

Annotated Bibliography

**DEVELOPMENTAL  
RELATIONSHIPS**

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### **About Pathways to Education Canada**

Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. Its award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting youth living in low-income communities to overcome barriers to education, graduate from high school, and build the foundation for a successful future. Through the collective power of partnerships, Pathways to Education's innovative program is preparing youth for tomorrow.

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## Developmental Relationships

This annotated bibliography presents a plain language overview of several seminal studies on developmental relationships. We define developmental relationships as “either formal or informal relationships where an individual takes an active interest in and initiates actions to advance the development of another” (Rock & Garavan, p. 330).

The aim of this annotated bibliography is not to offer an exhaustive and comprehensive collection of all relevant studies. Instead, we present a modest introduction, designed for those seeking an overview of this complex topic, a refresher, or a resource upon which to build more detailed and nuanced knowledge.

This document was developed for professionals who contribute to the well-being and development of youth. This includes those who work directly with youth, such as mentors, educators, child and youth workers, social workers, and front-line staff in school-based and out-of-school youth programs. This resource will also be of interest to those who work indirectly with or for youth: youth mentoring program managers, school administrators, or youth researchers.

This annotated bibliography emerged from our own internal research on developmental relationships, conducted in the context of program measurement, improvement, and impact assessment efforts. It has helped Pathways to Education Canada better understand this complex field and translate our knowledge into effective programming for youth furthest from opportunities. We share it here in the hopes that it will have similar impact in other youth-serving programs.

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**Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Interpersonal structures as contexts for human development. In *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design* (pp. 56–82). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.**

In this seminal book chapter, Bronfenbrenner discusses how relationships can enable human development. This chapter is important in understanding developmental relationships, though it does not use the term “developmental relationships”. It is foundational primarily due to Bronfenbrenner’s discussion of optimal dyadic interactions: “Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person” (p. 60). This definition is the precursor to Li and Julian’s (2012) developmental relationship model.

**Collins, W. A., & Steinberg, L. (2006). Adolescent development in interpersonal context. In *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 4) (pp. 1003–1067). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**

This chapter explores psychological processes during adolescence, particularly processes involved in forming relationships and attaining autonomy. It discusses how development results from the interactions between adolescent minds and the relationships in young people’s lives. It is divided into five main sections: Defining Features of Adolescence and Psychosocial Development (referring to changes in biology, cognition, and social definition), Conceptual Perspectives on Adolescent Development in Interpersonal Contexts (ecological, interpersonal, and biosocial perspectives), Significant Interpersonal Relationships During Adolescence (familial, extrafamilial, social networks, social status, friendships, and romantic relationships), Social Institutions as Contexts for Adolescent Psychosocial Development (neighbourhoods, schools, the workplace, and leisure settings), and Interpersonal Contexts and the Psychosocial Tasks of Adolescence (developing a sense of independence and of interdependence).

**Feeney, B. C., & Collins, N. L. (2014). A new look at social support: A theoretical perspective on thriving through relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 19(2), 113-147.**

This paper proposes a model to explain how optimal relationships lead to overall well-being (i.e. thriving). The authors report that relationships are crucial in two ways: they can protect people from the detrimental forces of adversity and maximize benefits that can be obtained from life opportunities. In these ways, developmental relationships influence the following: emotional states; self-evaluations and self-perceptions; appraisals of situations or events; motivational states; situation-relevant behaviours, resources, and outcomes; relational outcomes, attitudes, and expectations; neural activation and physiological functioning; health and lifestyle behaviours. Through these pathways, relationships determine people's well-being in the following domains: psychological, social, physical, self-indulgent pleasure (hedonistic), and happiness from maximizing well-being, i.e. flourishing or thriving (eudaimonic). Even though this paper does not mention developmental relationships, it is still relevant as it explains how relationships foster positive development.

**Janssen, S., Van Vuuren, M., & De Jong, M. (2012). Identifying support functions in developmental relationships: A self-determination perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 82(1), 20-29.**

This study qualitatively examines the content of developmental networks. Constellations of developmental relationships are examined in eighteen protégés in order to identify types of developmental support. The results show how developmental relationships support protégés' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This paper is useful particularly for its focus on developmental networks (which refers to the constellation of all the developmental relationships that one has at a time). The paper reports that over the past ten years research has begun to focus more on developmental networks rather than individual developmental relationships.

**Li, J., & Julian, M. M. (2012). Developmental relationships as the active ingredient: A unifying working hypothesis of “what works” across intervention settings. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(2), 157.**

This is a seminal article in the literature on developmental relationships. Li and Julian report that “developmental relationships are characterized by reciprocal human interactions that embody an enduring emotional attachment, progressively more complex patterns of joint activity, and a balance of power that gradually shifts from the developed person in favor of the developing person” (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 157). This definition builds on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) definition of optimal dyadic interactions. However, the authors expand Bronfenbrenner’s definition to include group as well as dyadic contexts. The paper argues that developmental relationships are the “active ingredient” in all effective interventions serving vulnerable children and youth. It also presents four case examples of developmental interventions centred on developmental relationships.

**Rock, A. D., & Garavan, T. N. (2006). Reconceptualizing developmental relationships. *Human Resource Development Review*, 5(3), 330–354.**

This article reviews the literature on developmental relationships, which was emerging at the time of publication. It provides a concise definition of developmental relationships, still cited in more recent publications: “Developmental relationships are defined as either formal or informal relationships where an individual takes an active interest in and initiates actions to advance the development of another” (Rock & Garavan, p. 330). The authors then describe five aspects of developmental relationships (type, network effect, object of learning, time span of outcomes, and developer style), and four types of developmental relationships (organizational navigator, sponsor of development, grandparent, and friend). However, these dimensions and types are less relevant in the current conceptualization of developmental relationships.

**Thompson, R. A. (2006). The development of the person: Social understanding, relationships, conscience, self. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology. Social, emotional, and personality development*. 6th ed. (Vol. 3, pp. 24-98). New York, NY: Wiley.**

The goal of this book chapter is “to describe how central facets of social and personality development emerge through the growth of social understanding, self-awareness, early conscience and cooperation, and the relationships that infuse these early achievements” (p. 25-25). The chapter has four sections: social understanding, relationships, conscience, and self. The author posits that these four elements are the most important ways in which one’s developing individuality interacts with the social world. This chapter is important to the study of developmental relationships because it discusses how development results from the interaction between a young child’s mind and people with whom the child is in a continuous relationship. It emphasizes the importance of relationships in development, both in the early years and for long-term outcomes, including emotion regulation, social skills, and general psychological well-being.

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