Department adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, [Protection of Scholarship and Grades](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations); the all-University Policy on [Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.asp?Section=534); and [Ordinance 17.00](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/student-group-regulations-administrative-rulings-all-university-policies-and-selected-ordinances/examinations-ordinance-17-00), Examinations.

You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, unless authorized, you are expected to complete all course activities, including exams, papers, and discussion questions without assistance from any source (except as specified in the assignment).

In addition, plagiarism of written work is forbidden. It includes taking the work of

another individual or source and presenting it as your own. This is considered plagiarism even if the source has given you permission to use their work, or the work is in the public domain (e.g., on the web). **Any student who violates these rules will receive a penalty grade, possibly a failing grade on the assignment or in the course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs.** See also: <https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/student-faq.html> Contact me if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your work.

### **Artificial Intelligence Policy**

The use of ChatGPT or any similar Artificial Intelligence platform or tool to generate discussion questions or paper assignments or assist in answering exam questions for this class is fully prohibited. Any work showing evidence of use of AI will receive a 0.0 grade and will be reported to the college as academic dishonesty.

**Classroom Conduct**: To make the class conducive to learning, please make sure to:

1. **Arrive on time.** Arriving on time will make sure you don’t miss important information and will minimize distractions for other students.
2. **Minimize distracting behaviors.** Turn off your cell phones or other devices that might make noise. Refrain from having side conversations with your classmates. Avoid engaging in other distracting behaviors (e.g., having food delivered, leaving in the middle of class, etc.).
3. **Ask questions.** If you don’t understand something, chances are your classmates don’t either! Asking questions enriches everyone’s learning experience.
4. **Be respectful to others.** We’ll be engaging in discussions and people may take different perspectives. We’ll sometimes disagree with each other and that’s ok! To make the class a safe place to learn, please make sure you are respectful of others’ viewpoints and ideas.
5. **Don’t come to class if you are sick!** If you are feeling unwell or have symptoms like a cough, congestion, or fever, please do not attend class in person. Instead, please join the class by [Zoom](https://msu.zoom.us/j/99703087474) to avoid spreading your illness to others. To participate by Zoom, you will need to log in using your MSU account (other accounts are not supported). If you are unable to participate in class, please contact me with any questions you have about the week’s materials.

### **Turnitin**

Consistent with MSU's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, I have chosen to use a tool called Turnitin to compare your papers with multiple sources. The tool will compare each paper you submit to an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a 'similarity score.' The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, I will make a complete assessment and judge the originality of your work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.

You should submit papers to Turnitin Dropboxes **without identifying information included in the paper** (e.g., name or student number), the D2L system will automatically show this information to me when I view the submission, but the information will not be retained by Turnitin. If you forget and submit your paper with your identifying information on it, it will be retained in the Turnitin repository.

**All submissions to this course will be checked using Turnitin.** In choosing to use Turnitin in our class, I have agreed to follow five guidelines. They are:

1. I will use Turnitin as part of a balanced approach to encourage academic integrity and foster student success.

2. I will openly disclose use of Turnitin in this course on the syllabus and at the time assignments are announced.

3. For a given assignment, I will use Turnitin for all papers.

4. I will make the final determination of originality and integrity.

5. To ensure privacy, I will ask students to remove identification (e.g., names and student numbers) from submissions.

If you have any questions about the use of Turnitin in this course, please bring them to my attention.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or **two weeks prior to the accommodation date** (exam, paper, etc.). Requests received without sufficient lead time will not be honored.

**Problems Completing Work**

Life happens and can be stressful at times! There will be distractions and you may have challenges come up in your personal lives. However, with a little patience and despite these challenges, I’m certain that we can still have a great time together learning about peer relations. Please make sure that you are taking time this semester for self-care.

Please also let me know as soon as possible if you experience any problems completing the course work due to illness, disability, or personal circumstances. By letting me know early, we can work out a plan and make sure that you do not fall behind. If you wait until the end of the semester to talk with me, it is much harder for me to help.

**Questions and Concerns**

I would like to see each and every one of you succeed in this course. I also would like everyone to feel comfortable contributing to and participating in the class. If you have any questions or concerns about your performance in the class, classroom dynamics, or any other issues, please contact me and we can set up a time to talk. I will make time to meet and will do my best to help address your concerns.

# Class Schedule & Reading List

All scheduled readings for the course are available for download on D2L. Please make sure to complete **all assigned readings** **before Tuesday on their scheduled course week**. As the instructor, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule according to the pace of the course and student needs. This also includes making any changes that I deem necessary to the details and/or policies listed in this syllabus. **Check D2L regularly to keep up with the topics and for notices of any changes.**

**Week 1 (August 26 & August 28) – Course Overview**

* **TO READ:**
  + Review the syllabus
* **Writing Skills Topic:**
  + *What is Plagiarism & How to Avoid it*

**Week 2 (September 2 & September 4) – Friendship**

* **TO READ:**
* **THEORY:** Bagwell, C.L. & Schmidt, M.E. (2011). Friendships in childhood and adolescence (Chapter 1: What is Friendship?). *Guilford Publications.*
* **METHODS:** Bagwell, C.L. & Schmidt, M.E. (2011). Friendships in childhood and adolescence (Chapter 2: Studying Friendship). *Guilford Publications.*
* **Writing Skills Topic:**
* *Reading and Summarizing Academic Articles*

**Week 3 (September 9 & September 11) – Romantic Relationships**

* **TO READ:**
* **THEORY:** Collins, W. A., Welsh, D. P., & Furman, W. (2009). Adolescent romantic relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*, 631-652. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163459
* **METHOD:** Furman, W., Collibee, C., Lantagne, A., & Golden, R. L. (2019). Making movies instead of taking snapshots: Studying change in youth's romantic relationships. *Child Development Perspectives*, *13*(3), 135-140. https://doi.org/ 10.1111/cdep.12325
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *AI Writing Tools and Academic Integrity*

**Week 4 (September 16 & September 18) – Social Networks**

* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Laninga-Wijnen, L., & Veenstra, R. (2021). Peer similarity in adolescent social networks: Types of selection and influence, and factors contributing to openness to peer influence. In B. Halpern-Felsher (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Health*. Elsevier
  + **METHOD:** Broda, M. D., Granger, K., Chow, J., & Ross, E. (2021). Using social network analysis in applied psychological research: A tutorial. *Psychological Methods*. https://doi.org/10.1037/met0000451
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *Crafting an Argument*
* **REMINDER**
  + Thursday September 18th is the last day to drop with a refund

**Week 5 (September 23 & September 25) – Review & Exam 1**

* **EXAM 1** 
  + **Exam 1 will be held in class on Thursday September 25.**
* **TO READ:**
  + Review Exam 1 Study Guide
* **REMINDER**
* Tuesday September 23: Exam 1 Review
* Thursday September 25: Exam 1!

**Week 6 (September 30 & October 2) – Peer Status**

* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Mayeux, L., Houser, J. J., & Dyches, K. D. (2011). Social acceptance and popularity: Two distinct forms of peer status (pp. 79 – 102). In A.H.N. Cillessen, D. Schwartz, & L. Mayeux (Eds.), *Popularity in the peer system.* Guilford Publications.
  + **METHOD:** Van den Berg, Y. H., Lansu, T. A., & Cillessen, A. H. (2015). Measuring social status and social behavior with peer and teacher nomination methods. *Social Development*, *24*(4), 815-832. https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12120
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *Outlining Your Paper*

**Week 7 (October 7 & October 9) – Peer Groups and Peer Cultures**

* **PAPER 1 DUE:**
  + **Submit Paper 1 to D2L on Tuesday October 7 by 10:20am**
* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Brown, B. B., & Dietz, E. L. (2009). Informal peer groups in middle childhood and adolescence. *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups*, 361-376.
  + **METHOD:** Cross, J. R., & Fletcher, K. L. (2009). The challenge of adolescent crowd research: Defining the crowd. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*(6), 747-764. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9307-6
* **Writing Skills Topic:**
  + *Defining Key Terms/Avoiding Jargon*

**Week 8 (October 14 & October 16) – Digital Communications**

* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M. J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 1—A theoretical framework and application to dyadic peer relationships. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *21*, 267-294. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x
  + **METHOD:** Verbeij, T., Pouwels, J. L., Beyens, I., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2021). The accuracy and validity of self-reported social media use measures among adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, *3*, 100090. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100090
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *Parallel Construction and Repetition*
* **REMINDER:** 
  + Monday October 13th is the last day to drop with no grade reported

**Week 9 (October 21 and October 23) – No Class: Fall Break**

* **TO READ:**
  + Exam 2 Study Guide
* **REMINDER:**
  + October 21: No class, Fall Break
  + October 23: No class, use class time to review Exam 2 Study Guide and study for Exam 2

**Week 10 (October 28 and October 30) – Review & Exam 2**

* **EXAM 2** 
  + **Exam 2 will be held in class on Thursday October 30.**
* **REMINDER**
* Tuesday October 28, Exam 2 Review
* Thursday October 30: Exam 2!

**Week 11 (November 4 and November 6) – Aggression, Bullying, and Victimization**

* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Malti, T., & Rubin, K. H. (2018). Aggression in childhood and adolescence (pp. 3-19). In T. Malti & K.H. Rubin (Eds.), *Handbook of Child and Adolescent Aggression.* The Guilford Press.
  + **METHOD:** Kaufman, T. M., Huitsing, G., & Veenstra, R. (2020). Refining victims’ self‐reports on bullying: Assessing frequency, intensity, power imbalance, and goal‐directedness. *Social Development*, *29*(2), 375-390. https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12441
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *Reviewing Peers’ Writing*

**Week 12 (November 11 and November 13) – Prosocial Behavior**

* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Dirks, M.A., Dunfield, K.A., & Recchia, H.E. (2018). Prosocial behavior with peers: Intentions, outcomes, and interpersonal adjustment (pp. 243-264). In W. M. Bukowski, B. Laursen, & K. H. Rubin (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups.* The Guilford Press.
  + **METHOD:** El Mallah, S. (2020). Conceptualization and measurement of adolescent prosocial behavior: Looking back and moving forward. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *30*, 15-38. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12476
* **Writing Skills Topic:** 
  + *Incorporating Feedback*

**Week 13 (November 18 and November 20) – Peer Relations and Health**

* **PAPER 2 DUE:**
  + **Submit Paper 2 to D2L on Tuesday November 18 by 10:20am**
* **TO READ:**
  + **THEORY:** Prinstein, M. J., & Giletta, M. (2020). Future directions in peer relations research. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *49*(4), 556-572. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2020.1756299
  + **THEORY:** Ehrhardt, A. D., & Schacter, H. L. (2024). Connecting adolescent friendships to physical health outcomes: A narrative review. *Social Development*, *33*(2), e12726. https://doi.org/ 10.1111/sode.12726

**Week 14 (November 25 and November 27) – No Class: Thanksgiving Break**

* **TO READ:**
  + Exam 3 Study Guide
* **REMINDER:**
  + November 25: No class, use class time to review Exam 3 Study Guide and study for Exam 3
  + November 27: No class, Thanksgiving Break

**Week 15 (December 2 and December 4) – Review & Exam 3**

* **EXAM 3** 
  + **Exam 3 will be held in class on Thursday December 4.**
* **REMINDER**
* Tuesday December 2, Exam 3 Review
* Thursday December 4: Exam 3!

**Week 16 Finals Week: Time/Date/Location TBD**

* **REMINDER**
  + This class does not have a final exam, but I will be available during the final exam time to review Exam 3, Paper 2, or any other course content.