


# Responsive Parenting and Friendship Quality in Adolescents: Interpersonal Communication Skills as a Mediator

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## INTRODUCTION

Friendship holds significant importance in the lives of adolescents, as during adolescence, most of them usually spend a lot of time with friends (Santrock, 2018; Smith, 2015). It's unsurprising that friendships can yield various positive impacts on adolescents, especially considering the transitional nature of adolescence. Numerous studies have revealed that friendships can foster positive socioemotional development, including boosting self-esteem (Corsano et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017) enhancing life satisfaction (Pang, 2018; Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014), promoting happiness (Quoidbach et al., 2019), improving psychological well-being (Bakalim & Taşdelen Karçkay, 2016), and reducing relational aggression (Soekoto et al., 2020). Conversely, teenagers who struggle to cultivate strong friendships often experience loneliness, which may lead to depression (Corsano et al., 2017; Lodder et al., 2017; Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020). Therefore, negative friendships, characterized by conflict, lack of support, and negative peer influence, have been shown to have substantial adverse effects on adolescents (Öztürk & Sumbas, 2023). Research indicates that approximately 20-25% of adolescents report having friendships that are more harmful than beneficial (Hall & Melia, 2023). Furthermore, research has found that the rejecting parenting style and the controlling parenting style, the two most common negative parenting styles significantly influence adolescent psychological crisis such as depression and self-harming behavior in adolescents (Zhao et al., 2023)

Friendship can be defined as a bond between two individuals who rely on each other and mutually appreciate each other's company, thereby fulfilling socioemotional and affective needs (Leibowitz, 2018). However, not all friendships yield positive outcomes. Only those friendships of high quality contribute to adolescent development. High-quality friendships are defined by the characteristics or traits inherent to the relationship itself, encompassing various interconnected elements (Bukowski et al., 1994; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1993). Mendelson and Aboud (1999) outline several qualities of high-quality friendships, such as engaging in activities together that bring happiness, offering guidance and essential information, showing sensitivity to each other's emotions, demonstrating loyalty, fostering a positive self-image, and providing emotional security and trust. Besides positive outcomes, negative friendships characterized by conflict, lack of support, and negative peer influence have been shown to have substantial adverse effects on adolescents. These detrimental effects can manifest in various aspects of an adolescent's life, including mental health issues such as increased levels of anxiety and depression, behavioral problems like delinquency and substance abuse, and academic challenges, including lower academic performance and disengagement from school (Shadur & Hussong, 2014).

Parenting plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' ability to form friendships in the future. Bowlby (1982) suggests that the attachment adolescents have with their parents can influence their internal models of behavior (the cognitive and psychological processes by which an individual constructs and utilizes internal representations or mental models of the external world to predict and understand behavior, both their own and that of others), which they then replicate when interacting with peers. Additionally, Bandura (2018) highlights how adolescents acquire social behaviors from their parents, including offering emotional support, negotiating compliance, and handling conflicts. Once these behaviors are learned and internalized, adolescents incorporate them into their interactions with peers. This perspective suggests that adolescents mirror their parents' interaction styles, beginning with warm and supportive attitudes.

The parenting style characterized by warmth and supportiveness is often termed as responsive parenting. This style, adopted by parents, revolves around meeting the child's needs by embracing and endorsing their behavior (Gafoor & Kurukkan, 2014; Slicker et al., 2005). Previous studies have indicated that responsive parenting can enhance the quality of friendships (Tjandra et al., 2021). However, its impact appears relatively modest, accounting for only 4.1%. This leads to the assumption that responsive parenting might not directly foster the quality of friendships. Another investigation by Mahirah and Muttaqin (2022) suggests that empathy may partially mediate this relationship, indicating that empathy alone may not fully elucidate the link between responsive parenting and friendship quality.

Theoretically, numerous factors serve as precursors to the quality of interpersonal relationships overall, with interpersonal communication skills being one of them, particularly in friendship relationships (Hargie, 2021; Solomon & Theiss, 2022). Slicker et al. (2005) asserts that interpersonal communication skills are typically acquired early on from parents and other family members. Previous studies have corroborated this, suggesting that parents who engage in open communication with their children can cultivate close interpersonal relationships, fostering sympathy, empathy, and prosocial behavior towards others (Carlo et al., 2007). Parents who exercise authority in their parenting, providing opportunities for dialogue, tend to nurture better interpersonal skills in their children compared to authoritarian or permissive parents.

Communication holds significant importance in friendships. As noted by Fehr (1996), communication lies at the heart of friendship, and many failed friendships stem from breakdowns in communication. This breakdown may occur because intimacy thrives when friends share personal information, leading to mutual trust and ultimately, higher friendship quality (Bauminger et al., 2008). Thus, effective communication within friendships fosters intimacy, resulting in satisfaction. The

presence of satisfaction within friendships serves as an indicator of their quality (Berndt & Perry, 1986).

### Rational of Current Study

The above explanation highlights that responsive parenting practiced by parents can influence the quality of adolescent friendships. However, it's possible that responsive parenting doesn't directly determine friendship quality but rather fosters the interpersonal communication skills necessary for adolescents to build meaningful friendships. Responsive parents typically demonstrate warmth and empathy, making them more inclined to engage in discussions with their children when they encounter challenges (Hidayati et al., 2023). Research by Khaidir et al. (2023) indicates that responsive parents communicate openly with their children, contributing to increased trust and intimacy in their relationship. As a result, adolescents feel safer and more at ease expressing their thoughts and emotions. These interpersonal communication skills are then internalized and utilized by adolescents when forming bonds with their peers. Indirectly, this area of study holds significance as its findings can offer guidance for parents in shaping their parenting practices. Establishing high-quality parent-child relationships is vital for adolescents' adaptive social development. Moreover, adolescents come to understand that good interpersonal communication underpins quality friendships. Consequently, interpersonal communication skills serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between responsive parenting and friendship quality.

### Study Aims and Hypotheses

In line with the preceding explanation, this research seeks to investigate the influence of interpersonal communication skills on the connection between responsive parenting from each parent—father and mother individually—and the quality of adolescent friendships. The research hypotheses are as follows, and depicted in Figure 1:

Hypothesis 1: Interpersonal communication skills mediate the relationship between father's responsive parenting and the quality of adolescent friendships.

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal communication skills mediate the relationship between mother's responsive parenting and the quality of adolescent friendships.

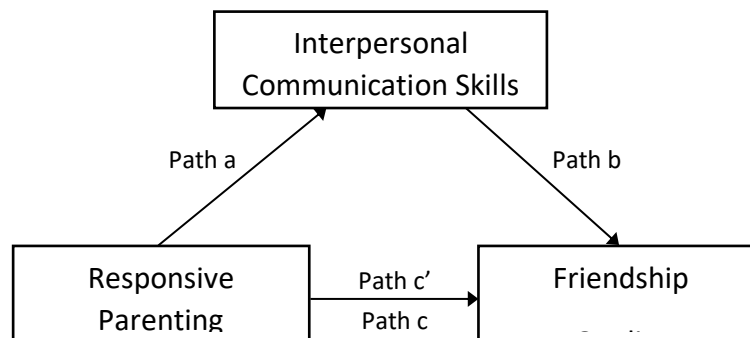


Figure 1. Research Framework

## METHODS

### Research Design

This research utilizes a quantitative cross-sectional survey method, gathering data from a predetermined sample size within the population. It investigated three main variables: responsive parenting as the independent variable, interpersonal communication skills as the mediating factor, and friendship quality as the dependent variable.

## Participants

This study included 150 teenagers aged between 12 and 20 years ( $M_{age} = 16.87$ ;  $SD = 2.51$ ), residing in Surabaya City. All participants had at least one friend, and both parents were present in their households. Of the participants, 70 were male teenagers (46.7%), and 80 were female teenagers (53.3%). Employing quota sampling, the researchers selected an equal number of participants for three adolescent groups: early adolescents, mid-adolescents, and late adolescents, each comprising 50 individuals (33.3%). Contact with participants was established directly, and information about the study was disseminated through social media. Participants who agreed to take part were requested to complete an online informed consent form and research questionnaire.

## Instruments

This study employed three instruments or measurement scales. The three self-reported scales used in this study were originally in English. These scales were then translated into Indonesian following the translation and adaptation guidelines provided by the International Test Commission (ITC) ([International Test Commission, 2017](#)). Descriptions of these three research scales were presented as follows.

*The McGill Friendship Questionnaires* (MFQ-FF; [Mendelson & Aboud, 1999](#)) comprised 30 items aimed at assessing friendship quality. It consisted of six subscales: stimulating companionship (five items, such as "My friend is enjoyable to talk to"), help (five items, such as "My friend helps me with things"), intimacy (five items, such as "My friend is someone I can tell personal things to"), reliable alliance (five items, such as "My friend still wants to be my friend even if we argue"), self-validation (five items, such as "My friend makes me feel special"), and emotional security (five items, such as "My friend would make me feel better if I were worried"). Response options for the MFQ-FF ranged from 0 (never) to 8 (always). The reliability of this measurement tool was Cronbach's alpha = 0.954.

*Parenting Style* (PS; [Paulson, 1994](#)). This study utilized the responsiveness subscale of the Parenting Style, aligning with its objectives and variables. This subscale assessed the responsive parenting behaviors of both mothers and fathers. It comprised seven items with a reliability coefficient of 0.854, featuring statements such as "My parents expect me to inform them when I perceive a rule as unfair" and "My parents value my opinion and encourage me to express it." Response options for the Responsiveness subscale ranged from 1 (very inappropriate) to 5 (very appropriate). This measurement tool exhibited reliability with Cronbach's alpha = 0.854.

*Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale* (ICCS; [Martin, 1994](#)). This scale consisted of 7 items aimed at assessing communication skills. Example statements included: "When I'm blamed, I'm confident enough to confront the person blaming me" and "When talking with others, I find it easy to change the topic of conversation." Response options for the ICCS scale ranged from 1 (very inappropriate) to 5 (very appropriate). In this study, the reliability coefficient for this measurement tool was Cronbach's alpha = 0.852.

## Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS version 26 program to examine the research hypothesis, which investigated the role of interpersonal communication skills as a mediator in the relationship between responsive parenting from either the father or mother and friendship quality. Before presenting the mediation analysis, we summarized the descriptive analysis of variables that were the mean ( $M$ ), standard deviation ( $SD$ ) and Pearson's intercorrelation among variables.

The mediation regression analysis (MRA) conducted to test the research hypothesis, utilizes the approach proposed by Baron and Kenny ([1986](#)), which involves regression analysis as follows: (1) the influence of responsive parenting from either the father or mother on interpersonal communication skills (path a), (2) the influence of responsive parenting from either the father or mother (path c') and

interpersonal communication skills (path b) on friendship quality, and (3) the influence of responsive parenting from either the father or mother on friendship quality (path c'). Additionally, Sobel's test (1982) was performed to determine the direct and indirect effects of interpersonal communication skills. Interpersonal communication skills were considered to act as a mediator if the significance (p-value) of the indirect effect was less than 0.05.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Prior to presenting the results of inferential testing, an overview of the research variables was provided. Table 1 summarizes the mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*) and Pearson's intercorrelation among variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Intercorrelation among Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. FQ	6.99	.54	—		
2. ICS	4.20	.41	.474**	—	
3. RPF	4.40	.60	.373**	.314**	—
4. RPM	4.50	.54	.351**	.291**	.455**

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; FQ (Friendship Quality), ICS (Interpersonal Communication Skills), RPF (Responsive Parenting by Father), RSM (Responsive Parenting by Mother)

Table 2. Mediator Regression Analysis

Variable	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Responsive Parenting by Father						
RPF → ICS (path a)	.099	.314	.218	.054	4.029	.001
ICS → FQ (path b)	.109	.396	.520	.097	5.365	.001
RPF → FQ (path c')	.120	.248	.226	.067	3.369	.001
RPF → FQ (path c)	.139	.373	.340	.069	4.887	.001
Responsive Parenting by Mother						
RPM → ICS (path a)	.085	.291	.225	.061	3.706	.001
ICS → FQ (path b)	.065	.406	.534	.097	5.525	.001
RPM → FQ (path c')	.099	.232	.236	.075	3.160	.001
RPM → FQ (path c)	.123	.351	.357	.078	4.553	.001

Note: RPF = Responsive Parenting by Father, RPM = Responsive Parenting by Mother, ICS (Interpersonal Communication Skills), FQ (Friendship Quality).

Table 2 shows the test of indirect effects using the SOBEL Test, which found that interpersonal communication can act as a mediator in the relationship between both father's (indirect effect value = .113,  $z = 3.186$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and mother's responsive parenting (indirect effect value = .120,  $z = 3.04$ ,  $p < .002$ ) with friendship quality. Following Baron and Kenny's approach (1986), if the significance value is less than .05, it indicates the presence of a mediator.

Table 3. Results of Sobel Test Analysis

Variabel	Value	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
RPF → ICS → FQ	.113	.356	3.186	.001
RPM → ICS → FQ	.120	.039	3.043	.002

Note: RPF = Responsive Parenting by Father, RPM = Responsive Parenting by Mother, ICS (Interpersonal Communication Skills), FQ (Friendship Quality).

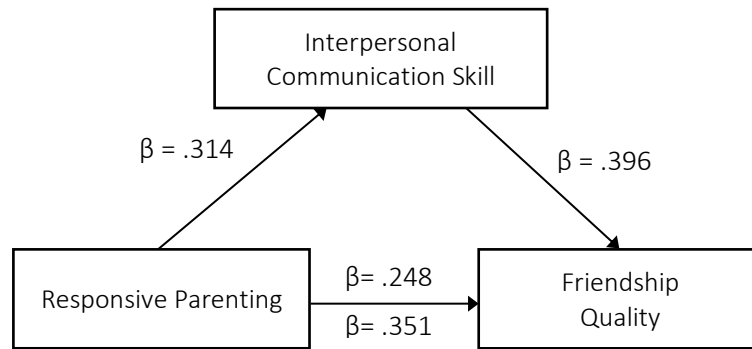


Figure 2. Mediation Test Results: Responsive Parenting by Father

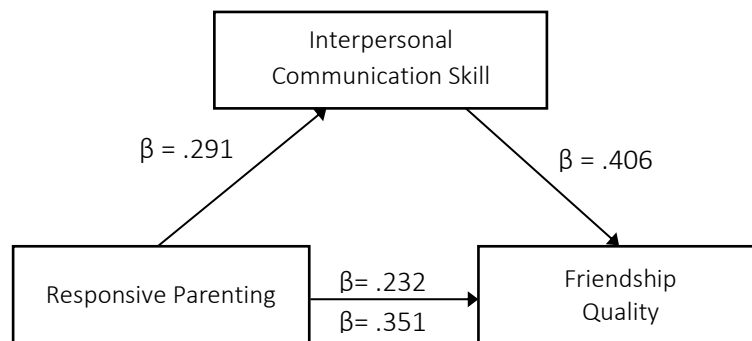


Figure 3. Mediation Test Results: Responsive Parenting by Mother

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of interpersonal communication skills as a mediator in the link between responsive parenting and friendship quality. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication skills can serve as a mediator in the relationship between responsive parenting and friendship quality. This suggests that responsive parenting indirectly affects friendship quality through the development of interpersonal communication skills. Essentially, when adolescents experience responsive parenting, it contributes to enhancing their interpersonal communication abilities. Subsequently, these communication skills prove valuable in sustaining high-quality friendships.

The results of this study align with earlier research suggesting that responsive parenting doesn't directly shape the quality of adolescent friendships (Mahirah & Muttaqin, 2022). Instead, responsive parents help cultivate adolescents' interpersonal communication abilities. This stems from the fact that interpersonal communication skills are frequently acquired from parents and other family members during childhood (Gazda, 1989). Moreover, adolescents who experience positive interactions and supportive upbringing tend to exhibit higher self-esteem and confidence in social settings, reducing the likelihood of encountering issues (Slicker et al., 2005).

The research findings are further bolstered by attachment theory, which posits that parental upbringing influences adolescent well-being and development (Zuckerman et al., 2023). Specifically, adolescents feel safer and can seek support from their mothers during stressful periods (Zhang et al., 2023). When dealing with feelings of insecurity, adolescents turn to their fathers for support. Mothers typically handle daily caregiving and provide emotional solace to adolescents, encouraging open communication. Hence, warm, responsive, and accepting parenting fosters the development of adolescents' interpersonal communication skills.

In particular, this study reveals that fathers play a role in developing adolescents' interpersonal communication skills. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that fathers significantly influence social development from childhood through adolescence due to effective communication

quality (Li et al., 2023). Fathers typically employ unique communication approaches with their children in their parenting, thus making a meaningful impact on adolescent growth (Baker et al., 2018). For instance, fathers may incorporate humor and cheerfulness into their interactions, helping children grasp complex emotions and social cues. Fathers practicing responsive parenting encourage their children to express thoughts and feelings, fostering effective communication skills (Baker et al., 2018; Grau et al., 2021; Papaleontiou - Louca & Al Omari, 2020; Venta et al., 2022; Waqar et al., 2022).

Moreover, the research findings suggest that mothers play a crucial role in enhancing adolescents' interpersonal communication skills. According to Ilyas et al. (2022), mothers who exhibit open communication with their children lay the groundwork for their independence, social competence, and interaction within their social circles. In this context, children's social development is closely tied to how they learn to interact with their mothers at home (Milkie & Wray, 2023). Consequently, adolescents tend to acquire and internalize these skills, subsequently applying them in their interactions with peers.

Adolescents' interpersonal communication skills can foster good friendship quality. This is supported by research conducted by Cholappallil et al. (2021), which found that effective communication in interpersonal relationships makes friends feel more understood and heard. In this regard, the ability to communicate enables individuals to be open about their thoughts and emotions, fostering a deep understanding of their needs. Simultaneously, nurturing friendships also helps adolescents feel less alone, understood, and provides a sense of companionship. The process of disclosing intimate information to friends leads to relationships dominated by mutual trust, thus resulting in better friendship quality (Bauminger et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2023; Yücel & Dincer, 2024).

Furthermore, Kadam et al. (2018) suggest that effective interpersonal communication skills are also demonstrated by the ability to entertain friends, peacefully resolve conflicts, engage in reciprocal conversations, articulate information clearly, and express thoughts and feelings openly. These attributes undoubtedly enhance the quality of friendships. In essence, this study contributes to clarifying the connection between responsive parenting and friendship quality as identified in prior research (Baumgardner & Boyatzis, 2018; Mahirah & Muttaqin, 2022; Tjandra et al., 2021). Responsive parents prioritize the development of interpersonal communication skills, enabling adolescents to cultivate meaningful friendships.

### Limitations and Future Research Direction

Although this study sheds light on the importance of interpersonal communication skills in the relationship between responsive parenting and friendship quality, it's crucial to recognize several limitations that should be considered for future research endeavors. Firstly, cross-sectional studies like this one can establish associations between variables but cannot determine causality, necessitating the use of longitudinal designs to clarify temporal sequences. Secondly, focusing solely on individual responses overlooks the complex dynamics of interpersonal communication within peer relationships, particularly the nuances of dyadic interactions. Utilizing qualitative methods or longitudinal designs could provide deeper insights into these dynamics. Lastly, reliance on self-reported data collection methods in survey research poses a risk of response bias, potentially compromising the validity of the research findings. Therefore, employing diverse data collection methods and triangulation techniques could help mitigate this bias and enhance the reliability of the results. Thus, future research should explore these areas to further advance our understanding of the interplay between interpersonal communication, responsive parenting, and friendship quality.

### CONCLUSION

This research concludes that interpersonal communication skills act as a mediator between both paternal and maternal responsive parenting and the quality of adolescent friendships. Warm

and supportive parental behavior, marked by acceptance and encouragement, tends to foster the development of social skills in adolescents, including interpersonal communication. Particularly, adolescents learn from fathers and mothers who exhibit effective and open communication, applying these skills in their future friendships. Overall, positive interactions between parents and adolescents through responsive parenting serve as models for adolescents in their peer relationships.

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