

Peer Coping Suggestions as a Predictor of Actual Youth Coping in School-Aged Participants

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Introduction

- Extensive research suggests that peers have an outsized influence on youth behavior (Brechwald & Prinstein , 2011; Brown & Larson, 2009).
- Research also demonstrates the applicability of socialization processes to youth coping (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010; Anderson et al., 2021; Kliewer , 1994), but only one study to date has investigated the relation between peer coping suggestions and self-reported coping strategies.
- Bradbury, Dubow, and Domoff (2018): both parent and peer coping suggestions predicted adolescent -reported coping strategies, but peer coaching was a stronger predictor for approach coping strategies when dealing with cyber victimization.
- Based on the Responses to stress model, using three coping subscales --Primary Control (coping efforts towards the stressor), Secondary Control (coping efforts towards feelings about the stressor), and Disengagement (coping efforts directed away from the stressor)
- In this study, I examined the predictive power of peer coping suggestions in response to two stressors (peer and family), across three age groups (elementary, middle, and high school -aged participants).

Method

Participants and Procedures

- 236 youth ages 10 -18 who attended a school district in the Midwest United States, in a town of approximately 30,000 people.
- 83 elementary school participants (grades 4 and 5)
- 77 middle school participants (grades 7 and 8)
- 75 high school participants (grades 9 through 12)
- 48% male; 72% White; 75% from 2 -parent families

- Data were collected at one point in time using an online survey (conducted via Qualtrics) in the participants' classrooms, on their school -issued computers, during school hours.

Measures

- Peer Suggestions for Coping** (Socialization of Coping scale, Abaied & Rudolph, 2010) based on the Responses to Stress model (Connor -Smith et al., 2000)
 - Adapted to refer to suggestions youth receive from their peers
 - 24 items, assessing suggestions youth received in the primary control (8 items), secondary control (8 items), and disengagement (8 items) domains.
 - Sample Items:
 - Primary Control- "My friend encourages me to deal with the situation head on rather than ignoring it"
 - Secondary Control- "My friend encourages me to look for something good in what is happening"
 - Disengagement- "My friend encourages me to NOT focus on the problem"
 - Youth completed this scale twice, once for the peer stressor and once for the family stressor.
- Self -Reported Coping** (Socialization of Coping scale (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010), adapted to refer to youth self-reports of their own coping: primary control, secondary control, disengagement coping.
 - Youth completed this version of the scale twice, once for the peer stressor and once for the family stressor.
- Perceived Controllability** over the stressor (a one-item scale adapted from Causey & Dubow, 1994).
 - Participants rated on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always), how often they felt they had control over the (peer/family) stressor.

RESULTS

Age Effects

- High school age group reported significantly more primary control coping than middle school age group and significantly more secondary control coping than elementary age group
- No significant age effects for disengagement

Intercorrelations

- Intercorrelations between suggestions and self-reported coping were high for all three coping subscales for peer stressors ($r = .71-.77$, $p < .01$) and family stressors ($r = .69-.80$, $p < .01$)

Table 1
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Covariates (Step 1) and Peer Coping Suggestions (Step 2) Predicting Self-Reported Coping with a Peer Stressor

Predictor Variables	Self-Reported Coping with the Peer Stressor					
	Primary Control		Secondary Control		Disengagement	
	R ²	β	R ²	β	R ²	β
Step 1	.17		.07		.08	
Age Group ^a		-.40		.13		-.39
Sex ^b		.14		-.05		.08
Race ^c		.03		.03		.00
Living Situation ^d		.07		.00		.02
Perceived Control		.36***		.23**		.26***
F (5, 178)	7.10***		2.76*		3.07*	
Step 2	.53		.62		.54	
Age Group ^a		-.12*		.13**		-.27
Sex ^b		.03		-.09*		-.38
Race ^c		.02		-.01		.00
Living Situation ^d		.07		.00		-.03
Perceived Control		.17**		.06		.11*
Peer Suggestion		.65***		.77***		.71***
ΔR ²	.37		.55		.46	
ΔF (1,177)	139.18		257.67		179.86	

^a Elementary = 1, Middle = 2, High = 3. ^b Male = 1, Female = 2. ^c White = 1, Not White = 2.
^d One Parent = 1, Two Parents = 2.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

- Peer coping suggestions significantly predicted self-reported coping for all three subscales for the peer stressor above and beyond all covariates ($\Delta R^2 = .37-.55$; See Table 1).

Table 2
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Covariates (Step 1) and Peer Coping Suggestions (Step 2) Predicting Self-Reported Coping with a Family Stressor

Predictor Variables	Self-Reported Coping with the Family Stressor					
	Primary Control		Secondary Control		Disengagement	
	R ²	β	R ²	β	R ²	β
Step 1	.16		.09		.05	
Age Group ^a		.17*		.18*		.15*
Sex ^b		.01		-.18*		-.02
Race ^c		-.10		.02		.02
Living Situation ^d		.05		.00		-.06
Perceived Control		.38***		.20**		.17**
F (5, 183)	7.10***		3.75**		1.97	
Step 2	.53		.67		.67	
Age Group ^a		-.01		.02		.03
Sex ^b		.02		-.17***		-.09*
Race ^c		.13*		-.01		-.06
Living Situation ^d		.06		-.04		-.06
Perceived Control		.22***		.06		.09
Peer Suggestion		.64***		.78***		.80***
ΔR ²	.37		.58		.61	
ΔF (1,177)	140.36		313.15		332.85	

^a Elementary = 1, Middle = 2, High = 3. ^b Male = 1, Female = 2. ^c White = 1, Not White = 2.
^d One Parent = 1, Two Parents = 2.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

- Peer coping suggestions significantly predicted self-reported coping for all three subscales for the peer stressor above and beyond all covariates ($\Delta R^2 = .37-.61$; See Table 2).

DISCUSSION

- Peer suggestions for specific coping strategies were highly related to the corresponding self-reported coping strategies across all three subscales.
 - Consistent with previous findings (Bradbury, Dubow, & Domoff, 2018; Legerski, 2015; Lim et al., 2023; Miller-Slough & Dunsmore, 2020), peer coping suggestions were found to predict self-reported coping above and beyond covariates such as age group, sex, race, number of parents in the home, and perceived controllability over the stressor.
 - Peer coping suggestions were the strongest predictor of the corresponding self-reported coping strategies across age groups and coping subscales, accounting for 36.7-61.4% of the variance in self-reported coping strategies.
 - This study serves as evidence that the influence of peers in adolescence extends into the domain of coping, and should be considered when developing youth social-emotional learning programming.
- Limitations and Future Directions
- Data came from self-report measures
 - The one point in time study design prevents any inference of causality
 - This study was limited by the sample characteristics (the geographic region in is largely White and middle class), which made it impossible to generalize results to participants of other ethnic-racial groups of socioeconomic levels, factors shown to be related to coping in adolescence (Caplan & Schooler, 2007; Copeland & Hess, 1995)

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For References



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