Managing Interpersonal Conflict: Adolescents With and Without Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract
Social Information Processing (SIP) informs the way we engage in social problem solving, such as conflict management. Although research has shown that adolescents with intellectual disability (ID) struggle more with the components of SIP when compared to typically developing peers, very little research has examined how adolescents with ID experience conflict with peers. This study examines the way adolescents with and without ID report experiencing and responding to conflict with best friends and non-friends utilizing their own rather than hypothetical scenarios. Nineteen adolescents (14 adolescents without ID and 5 with ID) were interviewed about their own real-life conflict experiences with best friends and non-friends using questions from the Social Problem-Solving Test-Mild Intellectual Disabilities. Interviews were qualitatively coded using a thematic analysis. Findings indicate that (a) adolescents with ID perceived less hostile intentions compared to adolescents without ID, (b) adolescents with ID described more submissive responses to conflict in both best friend and non-friend conflict situations compared to adolescents without ID, (c) adolescents with ID reported engaging in active conflict management strategies as often as adolescents without ID in the context of non-friend conflicts, and (d) adolescents with ID relied more heavily on adult and peer support to manage conflict compared to adolescents without ID. This study demonstrates that adolescents with ID are able to manage conflict independently, and will benefit from adult support in learning how to do so. Importantly, this study is the first to examine how adolescents with and without ID engage in SIP steps in the context of their own experiences.

Keywords: Social Information Processing, Mild Intellectual Disabilities, Adolescents, Interpersonal Conflict, Conflict Management, Best Friends, Non-Friends
Summary for Lay Audience

Social Information Processing (SIP) is a theory developed to help understand how we experience interactions with the people around us. This theory breaks interactions into five steps which includes taking in the information around us, making sense of it, setting our goals in the interaction, choosing how we will respond, and then responding. Researchers who study this area have found that adolescents with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the mild range are more likely than typically developing adolescents to describe a peer’s actions as being done on purpose, and to respond by being aggressive or giving into the peer. This study looked at how adolescents with and without intellectual disabilities in the mild range described their experiences with conflict with a best friend and someone they are not friends with (non-friend). I found that the adolescents with ID in this study described both best friends and non-friends as acting by accident or both by accident and on purpose. These adolescents were less likely than typically developing adolescents to see peers’ actions as being on purpose or trying to cause harm. Adolescents with ID described giving into peers more often than typically developing adolescents. However, adolescents with ID described active responses such as compromising, or doing what was best for themselves as often as typically developing adolescents in the non-friend conflict. Adolescents with ID needed help from adults or peers more often than adolescents without ID. This study showed that adolescents with ID can manage conflict on their own, but they need help from adults to develop the skills to do this. Researchers normally look at social information processing steps in adolescents with ID using stories they give them. This is the first study that used adolescents’ own experiences to talk about how they go through social information processing steps to manage conflicts.
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

Social Information Processing (SIP) is the process by which we experience and respond to social interactions (Dodge & Crick, 1990). The ability to solve social problems including managing interpersonal conflict is influenced by SIP skills (van Rest et al., 2019). A number of factors influence the way we process social information in conflict situations. One important factor is relational context (Burgess et al., 2006). Specifically, the history of our relationship with conflict partners influences the way we perceive their behavior, evaluate their intentions, and set our goals for our response to conflicts (Burgess et al., 2006; Peets et al., 2007). Therefore, when we experience conflict with friends or liked peers, we are less likely to perceive negative intent and more likely to engage in prosocial coping. Contrarily, with disliked peers, we are more likely to perceive hostile intent and engage in negative or antisocial coping (Peets et al., 2007; Peets et al., 2013).

During adolescence, friendships play an important role in the development of positive conflict management skills (Berndt, 2004). Adolescents with poor conflict management skills will struggle to build and maintain close friendships (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Laursen, 1996). Adolescents who are perceived as bad at resolving conflict by peers are less likely to be chosen as friendship partners (Bowker, 2004). Additionally, adolescents with poor social problem-solving skills report poor friendship quality and more conflict in existing friendships (Spencer et al., 2013). Therefore, adolescents with poor conflict management skills are less likely to have close friends and, as a result, lack an appropriate context for developing conflict management skills (Laursen, 1996). Unfortunately, these adolescents may be stuck in
a negative cycle whereby missing the opportunity to develop appropriate conflict
management skills further impacts their social development and their ability to hold
important friendships (Laursen, 1996; Salmon, 2013).

Conflict management skills are vital to social development in adolescents. Research
has shown that the ability to manage conflicts develops with age (Laursen et al., 2001). As
such, adolescents are better able than children to manage interpersonal conflict. Additionally,
relationship context plays a greater role in the way adolescents, when compared to children,
consider managing conflict with peers (Peets et al., 2013; Wainryb et al., 2020). As a result,
unlike children, adolescents are more likely to make conflict management decisions that
relate to their goals for the future of their relationship with the perpetrator and their social
standing (Burgess et al., 2006; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996; Tamm et al., 2018; Wainryb et
al., 2020).

While much is known about the way typically developing adolescents think about and
manage conflict, very little is known about the way adolescents with intellectual disabilities
(ID) engage in interpersonal conflict (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012; Pert & Jahoda, 2008).
Adolescents with ID are reported to experience more social rejection and isolation than
typically developing adolescents (DiGennaro et al., 2011; Zic, & Igric, 2001). Additionally,
adolescents with ID have more difficulty with SIP skills, which may result in poor social
problem-solving skills (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al.,
2009; Van Nieuwenhuijzen, at al., 2011). Research has shown that later in development,
during adulthood, individuals with ID have been found to engage in more aggressive or
submissive conflict management (Pert & Jahoda, 2008). However, research has neglected to
examine the way adolescents with ID experience interpersonal conflict and the way relational
context may influence the way they engage in conflict management (Larkin et al., 2012).
1.2 Present Study

This study will examine the way adolescents with and without ID experience and manage interpersonal conflict with close friends and non-friends through a SIP lens. As we know, SIP informs the way we engage in social problem solving, as such, breaking conflict experiences down using SIP steps will allow us to determine differences in the way adolescents with and without ID experience conflict situations and consider their responses in these situations. Further, we will examine the way adolescents with and without ID perceive their relationships with conflict partners following conflict situations. Interpersonal conflict plays an important role in adolescents’ peer relationships and acceptance within peer groups. However, very little research has examined how adolescents with ID experience and manage conflict within their own relationships. As such, we do not have appropriate knowledge of their ability to deal with conflict with peers.

1.2.1 Research Questions

Guiding research question. The primary research question that guided this study was: “How do adolescents with and without intellectual disabilities describe their own experiences and responses to conflict with peers?”

Sub-questions. Based on the guiding research question, this study sought to further answer sub-questions including: 1) What are the differences in the ways adolescents with and without ID report experiencing conflict with best friends and non-friends? 2) What are the differences and similarities in the ways adolescents with and without ID describe managing conflict with peers? and 3) How do adolescents with and without ID perceive changes in their relationships following conflict?
1.3 Scope of the Study

This study does not discuss the way adolescents resolve conflict, as we were not in a position to observe actual conflict situations between peers. Rather, this study discusses the way adolescents describe their experiences of conflict within the SIP framework.

1.4 Situating the Researcher

My research in the area of conflict management in this population stems from two experiences; 1) my master’s research and 2) an employment experience at an organization for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. During my undergraduate degree, I began volunteering in the Relationships Across Development Lab at Concordia University in the Education Department. It was in this position that I began to explore conflict experiences in children and adolescents, within a Forgiveness and Revenge Study completed in this lab. I was placed in the forgiveness portion of the data and began exploring the way the participants chose to forgive or not forgive and what forms of forgiveness they used. I chose to continue in this lab for my Master’s degree, with a focus on further exploring the way that peer relationships influenced the way the participants engaged in forgiveness. I was especially interested in how the context of a close friendship (best friend), acquaintance and disliked peer relationships impacted the way participants’ perceived actions and chose to resolve the conflict. As I completed my Master’s thesis and began to consider continuing onto a PhD, I started a position as a community outreach counsellor at an organization that provides social and community support to adults with mild intellectual disabilities and supports independent living. It was in this position that I began to observe the way adults with intellectual disabilities experienced conflict with peers. I was especially interested in the close-knit community they had, which played a role in how frequently they got into arguments with friends and disliked peers and in how emotionally expressive they were during arguments. However, what most quickly drew my attention was being asked by my
clients (most of whom were older than me) to help them resolve a conflict with their friends. I frequently got calls from one particular group of women who were close friends but got into a lot of arguments. I recognized both strengths and weaknesses in the way these adults experienced conflicts with their peers, both being forward about how they felt and requiring support from caregivers to resolve conflicts. With this experience, I began to wonder what the developmental process of conflict management looked like for adolescents with intellectual disabilities. After examining the literature, I did not find a lot of attention placed on the way children and adolescents with ID experience and resolve conflict. As such, I decided to further my area of research by focusing on adolescents with and without ID.

I positioned myself as an outsider in this study. I personally do not have an intellectual disability, nor do I have family members with an intellectual disability. My role within this community has always been as an observer, caregiver, and now, researcher. I recognize a position of authority when I engage with this community both in the caregiver role and as a researcher. I tried to be intentional in building rapport with all of the participants and allowing them to become comfortable before beginning the interviews in order to reduce our power imbalance.

My previous research experience does impact the decisions I made throughout the research process. Those decisions include the topic I chose, the understanding of conflict management and some of the coding process. I believe my previous employment experience also informed the way I engaged in this study and my expectations for the participants with ID’s responses. Each of these experiences impact the lens through which I viewed participant’s narratives and responses to questions and what I considered as important to report in the final thesis.
1.5 Overview

In Chapter 2, I present a review of Information Processing (IP) and Social Information Processing (SIP), as a theoretical framework for the current study and current literature in the area of SIP. Additionally, I review the current literature on friendships and conflict to contextualize the current study. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology including the data collection process and thematic analysis used in the study. In Chapter 4, I review the thematic analyses of participants’ responses within each of the research questions. In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretations of the findings, an analysis of the use of narratives instead of hypothetical scenarios in the Modified Social Problem-Solving Test modified for children with ID (SPT-MID), strengths and limitations of the study, and the implication of the finding for this research and social support for adolescents with ID.
Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

During this chapter, I will review the theoretical perspectives that inform this qualitative study. First, I will review a brief description of Information Processing. Second, I will discuss Social Information Processing (SIP) in depth. Third, I will discuss friendship across development and its significance during adolescence. Last, I will discuss interpersonal conflict, conflict management across development, and the impact of conflict management deficits during adolescence.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives: Information Processing

Information Processing is a model of mental processes that defines the way the mind processes symbols and determines responses to those symbols. Information processing takes place in a serial order. As such, one process or step is completed at a time, and no two steps can co-occur. Despite the serial nature, information is understood to be an extremely quick process with processing taking within hundreds or tens of milliseconds to complete (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977). During this brief period of time, stimuli are inputted, interpreted and responses are chosen and outputted (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977).

The model of information processing was initially based on mathematical logic and computer models (Hardcastle, 1995). Atkinson and Shiffin (1968) identified that information processing utilizes both short-term and long-term memory. However, information processing occurs in short-term memory. When a stimulus is encoded, it is stored in short-term memory, at this time processing is activated and schemas, (pre-defined response sequences) or responses, are pulled from long-term memory into short-
term memory. The types of schemas activated depends on a number of factors, including but not limited to, the amount and type of prior learning, physical characteristics, and the context in the environment. At this point, a decision of what schema to run must be made, as a number of responses can be pulled from long-term memory at once. This decision is likely unconscious, and is dependent on the strongest schema, which is often the most frequently used or well-learned. However, it is possible that there may be equally strong schemas in this evaluation (Atkinson & Shiffin, 1968). Researchers have attempted to determine what part of the mind or what process is in control of this decision. Hardcastle (1995) argued consciousness is responsible for this portion of processing. Regardless of what is responsible for this step, it plays a role in determining which is the best fit, if the schemas pulled from long-term memory fit the situation, and if other information needs to be pulled and in activating or inhibiting schemas from running (Norman & Shallice, 1986).

Information processing is defined by automatic processing and controlled processing. The automatic processing activates schemas of learned behaviors from long-term memory (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977). When these schemas of behavior are activated, they are done without conscious effort or control from the individual. These schemas or actions are learned through repetitive and frequent practice so that they become so well learned they no longer require any direct attention. One downfall of the automatic processing is these schemas become difficult to change, ignore or stop (Hardcastle, 1995). As a result, if the schema is activated, and while it is being run, the subject determines it is an inappropriate response, it is difficult to stop. In addition, if the subject has recognized their habitual response is not effective and chose to change it, this
will take a lot of conscious effort, as their automatic schemas will run quickly without inhibition (Hardcastle, 1995; Shiffin & Schneider, 1977).

Controlled processing is utilized in situations in which individuals meet new stimuli or when moment-to-moment decisions must be made. Tasks that require controlled processing include situations that involve planning or decision making, troubleshooting, a new sequence of actions, situations that are dangerous or technically difficult, or when the individual needs to overcome a habit or temptation (Norman & Shallice, 1986). Processing takes the same steps as it would in automatic processing. Controlled processing is slower than automatic processing and requires more attention and control from the individual. However, controlled processing demonstrates that we can quickly take in new information and respond without the need for someone to train our response (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977). Following development of responses to new stimuli or situations, this learned schema is added to long-term memory for future reference (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977).

Our capacity for information processing is limited because it relies on short-term memory. Short-term memory has a limited space and capacity and can only run one process at a time. This impacts the capacity of controlled processing and may result in limited ability to respond to new information or with individuals becoming overwhelmed by new stimuli in their environment if they occur too quickly (Shiffin & Schneider, 1977).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives: Social Information Processing

The Social Information Processing (SIP) model was introduced as a method to combine perspectives on our understanding of the way children and adolescents cognitively process social interactions (Dodge, 1986). During a social situation, the steps
of SIP include 1) encoding social cues, 2) interpreting internal and external cues, 3) goal setting, 4) accessing and constructing responses, 5) evaluating responses and deciding, and 6) enacting (Dodge, 1986; Dodge & Crick 1990). Adolescents come to a social situation with their own biological capabilities and database of memories of past experiences, social schema, social knowledge, and rules (Dodge & Crick, 1990). This database influences the way they engage in each step of SIP throughout social interactions (Dodge & Crick, 1990).

I will now define each of the steps in the SIP model. In order to simplify our understanding of this process, I will consider all of the steps within the context of this social problem: peer A and peer B are playing on the playground, peer A grabs peer B’s basketball out of peer B’s hands and begins to walk away with peer C while they both laugh.

The first two steps of SIP involve encoding and interpreting social cues (Dodge, 1986). During encoding, adolescents must take in the social cues around them through perception and sensory information. Social cues may involve but are not limited to: the number of people around them, the facial expressions, tone of voice and body position of their social partner, as well as their own emotional and bodily reaction to the interactions (Dodge, 1986; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). Following encoding, adolescents must use the encoded information to interpret the situation (Dodge, 1986). Therefore, they must combine the social cues they have encoded with their own memory from past experiences and create an accurate representation of what is happening and what their social partner’s intentions are in this situation (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge & Crick, 1990; Dodge, 1986). During interpretations, adolescents will evaluate the cause of the event, the peer’s
intent, their own goals and achievement, and/or performance in their previous exchanges with this individual (Dodge & Crick, 1990).

Figure 1: Social Information Processing

Therefore, in our scenario, peer B will encode that peer A has taken the ball from his hands, through the sensation of the ball being removed from his hands and seeing it being removed. Further, peer B will encode peer A’s facial expressions as he removes the ball, turns, walks away, and peer A and C laughing. Additionally, peer B may take in the number of people around him and consider how many have seen this interaction, as well as their facial expressions. Following this, peer B will combine this information with his own memory of past experiences with peer A and past conflict or rejection experiences with other peers to determine his representation of this situation.
The third and fourth steps of SIP involve goal setting, accessing response options and choosing a response (Dodge, 1986). Adolescents may come to a social situation with a pre-defined goal, however, adolescents are likely to set their goals based on their interpretation of the social situation combined with their data base of memories, social knowledge, and social schema. Once adolescents have set a goal, they will begin to determine how to respond (Dodge & Crick, 1990). During accessing, adolescents must search their long-term memory for a number of response options that fit the scenario (Dodge, 1986). Once all the response options have been accessed, the adolescent must determine which response to use (Dodge, 1986). This decision may be based on several factors including the adolescent’s social goal in response to their social partner’s actions, how socially acceptable the response is, and their evaluation of their ability to enact that response (Dodge, 1986; Dodge & Crick, 1990). Additionally, the degree to which they desire to maintain a relationship with their partner will influence the type of response they will choose to enact (Burgess et al., 2006; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996; Tamm et al., 2018; Wainryb et al., 2020). Once they have evaluated each of the response options and determined the one they feel best matches their goals and abilities, they choose that option and move to the next stage (Dodge, 1986; Dodge & Crick, 1990). Adolescents may also determine that the response options within their database do not fit the social situation or their goals. As such, adolescents may choose to construct a behavioral response for this situation (Dodge & Crick, 1990).

Therefore, in our scenario peer B may determine his goal for this interaction is to get revenge, establish power, develop a relationship with peer A, or move away from peer A. Once he has determined his goal, peer B will access a number of responses based
on previous experiences. If peer B and peer A frequently engage in conflict, the response may be quite automatic. However, if peer B and peer A are new to each other, or usually get along quite well, peer B may have to consider more options. Let us assume that peer B and peer A usually get along and this type of conflict is new for them. Peer B will consider all the options in his memory, then he will evaluate them based on his social goals and his ability to enact each response. Peer B will then choose the most positively evaluated response. Therefore, if peer B would like to maintain a friendship with peer A, he may choose, for example, to not respond aggressively, and rather to calmly explain to his friend that his actions were hurtful or to walk away until they can speak on their own.

The final step of SIP is enacting (Dodge, 1986). During this step, adolescents must enact the chosen response. However, it is also important to consider that social interactions are ongoing (Dodge & Crick, 1990). As such, one response does not terminate the interaction. Adolescents must continue the SIP steps (Dodge & Crick, 1990). As they enact their response, adolescents must re-enter into the encoding phase in order to determine whether their response is achieving their social goal and what steps to take next (Dodge & Crick, 1990). In situations where their goal is not being met by their response, adolescents must consider if they want to continue to attempt to achieve that goal by repeating the response, changing the response, or giving up on their goal altogether (Dodge & Crick, 1990).

Therefore, in our scenario, peer B has chosen to calmly explain to his friend that what he did was hurtful, while he enacts this response, peer A continues to laugh at him and walk away. At this point, peer B must decide if he would like to continue with this response, try another response option with the same goal in mind or move on to another
goal. Let us assume that peer B chooses to give up on this goal and move on, he may then choose to walk away. This experience will inform future interactions with peer A by impacting the way peer B encodes and interprets social cues and responds to peer A.

The SIP model is an online brain performance that is a constantly occurring cycle of encoding, interpreting, and accessing responses (Crick & Dodge, 1994). The SIP steps occur sequentially, however, the steps also occur simultaneously. In order to move though social interactions, we must move through the SIP steps extremely quickly. Although adolescents follow steps in a linear manner, steps may be influenced by a number of factors, and may not directly relate to previous steps. Therefore, adolescents’ databases may impact their interpretation, goals, and responses so that previous steps are disregarded or missed (Crick & Dodge, 1994). This may result in behavioural responses that are not appropriate for the situation (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 1986).

Researchers cannot prove that any one step is most likely to lead to inappropriate behavior or social maladjustment (Dodge & Crick, 1990; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). However, breakdowns at any step may happen in one of three forms (Dodge, 1986). First, the adolescents may fail to complete a step (Dodge, 1986). For example, adolescents that rely on strict social schemata, may demonstrate socially maladjusted behavior, by failing to consider other response options (Dodge & Crick, 1990). Using the same responses to social situations without considering other options may cause adolescents to respond inappropriately (Dodge, 1986; Dodge & Crick, 1990). For example, in our scenario, peer B may rely on a social schema of avoidance and may therefore not respond to peer A’s actions. While this could be an appropriate step to reduce the chances of escalating the situation, if peer B always
avoids scenarios, this may contribute to the way he is accepted by peers and may be the reason peer A felt it was acceptable to steal his ball in the first place.

Second, the adolescent may have a deficit in the skill necessary for a step (Dodge, 1986). For example, adolescents that have difficulty reading facial expressions or lack awareness of their surroundings may struggle to encode cues in social situations, which may cause difficulty in proceeding appropriately through the remainder of the SIP steps (Dodge & Crick, 1990; Thirion-Marissiaux & Nader-Grosbois, 2008; Zaja & Rojahn, 2008). Additionally, the number of responses accessed impacts effective responding (Dodge & Crick, 1990). Adolescents that have a limited repertoire of responses may lack the appropriate response to a social situation (Crick & Dodge, 1994). For example, in our scenario, peer B may not recognize that peer A and peer C were laughing, or may not have the ability to register the force with which peer A took the ball from him and may proceed as though peer A and peer C are playing with him. Additionally, as previously mentioned, peer B may not be able to access multiple response options and may rely on avoidance or aggression, if those are the only options he can think of.

Third, the adolescents may have a bias in processing (Dodge, 1986). Adolescents may have an attribution bias based on frequent experiences of hostility or negative perception of peers or social networks (Dodge & Crick, 1990; Loeb et al., 2016). Attribution biases impact the way adolescents will encode cues, causing them to focus on cues that reinforce their bias (Dodge & Crick, 1990). Further, adolescents will be more likely to interpret cues according to their bias (Dodge, 1986). As such, adolescents that have a hostile attribution bias, will encode more negative facial expressions, vocal tones, and postures (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Further, hostile attribution biases may cause
adolescents to interpret hostile intent from social cues, which will reinforce their hostile expectations (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Attribution biases may also impact adolescents’ ability to evaluate response options (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Therefore, adolescents may consider negative or aggressive responses more positively because of an attributional bias (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge & Crick, 1990). For example, in our scenario, peer B may have a hostile attribution bias and may assume that peer A and peer C are making fun of him, which could cause him to react by becoming physically aggressive or yelling at them.

2.2.1 Social Information Processing Measures

SIP has long been measured using the Social Problem-Solving Test (SPT) or the Attributions and Coping Questionnaire (ACQ; Burgess et al., 2006; Dodge et al., 1986). Both of these measures use hypothetical vignettes of social problems presented using stories, cartoons, or videos. In order to understand the way adolescents consider social problems, they are asked to consider stories through the lens of the protagonist and respond to questions based on how they would feel or act in the situation. Adolescents are asked about: (a) What has happened in the story, (b) Why they think the perpetrator did that (c) How they would respond, (d) Why they would respond that way and, (e) How confident they feel in their ability to enact response options, using multiple choice options. In order to measure adolescents’ ability to think of multiple responses, adolescents are also asked to provide spontaneous response options to the question, “what else could you have done”. This same procedure has been used to measure SIP steps and social problem solving in adolescents for decades (Dodge; et al., 1986; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Researchers have developed measures for children, adolescents, adolescents with intellectual disabilities (SPT-MID) and adolescents in
residential settings with behavioural issues by changing vignettes to better-fit life experiences of those adolescents (Matthys et al., 1999; Vagos et al., 2016; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Rest et al., 2014).

However, researchers have identified that the use of hypothetical scenarios may not capture SIP accurately. Despite their use of hypothetical scenarios, Crick and Dodge (1994), emphasized in their own review of the SIP model that the use of hypothetical scenarios fails to recognize the way emotions, relationships and social experiences influence adolescents’ responses. Further, participants are likely not emotionally involved in the hypothetical scenario, meaning their responses will not be reflective of their real life behavior (van Rest et al., 2014). Additionally, critiques of the SIP model, have emphasized that the use of hypothetical scenarios imposes researchers’ own social group norms into the scenario. As such, adolescents’ accuracy or ability to recognize intent is measured according to the researcher’s social understanding. However, we know that individuals own perception of social situations are not necessarily the same as those of researchers. Therefore, researchers have identified that there is a need to examine SIP without the use of hypothetical scenarios, focusing rather on real life experiences (Burgess et al., 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994; van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). As a result, researchers have attempted to measure the way adolescents experience social problems in real life by developing contrived scenarios. Specifically, most studies ask adolescents to participate in two scenarios; a peer group entry and being prevented from winning a game (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005).
Researchers have examined whether participants’ behavior in the contrived scenarios are reflective of their responses to hypothetical scenarios. Results have shown that participants’ responses to hypothetical scenarios are most reflective of their real life behavior when they are asked spontaneous questions than when they are given multiple-choice options (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). However, overall, participants’ responses in hypothetical scenarios may not be true to the way they behave in their real life social problems (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). When participants respond to hypothetical situations, they have time to consider their options. In a real-life situation, adolescents do not have a lot of time to consider the way they want to respond and decisions have to be made immediately. Further, when participants respond to hypothetical situations in a laboratory setting, their responses may be impacted by social desirability. This means, participants may try to respond in the way they think the researcher will expect them to or that will allow them to be evaluated positively (Sutton et al., 1999; Woods, 2010). This may also be the case in situations where participants engaged in contrived real-life situations in a laboratory setting where they may be aware of the camera or researcher in the room. Additionally, responding to hypothetical scenarios requires verbal skills that may not be required in real life situations (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). Lastly, researchers have identified that using hypothetical scenarios may be less emotionally relevant for adolescents than experiencing social problems in their own lives (Komolova & Wainryb, 2011).

Measures that use hypothetical scenarios to evaluate social problem solving either have adolescents try to place themselves in someone else’s shoes or participate in a situation with strangers (Burgess et al., 2006). As such, it may be very difficult to
measure the impact of relational context on the social problem solving of adolescents within the context of a hypothetical scenario. Research has shown that the relational context within which a social interaction occurs impacts the way adolescents respond (Bowker et al., 2007; Burgess et al., 2006; Peets et al., 2013). Using hypothetical scenarios, researchers have asked adolescents to think about their best friend as the perpetrator (Burgess et al., 2006). Results have shown that adolescents have demonstrated increased willingness to engage in positive and adaptive coping strategies with best friends than with unfamiliar peers (Bowker et al., 2007; Burgess et al., 2006). However, given the need to assume the way they may experience hypothetical scenarios, responses in these studies may not be true to the ways adolescents would engage in social problem solving in real life (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). For years, researchers have recommended the exploration of the way adolescents engage in social information processing and social problem-solving including conflict management within real life scenarios (Burgess et al., 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Pert & Jahoda, 2008; van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijjzen et al., 2005). As such, it is important to use the framework of SIP measures to better understand the way adolescents perceive, experience, and respond to conflict situations in their real-life experiences within varying relational contexts.

2.2.2 Social Information Processing and Intellectual Disabilities

The DSM-5 describes intellectual disabilities (ID) or intellectual developmental disability as a disorder associated with limitations in cognitive functioning and includes adaptive and intellectual deficits within conceptual, social, and practical areas. Delays in intellectual functioning include deficits in reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, and learning from experience. Delays in areas of adaptive
functioning impact individuals with IDs’ ability to communicate and engage in appropriate social interactions. As a consequence of these areas of delay, individuals with ID may appear immature in their social interactions. Therefore, these individuals may misread social cues, struggle to regulate their emotions, and may behave in age-inappropriate ways. Further, these adolescents have limited social understanding and, as a result, struggle to understand social situations and may be taken advantage of by peers (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2013). The DSM-5 provides levels of functioning including mild, moderate, and severe intellectual functioning, which are determined by an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score and differences in adaptive functioning. Therefore, individuals with more severe cognitive, social, and adaptive deficits are categorized by moderate or severe intellectual functioning (APA, 2013). Further, some individuals are diagnosed with mild/borderline intellectual disability (MBID) if they do not meet the criteria for ID but still have an IQ score that suggests cognitive and social deficits. Research examining individuals with intellectual disabilities generally examine individuals with mild, moderate, or mild/borderline intellectual disabilities together. Therefore, to remain consistent language, intellectual disabilities (ID) will be used to refer to all levels of ID in research for the remainder of this paper (APA, 2013).

It is evident by the description of ID put forth by the DSM-5 that adolescents with ID experience deficits that impact their ability to engage in social interactions (APA, 2013). Conflict management in adolescents requires sophisticated social skills. Further, more sophisticated conflict management skills are associated with increased social cognitive development (Laursen et al., 2001). As such, adolescents with ID may not have
acquired the social skills or cognitive ability to engage in conflict management and build and maintain friendships in the same way as typically developing adolescents, which may place them at a disadvantage socially amongst their peers (APA, 2013; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2012).

Given the foundation of the SIP model, there are a number of cognitive processes that influence adolescents’ ability to effectively and accurately engage in SIP (Baurain & Nader-Grosbois, 2013; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Working memory, long term memory, perspective taking, emotion recognition, emotion regulation and inhibition are some of the important cognitive processes involved in SIP (Baurain & Nader-Grosbois, 2013; Dučić et al., 2018; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Therefore, typically developing adolescent are generally better able to engage in SIP as these cognitive processes become better developed (Crick & Dodge, 1994). However, SIP may be more difficult for adolescent with cognitive delay such as adolescents with ID (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012).

van Nieuwenhuijzen and colleagues (2011) compared SIP in children with and without ID using hypothetical scenarios. They found that children with ID struggled to identify problems in social situations. Specifically, children with ID had more difficulty encoding and interpreting social information, especially in the context of complex situations. Children with ID struggled to recognize fear and sadness. Children with ID were also found to rely on previous knowledge rather than the information presented to them in the scenario. As a consequence of poor encoding and interpretation skills, children with ID were more likely to attribute hostile intent to the antagonist. Children with ID were more likely to choose passive responses, such as withdrawing overactive
responses, such as negotiating. Lastly, children with ID were more likely to choose revenge goals than positive goals. Consequently, children with ID struggle to choose appropriate responses and as such choose either not to respond or to respond aggressively rather than attempting to respond in a positive and productive way (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011).

Studies have also examined whether SIP explains aggressive behavior in children with ID (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2006). van Nieuwenhuijzen and colleagues (2006), found that the previous experiences of positive consequences following aggressive responses may inform children with ID’s likelihood to generate aggressive responses and demonstrate more aggressive behavior (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2006). Further, van Nieuwenhuijzen and colleagues (2004) found that children with ID and externalizing behavior problems struggled with encoding situational information and were more likely to generate, positively evaluate, and select aggressive responses. Therefore, these studies indicate that children with ID are more likely to respond aggressively to social interactions with peers (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al. 2006; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009).

van Rest and colleagues (2019) examined SIP in adolescents with and without ID. They found that adolescents with and without ID performed similarly on SIP skills. However, adolescents with ID had more difficulty recognizing a problem in video vignettes than typically developing adolescents. As such, adolescents with ID may struggle to recognize social problems (van Rest et al., 2019).

Overall, studies have identified that children with ID have more difficulty in SIP compared to typically developing children (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van
Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). Specifically, children with ID encode fewer social cues, especially in complex situations (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). Children with ID are more likely to interpret hostile or negative intent (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Lastly, children with ID are more likely to generate, positively evaluate, and choose aggressive or submissive responses (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2006; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009). Deficits in SIP impact children with ID’s social interactions and social problem solving skills (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009; Van Nieuwenhuijzen, at al., 2011). Lastly, adolescents with ID have more difficulty recognizing social problems (van Rest et al., 2019).

The cognitive delays associated with ID, therefore place adolescents with ID at a disadvantage for engaging in social interactions positively (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Consequently, adolescents with ID may struggle to engage in social interactions, more specifically conflict situations with other adolescents (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). We know that children with ID demonstrate significant difficulties compared to peers without ID in the areas of SIP, which impacts their social interactions and ability to manage conflict with peers. However, we have little information about the way adolescents with ID experience conflict with peers, and how they engage in SIP steps. Given the delays in children with ID, it is likely adolescents with ID will struggle as well. If this is true, adolescents with ID will be at increased risk of not being able to positively engage in social interactions with peers, struggling to build and maintain friendships and manage conflicts (APA, 2013; Laursen, 1996).
2.3 Friendships

Friendship is defined as a voluntary positive relationship shared between two individuals (Bukowski et al., 1996; Laursen, 1996; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Friendship involves key features including loyalty, companionship, trust, reciprocity, equality, mutual help and support (Berndt, 2002). However, friendships include negative features such as conflict, rivalry, and dominance. As such, friendship quality is determined based on the number of positive and negative features involved. Friendships involving more positive features, such as intimacy, loyalty, trust, and emotional support are perceived as higher quality. Contrarily, friendships involving more negative features are perceived as lower quality (Berndt, 1996). Therefore, friendships that involve frequent conflict are related to lower friendship quality and relationship satisfaction (Van Doorn et al., 2009).

2.3.1 Friendships Across Development

Friendships shift across development. During early school-age, children view friends as playmates. In this stage, children choose friends who share similar interests and play with children who are accessible to them (Selman et al., 1977). As children enter late childhood, friendships are defined as mutual relationships. As such, children at this stage choose each other as friends. During this period trust and responsiveness to needs and desires increases in importance in friendships (Markieevicz et al., 2001). As children transition into early adolescence, the exclusivity of friendship increases in importance. Therefore, during this stage adolescents place importance on maintaining important friendships (Komolova & Wainryb, 2011).

The friendship relationship in adolescence increases in intimacy and quality. During the adolescent years, adolescents turn away from their families as their primary
supports and begin to rely on friends and peers for social and emotional support. As adolescents rely on their friends for support they engage in more intimate self-disclosure than previous developmental periods. As a consequence of the increased intimacy and self-disclosure involved in adolescent friendship, expectations from friends also increase (Berndt, 2002; Jones et al., 1989). These expectations include being trustworthy, respectful, mutually affirming, and cooperative (Selman et al., 1997; Berndt, 2002).

Similarly, adolescents become more selective during the adolescent period than in previous developmental periods. This is a consequence of the increased intimacy, expectations and desire for higher quality friendships. Therefore, adolescents are more likely to identify 2-3 close friends, rather than a group of friends. Further, if adolescents believe a friend is not meeting their expectations, they are less likely than younger children to maintain friendships (Hardy et al., 2002). During childhood, popularity is more important, as such 9- to 12-year-old children are more likely to remain in friendships that may not be beneficial for them in an effort to maintain peer status and popularity (Rubin et al., 2015). However, adolescents are less influenced by the desire to maintain popularity. As such, adolescents have been found to be more likely to end friendships or distance themselves from friends that are not viewed as a good friend (Furman & Burhmester, 1992; MacEvoy & Asher, 2012; Selman et al., 1997).

Positive friendship quality has been linked to positive benefits for adolescents including: increased self-esteem and self-worth, and decreased risk for depression, anxiety and other mental health issues (Berndt, 2004; Rose et al., 2007). Additionally, adolescents experience increased feelings of acceptance and inclusion when they have reciprocal close friendships that are positive in quality (Berndt, 1996). As previously
mentioned, friendships provide a space to develop a greater understanding of relationships (Rubin et al., 2015). However, friendships also provide a safe space to explore self-identify, self-concept and develop a realistic understanding of self (Berndt, 2002). Further, adolescents who have positive friendships experience improved academic outcomes and are more likely to attend post-secondary education (Berndt, 2004).

2.3.2  **Friendships in Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities**

Friendships change and develop with adolescents’ cognitive development. As such, as adolescents are better able to understand varying perspectives, they are better able to understand friend’s needs and desires. Cognitive development further impacts adolescents’ abilities to initiate friendships, engage in appropriate social interactions with peers, and respond to conflict situations. The accumulation of social experiences across development further informs adolescents’ understanding of social situations. Cognitive delays in individuals with ID impact their social experiences and friendships (Hardy et al., 2002; Bennet et al., 2017; Matheson et al., 2007; Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017).

Researchers have examined the expectations of adolescents with ID in friendships (Bennet et al., 2017; Matheson et al., 2007; Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017). These studies have mixed findings (Bennet et al., 2017; Matheson et al., 2007; Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017). Some studies identify that adolescents with ID have less sophisticated expectations for friendships, which are similar to expectations observed in younger children (Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017). Contrarily, other studies have found that adolescents with ID desire to build and maintain similar friendships to typically developing adolescents (Bennett et al., 2017; Matheson et al., 2007; Sigstad, 2017).

Many studies have identified that adolescents with ID and typically developing adolescents have very similar expectations in friendships (Bennett et al., 2017; Matheson
et al., 2007; Sigstad, 2017). Specifically, adolescents with ID have described desiring companionship and stability in friendships (Matheson et al., 2007). Further, adolescents with ID describe expecting reciprocity, loyalty, trust, integrity and emotional support (Bennett et al., 2017; Matheson et al., 2007; Sigstad, 2017). These expectations and friendship characteristics match those described by typically developing adolescents (Sigstad, 2017).

However, some aspects of friendships in adolescents with ID relate to those observed in younger children, such as, shared interests, and enjoyment (Selman, et al., 1977). While older adolescents do prefer friends that share their interests, they are more likely to describe a positive friendship based on intimacy, mutual trust, and respect (Berndt, 2002; Burhmester, 1996). Furthermore, some aspects of friendships in adolescents with ID are completely unique, such as caregiving, helping, and balance (Bennett et al., 2017). Adolescents with ID identify depending on typically developing peers or peers with other disabilities for instrumental support in areas of deficit (Knox & Hickson, 2001; Salmon, 2013). For example, adolescents with ID describe receiving support with schoolwork or with taking the bus (Mokhtari, 2008; Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017). Further, adolescents with ID describe balance as an important aspect of a positive friendship (Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017). More specifically, adolescents with ID show concern for lacking power and control within their friendships (Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2016). These expectations or desires represent the unique needs of adolescents with ID in their social and adaptive functioning (Mokhtari, 2008; Salmon, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2016; APA, 2013).
The desires of adolescents with ID with regards to their social lives is of important consideration. Adolescents with ID often identify wanting to experience close friendships and improved contact with their peers (Knox & Hickson, 2001). However, not having the same level of social skills and ability to interact with peers inhibits their ability to break through the barriers in their social networks.

Adolescents with ID frequently experience rejection and social isolation within the school environment (Reed et al., 2011; Zic & Igric, 2001; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997). Typically developing peers are less accepting of adolescents with ID, and they are less likely to choose them as social, work, or classroom partners (Zic & Igric, 2001). Further, adolescents with ID are often the target of bullying (Christen et al., 2012). Many studies have found these adolescents are rejected as a consequence of externalizing behavior, social withdrawal and socially inappropriate behavior (Reed et al., 2011; Tipton et al., 2013).

Adolescents with ID frequently identify experiencing feelings of social isolation within their social networks (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997). Further, adolescents with ID have been found to have less close and warm friendships and friendships of lower quality with peers than typically developing adolescents (Tipton et al., 2013). As such adolescents with ID experience less social and emotional support from peers and feel a lack of social connectedness. Consequently, adolescents with ID experience negative consequences for their emotional well-being (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Tipton et al., 2013).

Adolescents with ID have identified that they perceive stigma as a factor that impacts their ability to form balanced mutually beneficial friendships with typically
developing peers their age (Salmon, 2013). As a result, adolescents with ID identify forming close friendships with peers they view as most similar to them in their social networks. This includes other adolescents with developmental disabilities and adolescents of a younger age group (Reed et al., 2011; Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017).

Across development, improved social lives and social relationships have a positive impact on the overall well-being of individuals with ID (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018; Murray & Greenberg, 2006). Having a positive social network increases the resilience to negative outcomes in adolescents with ID (Hall & Theron, 2016). Individuals with ID who have close friendships are less likely to experience neglect or abuse and are more likely to be treated fairly and to engage in self-advocacy (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018). Further, having close friends leads to increased chances for adolescents with ID to develop social skills, interact with peers and feel accepted (Berndt, 2002; Berndt, 2004). Lastly, close friendships reduce their feelings of isolation and loneliness (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997).

### 2.3.3 Importance of Friendships in Adolescence

Adolescent friendships require advanced interpersonal skills including communication, interacting in multiple contexts, conflict management skills, ability to engage in self-disclosure, and provide emotional support (Buhrmester, 1996). Unfortunately, social deficits in adolescents with ID impact their ability to develop these interpersonal skills (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997).

Friendship relationships provide an important opportunity to develop conflict management skills. Engaging in conflict resolution during childhood provides a model for the understanding of justice, affect regulation, and autonomy required in managing conflicts (Laursen et al., 2001). Adolescent friendships involve levels of interdependence
and autonomy which must be protected. Therefore, adolescents must learn to negotiate each other’s wants and needs to protect their shared relationship and their own independence (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Adolescent friendships provide opportunities to learn to reason with one another. Further, adolescent friendships provide adolescents with a better understanding of their social worlds (Laursen et al., 2001).

For adolescents that are unable to develop close friendships in adolescence, they lack important opportunities to learn about their social worlds, how to negotiate and positively resolve conflicts (Laursen, 1996; Tipton et al., 2013). Therefore, adolescents with ID, who struggle to build and maintain close friendships, may not have the opportunity to learn important social skills in the safe context of a close friendship (Laursen et al., 2001). Deficits in social skills, SIP, and decision-making impact adolescents’ ability to manage conflict (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Bexkens et al., 2016). As such, adolescents with social deficits are more likely to fail to meet interpersonal expectations in friendships, including being able to resolve conflicts (Adams & Laursen, 2001). Unfortunately, for adolescents with ID, not having close friendships further impacts their ability to develop the important interpersonal skills to meet friendship expectations (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Buhrmester, 1996). Therefore, adolescents with ID are less likely to have the appropriate conflict management skills to be able to maintain a close friendship (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Laursen, 1996; Tipton et al., 2013).

2.4 Interpersonal Conflict

Conflict is generally understood as a disagreement between two parties as a consequence of differences in opinions, status, goals, perceptions, or the need to share limited resources. Conflict is understood to involve certain elements, including: difference, opposition, dissonance, and incompatibility (Ayaz et al., 2010). Additionally,
conflict is defined as involving disagreement, negative emotion, and/or interference (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). As such, all conflict experiences between parties will involve one or more of these themes. For example, two individuals may experience conflict as a result of opposing views on a topic, feeling hurt, or being held back from a goal as a result of another’s actions (Barki & Hartwick, 2004).

Based on these descriptions of conflict, it is evident that conflict does not occur in one prescribed situation, relationship, or context. Rather, conflict can occur across relationships and contexts and stemming from a number of different causes (Ayaz et al., 2010; Shantz & Hartup, 1995). Therefore, we do not only experience conflict in the context of our home, but in our daily travels in work, school, and in public. Our experiences of conflict may occur with family members and friends, but we will also experience conflict with acquaintances and strangers (Barki & Hartwick, 2002). Conflict plays a role in our daily lives, social interactions, and relationships. We must therefore be prepared to deal with conflict appropriately in all situations. As such, our ability to manage conflict will impact our ability to interact positively with those around us, acquire resources and support, and engage in important relationships (Shantz & Hartup, 1995).

Researchers have examined the ways in which we engage in conflict management. Conflict resolution styles include: submission/compliance, negotiation, coercion, third-party intervention, and withdrawal/disengagement (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Laursen et al., 2001). Submission or compliance involves giving in to the other party without defending your own opinion or feelings (de Wied et al., 2007). Negotiation involves explaining one’s own viewpoint and/or asking for the other’s opinion, therefore
taking both parties values, beliefs, desires, and needs into consideration (Tamm et al., 2018). Coercion involves acting in a way that only benefits one’s own wishes, being defensive, manipulative, aggressive, or vengeful, therefore not taking the other party’s wishes into consideration (Tamm et al., 2018). Third-party intervention involves seeking out another peer or an authority figure to help resolve the issue (Fenning et al., 2011). Disengagement or withdrawal involves pulling away from the conflict and allowing things to work out for themselves, not taking active steps to fix the problem (Tamm et al., 2018).

Some conflict management strategies may be more active such as negotiation or coercion. Other conflict management strategies may be more passive, such as withdrawal, submission, and utilizing a third-party intervention (Scott, 2008). Additionally, strategies that involve taking the relationship or the other individual’s interests into consideration are perceived as more positive or prosocial. Strategies that do not take the relationship into consideration or are selfish in nature are perceived as more negative or antisocial (Keener et al., 2019). Strategies that are generally considered negative include coercion and withdrawal and disengagement, as they are considered more antisocial. Contrarily, strategies that are described as positive include negotiation or submission or compliance, because they are more prosocial towards the conflict partner (Keener et al., 2019). Other strategies can fit into positive or negative categories depending on a number of factors including relationship context, the intention behind their use and potential outcomes in the situation (Keener et al., 2019). Therefore, when a strategy is prosocial in nature and is used with the relationship and peer in mind and with positive intentions, such as to improve the relationship or help the other, it is considered positive. Contrarily, when a
strategy is antisocial in nature and is used without considering the relationship or peer, or with disregard for the relationship or peer and with negative intentions, such as to take revenge, it is considered negative (Keener et al., 2019; Tamm et al., 2018).

2.4.1 Conflict Management Across Development

Interpersonal conflict is experienced across development. The ability to engage in conflict management requires an appropriate ability to process social information, select response styles, and communicate (Adams & Laursen, 2001). These skills become increasingly valuable in older children and adolescents as the complexity of relationships, social environments, and conflicts increase (Laursen, 1996). Conflict management increases in sophistication as cognitive abilities develop (Laursen et al., 2001). As such, adolescents are more likely than children to have the skills required to engage in conflict management strategies such as negotiation and coercion, which require more advanced cognitive abilities, such as taking others perspective into consideration. In contrast, children are more likely to engage in withdrawal, avoidance or using a third-party to resolve conflicts with peers (Laursen et al., 2001).

Research has demonstrated that conflict management is required to successfully engage in the context of social interaction during adolescent development (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Laursen, 1996). The period of adolescent development is perceived as one in which adolescents become more selective about the peers with whom they choose to surround themselves (Bowker, 2004). Adolescents evaluate peers based on their abilities to engage in positive conflict management (Demir & Urberg, 2004). Adolescents indicate a lack of willingness to continue important friendships or relationships with social partners that are unable to engage in appropriate conflict management (Bowker, 2004).
Adolescents who do not possess the skills to manage conflict may be isolated from their peers (Laursen, 1996).

2.4.2 Conflict in Adolescents

Adolescents’ conflict management strategies are influenced by a number of factors. The way that adolescents will engage in conflict management with parents and peers is different. The parent-child relationship has a power imbalance, such that parents hold more leverage. Similarly, adolescents do not fear the loss of their relationship with their parent. Therefore, adolescents may not engage in negotiation with a parent, rather they may be more likely to engage in coercion or submission (Laursen et al., 2001). In contrast, peer relationships involve a balance of power and are defined as voluntary. Therefore, the relationship is vulnerable to changing or ending if adolescents do not take steps to protect the relationship. Adolescents experiencing conflicts in the context of a friendship are likely to focus on maintaining their relationship with the perpetrator (Adams & Laursen, 2001). Specifically, in order to ensure relationships are maintained, negotiation is the most adaptive conflict management strategy. Negotiation allows equal outcomes for both individuals involved in the conflict (Laursen et al., 2001). Adolescents do engage in negative or less constructive conflict management strategies such as coercion with peers. However, adolescents appear to avoid strategies that will negatively influence their relationships with friends and peers (Laursen et al., 2001).

Relationship type further impacts the types of responses accessed and how responses are evaluated (Burgess et al., 2006; Tamm et al., 2018). Adolescents are more likely to attempt to minimize the amount of impact a conflict may have on their relationship with a friend than a non-friend (Peets et al., 2013). As such, adolescents’ response generation and evaluation will be driven by their desire to maintain the
relationship with their friend (Burgess et al., 2006; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996; Tamm et al., 2018). Adolescents use more positive conflict management strategies in close friendships, such as negotiation (Tamm et al., 2018). Contrarily, with non-friends, adolescents perceive conflict as more hostile in nature (Peets et al., 2013). Consequently, adolescents are more likely to use negative conflict management strategies, such as coercion with non-friends or disliked peers (Burgess et al., 2006; Tamm et al., 2018). However, when adolescents experience a betrayal of their friendship expectations, they are more likely to feel angry and less likely to engage in positive conflict management strategies (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012; Wainryb et al., 2020).

Conflict between peers in adolescence has been found to frequently center on 4 main areas: shared interests, romantic competition, exclusivity of friendships, and backstabbing (Tamm et al., 2018). Adolescents perceive some areas of conflict as more severe in nature than others, which impacts the way they respond. Conflicts that threaten the future of a relationship or betray the expectations of a friendship are perceived as more severe by adolescents (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). Specifically, when a friend engages in backstabbing, such as talking badly about them behind their back, or sharing personal information, this is perceived as betraying an unspoken agreement of trust and positive evaluation from a friend (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012; Tamm et al., 2018). When adolescents perceive conflict as more severe, they are more likely to choose negative conflict management strategies (Peets et al., 2013; Tamm et al., 2018). Ultimately, adolescents are less willing to maintain a friendship with a friend they perceive as treating them poorly, or not meeting their friendship expectations (Tamm et al., 2018). Therefore, adolescents will choose to end the relationship or distance themselves from
friends who they perceive as behaving in hostile or negative ways (Casper & Card, 2010; Tamm et al., 2018). Generally, within friendships, adolescents strive to resolve conflict positively, allowing for the maintenance of a close friendship (Komolova & Wainryb, 2011). However, conflict can lead to neutral, positive, or negative consequences for the friendship relationship (Bowker, 2004; 2011; Tsang et al., 2006). Adolescents describe conflicts leading to improvements in relationships with friends, relationships remaining the same or negative changes in relationships, such as deteriorations or friendships ending (Bowker, 2011; Casper & Card, 2010).

Lastly, emotional reactions and empathy have been found to influence the way adolescents respond to interpersonal conflict (de Wied et al., 2007; MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). Adolescents who are able to experience empathy for the perpetrator are more likely to engage in positive conflict management. Adolescents that struggle to understand the other party’s perspective, or reason for their behavior will likely engage in more negative conflict management such as coercion (de Wied et al., 2007). Experiencing anger is also associated with more negative conflict management such as aggression and revenge (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). Further, adolescents that experience anger following a conflict are less likely to report relationship maintenance goals. Contrarily, when adolescents experience sadness following a conflict they are more likely to engage in problem solving and report relationship maintenance goals (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012).

Conflict plays an important role in adolescent relationships (Laursen, 1996). Specifically, conflict management skills partially inform the way adolescents choose friendship partners (Bowker, 2004; Demir & Urberg, 2004). Therefore, adolescents that are unable to positively engage in conflict management are less likely to be chosen as
friends (Demir & Urbger, 2004; Laursen, 1996). Adolescent friendships also provide context and opportunity to develop and improve conflict management skills (Laursen, 1996). As we have seen, adolescents with ID are less likely to have close friendships during the adolescent period (Salmon, 2013; Tipton et al., 2013). Therefore, adolescents with ID may not have the opportunity to develop conflict management skills in the same ways as typically developing adolescents (Laursen, 1996). This may impact their ability to form important peer relationships and engage in conflict management across a number of relationships. As such, adolescents with ID are stuck in a negative cycle within which they lack close peer relationships and the skills necessary to build those relationships (Laursen, 1996; Salmon, 2013).

Research examining the way typically developing adolescents experience conflict across peer relationships and engage in conflict management has been extensive (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012; Pert & Jahoda, 2008). Unfortunately, less research has focused on the way adolescents with ID experience conflict across peer relationships (Pert & Jahoda, 2008). Further, very little research has examined how adolescents with ID think about managing conflict with peers and what forms of conflict management they engage in. Lastly, research has yet to examine the impact conflict and conflict management has on the future of the shared relationship in adolescents with ID (Larkin et al., 2012). As such, we have been left with a gap in the current state of research. Further, our ability to support the social development of adolescents with ID in peer relationships is hindered.
2.4.3 **Interpersonal Conflict and Intellectual Disabilities**

Larkin and colleagues, (2012) examined experiences of conflict in adolescents and young adults with ID compared to typically developing peers. They found that individuals with ID describe experiencing more conflict with non-friends than with friends. Further, individuals with ID describe experiencing conflict that involves verbal or physical aggression more than typically developing peers (Larkin et al., 2012). Additionally, individuals with ID have been shown to perceive conflict as more personally targeting. Individuals with ID describe feeling victimized following conflict more than typically developing individuals (Larkin et al., 2012). Other studies have found that adults with ID are more likely to respond to conflict with aggressive behaviors as a means to avoid maltreatment and gain approval from peers. However, these findings are more specific to adults with aggressive behavior problems. Individuals with ID without aggressive behavior problems were more likely to respond to conflict submissively, therefore not actively attempting to resolve the conflict (Pert & Jahoda, 2008). When adults with ID use more problem-focused strategies to manage conflict, such as communicating with their conflict partner, they experience increased psychological distress (Hartley & Maclean, 2008). As such, in general it appears that individuals with ID struggle to effectively resolve conflict (Sigstad, 2017).

As we have discussed, currently very little research has examined conflict management in adolescents with ID (Sigstad, 2017). Some qualitative studies have discovered that adolescents with ID perceive conflict as a feature of friendships and describe experiencing conflict with friends (Bennett et al., 2017; Sigstad, 2017). However, the few adolescents with ID that described conflict as a part of friendship,
identified turning to adults for support in dealing with disagreements, or avoiding conflict all together (Bennet et al., 2017; Sigstad, 2017). As such, currently, there is no evidence that adolescents with ID have positive conflict management skills, which will allow them to maintain high quality friendships (Sigstad, 2017). Given the role of conflict management in adolescent friendships and vice versa it is vital that adolescents with ID have positive conflict management skills (Laursen, 1996; Salmon, 2013). We know that friendships play an important role in the overall well-being of adolescents with and without ID (Berndt, 2002; Berndt, 2004; Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018). As such, it is our responsibility to ensure we have the knowledge required to support them in the development of important social skills required for the development and maintenance of friendships.

2.5 Current Study
This study will compare the way adolescents with and without ID report experiences of conflict with best friends and non-friends. First, this study will examine the way adolescents with ID describe their own experiences with conflict with peers compared to typically developing peers, rather than examining hypothetical situations as has been the method in the past. I hypothesize that adolescents with ID may report perceiving conflicts as more hostile compared to adolescents without ID. Adolescents with ID may report more negative interpretations of peers’ actions than typically developing adolescents (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009; Van Nieuwenhuijzen at al., 2011; Larkin et al., 2013). Research has shown that adolescents evaluate conflicts with non-friends as more hostile (Peets et al., 2013). Individuals with ID have been reported to experience more conflict with acquaintances, strangers or peers outside of their peer group (Larkin et al.,
Additionally, individuals with ID evaluate actions in conflict situations as being more hostile and personally targeting (Larkin et al., 2012).

Second, this study will examine differences in the ways adolescents with and without ID report responding to conflict with best friends and non-friends. I hypothesize that adolescents with and without ID will report engaging in more positive conflict management strategies with best friends than non-friends. Previous research has demonstrated that adolescents respond to conflict with best friends more positively than with non-friends (Peets et al., 2013; Tamm et al., 2018). As such, it is expected that adolescents with and without ID will report responding to conflicts with non-friends more negatively than with best friends (Larkin et al., 2012; Peets et al., 2013; Pert & Jahoda, 2013). I further hypothesize that adolescents with ID will report less active and less positive conflict management strategies than adolescents without ID (Jahoda et al., 2012; Pert & Jahoda, 2008; Sigstad, 2017). Adolescents with ID have been found to evaluate conflict partners actions as more hostile and personally targeted. Further, children with ID demonstrate less empathy towards conflict partners which impacts the way they respond or engage in conflict management (Larkin et al., 2011). Therefore, the way adolescents with ID respond to experiences of conflict may reflect their tendency to perceive negative social interactions as a result of the social stigma and isolation they frequently experience (Larkin et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2016).

Lastly, this study will compare relational consequences between adolescents with and without ID. I hypothesize that adolescents with ID will report experiencing more negative consequences to their friendship relationships as a consequence of their conflict management skills (Buhrmester, 1996; Larkin et al., 2013; Laursen, 1996; Sigstad, 2017).
This study will serve to bridge the current gap in research, by informing our understanding of conflict management in peer relationships in adolescents with and without ID (Sigstad, 2017). Specifically, this study will provide insight into the ways in which adolescents with and without ID perceive and report conflict experiences with best friends and non-friends. Further, I will examine the way adolescents consider and report managing conflict situations with best friends and non-friends. This study will provide important information regarding the way conflict management may influence the shared relationships of conflict partners. Finally, this study will allow us to determine if adolescents with ID require added support in their conflict management skill development as compared to typically developing adolescents.
Chapter 3

3 Method

During this chapter I will review the methods of this qualitative study. First, we will review participants and measurement tools. Second, we will discuss the recruitment and data collection processes. Third, we will discuss the procedures of the study. Fourth, we will discuss the data analysis and thematic analysis. Lastly, we will discuss the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Qualitative Comparison

Qualitative studies using comparison groups have increased over the last 30 years. Lindsay (2019) completed a scoping review of studies utilizing comparison groups over the last three decades and found a number of benefits. First, using comparison groups can reduce bias, as many researchers make assumptions about how their participants compare to other groups. Second, using comparison groups improves dependability of the study analysis as they are duplicated with different groups. Further, studies have used comparison groups to explore differences and similarities between groups of participants with disabilities or illnesses and “healthy” participants, compare intervention outcomes and different perspectives on phenomena (Lindsay et al., 2014; Makela et al., 2009).

Although there is increasing popularity in the use of comparison groups, there continues to be a lack of standardization in the methodology. Lindsay (2019) found most studies employ semi-structured interviews, and code all transcripts before comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between groups. Further, recommendations for improving the use of comparison groups include incorporating the comparison group in the initial study design and recruiting participants from each group in the same or similar location using the same methods and matching techniques (Lindsay, 2019). My goal was
to compare differences and similarities between adolescents with and without ID, as such, I chose these groups from the outset of the study. As will be discussed, I made efforts to employ the same recruitment strategies for both groups, including recruiting from the same organizations and geographical area.

3.2 Participants

Participants included 19 high school students aged 14-20 ($M$ age = 15.66, $SD$ = 2.07). Participants without intellectual disabilities included 14 participants (11 females) with a mean age of 14.87 years ($SD$ = 1.56). Participants with intellectual disabilities included 5 participants (4 females) with a mean age of 18.5 years ($SD$ = 1.09).

3.3 Measures

*Modified Social Problem-Solving Test modified for children with ID (SPT-MID).*

The SPT-MID was designed to measure social problem-solving skills in children with ID in response to hypothetical scenarios (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, the SPT-MID was used to examine the way participants reported their own conflict experiences with peers. The original SPT-MID involved presenting participants with five video vignettes and asking the following questions with mostly multiple-choice answers.

1. What happened?
2. Why did this happen? (response options included benign intent, unkind intent, hostile intent)
3. What would you do? How else could you respond?
4. Presenting participants with 3 separate responses and asking, “Was this a good way to respond?”
5. Would you be able to behave in the same way (following each response option)?

6. Which of the 3 responses would you choose?

In this study, the questions were modified to provide participants with the opportunity to explain their own experiences rather than choose from response options.

1. What is a best friend?

2. Who is your best friend in your class?

3. Tell me the name of someone in your class who you are not friends with?

   NOTE: Questions 4 through 13 were then asked first for a friend and then a non-friend with the order of friend/non-friend counterbalanced between participants.

4. Tell me about a time you had a fight or disagreement with (insert name)

5. Why did (insert name) do that? Why did that happen?

6. How did you feel? (Participants were provided with options when needed e.g., sad, angry, happy, etc.)

7. Did it happen on purpose or accidentally?

8. What did you do?

9. Why did you do that?

10. Was this a good way to respond? (Response option good or not good)

11. What else could you have done?

12. How is your relationship with (insert name) now?

13. Has your relationship with (insert name) changed? How?

Despite a change in the way questions were asked, the purpose of the questions remained intact. Participants’ conflict management was evaluated for encoding and
interpretation using participants’ narratives and descriptions of why the peer acted the way they did, why the conflict happened, and whether the actions were on purpose or by accident. Further, participants’ conflict management was evaluated for response generation, goals, and response evaluation using participants’ narratives and description of what they did, why they did that, whether they felt this was a good way to respond, and what else they could have done.

3.4 Recruitment and Sampling

Sampling for this study followed a snowball approach sampling (Hennink et al., 2011). Specific organizations and schools/programs were selected (discussed below) and then participants were invited to share the research with anyone they knew who would be interested in participating and fit the criteria. As a result, a number of participants were recruited through word of mouth.

Participant recruitment took place over a year and half period, starting in September 2019 and ending in January 2021. Initial recruitment, as approved by Western’s Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) occurred within school boards in the Southwestern Ontario region. School boards were approached and approval for recruitment and data collection within the schools was received. During the Fall of 2019, recruitment was delayed by teacher job action and the new plan was to enter the schools in January 2020. However, as a result of the job actions, approval for data collection and recruitment was suspended. The choice was made to approach community organizations who provide activities for adolescents that bring them together in groups (e.g., sports or arts) (Appendix A). Revisions were granted by the REB and in January and February of 2020, approval was received from two community organizations. Recruitment with one of the organizations began in February 2020. I visited groups within the organization to
introduce the study and invite participants to participate. During these meetings, participants were provided with a letter of information and consent form to give to their parents or caregivers (Appendix B). For three weeks following the visits the researcher returned to the group to collect consent forms. Once a consent form was received, an in-person interview was scheduled with the participants at a mutually convenient location that provided privacy for the participants. In the first two weeks of March 2020, four participant interviews took place. During the last of these interviews the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were announced.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, recruitment and data collection were shifted online, following approval from the REB. The remaining participants from this organization were completed either over the phone or on a Zoom call. The second community organization sent the letter of information and consent forms to their participants through email. Through this community organization, two of the participants with ID were recruited and five more participants without ID were recruited. However, as a result of COVID-19 and remote learning, many families were not responsive to emails. Between the period of June 2020 and November 2020 emails were sent to community organizations for adolescents with ID across Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. I approached organizations that provided social groups for adolescents with ID at this point as I was hoping to increase recruitment for this group. Approval was received from organizations in Ontario and Quebec. These organizations agreed to send the letter of information and consent form to families in their communities. Previous participants were also contacted to send the study information to anyone they knew. Overall, three participants were recruited through snowball sampling (two without ID and
one with ID). These participants were either referred to the study by parents of previous participants or after hearing about the study from the researcher. Additionally, REB approval was received to begin recruitment through social media. Posts for recruitment were posted to Facebook and Twitter on personal accounts and on Facebook groups (Appendix C). One participant was recruited through these social media posts. In January of 2021 recruitment was terminated.

### 3.5 Participation Procedures

Participants were invited to an interview once a parent or caregiver provided consent. Four participants completed a one-on-one interview in a private room near the community organization site (before COVID-19). Following the onset of COVID-19, fifteen participants were invited to complete an interview on a video call (Zoom) or a phone call, depending on their comfort level. Participants provided assent for their participation during the beginning of the interview (Appendix D). Upon moving interviews to video or phone calls, parents of adolescents with ID offered to attend the interview to support their child with technology. All participants with ID were asked to provide consent for their parent to stay in the room while the interview was conducted. Only one participant with ID completed the interview without a parent or caregiver present.

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility (Sigstad, 2014). Adolescents with ID may take more time to understand a question, consider, and provide a response (Beail & Williams, 2014; Sigstad, 2014). Further, questions may require repeating, or restructuring depending on the strengths and needs of the participants (Sigstad, 2014). As such, it was important for questions to be clear and concise (Beail & Williams, 2014; Sigstad, 2014). The interviewer maintained
an open and flexible approach during the interviews, leaving room for alterations in interview questions and structure (Beail & Williams, 2014; Sigstad, 2014).

During the interview, participants were first asked to provide assent for participation in the study (Appendix D). I covered the assent information in order to ensure that participants fully comprehended the purpose of the study, their role, the role of the researcher and their rights as participants (McDonald & Kidney, 2012). Once the participants provided assent and I was certain the participants were well-informed of their rights as participants, the interview began. Starting with identification of best friend and non friend, and a telling of narratives (order-counterbalanced), followed by interview questions from the SPT-MID (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2009; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011).

3.6 Data Analysis

I kept notes during the interview. Additionally, I recorded their observations, thoughts, themes and the participants responses immediately following the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with REB approval and participant permission interview transcripts were qualitatively coded.

For the purpose of this study, my goal was to highlight and interpret the personal conflict experiences of adolescents with and without ID and to understand their relationships and conflict management process within the framework of the SIP steps of social problem solving. The main purpose of the qualitative coding was to emphasize the voices and experiences of the participants in their own conflict stories and to identify differences in experiences between adolescents with and without ID. As such, a thematic analysis of participants’ narratives and responses to questions was completed. Thematic analysis is a useful approach for examining different perspectives in participants, finding
similarities and differences in responses and discovering unanticipated responses (Nowell et al., 2017). The thematic analysis was a blended approach of deductive and inductive coding.

Deductive coding involves some codes being developed based on previous research or the research instrument (Hennink et al., 2011). Deductive codes were created based on prior research and the SIP framework. As such, participants’ interviews were scanned for the six steps of SIP; encoding, interpreting, response generation, response selection and enacting. As intentionality has previously been defined as purposeful or accidental within the SIP framework, participants’ responses to, “Why do you think they did that?” and, “Did they do it on purpose or by accident?” were coded as either on purpose or by accident (Appendix E). Further, previous research informed coding for conflict management strategies. Therefore, participants’ narratives and responses to, “What did you do when that happened?” and, “What else could you have done?” were coded within negotiation, coercion, submission, disengagement or third party intervention (Appendix E). Previous research has clearly identified that these conflict management strategies and evaluations of intent are commonly used amongst children and adolescents (Wainryb et al., 2020). Lastly, impact on relationship was defined by previous research, as such participants responses to, “How is your relationship now?” and, “Has your relationship with (peer) changed since that event?” were coded as either positive, neutral or negative (Wainryb et al., 2020; Appendix E).

Inductive coding involves codes being developed from the data (Hennink et al., 2011). This was used to focus on identifying participants’ own descriptions of their own experiences. Inductive coding in this study was used to examine participants’ narratives
and responses to interview questions for novel themes and to create an understanding of their experiences of conflict with peers. As previously discussed, this coding took a thematic analysis approach, which will now be described in detail.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis involves six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase involves familiarizing yourself with the data. This phase involves repeated and active reading of the data. As the interviewer, I was able to develop familiarity with the data from the first step of data collection. Further, I completed transcription of all of the interviewers, providing opportunity to continue to immerse myself in participants’ interviews. Throughout both of these steps, I took time to take notes on any thoughts or ideas I identified. As there was a break in data collection, each of the interviews was read twice before beginning the coding process.

The second phase involves generating initial codes. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to identify participants’ own experiences using the social information processing steps as a framework. As such, deductive coding was the first step of coding using the previously defined categories (see above). Following this, each of the interviews were read actively and sections of text were highlighted if they appeared to be interesting, to answer research questions, or represented potential themes. Sections of texts that were highlighted were copied into an Excel file. Responses to interview questions were kept together in the Excel file to facilitate coding and analysis. Further, any information from the narratives that communicated responses to interview questions were included in Excel sheets.

The third phase includes searching for themes. Sections of texts in the Excel files were sorted and collated into identified themes. During this phase sections of texts from
all interviews were placed together. General theme description for each of the categories began to be developed. Within questions participants’ responses for best friends and non-friends were kept in separate categories. However, general themes that were similar across best friend and non-friend stories were identified. This allowed me to identify differences between relational contexts. At this stage, a codebook was developed with each of the themes, subthemes, descriptions and examples of each (see Appendix E).

Phase four involves reviewing themes. The purpose of this step is to review all potential codes and determine if they actually form themes or not. Level 1 of this phase involves reviewing all of the coded extracts for each theme and determine if they form a pattern. Level 2 of this phase involves examining individual themes in relation to the entire data set and determining if the identified themes accurately represent the data set by reading the data set over with the themes in mind. During this phase I read through the sections of text in each of the potential categories and determined if these fit together, needed to be split into separate categories or collapsed with other categories. Additionally, during this phase I considered if themes identified in best friend and non-friend stories matched and could be collapsed into single categories or if there were identified unique themes for either relational context. I read through participant interviews again following this step while considering the themes I had identified. The purpose of this step was to determine if what I had identified represented the data and if there were any missing themes I had not identified.

The fifth phase included defining and renaming themes. During this phase each individual theme was reviewed to identify what each theme was about and what aspects of the data the themes captured. Following this, a detailed analysis was completed and
written for each theme. As themes were described, I considered how the story of each theme fit into the broader story of the data. Subthemes were identified within larger themes. Lastly, names were considered for the themes.

The final phase involves producing the report. During this phase a concise, coherent and logical account of the data is written. Excerpts of texts were selected as examples of themes. The analysis of the data and themes were related to the research objective and literature.

The goal of the qualitative analysis was to develop a deeper understanding of adolescents’ personal conflict experiences with peers, compare conflict management strategies between adolescents with and without ID and across relationship types and explore the impact of conflict management on the shared relationships with friends and peers.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study is exhibited when the results of the study are as closely as possible related to what the participants described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research is threatened by a number of factors including researcher biases, response biases, and reactivity. As such it is important to prove rigor and credibility (Rubin, 2000). Trustworthiness is established through transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.7.1 Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This can be established through thick description of methods and data collection to ensure goodness of fit for future researchers (Guba, 1981). Throughout this paper I have
attempted to provide a detailed description of my methods, interviews, data analysis and recruitment procedures.

3.7.2 Dependability
Dependability is a criterion that makes sure the research process is clearly documented, logical and traceable (Nowell et al., 2017). A reflexive journal and coding manual were used to ensure this was established. I kept a reflexive journal throughout the recruitment, interview and data analysis process. Throughout each step I kept note of lessons learned, changes to be made, observations in the field, and analytic memos. During the data analysis process, decisions regarding the development of themes, combining themes, removing themes or redefining themes were kept. Lastly, a coding manual was created throughout the coding process. The coding manual was discussed with a second coder and then 4 transcripts were read to ensure all thoughts were captured. This last step ensured that participants responses were not only evaluated based on one individual’s opinions, but had multiple perspective increasing reliability of findings.

3.7.3 Credibility
Credibility of a study focuses on the accuracy of the way researchers report participants’ perspectives (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Credibility can be established through member checks, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and persistent observations (Tobin & Begley, 2004). For the purpose of this study, I used peer debriefing as a method to establish credibility. I discussed the interview process, coding process and interpretations with another researcher throughout the data collection and analysis process. This peer debriefing provided an opportunity for an external check of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, credibility of the study is established
through detailed descriptions of methods, documentation of procedures of analysis and transparency in the procedures conducted (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is established when the interpretation and findings of the study are shown to be from the data itself (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability is established when transferability, dependability and credibility are demonstrated (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.7.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity allows the researcher to monitor the way they may impact the findings in their study and to ensure the accuracy and credibility of what they report. Through the use of my reflexive journal, I was able to establish my position in this study and how my beliefs may impact the outcome of my study. This positioning and role in the research were discussed at the Preface.

3.7.6 Response bias

Another concern in qualitative studies is reducing response bias. In using participants own perspectives on their experiences of conflicts with peers we are reducing bias on the way adolescents with and without ID manage conflict. I was also aware of the need to reduce power imbalances and the impact of social desirability on participants’ responses. As previously discussed, participants were provided with a period to build rapport with the interviewer prior to beginning the interview process. In addition, participants were informed they were being spoken to as the experts on adolescent conflicts. I also provided an open and neutral environment to participants by maintaining a calm and positive facial expression and responses to their narratives and responses.
Chapter 4

4 Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the way adolescents with and without ID describe their own experiences of interpersonal conflict with best friends and non-friends. The Modified Social Problem-Solving Test modified for children with ID (SPT-MID) was used to interview participants. The results will be organized within the steps of social information processing and interview questions. Therefore, I will begin by reviewing the way participants describe a best friend. Following this, I will discuss the way adolescents with and without ID described their interpretation of the conflict (Step 1 encoding and interpretation), how they felt (Step 2 emotional reaction), their response, why they responded that way, their evaluation of responses and how else they could have responded (Step 3 response selection and evaluation, enactment). I will then discuss the way adolescents with and without ID perceive their relationship following the conflict and whether it changed. Finally, we will discuss other themes that came up through the interview and coding process.

Results will be presented in tables comparing adolescents with and without ID in relationship context. Each table will present percentages of each group that reported each theme. I will discuss results as they relate to differences and similarities in the way adolescents with and without ID describe conflict experiences within each relationship context. It is important to note that participants’ descriptions often fit into multiple themes, therefore, the majority of the themes discussed were not mutually exclusive.

4.1 Best Friend

Participants were asked, “what a best friend is?” Participants described a number of friendship qualities they felt made someone their best friend, including trust,
support/love, shared time/interests, known for a long time/closest, accepting or valuing each other, dealing with conflict, and not mean or a bully. Many participants’ descriptions of a best friend referred to a number of these qualitative traits.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Best Friend</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Support/ Love</th>
<th>Share time/interests</th>
<th>Known for a long time/closest</th>
<th>Accepting or valuing each other</th>
<th>Deal with conflict</th>
<th>Not mean or a bully</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W/O ID</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19:
Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

Trust

Participants described trust as an important part of sharing a best friendship.

Participants made it clear that a best friend should be someone you trust or that is trustworthy.

“Just really trustworthy that you can you know rely on them in times of need."

Descriptions of trust in a best friendship included a relationship in which you could tell each other secrets, confide in each other and tell your best friend anything. These descriptions indicated there was a feeling of safety in a best friendship, that they would keep your information private from others.

“Tell your secrets to and you hold a lot of trust in the relationship.”

“Feel comfortable talking about private things around.”

Participants also felt trust in a best friend meant this was someone, “that you feel comfortable around” or, “you feel really comfortable with that person, you don’t worry with that person”. This suggests that participants felt they can be themselves around their
best friends and did not need to worry that they would be judged. Participants also felt a best friend should be, “somebody that you can rely on when you’re in a tough situation” and trust they will be a good friend.

As is seen in Table 1, trust was a valued trait in a best friend by both adolescents with and without ID. However, adolescents without ID more often described trust compared to adolescents with ID.

**Support/Love**

Participants further described a best friend as someone you receive support and love from. Descriptions of best friends included describing a best friend as, “someone who can support you,” “a person who you love”, and someone who is, “almost like a part of your family”. Table 1 shows that adolescents with and without ID described support/love equally as often. Adolescents that identified support/love as an important quality, made it clear that best friends are individuals that are important in your life, and with whom you share a lot of care, support and love. Uniquely, one adolescent with ID also identified that a best friend is someone that helps you with things.

“She’s helpful, she takes me out for lunch or dinner or to work out.” (P 18, with ID)

**Share Time and Interests**

Participants also described a best friend as someone who you share time and interests with. With regards to spending time together, participants’ descriptions included quantity of time and enjoying time together.

“You try to do everything together.” (P 2, without ID)

“You can have fun.” (P4, without ID)

“Someone I enjoy spending time with.” (P11, without ID)
“The person that you spend the most time with.” (P 15, without ID)

Participants also explained a best friend as someone you share similar interests with. Participants identified that sharing interests was part of the reason spending so much time together was fun for them.

“You just try and do everything together because you share interests.” (P 2, without ID)

“You usually have a lot in common with that person.” (P 13, without ID)

As seen in Table 1, sharing time and interests was often described as a trait in best friendships by both adolescents with and without ID.

**Length and Closeness of Relationship**

Participants also indicated that the length and closeness of the friendship differentiated a best friend from a friend. These participants described knowing their best friend for a long time, sharing the longest friendship with them, or with whom they felt they were closest and shared the deepest connection.

“We’ve known each other since grade 9 or 10.” (P 21, with ID)

“Like I said I’ve known them for a very long time.” (P 2, without ID)

“You have this really sort of deep connection with the person.” (P 10, without ID)

“The friend that you’re the closest with…knows you better than anyone else.” (P 12, without ID)

Table 1 shows that this was more often described by adolescents without ID and less often by those with ID.
Accepting or Valuing Each Other

Participants with and without ID less often described a best friend as someone who accepts, values, and/or respects you. The participants that described a best friend in this way identified that a best friend is, “someone that respects you and likes you for who you are, and doesn’t make you change” (P 4, without ID). Additionally, participants described a best friend as, “someone who respects you” and sharing admiration or value between best friends, “someone you can look up to” (P 3, without ID).

Deal with Conflict

The ability to manage conflict with each other was described by two participants as a valuable trait in a best friend relationship. One participant without ID explained, “if you get into a fight or argument, you just get past it” (P 5, without ID) this participant clarified you recognize the disagreement and choose to get past it together. The second participant, an adolescent with ID explained dealing with conflict within her relationship with her best friend:

“Sometimes I disagree with something and she disagrees with what I have to say...sometimes we don’t get along, but we have our own opinions and I go okay well you don’t have to agree, and I don’t have to agree...we respect each other’s opinions, and then we can move on from it after.” (P 21, with ID)

Not Mean or a Bully

Two participants with ID identified that a best friend is someone who is not mean to you or is not a bully. None of the participants without ID discussed a best friend as being someone that was not mean or a bully to them. One adolescent with ID discussed this with the support of her mother:

“Mom: is Best Friend mean to you
Participant: no
Mom: do you like friends that are mean to you?
Participant: no.” (P 18, with ID)

The second participant with ID indicated his best friends were people that did not bully him and stuck up for him.

“A person that has your back all the time, well not all of the time, but most of the time and sticks up for you in situations…doesn’t bully you and is nice to you.” (P 22, with ID)

Summary

Participants’ descriptions of a best friend centered on important qualities of friendships including trust, love, respect, support and valuing each other. Further, adolescents described closeness, longevity of the friendship and amount of time spent together as important factors that differentiated a best friendship from a regular friendship. A few adolescents also described conflict management as an important trait in a best friend. Participants with and without ID had similar descriptions of best friends, except adolescents without ID more often discussed a best friend as someone you have shared the longest and closest friendship with whereas adolescents with ID more often discussed a best friend being someone that was nice to them and not a bully and with whom they can manage conflict.

4.2 Social Information Processing Steps 1 and 2: Encoding and Interpretation

The following sections will discuss the way adolescents described conflict experiences, the type of conflict and why they think the conflict happened. Participants were asked to provide narrative descriptions of conflicts with best friends and non-friends. These narratives provided an opportunity to determine how adolescents perceived conflict, how they described the conflict they experienced and why they think the conflict happened. Participants were also asked why they think the conflict happened, why the peer did what they did and if it was on purpose or by accident. These questions
allowed me to determine the way adolescents interpreted conflict situations and peer actions. I will first discuss the way adolescents described the conflict situations. Following this I will discuss the way adolescents interpreted the conflict and the peers’ actions.

### 4.2.1 Cause or Type of Conflict

Participants were asked to provide narrative descriptions of a time they had a fight, disagreement or argument with a best friend and non-friend. The type of conflict and potential causes of the conflict were coded. Participants provided a number of conflict types including the peer being unfair or dishonest, being blamed, aggression, interfering with goals, negative relationship/person, friendship expectations and interests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Without vs. With ID Cause or Type of Conflict in Best Friend Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Being unfair or dishonest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
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*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Without vs. With ID Cause of Type of Conflict in Non-Friend Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Being unfair or dishonest</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**Being unfair or dishonest.** Fairness and honesty were perceived as factors that contribute to a conflict beginning. Participants described peers trying to take unfair advantage, not following rules or lying.
“She lied to me about stuff, I used to have a boyfriend, but I broke up with him a while back now, so she told me that, that boyfriend was kissing her in the elevator and I’m like what, and I got kind of upset because I don’t really like it when people lie to me.” (P 21, with ID)

“We made plans to see each other at about 5 o’clock, he didn’t show up like he promised, and then the next day we argued a bit.” (P 22, with ID)

“It was a group effort to tell him that he was wrong really, but it was everyone telling him he was not following the correct rules in football and he was breaking the rules that we all set up ourselves.” (P 11, without ID)

In Table 2, we see being unfair or dishonest was least often described by adolescents in the best friend conflict; adolescents with ID did not discuss a best friend being unfair or dishonest in a conflict, and it was the least frequently discussed as the reason for a conflict for adolescents without ID. In Table 3, we see this was more frequently discussed in the non-friend conflict. Compared to adolescents without ID adolescents with ID more often reported a non-friend being unfair or dishonest as the cause of the conflict.

**Blame.** Adolescents identified shifting of blame or not accepting blame was another cause of conflict. Participants explained conflicts began because they felt blamed for something by a peer.

“At this point she voiced to us that she felt as though we had walked all over her and didn’t do anything she wanted.” (P 19, without ID)

“Then she kind of blamed it on me but then I just said like neither of us did anything to keep it alive.” (P 12, without ID)

“It was technically on both of us, but she was blaming it all on me.” (P 4, without ID)

In Table 2 and 3 both adolescents with and without ID reported feeling blamed as a cause of conflict equally often.
**Aggression.** Participants identified aggression as a form of conflict between themselves and the peer. Aggression in conflict included physical aggression, such as pushing, punching, hitting, etc.

““It just got really bad, and it started to get physical.” (P 4, without ID)

“He kicked me and threw sticks at me, and it hurt.” (P 8, with ID)

“I got into a fist fight with him.” (P 13, without ID)

Aggression also included verbal violence such as yelling, screaming, calling names, etc.

“All my friends got really mad at me and told me it was really stupid that I would do that and just started kind of insulting me and just saying rude things…she was just very passive aggressive and just kind of saying things she knows would bother me and hurt me.” (P 1, without ID)

“She was telling me to be quiet and shut up and stuff.” (P 10, without ID)

In Table 2 and 3, both adolescents with and without ID discussed aggression in the context of the best friend and non-friend conflict equally often. Adolescents with and without ID discussed aggression more often in the non-friend conflict.

**Interfering with goals.** Peers’ actions or behavior interfering with goals were a cause of conflict beginning. Participants described conflict starting when they felt a peer interfered with their ability to achieve their goals. Specifically, when participants felt a peer got in the way of them completing an assignment or school project.

“She just wasn’t really into it and so that was affecting our mark…our group said that we need to do this to get a good mark.” (P 3, without ID)

“I had finished all of my work for the presentation about three days before, so it was due on a Tuesday and I had finished all of my work on the Friday before that and so I had noticed that she hadn’t done anything for the presentation and I was concerned because she, her subtopics were before my subtopics so I wanted it to flow nicely and be able to practice it, so that we could get a good mark...on Monday then I, I, I noticed that she still hadn’t done anything so I went to her in class and I was like… “we have our presentation due tomorrow it would be great”… I basically I voiced my concerns…I told her that I felt uncomfortable
and I didn’t appreciate the fact that she didn’t understand my point of view of it, because I was, I really wanted the presentation to flow nicely so you could get a good mark.” (P 19, without ID)

Participants also described competing goals with the peer as a cause of conflict.

“We worked on a group project and I think he wanted the project done one way, I wanted it done the other way, and we kind, we had a bit of a disagreement over that.” (P 13, without ID)

“She is more active and will say let’s go swimming and let’s go kayaking. I like that but when I’m camping I kind of like to just sit in a chair and just relax and enjoy the fresh air and stuff.” (P 2, without ID)

In Table 2, we see that in the best friend conflict adolescents with and without ID described interests causing conflicts equally often. In Table 3, we see adolescents without ID reported interfering with goals as a cause of conflict in the non-friend conflict, however adolescents with ID did not discuss interfering with goals.

**Negative relationship/Person.** Participants explained a history of conflict or negative relationship with the peer impacting the conflict. As expected, participants identified the negative history of their relationship with the non-friend as the cause of the conflict more than within the context of best friend relationships. Adolescents with and without ID reported a negative relationship history in the non-friend conflicts equally as often. Participants indicated they often had arguments or did not get along with the peer.

“Her and I already fought a lot.” (P 1, without ID)

“We just really didn’t get a long, he’s a very irritating person and a lot of people really dislike him, I kept trying to be patient with him, but he really got on my nerves.” (P 13, without ID)

“She and I are like not very good friends we have a lot of arguments over academics.” (P 17, without ID)

Participants also explained the non-friend was a negative person, as they either often irritated everyone, had a negative personality or were a bully.
“Just all of the things that she did I never agreed with and things that she would say which I just thought were like not okay.” (P 1, without ID)

“That’s her personality, she’s one of those people, she’s controlling sometimes.” (P 2, without ID)

“She has a negative energy and she kind of reacts to certain things I say and stuff.” (P 4, without ID)

“Yeah being a bully.” (P 8, with ID)

“He always argues with people.” (P 11, without ID)

“He is a really irritating person.” (P 13, without ID)

Within the best friend conflict only adolescents without ID discussed a negative relationship with the peer as a cause of conflict. These participants discussed a negative relationship history within the context of best friend relationships, detailed a build-up of anger over time following repeated arguments that were not settled, or issues in their friendship.

“Which I think was the issue, we just kind of let things build-up.” (P 1, without ID)

“He just kept doing it…him being agitated wasn’t the first time it happened, like when we played basketball sometimes, he gets really agitated with me, it’s like if I’m on his team and were not winning, he’ll get really mad at me.” (P 14, without ID)

**Friendship expectations.** The most common cause of conflict described by participants was friendship expectations. Participants described an argument being caused by themselves or the peer not meeting friendship expectations. Specifically, participants described peers not maintaining trust, loyalty, support or helping each other within a friendship context. This included participants discussing the peer not meeting their expectations of exclusivity in the friendship.
“We were in science and we didn’t know exactly how to do a question, and so in the end over the weekend some time I got the answer. And I guess in, when I got back to school, she’s like, “so did you get the answer?” I’m like, “yes I did” and she completely freaks out at me saying, “why didn’t you give me the answer or tell me the answer”, which makes sense I would help her if I knew.” (P 5, without ID)

“She was getting kind of being distant sometimes and so we kind of just talked to her seeing what was up, she started forming a new friend group which was fine, but she started always hanging out with them and not seeing us anymore, it made me feel like she was picking them over us.” (P 3, without ID)

“She would leave me to be with this other girl, she was kind of being mean to her and I got like really protective like she, she wouldn’t hang out with me anymore because then the other girl would get jealous.” (P 16, without ID)

Participants also explained they expected a friend to provide them with emotional support or stand up for them. Participants described being upset by a friend not recognizing they were hurt by their own or someone else’s actions. When a friend failed to meet this expectation, this caused conflict.

“She didn’t see that it was bothering me at all because I was laughing along and kind of being like, “oh guys come on” and laughing and stuff, she never said anything really, she never said anything mean, she just kind of laughed…we stopped being friends for a brief period, I was like, “you’re my best friend, you shouldn’t have been laughing you should have been saying something.” (P 1, without ID)

Participants also described not being able to manage conflicts or protect their image in public as issues that caused conflicts to begin. Specifically, participants were upset by friends that did not try to work with them or communicate with them to solve the argument. Participants were also upset when a friend spoke negatively about them to others.

“The next day she was visibly upset and she wasn’t talking to us…when we asked her if she was okay, she would say she was fine, or would not answer us at all, she didn’t say a single word to us on the drive home, we were confused…we were hoping to talk to her and resolve whatever was happening, cause she, we were all best friends…we found out that rather than talking to us and communicating with
us about what was wrong, she had told our mutual friends what happened and she also told them things that weren’t true and that made us seem like horrible people...we had to explain to everyone that this, like our perspective, we weren’t sure if anybody would believe us.” (P 19, without ID)

In non-friend narratives, the description of the friendship expectations not being met, also led to a significant change in the relationship where the participant and the peer were no longer friends or shared a relationship that had deteriorated.

“We were very very close and I had trusted her with so much of my past life experience and all that stuff...she was my best friend I had seen her in that light so as I said before what’s a best friend, a person you can trust, a person who supports you, a person who is also understanding, and the fact that she wasn’t accepting our apology even though in, in our mind we, we said oh maybe we did like not hear what she wanted to do but we also did try during the trip so even though we did try and we didn’t purposefully do anything wrong or hurt her on purpose.” (P 19, without ID)

In Table 2, adolescents without ID discussed best friends not meeting their friendship expectations being the cause of conflict more often than adolescents with ID. In Table 3, adolescents without ID were the only ones to discuss friendship expectations being the cause of conflict in the non-friend conflict. Adolescents described friendship expectations being the cause of conflict more often in the best friend conflict.

**Interests.** Differences in interests also led to disagreements. Participants who discussed romantic relationships generally identified that their best friend was not spending time with them because they were with a significant other, or they disagreed on the friend’s choice of boyfriend.

“I think it was when she didn’t tell us that she was going to break up with him, but just out of the blue she dumped him and told us we had to choose” (P 2, without ID)

“I think she, well she got a boyfriend so that boyfriend was a part of the friend group, so I think she wanted to be with him.” (P 3, without ID)
One adolescent with ID also explained they had a conflict with a non-friend because that peer wanted to steal her boyfriend.

“I think the reason why she did that was because she wanted to be with my boyfriend instead of me, because she wanted to break me and him up, so she can have him…she was trying to steal him.” (P 21, with ID)

In Table 2 and 3 adolescents with and without ID equally described differing interests as a cause of conflict. Adolescents discussed differing interests more frequently in the non-friend conflict context.

**Summary Cause or Type of Conflict**

This section of results communicates the first description of how adolescents perceived the conflict scenarios. Within the SIP framework, this could be considered one measurable portion of encoding and interpretation, as adolescents were providing their perception of the events of conflict situations with peers. This in combination with the themes for the way adolescents perceived intentions in the conflict situations will help us to understand the steps of encoding and interpretation.

Overall, participants discussed expected causes and types of conflict including conflict caused by a best friend not meeting friendship expectations and a conflict situation being an escalation from a history of conflict or repeated negative actions or aggression by the peer. Adolescents with and without ID discussed friendship expectations most often in the best friend conflict, however, adolescents without ID discussed it more than adolescents with ID. Further, adolescents with ID did not discuss friendship expectations in the non-friend conflict while adolescents without ID did. Both adolescents with and without ID described aggression and a negative relationship or
person most often in the non-friend conflict. Lastly, adolescents with ID discussed a non-
friend being unfair or dishonest more often than adolescents without ID.

4.2.2 Intention

Participants were asked to describe why they thought the peer had acted the way they did, why this had happened, and if it was on purpose or by accident. The purpose of this section was to further understand how adolescents perceived the intentionality of the conflict partner’s actions. This will speak to interpretation and developing understanding of the situation within the SIP framework. Participants provided a number of themes describing why they thought a peer did what they did including to demonstrate power, self-preservation, emotional, standing up for someone, and as a result of outside factors.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without vs. With ID Intention in Best Friend Conflict</th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On purpose</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate power</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standing up for someone</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside factors</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both on purpose and by accident</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5
Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without vs. With ID Intention in Non-Friend Conflict</th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On purpose</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-preserving</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>Standing up for someone</td>
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<td>Both on purpose and by accident</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**On Purpose.** Participants described peers’ actions as being intentional, or purposeful. Specifically, participants who described the actions as being on purpose explained the peer was trying to hurt them, bother them or acted in this way to attain a goal. Adolescents without ID perceived best friends and non-friends’ actions as being on purpose more often than adolescents with ID. Adolescents with ID did not perceive best friend’s actions as being on purpose.

“Probably on purpose, I mean she definitely had like some feelings inside and she, it’s not like she accidentally told me no, she definitely had a little bit of a yelling argument at me.” (P 15, without ID)

“To hurt me and I did it like out my chest, trying to apologize to him and its very important to apologize to him.” (P 18, with ID)

Table 5 shows that adolescents with ID described non-friends actions as being purposeful less often than adolescents without ID. One adolescent with ID reported her non-friend’s actions were purposeful.

“I think she did that on purpose because I think that girl did not like me at all and I did not even like her so, after she didn’t like me, I didn’t like her so.” (P 21, with ID)
Demonstrate Power. One reason adolescents perceived behavior as intentional, was based on the belief that the peer was trying to demonstrate power. Adolescents with ID did not discuss the peers’ actions as an attempt to demonstrate power. Adolescents without ID described the peer’s behavior as trying to show they had power over the participant or show they had power in the social group.

“I think she was trying to just prove that she had more power over me because in our dance group we have like the popular girls, I guess you could say, so she was one of the popular girls and I guess she was trying to prove that she had more power over me and was able to get physical if she wanted.” (P 4, with ID)

Self-Preservation. Adolescents also felt conflict partners acted intentionally for self-preservation reason. Specifically, participants described the peer trying to preserve their image in front of others, get attention or to protect themselves from getting in trouble. Only adolescents without ID reported this as a reason for peers actions in both best friend and non-friend conflicts.

“I felt like she didn’t want to be getting the blame and she just threw me under the bus for it because I still…cause that’s like most people just don’t want to get in trouble…my other friend and her were also really close and she didn’t really I feel like she didn’t wanna cause conflict in between them two.” (P 4, with ID)

“Her lack of communication after the conflict, I think that she just felt as though we wouldn’t, we still wouldn’t understand where she was coming from and if she was friends with us again, it would happen again, or we’d just be fighting all the time because we wouldn’t see her in the same light and vice versa.” (P 19, with ID)

Accidental. Participants described their best or non-friend’s actions as being accidental. Adolescents who identified the actions were accidental explained the peer was not acting on purpose or that the peer did not mean to cause harm. Adolescents with and without ID identified best friend’s behavior was accidental more often than non-friends.
Adolescents with ID described best friend’s actions as being accidental more often than adolescents without ID (Table 4).

“I don’t think she did it intentionally to hurt me, but she definitely did get a new friend just cause she needed a new friend, not for purposes to like hurt me or anything.” (P 4, without ID)

Participants who described behavior as accidental described this was the case because of a number of reasons including outside factors, standing up for someone else and the peer feeling emotional.

**Emotional.** Participants who described the peer as being emotional, explained that the peer’s feelings caused them to act the way they did. Adolescents perceived this as either an excuse for the behavior or an indication that they may not have been thinking when they acted. Further, participants were more likely to excuse behavior based on emotions within the context of the best friend narratives. Compared to adolescents without ID, adolescents with ID described best friends’ emotions as an excuse for their behavior more often (Table 4).

“She got frustrated about something that was going on, because of her temper.” (P 9, with ID)

“I don’t think it was on purpose, I don’t think it was directly to hurt me, to be honest I think it was just like his feelings in the moment of kind of everything put together so I think it was more emotionally based of a response.” (P 17, without ID)

However, one adolescent without ID also discussed this is in the context of non-friend conflict. This adolescent perceived behavior as intentional, explained it was for emotional reasons, and specified this was because the conflict partner was jealous.

“Part of me thinks it was kind of jealousy I guess but also because she kind was just envied us cause most of the time, I wasn’t like Best Friend knew the people from the other school cause she plays sports too and she knew them and then I knew other people too but we kind of introduced other people introduced each
other to our other friends but we didn’t really do that with *Non-Friend* so she was probably kind of mad about that.” (P 12, without ID)

**Standing up for someone.** Adolescents explained the peer was trying to stand up for someone else, which was why the conflict between them and the participant happened. Adolescents with ID never discussed this as a reason for peers’ behaviors. Adolescents without ID described this in the context of the best friend conflict more often than in the context of the non-friend conflict.

“I feel like she just was trying to stick up for her friend.” (P 4, without ID)

“I think just kind of trying to defend the person, she’s a really great person so she likes to stick up for people.” (P 10, without ID)

**Outside factors.** Adolescents perceived outside factors such as other’s behaviors or stressors causing them to act the way they did. Adolescents were more likely to excuse behavior with outside factors within the context of the best friend relationship. Adolescents with ID never described outside factors in the context of the non-friend conflict.

“I feel like her siblings are kind of annoying sometimes to her and her older brother is mean to her, so when I’m there it’s kind of we just do everything together, let’s get away from the people because I don’t like them.” (P 2, without ID)

“Just because like I mean quarantine’s got to us…for us anyways as a couple that was very hard for us at the beginning so I think that’s kind of how it kind of stemmed.” (P 17, without ID)

**Accidental and on Purpose.** Adolescents perceived some conflict partners’ actions as possibly being both on purpose and by accident. Adolescents without ID described portions of the conflict situation involving peers acting on purpose and some parts in which peers did something by accident.
“A bit of both, I think purposefully laughing and being like, “you’re being stupid about this having your child move schools over something like this” sort of saying but I think that she was doing that on purpose but I think it was accidental when it came to the point, she didn’t realize that it was actually really hurting.” (P 1, without ID)

Other participants, mostly adolescents with ID, used the response of both when they were uncertain about the intentionally of the conflict partner’s behaviors. These participants often also could not explain their reasoning. Throughout the questioning about intentionality, adolescents with ID struggled more than adolescents without ID to provide detailed descriptions of why a peer acted the way they did, or why the conflict occurred.

“Both, I don’t know.” (P 8, with ID)

In Table 4, we see adolescents with and without ID equally identified best friends acted on purpose and by accident. However, adolescents with ID more often reported non-friends’ actions as both on purpose and by accident than adolescents without ID (Table 5).

**Summary Interpretation**

Participants’ descriptions of intentionality fell within what was expected for each relationship context. Specifically, adolescents most often described best friend’s actions as being accidental, while purposeful behaviours were most often attributed to non-friends. Adolescents with ID, however, were more likely to describe peers’ behaviors regardless of relational context as being accidental. Adolescents with ID more often than those without ID described non-friends’ actions as being both on purpose and by accident. Compared to adolescents with ID, adolescents without ID more often reported peers’ behavior as on purpose in both relationship contexts. Adolescents with ID overall,
struggled to provide reasoning for peers’ behaviors, choosing mostly to respond to the multiple-choice option of was it on purpose or by accident.

4.2.3 Emotional Reactions
Adolescents provided a description of how they felt emotionally during the interpersonal conflict with peers. Within the SPT-MID test, emotional reaction is not generally tested. During the interview process, adolescents began to discuss how they felt emotionally during their narrative recounting of the conflicts. Emotional reactions impact the way adolescents will interpret others’ actions, as such this was evaluated within narratives and an added follow-up question. Adolescents identified feeling: sad, surprised, confused or embarrassed, angry, annoyed, empathetic, happy and disappointed. Participants’ discussion of emotions were not mutually exclusive. Therefore, participants discussed feeling multiple emotions within the same conflict situation.

Table 6
Without vs. With ID Emotional Reaction in Best Friend Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Reaction</th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad/hurt/upset</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprised/not</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused/embarrassed</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bothered/annoyed/irritated</td>
<td>42.96</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding/empathy/feeling bad</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy/not</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5
## Table 7

*Without vs. With ID Emotional Reaction in Non-Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TD</th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sad/hurt/upset</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprised/not</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused/embarrassed</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bothered/annoyed/irritated</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding/empathy/feeling bad</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy/not</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**Sad, annoyed and angry.** The most frequently described emotional reactions included feeling sad, angry and annoyed. Adolescents who described feeling sad during the conflict situations explained they were hurt or upset by the situation. Adolescents with ID most often expressed sadness in the context of non-friend conflict. Adolescents who described feeling angry during the conflict situation explained they were mad or angry at the peer. Adolescents with ID never reported feeling angry regardless of relationship context. Adolescents described feeling bothered, annoyed, frustrated or irritated by the peers’ behaviors and situations. Adolescents without ID reported feeling annoyed or irritated more often than adolescents with ID in both relationship contexts.

**Understanding/empathy/feeling bad.** Fewer participants described they felt badly for the peer. These adolescents indicated they were empathetic towards their best friend or non-friend as a result of their own actions in the conflict. Adolescents also described recognizing the experience or conflict was difficult for the peer. Adolescents with ID more often reported feeling badly for best friends than adolescents without ID. Adolescents with and without ID both reported feeling bad for non-friends equally often.

“I didn’t know she felt like that because we didn’t really talk about it because everything was going fine, but I guess she has the right to feel annoyed that she
doesn’t see me enough and stuff like that, so it made sense that she was mad.” (P 2, without ID)

**Confused or Embarrassed.** In addition, several participants identified they felt confused or embarrassed. Specifically, adolescents either reported they were confused by the conflict, the peer’s behavior or when trying to determine what to do next. Adolescents with ID more often than adolescents without ID reported feeling embarrassed or confused in both relationship contexts.

“I felt confused in that moment, I felt confused cause I’m like what’s going on here, I was confused cause sometimes I don’t know, and sometimes I do so, no like I was confused cause I’m like what’s going on here?” (P 21, with ID)

“I felt like confused, embarrassed and I think it’s hard I want to…and I want to stand by him but it’s a hard conversation about it… so it’s hard and confusing and embarrassing, my hands were shaking a lot.” (P 18, with ID)

**Surprise.** A few adolescents described either feeling surprised by the conflict, or not surprised by the results. Either they did not expect the conflict or peer’s feelings, or they anticipated the reaction from the peer. Adolescents with ID never talked about being surprised by the conflict.

“I was quite surprised because I wasn’t expecting anything to come out of this.” (P 5, without ID)

“I knew she had some anger issues and that she was definitely like I almost saw it coming not really but a little bit as its’ not the first time she did that to somebody.” (P 15, without ID)

**Happy.** A few participants described happiness. Two adolescents with ID reported they were happy. One of these adolescents explained she was happy to spend time with her friend, the second had described a romantic scenario she had imagined during the conflict with the non-friend. One adolescent without ID explained he was not happy with the non-friend.
“I’m not mad at him, nothing else I was just happy and spend time with the class” (P 18, with ID)

“happy…(mom) happy when he bumped into you? Participant,“yes I said yes.” (P 9, with ID)

**Summary Emotional Reaction**

Adolescents without ID described feeling angry, upset, sad or annoyed during the conflict situations in both relationship contexts. Adolescents with ID most often reported feeling sad, confused/embarrassed and empathetic in both relationship contexts. Adolescents with ID never discussed feeling angry or surprised and very rarely discussed feeling annoyed. Adolescents without ID less often than adolescents with ID discussed feeling confused or embarrassed.

### 4.3 Steps 3 and 4: Response Generation, Selection and Enactment

This next section will examine the responses to conflict adolescents with and without ID discussed. Adolescents were first asked to describe how they responded to the conflict. Next, adolescents were asked if they felt this was a good way to respond, why or why not. Lastly, adolescents were asked to describe how else they could have responded. These questions provide us with the opportunity to explore the response options adolescents consider, how they evaluate and select responses and what responses they choose to enact in conflict situations with best friends and non-friends.

#### 4.3.1 Response Options

The purpose of this section was to understand how adolescents chose to manage conflict with peers. Conflict resolution strategies were used to frame coding, however, adolescents’ responses led to the overall understanding of the way conflicts were resolved. Initial responses will be discussed followed by the other options adolescents identified when asked what else they could do. Within each question, participants
provided descriptions that fit into multiple themes, including passive responses such as submission or compliance and disengagement or withdrawal, and active responses such as investing in the relationship, negotiating, coercion, taking a break, and using third party intervention.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without vs. With ID Response to Conflict in Best Friend Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W/O ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission or compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement or withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break/space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party intervention/Involved other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other response options or don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without vs. With ID Response to Conflict in Non-Friend Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W/O ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission or compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement or withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break/space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party intervention/Involved other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other response options or don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5
**Passive.** Participants that identified passive conflict management steps described not taking active steps to resolve conflict. These adolescents indicated they did not face the conflict or peer directly through two primary strategies.

**Submission or Compliance.** The first strategy participants described was submission or compliance. Adolescents reported they followed the peer's lead or gave into the peer. Specifically, these participants described not saying anything to the peer about the conflict, not asking them to stop or telling them how they felt, apologizing when the peer apologized or doing what peer wanted.

“Every time we got into a fight any of we would all kind of play it off as a joke, depending on who was getting like yelled at.” (P 1, without ID)

“I shrugged it off.” (P 5, without ID)

“I just apologized back to him.” (P 9, with ID)

“To avoid confrontation I just paid him the $5 for it.” (P 13, without ID)

**Disengagement or Withdrawal.** The second strategy adolescents described was disengagement or withdrawal. These participants described walking away from the conflict or peer. Specifically, these adolescents described distancing themselves from the relationship, not talking to the peer about the conflict, trying to avoid the conflict getting bigger.

“I was telling her that for the time being while all of those girls didn’t like me, I didn’t want to possibly hang out with her because I didn’t know what she would be telling them, what she would be telling them that I said about them and those kinds of things.” (P 1, without ID)

“I think I just tried to back away from it because I didn’t want to grow the argument any larger than it already was.” (P 4, without ID)

“Normally when we have arguments it would just be ignore for a couple minutes and then our minds are back in the same place and we’re good to go again, just do our own thing for a couple minutes.” (P 11, without ID)
Adolescents with ID more often reported engaging in passive strategies in the best friend conflict. Specifically, adolescents with ID more often described being submissive or compliant with their best friend or non-friend than adolescents without ID. Adolescents with ID reported disengagement strategies in the best friend conflict as often as adolescents without ID. Adolescents without ID reported engaging in passive conflict strategies more often in non-friend conflict than adolescents with ID. Adolescents without ID described disengagement strategies more often than adolescents with ID in the non-friend conflict.

**Active.** Participants that identified active conflict management steps described actively taking steps towards resolving the conflict with the peer. These adolescents described facing the conflict and the peer directly. Active steps for resolving conflict varied between positive and negative conflict management strategies.

**Negotiation.** The first positive strategy described by adolescents involved negotiating with peers to resolve the conflict. These participants described talking to the peer, explaining how they felt, what upset them and trying to understand the peers’ perspective. Participants also discussed apologizing to the peer, compromising with each other and learning how to deal with things during the next conflict.

“..."I tried talking to her about it, saying, “well I don’t see, I see him only on the weekends and I see you throughout the week and I don’t talk about him to you like why can’t I still be friends with him,” but she just got like really annoyed and stopped eventually talking to me about it.” (P 2, without ID)

“I kind of wanted it done my way, but we both kind of gave in and we did it kind of half and half almost…I agreed to go halfway with him.” (P 13, without ID)

“I said I’m sorry to Best Friend.” (P 8, with ID)
Coercion. Participants described coercion which included pushing for their goals and desires in the conflict. This is generally described as a negative conflict management strategy. These adolescents described being defensive, manipulative, aggressive or vengeful and not taking the peer’s wishes into account during the conflict.

“I just was like yeah how about no on that one and she was, she was yelling at me and I said I’m not trying to hurt you here I’m not doing anything, she’s my friend too, like I should be able to hang out with her and whatever but I’m not one to go yell at others...more an argument than a conversation.” (P 15, without ID)

“She really made me upset, I said you know what, I'm like you know what I'm not your friend and I say you leave me alone and don’t talk to me, so I didn’t even talk to her because like I said I'm not being your friend, you lied...I said, I said, I said you know what he didn’t do it, I said I found out, and I said you know what he didn’t do it, so I said you know what I don’t want to talk to you anymore so I just kind of just said, just leave me alone, were done...I deleted her number and everything I was done with her.” (P 21, with ID)

Investing in Relationship. Adolescents described investing in the relationship with the best friend. These adolescents identified spending time with the best friend, talking to them or trying to understand the peer’s perspective.

“I made more of an effort to come to her first...I would always text her and like when I’d see her I’d go like hang out with her new friend group as well.” (P 3, without ID)

Third Party Intervention. Participants also described getting support from an authority figure or peer while solving the conflict. These adolescents talked about asking an authority figure for help (teachers, parents, or older siblings) or involving peers in the conflict to help solve the conflict. Adolescents with ID described asking for support in managing conflict with non-friends more often than adolescents without ID. Participants also explained third party members stepped in to solve the problem for them.

“My older sister talked to Non-Friend in the hallway one day cause I was really upset about the whole situation cause they wouldn’t leave me alone even after we stopped being friends, like still making fun of me and making videos, tik
to my sister, she yelled at Non-Friend in the hallway in front of all my old friends, not yelled just kind of put her in her place, after that Non-Friend sent a very long apology” (P 1, without ID)

“P: “I went to church and prayed for Non-Friend…
Mom: at the park Participant did come and tell me about it…do you remember that? You came and told mom that he was being a meany?
P: yes,
Mom: you wanted a paper note,
Mom: we resolve a lot of conflicts with paper apologies.” (P 8, with ID)

“Umm well I think the other person in our group stepped in and said come on guys why don’t we just do it half and half, this is taking too much time.” (P 13, without ID)

**Take a Break/Space.** Some participants discussed taking a break or space from the peer as a strategy for resolving the conflict. Participants explained they gave the peer some space or took a break from each other to process the conflict and emotions. This was an active step because adolescents described the break as a tool to calm down, think about things and then come back together.

“I think I just keep to myself a little bit, just give her space and just cause I think that’s the best thing that we did, like if we do have an argument, then I do try and ask later, talk to her about it again.” (P 5, without ID)

“So there was also two other friends in there as well umm all three of us just kind of wanted to like go away from the situation take a break you know process what we heard sort of thing.” (P 10, without ID)

In the best friend conflict adolescents without ID reported actives steps more often than adolescents with ID, who reported passive steps more often. Adolescents with ID reported being submissive or compliant with a best friend and non-friend more often than adolescents without ID. Adolescents without ID reported engaging in negotiation more often than adolescents with ID. In the non-friend conflict adolescents with and without ID described active steps as often as each other. Adolescents without ID however, reported engaging in passive steps more often than adolescents with ID in the
non-friend conflict. Adolescents without ID overall in both relationship contexts engaged in disengagement or withdrawal from the peer or conflict more often than adolescents with ID. Adolescents without ID described engaging in coercion more often than adolescents with ID in the non-friend conflict. Adolescents with ID reported requiring third party intervention more often than adolescents without ID in the non-friend conflict.

### 4.3.2 Other Response Options

Adolescents were asked to describe how else they could have responded to the conflict situation. These responses were coded to provide insight into other responses adolescents with and without ID consider in the context of their own conflict situations.

A brief summary of the responses will be discussed.

**Table 10**

*Without vs. With ID Other Response Option in Best Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Response Option</th>
<th>Without ID</th>
<th>With ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission or compliance</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement or withdrawal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in relationship</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break/space</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party intervention/</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other response options or</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5
Table 11

Without vs. With ID Other Response Option in Non-Friend Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission or compliance</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement or withdrawal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in relationship</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break/space</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party intervention/Involved other people</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other response options or don’t know</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

Overall, adolescents were less likely to report passive strategies as alternative responses in the best friend and non-friend conflict situations. Adolescents with ID did not report they would engage in any passive strategies when asked how else they could have responded. Adolescents without ID reported they could have engaged in submission or compliance in the best friend and non-friend conflict.

“I could have continued to go on the kayak with her, and not said anything about it, I could have asked her if we could stop short, go again the next day.” (P 2, without ID)

“Walking away because I didn’t want to seem like I was just going to let him walk all over me so I just ignored it and just kept on playing.” (P 11, without ID)

“I could have completely umm leaned into what he was doing, but I don’t think I was willing to do that.” (P 13, without ID)

Adolescents without ID reported they could have engaged in active steps most often in both best friend and non-friend conflicts. Adolescents with ID reported they could have engaged in active steps to resolve the conflict in both relationship contexts, however, less often than adolescents without ID. In the best friend conflict, adolescents
without ID most often reported they could have engaged in coercion, whereas adolescents with ID most often indicated they could have invested in the relationship or taken a break. In the non-friend conflict, adolescents without ID most often reported they could have engaged in coercion or negotiation, whereas adolescents with ID reported they could have engaged in coercion.

“I think I probably could have, when I was playing it off as a joke, I think I probably could have messaged her and been like I know I’m making this seem like its really funny and I’m fine but its actually really bothering me and I just want to stop fighting with the friend group, I don’t want to keep having these fights.” (P 1, without ID)

“There are many other ways I could have fought back and did the same thing she did and not made, have not made this a problem.” (P 2, without ID)

“I mean I could have said I wanted it done my way.” (P 13, without ID)

“I could have spent time with her.” (P 9, with ID)

Adolescents with ID never reported they could have asked for support from a third party. Adolescents without ID indicated they could have asked for other peers support in their conflict situations. Some of these adolescents indicated involving other peers as a negative option to resolving or dealing with the conflict.

“I could have made this problem worse when it didn’t have to be, I could have involved other people who didn’t need to be involved.” (P 2, without ID)

“I could have told a teacher or someone but that usually doesn’t go over well.” (P 13, without ID)

**No Other Response Options.** When asked what other ways they could have responded participants explained they did not know how else they could have responded or did not think there was any other way to respond in that situation. Adolescents with ID most often reported they did not know or there were no other response options.

“I don’t know.” (P 9, with ID)
“I’d say that actually those two were the only options.” (P 11, without ID)

“I guess we mainly talked about it over snapchat so definitely if I would have talked to her in person maybe it would have helped a little better but I can’t really think of what else would have been.” (P 15, without ID)

Summary Response Options

Overall, adolescents with and without ID described more active responses than passive responses, both in their description of the way they managed the conflicts and when discussing other response options. Adolescents with ID described passive responses as expected, as well as requiring adult support, however they also described negotiation and coercion in resolving conflicts with peers. As expected, adolescents described coercion more frequently within the context of the non-friend conflict than best friend conflict. Similarly, adolescents described engaging in negotiation and investing in the relationship more often in the best friend conflict than the non-friend conflict. The majority of participants discussed negotiation or coercion as other response options. Adolescents with ID most often reported they did not know how else they could have responded to the conflict situation.

4.3.3 Response Evaluation

Participants were asked to evaluate the way they responded to the conflict situations. Participants described whether they felt the response was good or not. Participants were also asked to explain why they had responded the way they did. Each of these questions inform the response selection and evaluation process in the SIP model. Adolescents reported if they felt their responses was a good way or not a good way to respond. Adolescents identified a variety of reasons why they responded the way they did including maintaining their friendship, to protect or help the peer, self-preservation, they
felt bad or were emotional, no other response was worth it, to avoid increasing conflict, to get help or they could not think of other options.

**Table 12**

*Without vs. With ID Response Evaluation in Best Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W/O ID %</th>
<th>ID %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good way to respond</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good way to respond</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Maintenance</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect/Help Peer</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Preservation</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/Empathy</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not worth it</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Conflict</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get help</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Other Options</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**Table 13**

*Without vs. With ID Response Evaluation in Non-Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W/O ID %</th>
<th>ID %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good way to respond</td>
<td>92.96</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good way to respond</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Maintenance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect/Help Peer</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Preservation</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/Empathy</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not worth it</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Conflict</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get help</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Other Options</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**Good way to Respond.** The majority of participants indicated they felt the way they responded was a good way to respond. These adolescents provided a number of reasons why they felt this was a good way to respond including that it allowed them to achieve their goal, maintain their friendship and it was not aggressive or did not lead to
negative consequences. Adolescents with and without ID most often reported they felt their response was good in both the best friend and non-friend conflict

“I think so, I think I got my point across.” (P 1, without ID)

“I think it was the best way I could have responded.” (P 10, without ID)

**Not a Good Way to Respond.** Participants explained they felt the way they responded to the conflict was not a good way to respond. These adolescents explained they did not handle things well, they should have been nicer, should not have been physical, mean or aggressive. In Table 12 and 13 we see adolescents with and without ID were less likely to report their response was not a good way to respond in both relationship contexts. In fact, adolescents with ID never reported their response was not good in either relationship context.

“I don’t think I handled it the best but I'm really glad that I made the decision to stop being their friends.” (P 1, without ID)

“I was kind of calm about it, I was obviously upset and mad at her so I could have handled it better for sure...I definitely could have been nicer about it...I was definitely could have been a lot better about the situation.” (P 15, without ID)

**Friendship Maintenance.** Participants explained they chose the response they used to manage conflict because they wanted to maintain a friendship with the peer. These adolescents explained they responded the way they did because they loved and cared for their best friend and did not want to cause the friendship to end. Adolescents with and without ID did not discuss friendship maintenance as a reason within the context of the non-friend conflict.

“I think I did it, kind of out of jealousy I guess you could say because I needed to make sure that I was still her best friend, but obviously I wasn’t at the time.” (P 4, without ID)
“Being actually mad at each other last year, she is actually love me and she is a really special friends...because we just having fun, because she’s funny...actually because we just happy to have each other.” (P 9, with ID)

“I'm a person who values relationships...I had seen her as my best friend umm so in my opinion you don’t just give up on people who you care for or people that you love so I had, I tried my best to fix it and so that we could move past it and still be best friends, because I cared for her and I loved her and I wanted to make sure that she didn’t see me as a horrible person.” (P 19, without ID)

**Protect/Help Peer.** Adolescents explained they responded the way they did because they wanted to protect or help the peer. These adolescents explained they chose to respond the way they did to help the peer feel good, comfortable, happy or to protect the peer them from harm. In Table 12, we see adolescents with ID reported this as a reason for their response more often in the best friend conflict than adolescents without ID. Only adolescents with ID reported this in the non-friend conflict.

“I know Best Friend is very vulnerable to that kind of stuff she suffers with some mental health stuff, so that definitely didn’t help with this so that was definitely why I kept pushing, pushing this.” (P 15, without ID)

“Because I wanted her to know that we weren’t trying to single her out and say that she can’t be our friend because even other people had made memes making fun of people that were our friends.” (P 16, without ID)

**Self-Preservation.** Participants also described responding the way they did to protect themselves. These adolescents explained they wanted to protect themselves from harm, being hurt, being associated with negative peers and bad behavior, protect their image and to ensure they could achieve their goals. Adolescents without ID reported they responded the way did to protect themselves more often than adolescents with ID in both relationship contexts. Adolescents with ID never identified self-preservation as the reason for their response in the best friend conflict.

“I know it had a kind of effect on our mark and so I wanted to make sure that we were doing the best work we could.” (P 3, without ID)
“I did that because I don’t like how people lie to me and it really hurts me, and I just like it when people just be honest with me and tell me the truth…yeah I, I believe that it was good because I was thinking you know I need to take care of this, I can’t let her hurt me anymore, she hurt me enough, it’s time for me to stand up for myself again and just take it for myself.” (P 21, with ID)

**Emotional Reaction/Empathy.** Some participants explained they responded the way they did because they were upset or angry or because they felt bad for the peer. Adolescents with ID never reported this as a reason in the best friend conflict.

Adolescents with and without ID both equally discussed this as a reason or their response in the non-friend conflict.

“If you say it as the right time during the day and if that had a bad day and you then make comments about it, I get frustrated and upset but it hasn’t become something again, I think a lot of people can have dramatic arguments in class, it’s more of statements that are made.” (P 17, without ID)

“I was hurt and because she was moving to the new school like I knew we wouldn’t really be friends, the next year anyways if she didn’t to so cause we wouldn’t, we wouldn’t be in any of the same classes so we wouldn’t really have a connection anymore so I was kind of well there’s no point in, in pursuing that.” (P 16, without ID)

**Not Worth It.** Adolescents without ID in the context of the non-friend conflict explained they responded the way they did because the conflict was not worth it.

Specifically, adolescents explained they responded the way they did because any other response would not have changed anything, or the conflict itself was not worth their time. Adolescents with ID never discussed this as a reason.

“If it’s a continuous, always putting the person down or whatever, then yes that could get to the point where you should talk about it and take it somewhere else, if not just shrug it off.” (P 5, without ID)

“Cause things like that are not really worth arguing about…I feel there’s some things that are worth arguing about and some things that aren’t and that’s one of the times that it isn’t worth arguing about.” (P 11, without ID)
**Avoid Conflict.** Adolescents reported they responded the way they did because they were trying to avoid conflict. These adolescents explained they wanted to avoid conflict, arguments or drama, or they wanted to make sure the conflict did not get worse, or they did not want others to know about the conflict. Only adolescents without ID reported this as the reason for their response. Adolescents without ID reported this more often in the non-friend conflict.

“I don’t really necessarily like to be part of drama…and I thought maybe if we talked to her it could just stay on the downlow and no one would really know about it and it would just be between us because that’s always easier to handle.” (P 1, without ID)

“To avoid any more confrontation, I just kind of like paid him 5$ or whatever for it… so we cannot get into another fight.” (P 13, without ID)

**To Get Help Dealing with Conflict.** Adolescents with ID explained they responded the way they did because they wanted to get help managing the conflict with the non-friend. These adolescents identified this in the context of the non-friend conflict. These participants described talking to peers, parents, teachers or authority figures about the conflict so they could get help dealing with the conflict. Adolescents without ID did not report this as a reason for their response.

“God would help solve the conflict.” (P 9, with ID)

**No Other options.** Adolescents without ID reported they had no other response options in both best friend and non-friend conflicts. These adolescents identified they responded the way they did because nothing else would have helped, there was no other options, or they did not have an opportunity to do anything else. Adolescents with ID did not report this as a reason for their response.
“Well definitely wasn’t the most controlled way to stop him but I think there wasn’t any other way he was going to stop, he was just going to keep going.” (P 14, without ID)

“I was hurt and because she was moving to the new school I knew we wouldn’t really be friends the next year anyways if she didn’t to so cause we wouldn’t, we wouldn’t be in any of the same classes so we wouldn’t really have a connection anymore so I was kind of like well there’s no point in, in pursuing that.” (P 16, without ID)

**Summary Response Evaluation**

Overall, adolescents with and without ID perceived the way they responded as being a good response in both relationship contexts. Adolescents with ID never evaluated their response being not a good way to respond. The most frequently discussed reasons for responses included friendship maintenance, avoiding conflict, and self-preservation. Each of these responses is related to adolescents preserving themselves, their own comfort and their relationships. As such, adolescents described trying to protect themselves from further conflict, harm or loss of relationships. Fewer participants focused on peers needs as a reason to act the way they did (e.g., protect peer, emotional/empathy). Adolescents with ID uniquely described responding the way they did because they needed help managing the conflict or reported they did not know why they responded that way.

**4.3.4 Relationship Status**

Participants were asked how their relationship with the peer was now and if they felt it had changed since the conflict. Responses were coded for whether participants felt their relationship with their conflict partners had changed for the better, worse or remained the same.
Table 14
*Without vs. With ID Relationship Consequences in the Best Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>28.57</td>
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<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

Table 15
*Without vs. With ID Relationship Consequences in the Non-Friend Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W/O ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total number of participants: overall 19: Without ID (W/O ID), 14: With ID (ID), 5

**Positive.** Adolescents described their relationship with the peer improving following the conflict. Specifically, adolescents explained they felt they had become closer, the peer changed their behavior, or they became friends following the conflict. Adolescents without ID more often reported positive changes to their relationship with their best friend compared to adolescents without ID. Adolescents without ID never discussed their relationship improving with a non-friend. Adolescents with ID perceived improvements in their non-friend relationship following the conflict.

“We’re close than ever, so it was pretty good…I think after we got closer.” (P 3, without ID)

“Really good we talk a lot actually, we talk, we talk, almost every week, really good we talk a lot actually, we talk, we talk, almost every week...maybe, maybe a little bit... but I think, I, I, I’m not too sure really, I think he just kind of stopped being so agitated all the time.” (P 14, without ID)

“Well she back together and are friends and I feel lucky that way so…well I think so, I don’t know why, no not worse just getting better, and getting better and not worse.” (P 18, with ID)
Negative. Participants also described perceiving negative changes in their relationships following the conflict. In the best friend conflict, adolescents described feeling less close, losing trust in their friend or the relationship ending completely and no longer being friends. In the non-friend context participants described their relationship getting worse. In addition, these adolescents explained they did not want to associate with negative people anymore or feeling increased dislike for the non-friend. Adolescents with ID did not discuss negative changes in their relationship with the best friend. Adolescents with and without ID more often described negative changes to their relationship with the non-friend.

“I stopped being friends with everybody like in my whole friend group cause we had already been fighting a lot, and so I just didn’t want, I had made new friends and I didn’t really want to associate with them anymore.” (P 1, without ID)

“We started getting more distant was from that one conflict that happened...we kind of drifted away after that...I think we kind of drifted away because she was kind of mad at me for blaming her for being friends with someone else.” (P 4, without ID)

“I said, I said, I said you know what he didn’t do it, I said I found out, and I'm like you know what he didn’t do it, so I said you know what I don’t want to talk to you anymore so I just kind of just said, just leave me alone, were done...I deleted her number and everything I was done with her.” (P 21, with ID)

Neutral. The majority of participants described their relationship with the peer remaining the same. These adolescents described their relationship being the same as it was prior to the conflict; feeling still as close or still not friends. Adolescents with and without ID most often described their relationship with their best friend remaining the same.

“We ended up making up...really good, were still really close and we try and see each other as much as we possibly can but yeah everything is back to better now...for the rest of the day yeah but it went back to normal after we talked.” (P 2, without ID)
“Umm great yeah…it didn’t really change per say it was kind of like the same.” (P 10, without ID)

“Oh its’ not good, never really been good, no not really there’s been so many arguments.” (P 13, without ID)

**Summary Relationship Consequences**

Participants were asked how they perceived their relationship with their best friend and non-friend following the conflicts. Adolescents with and without ID most often reported their relationship with their best friend remaining the same. Adolescents without ID more than adolescents with ID perceived their relationships with best friends improving or getting worse. Adolescents with ID never described their relationship with their best friend getting worse. Adolescents with and without ID more often described relationships with non-friends getting worse or staying the same.

### 4.4 Additional Themes

#### 4.4.1 Evaluating Peer’s Response to Conflict

In addition to evaluating the way they responded to the conflict, some participants evaluated their conflict partner’s response to the conflict. These adolescents reported that the peer apologized or evaluated the peer’s response to the conflict negatively.

Adolescents with ID most often reported the peer apologized to them. One adolescent without ID also reported a best friend apologized to them. This reporting was often associated with adolescents with ID engaging in submissive or compliant conflict responses and responding with an apology.

“(mom) Okay, you wanted a paper note.
P: Yes.
(mom) Yes, we resolve a lot of conflicts with paper apologies...
Interviewer: Did Non-Friend ever apologize to you?
P: Yes” (P 8, with ID)
“I think I saw somebody, I was being alone, and I saw, saw, saw somebody come to me and apologize to me and I trying to do that…I’m not mad…just confused...embarrassed and that time she come to me and apologize to me.” (P 18, with ID)

Adolescents described being disappointed in the way the peer managed the conflict situation. Adolescents without ID were the only participants to judge the way best friends and non-friends dealt with the conflict.

“I tried talking to her about it saying like well I don’t see, I see him on the weekends and I see you throughout the week and I don’t talk about him to you like why cant I still be friends with him, but she got like really annoyed and stopped eventually talking to me about it...but she just like she didn’t want to talk she was just like well this is like its either me or him so that’s it and she just like would not talk about like well maybe I could still be friends with him, I just wont talk to him in front of you like stuff like that.” (P 2, without ID)

“I'm sorry I can tell you now we still have time before class, she’s like no nevermind I don’t need your help anyway and so then she just walks off, and I'm like sure maybe that’s how, she just doesn’t want to talk about it now we can talk about it later...the whole feeling component and with your friend or whatever if that makes sense is important to me and if she really doesn’t like get down to the bottom of it of what it exactly was, even though I know faintly what it was around, I don’t know I kind of want that like to get it because if we don’t then it will build up in my opinion. And then it would get to something bigger without like an actual like one event or two or three, but like to general we don’t know what were disagreeing on like from the basis of it. I guess I wanted more of a clear answer that I did not like when you didn’t think about me, like she kind of like gave me like indirect answers which I couldn’t really make out what they meant.” (P 5, without ID)

“The other thing was she didn’t go to us, like she didn’t ask us about it she went to the teacher and the teacher like got mad at us about it.” (P 16, without ID)

**Deal with Conflict Over Text or Social Media.** Adolescents without ID reported they communicated with peers about the conflict over text message or social media.

Adolescents expressed they felt things were taken out of context, or the peer did not understand what they were saying because the conflict took place online. Adolescents with ID never reported experiencing conflict situations online.
“P: That is just kind of how, if you're mad that's just how…it’s a common thing
Interviewer: Mmhmm like you you’re mad that’s how you kind of communicate
that to people?
P: yeah especially if it's about a group thing that's exactly how, it's not,
it wasn't out of the blue thing that she did that.” (P 12, without ID)

Don’t Fight with Peers/Friends. When considering what stories to tell about
conflicts with best friends and non-friends, some participants reported they did not fight
with peers. Specifically, participants describe not having a lot of disagreements or fights
with their best friend, friends or people in general, or that they try to avoid conflicts.
Adolescents without ID reported this more often than adolescents with ID. However, in
the case of adolescents with ID, some parents reported for them that they do not often
experience conflicts.

“With my close friends I don’t really get into arguments.” (P 14, without ID)

“(mom) Yeah I have to just say for most…Participant doesn’t have a whole lot
of conflicts with kids and its often with this Best Friend friend that she can have
a bit of a temper, her friend can, then things kind of blow up but they usually end
up making up afterwards.” (P 9, with ID)

“(mom) She doesn’t get into a lot of conflicts with other kids.” (P 18, with ID)

Discomfort/Difficulty Talking About Conflict with Best Friends. When
discussing conflicts with best friends, two adolescents with ID demonstrated some
difficulty or discomfort. These adolescents appeared to be upset by the idea of having a
conflict with their best friend. Specifically, these adolescents hesitated to respond, or talk
about feeling upset or angry with their best friend, or became emotional, expressed they
were feeling sad when talking about the conflict with their best friend. With support they
expressed being open to discussing the topic, however, it was clear for these adolescents
that they did not feel good about having a conflict with an important friend.
“Interviewer: So I want you to tell me about a time that you had a fight or a disagreement with Best Friend?
P: Nooo. Interviewer: No you don’t have fights with Best Friend?
P: Yah I do have a time.”
Interviewer: Does it make you feel sad to think about fights that you had with your friends before?
P: Yes.” (P 8, with ID)

4.4.2 Parents Participation in Interview/Conflict
An important discovery during the interview process was the amount of participation from parents. As previously discussed, given the shift to virtual interviews, parents of adolescents with ID offered to sit in the room with them to support if there were issues with technology. Of the five participants with ID, four of them had parents who sat in the room with them, and one completed the interview on his own. During the interview parents of three adolescents with ID participated in supporting them to think of a conflict, communicate what happened, understand questions, stay on track. For the other adolescent with ID whose mother sat in the room with her, the mom gave prompts when she got sidetracked, but for the most part did not participate. The one adolescent with ID who completed the interview on his own, did not require adult support to answer the questions. It became noticeable that the amount of participation from parents during the interview process was reflected in the amount of support they provided during conflict situations. As such, adolescents whose parents were less involved in the interview, overall managed conflict independently, whereas adolescents whose parents supported them a lot in the interview leaned on them for support in conflict management.

“(mom) Just from a farming community and in a conflict I really thought this would pass over cause I had a conversation with the boy at the park and what not, in a very constructive way, but anyways it wasn’t the issue for Participant it was absolutely not going away, and so in a subsequent conversation I explained Participant’s feelings of being hurt to the mom, and we had a very rich conversation, a really healthy conversation.” (P 8, with ID)
“(mom) Participant doesn’t have a whole lot of conflicts with kids and its often with this Best Friend that she can have a bit of a temper, her friend can, then things kind of blow up but they usually end up making up afterwards.” (P 9, with ID)

Each of these quotations demonstrate examples of how parents participated in the interview. The first parent described her own participation in resolving the conflict. The second parent interjected to answer questions for her child and describe her child’s experiences with conflict. The adolescents with ID whose parents were involved in these ways ranged from trying to respond to questions on their own and having parents step in to help clarify or complete sentences to requesting support from their parents when questions were asked. These same adolescents followed similar patterns in their conflicts either trying on their own before leaning on parents, teachers or peers or immediately turned to third party support when a conflict occurred. These parents were trying to support their teens in the interview process and demonstrate patience and kindness while participating in the interview. However, it was evident that the parents felt it was their role to support their child in participating in the interview and managing conflict.
Chapter 5

5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the way adolescents with and without ID described experiences of conflict with best friends and non-friends. This qualitative study explored the way adolescents with and without ID experienced conflict within the Social Information Processing model by examining how adolescents perceived the conflict, intentionality and reacted emotionally, how they described their response to the conflict, other response options and evaluation of their response selection (Crick & Dodge, 1990). Lastly, this study examined the way adolescents perceived changes in their relationships following the conflict experiences. We will review the findings of this study within the research questions:

1) What are the differences in the ways adolescents with and without ID report experiencing conflict with best friends and non-friends?
2) What are the differences and similarities in the ways adolescents with and without ID describe managing conflict with best friends and non-friends?
3) How do adolescents with and without ID perceive changes in their relationships following conflict?

5.1 Adolescents With and Without Intellectual Disabilities Experience of Conflict

The first step of SIP involves encoding and interpreting social cues (Crick & Dodge, 1990). In this study, this step was evaluated through participants’ narrative descriptions of the conflict and responses to why the best friend or non-friend acted the way they did. I hypothesized that adolescents with ID would report perceiving conflicts as more hostile compared to adolescents without ID. Based on participants’ descriptions,
adolescents with ID described a peer being unfair or dishonest as a cause of conflict more often than adolescents without ID. These adolescents explained that non-friends were lying to them or did not follow through on plans made. However, adolescents with ID most often described both best friend and non-friends’ actions as being accidental or both accidental and on purpose. Adolescents without ID were more likely than adolescents with ID to report peers’ intentions as being on purpose, trying to demonstrate power and protect themselves. Adolescents with ID struggled to provide detailed explanations for why peers acted the way they did, and more often responded to the multiple-choice options of on purpose or by accident. However, adolescents with ID excused best friends’ actions as being the result of outside factors or emotional reasons.

Previous studies examining the way adolescents with and without ID engage in SIP steps report adolescents with ID struggle to recognize social cues, identify social problems and overall have more difficulty with the encoding and interpretation step than adolescents without ID (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Rest et al., 2019). The results of this study demonstrate that adolescents with ID had more difficulty than adolescents without ID in reporting why they thought the peer, either best friend or non-friend, did what they did in a detailed manner. Further, some of these adolescents with ID struggled to determine whether the peers’ actions were by accident or on purpose, and when asked for further information, they were not able to explain their reasoning. It is important to recognize that this was not all of the adolescents with ID, and that some were able to provide their own thoughts on why the peer behaved the way they did with their own words.
Previous studies of adolescent conflict, have found that typically developing adolescents and adolescents with ID are more likely to report a non-friend acted with intention to cause harm (Peet et al., 2007; Peets et al., 2013). The results of this study show that both adolescents with and without ID were more likely to report a non-friend acting on purpose or trying to cause harm than best friends. Further, previous research in both SIP steps and interpersonal conflict has demonstrated that adolescents and adults with ID perceive hostile intention more often than typically developing peers (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012; Larkin et al., 2012). As we saw, this was not the case in this study as adolescents with ID across relationship contexts were more likely to report the peers’ actions were accidental or both by accident and on purpose. In the best friend conflict, adolescents with ID did not report that the peer acted on purpose. Therefore, these adolescents with ID were less likely to perceive negative intention or peers’ actions as personally targeting than previous research has stated (Larkin et al., 2012).

Adolescents with ID in this study may have identified less hostile or negative intention than expected as a result of a number of factors. First, allowing adolescents to discuss conflict within the context of their own relationships may have made it easier for them to perceive intentionality. In hypothetical scenarios, adolescents have to infer intentionality by placing themselves in the shoes of the people in the story. In this study, adolescents were able to make sense of intentionality based on their own experience of the situation and with the conflict partners in that situation and in the past. Second, adolescents with ID described feeling confused or embarrassed more often in the conflict with non-friends. This may also explain difficulty understanding what was happening and why it was happening or why the peer acted the way they did. Third, previous research
has asked adolescents to respond to a multiple-choice question (e.g., did the offender act on purpose or by accident). In this study, I allowed participants to use this multiple-choice option, identify if it was both on purpose and by accident and provide a description of their own perception of why the peer acted the way they did. This may have influenced the difference in these results versus previous studies.

Previous research has also shown that emotional reactions impact the way we experience and resolve conflict (de Wied et al., 2007; MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). Adolescents’ descriptions demonstrated that adolescents with ID did not report feeling angry in either best friend or non-friend conflicts. Adolescents without ID were more likely to describe feeling angry, annoyed and bothered in both relationship contexts than adolescents with ID. Adolescents with ID also expressed feeling badly for their best friend. Adolescents with and without ID also described feeling sad or hurt in both relationship contexts equally often. Adolescents without ID described feeling angry or annoyed and irritated more often in the best friend conflict than in the non-friend conflict. Previous research indicated adolescents report being angry most often when they feel a friend has betrayed their relationship or expectations of friendship (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). This fits with the descriptions the participants in this study provided for feeling angry or annoyed.

Uniquely, adolescents with ID more often reported feeling confused or embarrassed by the situation in both relationship contexts. Previous research has not discussed these emotions as much (de Wied et al., 2007; MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). The adolescents with ID in this study demonstrated uncertainty in why conflicts happened, which led to them feeling confused. However, adolescents with ID also referred to
embarrassment when a best friend or non-friend treated them in negative or aggressive ways. This fits with previous studies that describe adolescents with ID struggling to understand complex social situations (van Rest, 2019). These findings further imply that conflict situations particularly for those adolescents with ID that struggled more with conflict in this study, may be a confusing and embarrassing experience that leads them to feeling unsure of what to do next. While I cannot comment on causality, the adolescents who relied more heavily on parents or third-party intervention were those that identified feeling confused or embarrassed. Further, the adolescents with ID who experienced discomfort when discussing conflicts with best friends described feeling confused or embarrassed. It appears that conflicts may then be perceived as a negative interaction, that these adolescents appeared to feel badly about. This demonstrates that adolescents with ID in this study could benefit from support in understanding conflict experiences and learning to deal with them independently. As we have discussed, interpersonal conflict is a part of everyday life, and adolescents with ID should be equipped to manage these interactions and not feel embarrassed when they happen (Ayaz et al., 2010; Shantz & Hartup, 1995).

5.2 Adolescents With and Without Intellectual Disabilities Responses to Conflict

5.2.1 Response

The next steps of SIP involve setting a goal, choosing a response and enacting the response (Crick and Dodge, 1990). This was evaluated by asking participants to describe how they responded, why they responded that way, evaluate their response and discuss other response options they could have used. Participants’ responses to conflict were coded within previously identified categories including negotiation, coercion, submission/compliance, disengagement/withdrawal and third-party intervention (Laursen
Participants also described new strategies including taking a break and investing in the relationship. Passive conflict management strategies include submission/compliance and disengagement/withdrawal. Active conflict management strategies include negotiation and coercion (de Wied et al., 2007; Fenning et al., 2018; Tamm et al., 2018). Further, negotiation and submission/compliance are generally considered positive conflict management strategies and coercion and disengagement/withdrawal are generally considered negative strategies (Keener et al., 2009; Scott, 2008).

I hypothesized that adolescents with and without ID would report engaging in more positive conflict management strategies with best friends than non-friends. Adolescents’ descriptions of their responses to conflict demonstrated that both adolescents with and without ID described more positive conflict management strategies within the best friend conflict than non-friend conflict. Specifically, adolescents without ID described engaging in negotiation most often, which means they worked with their best friend to resolve the conflict, apologized and compromised. Adolescents with ID most frequently described engaging in submission or compliance and negotiation in the best friend conflict. Submission or compliance is considered a positive strategy as it means following the best friend’s lead in the conflict management, not pulling away or fighting back.

Within the non-friend conflict adolescents without ID were more likely to describe engaging in coercion, which included being aggressive, fighting back or not taking the peers needs into consideration. Adolescents with ID continued to report engaging in submission, negotiation and coercion as often in the non-friend conflict as
they did in the best friend conflict. However, adolescents with ID also described requiring third party interventions more often in the non-friend conflict. As such, similar to previous research findings, adolescents without ID did engage in more positive conflict management with best friends than non-friends (Burgess et al., 2006; Peets et al., 2007; Peets et al., 2013; Tamm et al., 2018). Adolescents with ID did not report engaging in more positive or negative conflict management strategies in either relationship, rather the frequency of positive and negative conflict management strategies was even across relationships.

I further hypothesized that adolescents with ID would less frequently report engaging in active and more frequently report negative conflict management strategies than adolescents without ID. Adolescents with ID did report engaging in passive strategies such as submission or compliance and withdrawal more often than adolescents without ID in the best friend conflict. Further, adolescents with ID reported engaging in active conflict management strategies such as negotiation less often than adolescents without ID in the best friend conflict. However, in the non-friend conflict context adolescents with ID reported engaging in passive strategies less often and engaging in active strategies equally as often as adolescents without ID. Within the best friend context adolescents with ID were more likely to report engaging in coercion than adolescents without ID. However, in the non-friend context adolescents with ID were less likely than adolescents without ID to report engaging in coercion. Therefore, the findings fit with the hypothesized expectations for passive and negative conflict management strategies within the best friend conflict, but not the non-friend conflict.
Previous research examining SIP and conflict management in children and adolescents with and without ID, have found that individuals with ID are more likely to choose aggressive and submissive responses than those without ID (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009). The current findings appear to fit with previous research, as our adolescents with ID were more likely to describe submissive responses across relationship contexts. Further, adolescents with ID reported engaging in coercion more often than adolescents without ID in the best friend conflict. However, previous researchers referred to aggression including, physical and verbal aggression towards the conflict partner (Larkin et al., 2012). When describing coercive responses adolescents with and without ID described yelling in some instances, however they also included ending friendships or relationships and trying to get the peer to do what they wanted. As such, these adolescents did not report engaging in aggression more often than adolescents without ID. Adolescents with ID in this study reported feeling more embarrassed or confused in the non-friend conflict and were more likely to report requiring third-party intervention. This may have resulted in less aggressive responses than previous research has found.

Interestingly, previous research appears to indicate adolescents without ID would be less likely than adolescents with ID to report engaging in passive conflict management strategies (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009). Our results demonstrate that in the non-friend conflict, adolescents without ID were more likely to report passive strategies, specifically, disengagement or withdrawal than adolescents with ID. Providing participants with the opportunity to discuss their responses in the context of their own conflict experiences could impact the differences in these findings compared to previous
research. Adolescents in this study described their actual responses rather than answering from a list of response options provided to them (van Niuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009). When adolescents respond to questions in a hypothetical scenario, they are more likely to choose responses that they feel the researcher will approve of (Burgess et al., 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Pert & Jahoda, 2008; van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). Providing descriptions of their actual conflict experiences may have reduced the response bias. Further, as we know, responding to hypothetical scenarios allows for more time to think about the way we might respond than we have in real life. Participants in this study were describing the way they responded in the moment, which may be why adolescents without ID reported more aggressive and passive responses than would be seen in research using hypothetical scenarios.

5.2.2 Response Evaluation

Adolescents were asked to provide an evaluation of the way they responded, why they responded the way they did and how else they could have responded. The purpose of these questions was to access the goal setting and response selection steps of the SIP model (Crick & Dodge, 1990). As for their own evaluation of the way they responded, adolescents with ID always evaluated their response as a good way to respond to the conflict. Adolescents without ID very often reported their response was a good way to respond, however they were also able to recognize space for improvement in some conflict situations, in which they reported they should have been less aggressive with the peer.

Adolescents with and without ID most often reported responding the way they did in the best friend conflict to maintain their friendship. Previous research has shown that adolescents place a lot of importance on maintaining friendships with their best friend in
conflict situations (Adams & Laursen, 2001). Previous research has not examined this in adolescents with ID. As such, I found that similar to adolescents without ID, adolescents with ID also value maintaining their friendships, when considering how to respond to conflict situations.

Within the non-friend conflict, adolescents without ID explained they responded the way they did most often because they wanted to avoid the conflict or felt other responses would not have been worth it because they would not have led to more positive outcomes. Previous research has shown that adolescents are more likely to engage in coercion within the non-friend conflict, as a result of perceiving hostile intention (Burgess et al., 2006; Tamm et al., 2018). While adolescents without ID perceived more hostile intention in the non-friend conflict, they also discussed more conflict with peers in the context of a negative relationship. As such, these adolescents reported they shared a history of conflict with these peers. This may be the reason adolescents without ID felt it was not worth trying other conflict management strategies.

Contrarily, adolescents with ID explained they responded the way they did in the non-friend conflict most often to receive help managing the conflict. As we previously saw, adolescents with ID often reported requiring third party intervention in the non-friend conflict. Previous research has shown that adults with ID report turning to adults during conflict situations for help (Bennett et al., 2017; Sigstad, 2017). As such, this study shows that this, as anticipated is also true for adolescents with ID.

While adolescents with ID always evaluated their response as positive, they were able to explain why they had responded the way they did, demonstrating appropriate ability to evaluate their reasoning. In research examining the way adolescents with Down
syndrome explain why they chose to respond the way they did, Kokima and Ikeda (2002) found that reduced expressive language ability made it difficult for them to describe why they responded the way they did. Within our sample of adolescents with ID, three of our five participants were adolescents with Down syndrome. I found these adolescents struggled with expressive language, that at times made it difficult for them to communicate their reasoning. However, it was not impossible for the adolescents with Down syndrome to communicate their reasoning as they did so with some support from parents and extra time.

5.2.3 Other Response Options

When responding to how else they could have responded, adolescents with ID demonstrated significant difficulty. Overall, within the best friend and non-friend conflict context adolescents with ID most often responded they did not know how else they could have responded or there were no other options. Within the best friend conflict adolescents with ID reported they could have taken a break or given the peer space. Within the non-friend conflict, adolescents with ID reported they could have engaged in coercion most often, either yelling at the peer or being aggressive. Adolescents without ID provided more response options in both relationship contexts. Specifically, they described passive and active response options in the best friend context and more active responses in the non-friend context.

Previous research examining SIP steps, generally relies on hypothetical scenarios and requires participants to choose from a list of response options (Matthys et al., 1999; Vagos, Rijo & Santos, 2016; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2010; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). As such, adolescents and children, were required to choose from a list of
options and not independently consider how they would respond in the conflict scenario. In this study, I asked participants not only to describe how they actually responded in the conflict, but also to consider what other ways they could have responded. This likely played a role in the differences between these findings and past literature. While the participants without ID were able to provide descriptions of how they considered response options in the moment, adolescents with ID appeared to have a harder time with this question. The results demonstrate that adolescents with ID were able to consider other response options, however, the majority struggled and responded they did not know or there were no other options. It is important to note, adolescents with ID relied more on submissive responses and third-party intervention, which may be the reason they struggled to consider other response options. As their reliance on others to solve the conflict meant they did know how to independently manage the situation.

5.2.4 Summary of Responses to Conflict

Overall, this exploration of the way adolescents with and without ID engage in response generation, selection and enactment demonstrated similarities and differences between these two groups. Adolescents with and without ID generally described both passive and active strategies. However, adolescents with ID more frequently described passive strategies. Adolescents with and without ID equally described engaging in active strategies. The results also showed that aggressive responses were not more frequently described by adolescents with ID. Adolescents with ID relied on support from others, through third party intervention and submissive responses more often than adolescents without ID to resolve conflict with both best friends and non-friends. It was evident in the descriptions provided by adolescents with ID that submissive responses meant relying on or following the peers lead to resolve the conflict. Adolescents with ID struggled more
than adolescents without ID to evaluate their response retrospectively. However, this study shows that adolescents with ID can consider other response options, rather than relying solely on response options provided to them.

Within the SIP model, these results show that adolescents with ID struggled more than adolescents without ID to recognize social problems, encode or describe social situations and to interpret social cues (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Rest, 2019). Specifically, adolescents with ID reported feeling embarrassed and confused most often when the conflict occurred, which suggests conflict situations with peers may feel overwhelming and hard to interpret for them. However, adolescents with ID did not interpret more hostile intention as previous research has found when using hypothetical scenarios (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). Further, adolescents with ID did not engage in more aggressive responses than adolescents without ID, as most research suggests (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009). Adolescents with ID are more likely to report passive conflict management strategies.

5.3 Differences in Relationship Consequences

I hypothesized that adolescents with ID would report experiencing more negative consequences in peer relationships as a result of their conflict management skills. Adolescents’ descriptions of their relationships with both best friends and non-friends demonstrated that adolescents with ID were less likely to perceive negative consequences in either relationship context following the conflict. In fact, in the best friend conflicts, adolescents with ID never reported negative consequences to their relationship. Overall, adolescents with and without ID in both best friend and non-friend conflicts most often reported their relationship remained the same with the peer. Adolescents with and
without ID reported negative consequences more often in the non-friend conflict than in the best friend conflict.

While completing the interviews, some of the adolescents with ID struggled with this question. Specifically, one adolescent with ID who had not been able to define a best friend, was unable to communicate how her relationship with peers was, which led to her communicating it was the same. This led to the question being reworded with multiple choice options for future interviews with adolescents with ID. With the multiple-choice options adolescents were better able to communicate how they perceived their relationship.

Previous research has shown that adolescents without ID perceive negative consequences in their relationships as a result of the type of conflict experienced (Bowker, 2011; Casper & Card, 2012). The adolescents in this study reported negative consequences to their relationship more often in the non-friend conflict and indicated this often meant they stopped interacting with the peer because of their negative behavior. Further, adolescents without ID described negative consequences in their best friend conflict. Previous research has shown that adolescents will choose to end friendships with friends that do not meet their friendship expectations (Tamm et al., 2018). This was true for this group of adolescents who generally described the best friend betraying their trust, not being loyal or not spending time with them. Research has yet to examine how adolescents with ID perceive their relationships with peers following conflict. As such, this is the first study to examine how adolescents with ID perceive their relationship with conflict partners following the conflict event. This study demonstrated that adolescents with ID, similar to adolescents without ID, generally perceived neutral consequences, but
also experienced improvement and deterioration in relationships following conflict. It is important that we direct the same amount of attention to the way adolescents with ID experience conflict within their peer relationships as we do for adolescents without ID. Without this information, we do not have insight into how adolescents with ID recognize the impact conflict can have on their relationships with peers. As we have discussed, interpersonal conflict plays a role in the way adolescents choose conflict partners. If adolescents with ID do not perceive conflict as playing a role in the quality of their relationships with peers, then this can impact their ability to learn appropriate conflict management strategies to use to maintain important friendships, as adolescents without ID would do (Bowker, 2004; Laursen, 1996; Salmon, 2013; Spencer et al., 2013).

5.4 Best Friend

Participants were asked to describe what a best friend is. Based on previous research, I expected adolescents with and without ID to describe best friends as someone you can trust, receive emotional support from and who will be loyal (Bennett et al., 2017; Matheson, et al., 2007; Sigstad, 2017). Further, I expected adolescents with ID to describe sharing time and interests and receive caregiving and help more than adolescents without ID (Bennett et al., 2017; Selman et al., 1977). Participants’ descriptions showed that adolescents with and without ID described trust as an important trait of best friendships, however adolescents without ID described it more often than adolescents with ID. Contrary to previous research, adolescents with and without ID most often described sharing time and interests as a trait of a best friendship and adolescents without ID described it more often than adolescents with ID. Previous research has shown that adolescents without ID less often use shared time and interests as descriptors for a best friendship, as this is more frequently a defining trait of friendships in younger age groups.
Therefore, I had anticipated adolescents without ID would be less likely than adolescents with ID to described shared time and interests.

Adolescents with ID in this study most often discussed a best friend as someone they can resolve conflict with. In a qualitative study of adolescents with ID, Bennett and colleagues (2017) found that their participants explained they got into conflicts with their best friends, but were able to keep it between them, get past it and deal with it together. As such, the findings from this study confirm that adolescents with ID perceive being able to deal with conflict with their best friend as an important trait. Previous research has shown that adolescents choose friends based on people they feel can manage conflict appropriately (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Laursen, 1996). However, this understanding of teen friendships has mainly been based on typically developing adolescents. In this study, participants without ID less often discussed a best friend as someone who they could manage conflict with. We can now see adolescents with ID also believe a best friend should be someone you can manage conflict with. Lastly, adolescents with ID uniquely described a best friend as someone who is not a bully or is not mean to them. Adolescents without ID never referenced this in their descriptions of a best friend. This may relate to findings in previous research that show adolescents with ID look for and desire balance and care in their relationships with a best friend (Salmon, 2013; Sigstad, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2016). Further, adolescents without ID did not feel this was something they needed to include in their descriptions, which may be an indication of the differences in their social experiences. As we know from previous research, adolescents with ID experience more
social isolation, exclusion and bullying than adolescents without ID (Reed et al., 2011; Zic & Igric, 2001; Gresham & MacMillan 1997).

5.5 Parental Involvement/Third Party Intervention

An unexpected finding of this study was the role parents played in the interviews and conflict management. Originally, participants were meant to be interviewed independently. As a result of COVID-19, interviews were moved from in person to virtual. With this transition, parents of adolescents with ID offered to sit in the room during the interview in case their child required support with technology. Four of the five adolescents with ID had a parent sit in the room with them. Parents were instructed to allow their teen to answer and to provide support only if the teen did not understand the question or lost connection. However, during the interviews three of the four parents participated in the interview more than they had been asked. Specifically, these parents re-worded questions, provided more details or clarification and provided interpretation of their teens’ responses. I found that the three teens whose parents participated more than expected in the interviews also required more adult or peer support in managing their conflicts and described either submissive or third-party interventions more often than adolescents without ID and the other two adolescents with ID.

The three participants whose parents participated in the interview the most were adolescents with Down syndrome. The other two adolescents were diagnosed with an Intellectual Disability in the Mild range but not Down syndrome. Therefore, the three adolescents with Down syndrome relied more heavily on their parents to interpret what they were saying and provide scaffolding for questions. Previous research has shown that expressive language can be a barrier to providing detailed responses in interviews for adolescents with Down syndrome (Kokima and Ikeda, 2002; Martin et al., 2009; Soriano
et al., 2020). However, I found these adolescents experienced their conflicts, had thoughts about what happened and provided reasoning for why they responded the way they did. Specifically, one of the adolescents with Down syndrome, provided responses independently that demonstrated she was emotionally impacted by the conflicts, and had considered how to resolve the conflicts in order to manage her relationship with her best friend and ensure the non-friend was not hurt.

The two other participants who did not have Down syndrome responded to questions completely independently and demonstrated more independent conflict management skills. One of these adolescents had a parent sit in the room with her, however she responded to questions on her own, and her mother only interjected a few times to keep her on track. This adolescent communicated at the end of the interview that she had learned all of her conflict management from her mother and expressed pride in her independence in resolving these conflict situations. The second adolescent did not have a parent sit in with him and was able to communicate his responses without hesitation or support.

It appears based on this study that the amount of participation from parents in adolescents with ID’s lives may impact their ability to independently manage social interactions. Specifically, these adolescents demonstrated less confidence compared to typically developing adolescents when managing conflict by relying on third party intervention and submission or compliance. However, previous research has shown that adolescents with ID, struggle with feeling they are not provided with enough independence in their social lives (Sullivan et al., 2016). The findings from this study, I believe are an extension of this experience, as I found adolescents with ID who were
given more space could manage conflict independently. Further, adolescents who received more support from parents, communicated their own thoughts on their experiences with conflict in their own time and with some support. Therefore, I believe adolescents with ID do have the capacity to complete SIP steps with enough practice and training. Specifically, in this study adolescents with ID perceived conflict as being less hostile than previous studies, chose and engaged in both active and passive steps in an effort to achieve their set goals. With scaffolding, teaching and support adolescents with ID can learn how to engage in social interactions using SIP steps more independently. D’Haem (2008) found that adolescents with ID want to be able to initiate friendships, plan gatherings, and problem solve independently. If these adolescents are provided with the opportunity to learn how to resolve conflicts with peers, I believe this can lead to further feelings of independence in their social lives and confidence in their social skills.

5.6 Assessing use of narratives in SPT-MID

This study examined the way adolescents with and without ID described their experiences with conflict within the SIP model. Previous research has mainly examined adolescent and children’s SIP steps with the use of hypothetical scenarios using the SPT-MID and ACQ (Matthys et al., 1999; Vagos et al., 2016; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2010; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011; van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). I chose to use participants’ narrative descriptions of their own conflicts to examine the SIP steps and their ability to manage conflict. Adolescents without ID were able to provide narratives and respond to the SPT-MID questions about their own experiences without difficulty. I also found adolescents with ID were generally able to participate in the interview about their experiences well,
however I found some changes and accommodations to be valuable to the success of the interview.

After the first interview with an adolescent with ID, I found it to be beneficial to allow adolescents with ID to consider the conflict stories they wanted to discuss prior to the interview. Adolescents with ID became more frustrated when they were put on the spot to think of a story from memory, however when they chose the story the night before with their parents, they were more confident in participating in the interview. Further, both adolescents with and without ID benefitted from multiple choice options to some questions including was it on purpose or by accident, emotional reactions and relationship consequences. Adolescents with ID, specifically those with Down syndrome, relied on these questions more heavily than adolescents without ID. This may be a consequence of language barriers for adolescents with Down syndrome, as they often hesitated in their response until provided with options. The choice to make these interviews semi-structured was extremely valuable. As I conducted the interviews, I was able to be flexible, reword questions, take time to build rapport, check-in and discuss responses more fully with adolescents with and without ID. This led to more full, rich and informative responses. Further, this made the process more comfortable for all of the participants.

Previous researchers, including Crick and Dodge (1994), the fathers of SIP have emphasized the need for less hypothetical scenarios and more real-life examination of SIP steps. I believe with the modifications I made in the interviews, this can be a positive option for exploring SIP steps in children and adolescents. Allowing adolescents to describe how they managed conflict and respond to questions about SIP steps within their
own real-life experiences made the interview more personally relevant and reduced the researcher bias on participants’ responses (van Rest et al., 2014; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005). Further, this allowed us to examine the way adolescents experience conflict and engage in SIP steps within the context of two different relationships more easily (Bowker et al., 2007; Burgess et al., 2006; Peets et al., 2013). Lastly, I believe using their own narratives removed the barrier for adolescents with ID who may have struggled to put themselves in someone else’s shoes to respond to hypothetical scenarios (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005).

5.7 Limitations

The first limitation of this study is a small sample size. Only five adolescents with ID and 14 adolescents without ID participated in the study. I had originally aimed to have 20 adolescents with and without ID. As recruitment was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were hard to contact and recruit. A larger sample of participants may have provided more or different themes which would have changed the outcome of the study. This sample size limits the generalizability of the study. It would be inappropriate to indicate that all adolescents with ID think the same as these five participants. Further, as three of the five adolescents with ID were also diagnosed with Down syndrome, this may impact the results given increased difficulty with expressive language compared to other adolescents with ID and the increased participation from parents in their interviews (Martin et al., 2009; Soriano et al., 2020).

The second limitation is a result of physical location. Adolescents with and without ID were mainly recruited from the Southwestern Ontario region. Adolescents without ID primarily came from two community organizations, and adolescents with ID primarily came from another community organization and snowball sampling. All of the
community organizations involved in this study support adolescents with and without ID. This further limits the generalizability of this study, as participants from each group may be in similar school and social environments which could impact their social experiences and development.

Third, this study was conducted almost entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may have impacted the results of the study for a number of reasons. First, the majority of participants completed the interview while in lockdown or during a stay-at-home order. Therefore, participants were not in school and had limited access to their peers. During recruitment some parents expressed discomfort in having their teens with ID participate in a study discussing friends because their teen was not able to see their friends. Therefore, the interview may have been difficult for participants who felt isolated from social interactions with friends. Third, some participants discussed conflicts caused by COVID-19. Specifically, one adolescent described a conflict with a best friend, because they could not compromise on how to spend time with each other.

5.8 Implications

5.8.1 Research Implications

This study served to examine the way adolescents with and without ID experience conflict with best friends and non-friends within the SIP model. SIP informs the way we understand how adolescents cognitively process social interactions (Dodge, 1986). SIP steps include 1) encoding social cues, 2) interpreting cues, 3) goal setting, 4) accessing or constructing responses, 5) evaluating and choosing response options and 6) enacting the response (Crick & Dodge, 1990; Dodge, 1986). Previous research has examined how children and adolescents with and without ID manage social interactions including conflict within the SIP model using hypothetical scenarios and contrived real-life
scenarios (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009; 2011). This is the first study to examine SIP steps in the context of participants’ own experiences through the use of narratives.

Previous research has shown that typically developing adolescents are better able to engage in SIP steps and due to cognitive delays adolescents with ID struggle more with SIP steps (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2005; 2006; 2009; van Rest et al., 2019). The findings from this study show that adolescents with ID struggled in some SIP steps compared to typically developing peers. Adolescents with ID did have more difficulty understanding social problems, as previous research has suggested (van Rest et al., 2019). Adolescents with ID in this study, provided less detailed narrative descriptions of their conflict situations, relied more heavily on multiple choice options to explain intentionality and reported feeling confused and embarrassed more often than adolescents without ID by peers’ actions. In particular, adolescents with ID’s description of feeling confused by peers’ actions demonstrated increased difficulty with understanding conflict situations and knowing how to respond.

Previous SIP studies have described individuals with ID interpreting actions as being more hostile (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). Further, studies exploring conflict in adults with ID also found the adults identified more hostile intentions (Larkin et al., 2012). The findings in this study showed that adolescents with ID did not perceive more hostile intention from conflict partners compared to typically developing peers. Rather, they described best friends and non-friends actions as being accidental more often than adolescents without ID.
Individuals with ID have also been found to engage in more submissive or aggressive conflict management (Pert & Jahoda, 2008; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011). This study showed that adolescents with ID reported engaging in submissive responses more often than adolescents without ID with both best friends and non-friends. However, adolescents with ID were not more likely to report aggressive responses compared to adolescents without ID.

The results of this study show the importance of exploring SIP steps and conflict management in adolescents with and without ID within their own experiences. As we saw, the differences that are commonly identified between adolescents with and without ID were less apparent in this study. Adolescents with ID were able to demonstrate their ability to perceive conflicts as less hostile, engage in more active strategies and less aggressive strategies than previous research has found. Adolescents with ID demonstrated more difficulty understanding social problems compared to adolescents without ID and greater reliance on others to help them manage conflicts.

This study served to provide preliminary findings to fill the current gap in research. Specifically, prior to this study, researchers had yet to examine the way adolescents with and without ID describe SIP steps within their own conflict narratives with peers. Further, researchers had not yet examined the way adolescents with ID describe their own experiences of conflict with best friend and non-friends and how they respond to conflict. Prior to this study, only adolescents without ID’s experiences with conflict in the context of their own relationships have been examined. Therefore, this is the first study to provide a voice for adolescents with ID in the context of interpersonal conflict.
This study provides an avenue for future research to continue exploring the way adolescents with and without ID experience conflict with peers and engage in SIP steps. Further, this study contributes to the discussion of the use of hypothetical scenarios versus real-life experiences in the examination of conflict and SIP. This is one of the first studies to explore adolescents with ID’s experiences with conflict within their own real-life narratives. The results allowed us to see that this may be a valuable option in the exploration of these important topics. Specifically, the findings in this study related to SIP steps differed from previous research. Adolescents in this study both with and without ID described their own SIP steps within their experiences that did not rely on a pre-set number of responses. This allowed adolescents to communicate their true interpretations of conflicts with peers, describe their own conflict management strategies and their own goals for acting the way they did. Adolescents with and without ID’s responses were more similar than would have been expected based on previous research. Adolescents with ID described less hostile intention and aggressive responses than seen in previous research compared to typically developing peers (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004; 2006; 2009). A number of factors may have played a role in the differences in the findings from this study compared to previous studies.

First, I believe that response bias may be an important factor to consider. Adolescents without ID participating in studies using hypothetical scenarios, may have chosen responses that they felt the researcher would like them to choose, or chose more positively evaluated responses than they would use in real life to protect their image. As we know, the use of hypothetical scenarios allows for more time to consider answers than is possible in real life interactions. Individuals with ID participating in the same studies
may not have filtered their answers in the same way as adolescents without ID. As such, the difference in the findings in this study may be a result of typically developing adolescents reporting the actual response styles they use during conflict and not what they think the researcher would prefer. As a result, we saw the frequency that adolescents with and without ID reported engaging in aggressive responses was more similar than previous research (van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2011).

Second, using participants’ real-life experiences allowed the interview questions to be more personally relevant to participants. As such, for both adolescents with and without ID, their responses may be a better reflection of how they perceive conflict experiences with peers than previous studies. Adolescents with ID in this study were provided with an opportunity to discuss their own experiences rather than try to understand what someone in a story may be experiencing. As a result of cognitive delays in adolescents with ID, the use of hypothetical scenarios may interfere with their ability to grasp what is happening and how they should be responding. Allowing adolescents with ID to use their own experiences reduced this barrier for them.

This qualitative study allowed me to explore these gaps in research and discover important methodological shifts in this research. By using qualitative interviews and semi-structured interviews, this study provides an example for future researchers in the use of real-life scenarios. Specifically, we know that adolescents with and without ID can participate in an interview about their own experiences and respond to questions about SIP steps. Additionally, we learned that adolescents with ID will require some additional support to increase the success of their interviews. First, allowing adolescents to choose the conflict narratives they would like to discuss prior to the interview reduced the
cognitive load and stress for these adolescents. Second, providing the option to use multiple choice options for intentionality, emotional reactions and relationship consequences helped adolescents with ID to consider their options. Lastly, as previous research has stated building rapport, rewording questions, moving slowly and the use of patience will be very important for these interviews (Sigstad, 2014). Future studies should continue to explore this area and build our understanding of conflict in adolescents with and without ID. Specifically, this study should be repeated with a larger sample across larger geographical areas using the directions from this study for the use of the SPT-MID with narratives. This will help to inform our understanding and allow exploration of similarities and differences in conflict management skills in adolescents with and without ID across contexts.

The current state of research exploring social skills in children and adolescents with disabilities is marked by ableism (Bottem-Beutel et al., 2020). Ableism is a result of our understanding of “normal” ability and viewing those with disabilities as less than the “normal” group (Wolbring, 2012). Studies exploring the way adolescents with ID compare to adolescents without in their social skills, including SIP, focus on their areas of weakness or deficit (Larkin et al., 2012, 2013; van Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011). This leads to negative impact on our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses present in both groups with and without disability (Bottem-Beutel et al., 2020). The focus of this study was to emphasize both groups strengths and weaknesses and emphasize the way adolescents with ID are capable of managing their own social experiences. Research exploring these adolescents should consider the way we more broadly think about adolescents with ID and how the world, their communities and
supports as a whole position them in our own expectations for their ability level. When we do this, both in research and support we reduce their opportunities for success (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020; Wolbring, 2012).

5.8.2 Clinical Implications

The results of this study demonstrated that there are similarities and differences in the way adolescents with and without ID experience and respond to conflict with best friends and non-friends. Importantly, I found that adolescents with ID that were provided with space and scaffolding to manage conflict on their own were able to resolve conflicts independently and to use more active strategies. Adolescents without ID did not necessarily do a better job than adolescents with ID in resolving conflict with either best friends or non-friends. However, the results of this study demonstrate that adolescents with ID can do well in managing conflict when they are taught how to do so. As research has not explored the way adolescents with ID experience and manage conflict, there is limited direction in what support they need.

This study demonstrated that adolescents with ID who were provided with space to deal with conflict and social interactions more independently had more confidence to do so on their own. Parental involvement was an unexpected finding, but it allowed us to see that while parents’ efforts to help their teens with difficult situations is well intended, it may be impacting their ability to develop this skill on their own. Adolescents and young adults with ID desire increased independence in their social lives (Cuckle & Wilson, 2001; Knox & Hickson, 2001). Without the ability to feel confident that they can handle all social situations, this may feel impossible to adolescents and their parents. This may be one of the reasons parents choose to play such a big role in their children with
ID’s lives. I believe, parents should strive to provide their children with the skills to engage in their social lives independently.

As such, professionals working with children and adolescents with ID and their families should support parents to foster these social skills and conflict management in their children. Further, by providing scaffolding and some teaching about complex social situations such as interpersonal conflict, this could increase the confidence adolescents can have in managing their own conflicts. For children and adolescents with ID who may demonstrate more difficulty than others to interact with peers, targeted interventions may be supportive. A study examining a SIP program for children with mild to moderate ID found that these children demonstrated improved social problem solving, increased ability to judge social situations and provide explanation for their social behaviors (Jacobs & Nader-Grosbois, 2020). Therefore, research has shown that children and adolescents with ID can benefit from interventions and training for their social skills, SIP and problem solving.

Adolescents with ID may benefit from support in the school, home or other settings to facilitate their development of conflict management and SIP skills. This will lead to improved independence and confidence in resolving conflicts. As we saw, adolescents with ID who were provided with space to deal with conflict on their own were able to resolve conflicts that led to maintaining important friendships and protecting themselves from further harm in negative relationships independently. All adolescents with and without ID should be provided with the same opportunity to feel confident that they can handle their social interactions with peers, and do not need to rely on adults or peers to support them. As we know, friendships play an important role in adolescence.
Without the skills to manage conflict, adolescents with ID may not be able to maintain important friendships (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Bexkens et al., 2016; Laursent et al., 2001; Tipton et al., 2013). As caregivers and important adults in the lives of adolescents with ID we should all be striving to give them the skills to have the important relationships we all have and benefit from.
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[https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1651-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1651-4)


https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00157

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Jacobs, E., & Nader-Grosbois, N. (2020). Training social information processing in elementary school children with intellectual disabilities: a key to support their emotion regulation and

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https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12220


https://doi.org/10.1080/17405620444000111


Appendices

Appendix A: Email Script for Organization Recruitment

Hello, my name is Olivia Faulconbridge and I am from Western University’s Education Department. I am doing a research study for my PhD about interpersonal conflict with peers which is being done under the supervision of Dr. Jacqueline Specht. I am interested in the way in which students with intellectual disabilities compare to students without intellectual disabilities in their understanding of and reaction to conflict with peers.

I am currently recruiting participants who are in highschool. Briefly, the study involves doing one interview with me. This study will take about 30 minutes of your child’s time. We will set up an interview over the phone or using technology called zoom meeting which allows us to see each other over the computer. For participating, your child will receive a $25 gift card for Starbucks.

I am attaching a letter of information for you to read and discuss with your child. If you are interested in participating or have any questions; please contact me at the email address provided in the letter.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.
Appendix B: Letter of information and consent

Adolescents management of conflict

Researchers
Principal Investigator:
Dr. Jacqueline Specht, Education
Western University

Olivia Faulconbridge, PhD Candidate, Education
Western University

Introduction
Your child is being invited to participate in this research study about their experiences with managing conflict with peers because they are an adolescent currently attending high school.

Background/Purpose
The purpose of this study is to better understand how adolescents experience conflicts with peers. This study will help us to understand differences in how adolescents with and without intellectual disabilities think about resolving conflicts with peers and how this impacts their future relationships with peers. Interpersonal conflict is a part of everyday life, and impacts the way adolescents build relationships with their peers. This study will help us to determine if adolescents with and without disabilities approach conflict in the same ways to help us understand how to help the development of genuine friendships in inclusive settings.

Study Design
It is expected that your child will participate in one interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.

We are looking for participants who are high school students.

Procedures
If you agree to have your child participate they will be asked to participate in an individual interview where they will be asked about experiences of conflict with a best-friend and a non-friend. These interviews will take place in a mutually agreeable setting that protects the confidentiality of what your child tells us. They will also then be asked a number of follow-up questions regarding how they thought about resolving these conflicts and the impact the conflict has had on their relationships with these peers. The individual interview will take place in a mutually convenient place during a time that works best for your child.
Participants will be audio-recorded. The purpose of the audio-recording will be to ensure the information provided by the participants is correctly recorded. If participants choose not to be audio-recorded they must let us know.

During the individual interview participants will be asked to respond to questions about their experiences of conflict with a best friend and a non-friend in their class. Participants will be asked to describe the conflict situation, how they resolved the conflict and how the conflict has impacted their relationship with the other person.

**Withdrawal from Study**
If you decide to withdraw your child from the study, you have the right to request (e.g., by email, in writing) withdrawal of information collected about your child. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our records. Once the data has been analyzed, we will not be able to withdraw your child’s information.

**Risks**
The possible risks and harms to your child include becoming emotionally upset or distressed by talking about a difficult situation with a peer. If your child becomes upset during the course of the interviews, we will provide them with reassurances and direct them to the counsellor at their school.

**Benefits**
Your child may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include increasing awareness of the way adolescents think about conflict with peers and improving the support we provide to all adolescents surrounding their peer relationships.

**Confidentiality**
All of the information collected for this study will be kept private. For the purpose of this study we will only require names, ages and grade level. No other information will be requested for this study. All of the interview recordings and personal information will be stored on a password protected computer, for 7 years following the end of this study. All of the information we receive including interviews will be encrypted. Only the primary research and co-investigators will have access to this data during that time. At the end of the 7-year period all data files will be deleted and erased from the computer. If we receive information regarding abuse, neglect or risk of harm to self or others, we will inform the authorities as necessary.

For the purpose of our study we may use personal quotes in our publications. All quotes will be anonymous as we will remove all identifying information (e.g., names, school name). Please let us know if you would prefer for your child’s quotes not to be included in our publications.

**Compensation**
You will be compensated with a 25$ Starbucks gift card for your participation in this study. You will receive your compensation at the end of the individual interview.

**Rights as a Participant**
Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to have your child be in this study. Even if you consent to have your child participate they will have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to have your child participate or your child chooses to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on their academic standing.

You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

**Questions about the Study**
If you have questions about this research study please contact Olivia Faulconbridge,

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics… this office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not a part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

**This letter is yours to keep for future reference.**
Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN ADOLESCENT CONFLICT

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of how adolescents manage conflict with peers, who meet the following criteria: adolescents between the ages of 13-21, with a diagnosis of intellectual disability in the mild range.

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to:
- participate in a brief interview over zoom regarding interpersonal conflict with peers.
- Your participation would involve 1 session.
- The session will be about 30 minutes long.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive
- A $25 gift card for Starbucks.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Olivia Faulconbridge
Faculty of Education
Appendix D: Assent Letter

Adolescents management of conflict

Assent Letter-Student

Researchers
Dr. Jacqueline Specht and Olivia Faulconbridge Faculty of Education, Western University,

1. Why are you here?
   - We want to tell you about a study that will look at how teenagers deal with conflict with their peers. We want to see if you would like to be in this study.

2. Why are we doing this study?
   - We want to understand how you think about solving conflicts with your peers.

3. What will happen to you?
   - If you want to be in the study, this is what will happen:
     i. Olivia will ask you some questions about some times you had an argument, disagreement or fight with a best friend and a non-friend. Olivia will ask you some questions about how you thought about fixing the arguments, disagreements or fights with you best-friend and non-friend. Olivia will also ask you some questions about how your relationships with these people have changed since those arguments, disagreements or fights. We will do this at a time that works best for you. It will take about 30 minutes.

4. Will there be any tests?
   - There will not be any tests or marks on the report card for this study.

5. Will the study help you?
   - This study will not help you directly, but in the future, it might help other teenagers deal with conflict with their peers.

6. Do you have to be in the study?
   - You do not have to be in the study. No one will be mad at you if you do not want to do this. If you do not want to be in the study, tell Olivia or your
parents. Even if you say yes, you can change your mind later. It is up to you.

7. What if you have any questions?
   - You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to the counsellor, your family, or Olivia

8. Who will know about what you talk about?
   - Everything you tell me will be kept private, we will only share what you told us without any names or information that will show who you are.
   - We will only have to share information you told us if we think you are being hurt or may be hurting someone else.
### Appendix E: Coding Manual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being unfair or dishonest</td>
<td>Following the rules of the game, not playing fair with participant, cheating, taking unfair advantage, lying</td>
<td>“he had already like played the game before I had and he had a lot more experience and knowledge about it” “she kinda liked to me about stuff”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Participant describes peers’ interests causing conflict including; romantic interests: wanting a boyfriend, not spending time with participant to be with romantic interest, not agreeing with participant about romantic interest, or desire to have a friend in new school or join a new friend group. Participant describes different interests, views or opinions causing conflict</td>
<td>“She got a boyfriend so that boyfriend was a part of the friend group, so I think she wanted to be with him”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Expectations</td>
<td>Argument was caused by participant or peer not meeting friendship expectations; trust, loyalty, spending time together, exclusivity of the friendship (not having other friends), not excluding each other, standing up for each other, recognizing things are causing distress or pain, helping each other, managing conflicts and protecting each others image in public/in front of others</td>
<td>“she was my best friend she should have stood up for me.” “she started hanging out with another girl”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>Peer puts blame or responsibility on the participant despite being responsible themselves or sharing responsibility, getting peer in trouble for something they did or participated in</td>
<td>“it was technically on both of is, but she was blaming it all on me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>When peer and participant engage in verbal or physical aggression. Verbal aggression: in communication with participant that is negative including name calling, insulting, yelling, nagging, telling them what they did wrong or they are wrong. Physical aggression: using body to cause harm</td>
<td>“all my friends got really mad at me and told me it was really stupid that I would do that and just started kind of insulting me and just saying rude things … NF she like the worst things so I just,”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Interfering with goals
Peer behavior or actions interfere with participants goals or vice versa
“she wasn’t really like into it and so that was affecting our mark and stuff”

Negative relationship/Person
Participant describes a negative relationship with peer; argue a lot, do not get along, do not like each other, have had the same argument a few times (history of the same argument) or describe peer as a negative person; a bully, controlling, negative, not a friendly person, disliked by other people, angry, irritated, treats people negatively
“hes in general just someone who likes to annoy people..., it would be a kid named nf, it was just a disagreement like he always argues with people anyways so”

Why do you think they did that/ Why did that happen? Was it on purpose or by accident?

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| **Hostile/on purpose** | Participant describes peer acting on purpose or intentionally, trying to hurt, bother or attain goal | “trying to get a rise out of me or something”
“the way she said it was totally on purpose, like it was like you can’t hang out with him anymore, which sucks but like she totally meant what she was saying” |
<p>| Demonstrate power | Peer's behavior shows they have power, are better than the participant or can get the participant or others to do what they want | “just trying to prove that she had more power over me...and she was able to get physical if she wanted to” |
| Self-preserving    | Participant behaved in this way to make sure they did not get in trouble, protected their image or got attention | “she was just like “seriously you’re asking me to take this down I already got so many likes and comments and stuff, its been up for over an hour, now you’re asking me to take it down, if I repost it but without that photo it will be kind of weird”…” I think she just liked that she got a lot of likes or” |</p>
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<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/Jealousy</td>
<td>Participant describes peer engaging in conflict because they were emotional or jealous, perceive the behavior as not intentional because of the emotions</td>
<td>“she was emotional” “if someone was working with one of her friends for a group project like she’d be mad about it”</td>
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<td>Benign/accidental</td>
<td>Participant describes peers actions as being accidental, not on purpose, and explains they did not mean to hurt them, or start a fight, did not realize it was hurting them or bothering them</td>
<td>“it was totally accidental, because she just like, in the spur of the moment she was like well we don’t spend enough time with each other, like this is something we should do”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both (on purpose and by accident)</td>
<td>Participant describes peer’s behavior as both on purpose and by accident (intentional and unintentional), did not see all of what they did being intentional or accidental</td>
<td>“a bit of both, I think purposefully like laughing and being like ”you’re being stupid about this like having your child move schools over something this” but I think that she was doing that on purpose but I think it was accidental when it came to the point like she didn’t realize that it was actually like hurting”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standing up for someone else</td>
<td>Peer was trying to stand up for another person or for themselves, peer was being treated unfairly, excluded and was standing up for themselves</td>
<td>“I think she was trying to stand up for her friend”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside factors</td>
<td>Participant explained peer acted that way because of issues in other relationships (e.g., with family, friend or boyfriend) or the current circumstances (e.g., quarantine, not being in the same class, other responsibilities)</td>
<td>“cause she like her siblings are older, like not older she has one younger sibling that’s way younger so she’s kinds of annoying sometimes to BF and her older brother is like mean to her” “she said that she had umm other school work”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Participant says they do not know why peer did that</td>
<td>“I don’t know”</td>
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</table>
### How did you feel?

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Sad/hurt/upset          | Participant describes feeling sad, upset or hurt, or the event being hurtful or upsetting       | “I guess sad”  
 “I feel like, she may have realized at some point that it actually was really hurting me but she didn’t do anything to care about that, to show that she cared”  
 “a bit upset”                                                                                         |
| Surprised/not           | Participant describes feeling confused while the conflict was happening, by the participants behavior or in what to do next | “I was shocked”  
 “I wasn’t really surprised, I kind of knew this was coming”                                                                                                                                           |
| Confused/embarrassed    | Participant describes feeling confused or embarrassed while the conflict was happening, by the participants behavior or in what to do next | “I was just a little confused why it mattered that much to her”                                                                                                                                         |
| Angry                   | Participant felt mad or angry at the peer or as a result of the conflict                         | “it made me mad just cause of a lot of built up anger from all of our other fights”                                                                                                                                 |
| Bothered/annoyed/irritated | Participant felt bother, annoyed, frustrated or irritated by the peer's behavior and situation | “I was really annoyed”                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Understanding/Empathy/Feeling bad | Participant describes feeling bad for peer, empathetic towards peer for feeling bad for what they did | “I guess she has the right to feel annoyed that she doesn’t see me enough and stuff like that so it made sense that she was mad”  
 “even if it’s not my fault I still feel bad, for what I didn’t even do because the person’s blaming me and so I think that I did something wrong” |
| Happy/not               | Participant describes feeling happy in the situation, with the peer or with the outcome or not happy with peer | “I'm not mad, I'm nothing else, I was just happy to spend time with the class”                                                                                                                                 |

### What did you do in response?/What else could you have done

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Participant describes not</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SIP AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ADOLESCENTS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>taking active steps to resolve the conflict</strong>: distancing themselves from peer or group, not talking to them anymore, ending relationships, or not talking to peer about the conflict, shrugging it off, taking a break before coming back together, ignoring the conflict or peer or following peers lead by apologizing when they apologized</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Submission or compliance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant describes giving into peer; not saying anything to peer about conflict, not asking them to stop or telling them how they felt, apologizing when peer apologized or doing what peer wanted</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“apologized to her when she apologized”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think I could have just not said anything, just like let it be. just not make a big deal out of it”, “have not made this a problem”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disengagement or withdrawal</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant describes distancing themselves from the relationship, ignoring the conflict or peer, not talking to peer about the conflict, trying to avoid the conflict getting bigger</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I kind of just stopped responding to text messages…I stopped being friends with everybody”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I could have walked away”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant talks about taking active steps to resolve conflict with peer including positive steps such as talking to peer, explaining themselves to peer; how they felt and why behavior was bad or hurtful, standing up for myself, compromised, apologized or forgave each other and asking for third party support and negative steps such as using aggression to resolve conflict; yelling, hitting, telling peer they are wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investing in relationship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant describes taking steps to improve friendship; talking to peer, spent time with friend, tried to understand what they are experiencing, made an effort to hang out with them or</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I just tried to understand what she was going through because I also have siblings…I was trying to understand what she was going through and listen”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Participant describes engaging in active steps to resolve conflict, specifically focused on talking to peer, explaining how they felt, why they were upset and trying to understand what was happening for peer, why they were upset. Participant describes compromising with peer, apologizing, and learning what to do next time, acting in a non-aggressive way</td>
<td>“I tried to talk to her about it saying like well I don’t see, I see him on the weekends, and I see you throughout the week and I don’t talk about him to you like why can’t I still be friends with him” “I think I probably could’ve explained a bit more but every time I tried to explain…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Acting in a way that only benefits one’s own wishes, being defensive, manipulative, aggressive or vengeful, therefore not taking the other party’s wishes into consideration or taking revenge</td>
<td>“I could have fought back and did the same thing she did”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break/space</td>
<td>Participant explains they gave the peer some space or took a break from each other to process the conflict and emotions</td>
<td>“wanted to like go away from the situation take a break you know process what we heard” “maybe a bit more calm then I was”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party</td>
<td>Participant describes getting support from an authority figure (teacher, parent, sibling) or peer to solve the conflict, or they stepped in to solve the conflict for them or involving other peers as a negative way to deal with the conflict</td>
<td>“but once it started getting physical I obviously told the teacher” “I told my mom” “involved other people who didn’t need to be involved”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>No other response options</td>
<td>Participant explains they cannot think of other response options, no other responses would have resolved the conflict better or made a difference, or expressed they did not know</td>
<td>“no nothing else just that’s it”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Why did you do that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Friendship maintenance    | Participant explains they tried to resolve conflict, used the response they did because they wanted to maintain their friendship with peer, loved and cared for peer, did not want to cause relationships to end | “actually because we just happy to have each other”  
“I needed to make sure that I was still her best friend, but obviously I wasn’t at the time” |
| Protect/help peer         | Participant explains they chose to respond the way they did to help them feel good, comfortable, happy or to protect them from harm | “I know she is very vulnerable to that kinda stuff she suffers from some mental health stuff, so that definitely didn’t help with this so that was definitely like why I kept like pushing, pushing this and like trying to get her to see that” |
| Self-Preservation         | Participant describes responding the way they did to protect themselves from harm, being hurt, being associated with negative peers and bad behavior, protect their image and to ensure they could achieve their goals | “it had a kind of effect on our mark and so like I wanted to make sure that we were like doing the best work we could”  
“I know like it had a kind of effect on our mark and so like I wanted to make sure that we were like doing the best work we could” |
| Emotional reaction/empathy | Participant describes responding the way they did because they were upset or angry or because they felt bad for the peer | “I think I did it kind of out of jealousy I guess you could say because I needed to make sure that I was still her best friend, but obviously I wasn’t at the time” |
| Not worth it              | Participant explains they responded the way they did because any other response would not have changed anything, or the conflict itself was not worth their time | “cause things like that are not really worth arguing about” |
| Avoid conflict            | Participant describes responding the way they did because they wanted to avoid conflict, arguments or drama, or they wanted to make sure the conflict did not get worse or they did not want others to know about the conflict | “I think its just out of instinct, with conflicts even now, even with my friends I just, when there’s a conflict I try to ignore it until it kind of solves itself” |
No other options | Participant explains they responded the way they did because nothing else would have helped, there was no other options, or they did not have an opportunity to do anything else | “well definitely wasn’t the most controlled way to stop him but I think there wasn’t any other way he was gonna stop, he was just gonna keep going”

To get help dealing with conflict | Participant describes talking to peers, parents, teachers or authority figures about the conflict so they could get help dealing with the conflict | “yes you help me, god”

Don’t know | Participant says they do not know why they did that | “don’t know”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was that a good way or not a good way to respond?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good way to respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a good way to respond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>How is your relationship with peer now? Has it changed since the event?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Negative | Participant describes conflict leading to negative change in relationship with peer; with best friend either less close or no longer friends, relationship ending, losing trust, with nonfriend no longer communicate, | “stopped being friends after that”
“we still get along but we aren’t friends anymore, we used to talk all the time but now we don’t talk at all” |
not wanting to associate with negative person anymore or increasing dislike for peer

**Neutral**

Participant describes relationship being the same; still as close as before, still not friends, or if it changed it was not a result of the conflict

“nothing changed, were still as close as before”

### What is a Best Friend:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>Someone you can tell secrets to/confide in/tell them anything, feel comfortable around, rely on to be there when you’re in a tough situation or times of need, you can trust/trustworthy, will be a good friend</td>
<td>“who you can uhh tell your secrets to and you hold a lot of trust”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support/love</strong></td>
<td>Someone who supports you, is there for you, listens to you, is there in time of need, love each other, help each other</td>
<td>“someone who can like support you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“we love each other”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share time and interests</strong></td>
<td>Someone you enjoy spending a lot of time with and share similar interests with, friend you spend the most time with</td>
<td>“you just always like try and hang out… do everything together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Have fun together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Known for a long time/closest</strong></td>
<td>Someone you have known for a long time, been friends with for the longest, closest friend, share deep connection, like family, know you the best/better than anyone else</td>
<td>“you’ve probably known for a while”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accepting or valuing each other</strong></td>
<td>Someone who demonstrates acceptance and respect for you; you can be yourself with, don’t have to change who you are, likes you for who you are, someone you can look up to: don’t make you change who you are</td>
<td>“likes you for who you are and doesn’t make you change anything about yourself”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think someone who you look up to”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Not mean or bully</strong></td>
<td>A best friend is not mean to you, is not a bully, sticks up for you with others</td>
<td>“a person that has your back all the time, well not all of the time but most of the time, sticks up for you in situations …doesn’t bully you, is nice to you”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Deal with conflict**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deal with conflict</th>
<th>Friends can get past fights or arguments together: fight, disagree, don’t get a long, get past it/move on from it</th>
<th>“even if you do get into a fight or argument like you just get past it, and you’re like yeah I know it wasn’t the best time but yeah you get past it”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Participant does not provide a response</td>
<td>“I don’t know”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Themes:**

**Other**

**Don’t really fight with people/best friends**
Identifying they do not fight with peers a lot, or that they do not feel they fight with best friends

- “I don’t really] fight with my best friends”
- ID 13 “with my close friends i dont really get into arguments”
- ID 09 “(mom) yeah i have to just say for most…H doesnt have a whole lot of conflicts with kids and hadnt yeah its often with this BF friend that yeah, she can have a bit of a temper, her friend can, then things kind of blow up but they usually end up making up afterwards so yeah”
- ID 09 “(mom) she doesnt get into a lot of conflicts with the, with other kids, umm I'm”

**Dealing with conflict over text or social media**

Using text messages, social media posts, or private messages to communicate about conflict

- “like this all transpired over group chat”
- ID 12 “thats just kinda like how, if youre mad thats just how like i dont know, its a its a common thing

**MMHMM LIKE IF YOURE MAD THATS HOW YOU KIND OF COMMUNICATE THAT TO PEOPLE**

yeah especially if its like about a group thing thats exactly how, like its not, it wasnt a out of the blue thing that she did that”

**Discomfort or difficulty talking about conflict with best friends**

Mostly adolescents with intellectual disabilities demonstrate difficulty discussing conflicts with best friends. Often answering initial questions with “noooo” or “I don’t know” or expressing they do not have conflicts with their friends (parents may also report this in emails or during the interview). Facial expressions also demonstrate some shame in having conflict with best friends. However adolescents without ID also seem to want to protect the appearance of their best friends, and will struggle to point negative intentionality to them even in a private interview (example ID 05)

“DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL SAD TO THINK ABOUT FIGHTS THAT YOU HAD WITH YOUR FRIENDS BEFORE? Yes”

“SO I WANT YOU TO TELL ME ABOUT A TIME THAT YOU HAD A FIGHT OR A DISAGREEMENT WITH BF?”
NO YOU DONT HAVE FIGHTS WITH BF?
yeah i do, i have a time. “
ID 05 “umm but yeah, I guess then that she knows that I will apologize for something I might not have done. Also I don’t want that to be like you and don’t want to point that at her but like possibly that could have a thing in it, but so I think positive so we can get over it”

Parent involved in answering questions
Participants parents who were in the room for technical support, aided participant in answering or understanding questions or explained situation in greater detail for interviewer. This was only the case for participants with intellectual disabilities and often reflected the amount of participation they had in the actual conflicts or the amount of adult support involved in resolving the conflict.
“(mom) just from a farming community and in a conflict I really thought this was, would pass over cause I had a conversation with the boy at the park and what not, in a, in a very constructive way, but anyways it wasn’t the issue for t was absolutely not going away, absolutely not, and so in a subsequent conversation I explained the, t’s feelings if being hurt to the mom, and we had a very rich conversation, a really healthy conversation”
“(mom) yeah i have to just say for most…H doesnt have a whole lot of conflicts with kids and hadnt yeah its often with this BF friend that yeah, she can have a bit of a temper, her friend can, then things kind of blow up but they usually end up making up afterwards so yeah” ID 09
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Olivia Faulconbridge

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:
Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
2017-2021 Ph.D. School and Applied Child Psychology

Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
2015-2017 M.A. Child Studies

Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
2010-2014 B.A. Specialization Psychology

Honours and Awards:
Travel Award Arts and Science Department
2016

Travel Award Education Department
2016

Travel Award School of Graduate Studies
2015

Related Work Experience
Psychology Resident
Child and Youth Development Clinic
2020-2021

Advanced Practicum Student
Child and Youth Development Clinic
2019-2020

Practicum Student
Thames Valley District School Board
2018-2019

Teaching Assistant
Western University
2018-2019

Communications Officer
Reseau de Savoir sur l’Equite/Equity Knowledge Network (RSEKN)
2018-2019
Practicum Student
Child and Parent Resource Institute
2018

Practicum Student
Mary J. Wright
2017-2018

Graduate Student Assistant
Western University
2017-2018

Research Assistant
Concordia University
2011-2016

Publications


Poster Presentations


Wainryb, C., Recchia, H. E., Faulconbridge, O. & Pasupathi, M. (2016). “I’m a forgiving person, but that was just too mean”: Adolescents’ accounts of forgiving and not forgiving. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Research in Adolescents, Baltimore, MD, USA.


Faulconbridge, O., Recchia, H. E., Wainryb, C. & Pasupathi, M. (2015). “I forgave him cuz he showed he was sorry”: Adolescents’ reasons for forgiveness and nonforgiveness in different cultural contexts. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for research in child’s development, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

Faulconbridge, O., Recchia, H. E., Wainryb, C. & Pasupathi, M. (2013). “I was so mad that I didn’t want to forgive him”: Children’s and adolescents’ reasoning for forgiveness and non-forgiveness. Poster presented twice internally at the annual meeting of the Concordia center for research in human development and the Concordia Undergraduate Research day, Montreal, Quebec, and once externally at the annual meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, Chicago, Il, USA.

Conference Talk