

Young children make friends faster than teenagers when they move into more affluent neighborhoods

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Elementary school children who move from low-income to higher-income neighborhoods form new friendships faster than teenagers,

according to a newly released study conducted by a Rice University researcher.

"The Age of Belonging: Friendship Formation After Residential Mobility," authored by Anna Rhodes, an assistant professor of sociology at Rice, appears in the December edition of *Social Forces*. The study examined how children adjusted to more affluent neighborhoods and higher-performing schools after their families moved with the help of a housing voucher program.

Friendships with their peers play a big part in how children adapt to higher-income neighborhoods, Rhodes said. The way the children she studied formed new friendships varied dramatically between youth who moved during middle childhood (ages 9-12) and adolescence (13-20).

While elementary school age children in the study generally made friends quickly—in part thanks to shared activities and other things in common – teenagers took longer and exercised more caution. Teens were also more likely to maintain friendships in their old neighborhoods.

"The younger children who moved benefited from an easier process of making new friends, on top of less exposure to high-poverty neighborhoods," Rhodes wrote. "These new friends then supported children's sense of belonging in their new school and encouraged their engagement and academic motivation in school, which enhances the potential for these children to experience educational benefits following the move. In contrast, the adolescents, who were more cautious and slow about forming new friendships and maintained old relationships, did not enjoy the same benefits."

Previous research suggests that a sense of belonging can impact how well students adjust to a new [school](#) and how well they perform in the classroom, Rhodes said. Offering families who move into new

neighborhoods information about social, recreational and [religious activities](#) might help adolescents form [friendships](#) as quickly as younger children.

Rhodes' study examined the behavior of 79 low-income black youth after they moved to higher-income neighborhoods in suburban Baltimore as part of a residential mobility program. As Congress considers authorizing a new housing choice voucher program, Rhodes emphasized [policy makers](#) need to understand how families – especially children – deal with the experience of moving into their new homes.

"These findings highlight the importance of providing families with information about the resources they can access in their new communities that will promote their [children's](#) social integration after they move," Rhodes wrote. "Youth of all ages experience benefits from moving to safe, low-poverty [neighborhoods](#), but acknowledging the age-specific challenges youth face when negotiating this move will help us more effectively support them through the social transition that comes with moving."

Provided by Rice University

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