

Study: Early friendships good for children

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University of Illinois scientists say children who have a good friendship before a sibling's birth are likely to have a better sibling relationship.

"When early friendships are successful, young children get the chance to master sophisticated social and emotional skills, even more than they do with a parent," said Laurie Kramer, a professor of applied family studies and co-author of the research.

The research showed children who had a positive relationship with a best friend before the birth of a sibling ultimately had a good relationship with their sibling that lasted throughout adolescence, Kramer said.

The study also revealed preschoolers able to coordinate play with a friend, manage conflicts, and keep an interaction positive in tone are most likely as teenagers to avoid the negative sibling interaction that can sometimes launch children on a path of antisocial behaviors, she added.

Kramer said the 13-year study also showed early friendships predict future competence in other sorts of relationships and fewer behavior problems and less depression or anxiety later in life.

The research appeared in December's Journal of Family Psychology.

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