

Navigating Peer Conflict: Children's Anticipated Disclosures to their Mothers about Experiences
of Harming and Being Harmed by a Friend

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Abstract

Navigating Peer Conflict: Children's Anticipated Disclosures to their Mothers about Experiences of Harming and Being Harmed by a Friend

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This thesis examined children's anticipated disclosure to parents regarding hypothetical situations of being harmed and harming a friend, along with their descriptions and evaluations of expected maternal responses. A sample of 196 children (92 boys, 104 girls) across three age groups ($M_{ages} = 8.57, 12.47, 17.58$ years, respectively) responded to questions following two hypothetical conflict scenarios in which they were described as harming or being harmed by a friend (order counterbalanced). The first research aim was to examine whether children were more likely to disclose being harmed than harming a friend. Findings revealed that children were significantly more likely to disclose when they had been harmed. The second aim examined children's expectations of maternal responses. Children expected more supportive responses and fewer negative judgments from their mothers when they had been harmed. The third aim explored whether children found maternal responses equally helpful across both events. Contrary to our expectations, children perceived their mothers' responses as more helpful when they had harmed a friend. Lastly, the fourth aim examined how perceptions of maternal helpfulness were associated with children's likelihood to disclose future experiences of harm. Children who perceived their mothers' responses as more helpful were more likely to anticipate disclosing future experiences of harm. Children's age and gender moderated some of these findings, and overall relationship quality also contributed uniquely to predicting disclosure patterns. Our study

suggests disclosure of peer conflict and parent-child communication are fostered by a supportive, nonjudgmental environment in the context of high-quality, trusting relationships.

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Navigating Peer Conflict: Children's Anticipated Disclosures to their Mothers about Experiences of Harming and Being Harmed by a Friend

Sharing personal information, also known as self-disclosure, is essential to children's development (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). The act of sharing information about hobbies and activities (i.e., routine disclosure) as well as feelings and thoughts (i.e., self-disclosure) contributes to the development of children's social and emotional skills (Darling et al., 2006; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2013). Disclosing experiences and emotions, in particular, plays a crucial role in the development of meaningful parent-child relationships (Gregson et al., 2016; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). Children in high-quality relationships, characterized by trust and emotional support, have the opportunity to express their emotions within these exchanges, which can improve their emotional communication and coping skills (Gentzler et al., 2005; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). Moreover, these interpersonal exchanges can provide opportunities for reflection and moral learning (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014), which can be particularly beneficial in emotionally laden experiences, such as those involving harm and interpersonal conflict.

Although parental monitoring efforts such as solicitation can be considered instrumental in acquiring information about children's whereabouts and feelings, research suggests that children's *voluntary* disclosure plays a more central role in parental knowledge of children's lives (Kerr et al., 2010; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Children's experiences of harm and harm-doing can have a key impact on their moral development, and when children choose to disclose such events, parents can provide support in understanding these experiences (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Importantly, how children interpret harm may vary based on whether they were harmed by others or harmed others (Wainryb et al., 2005). These distinctions in children's positioning within each experience are central to the present

thesis, in that they may inform the extent to which children choose to disclose and the responses they expect to receive from their parents. In sum, exploring how children navigate disclosing information in varied emotionally laden situations, such as those involving harm and interpersonal conflict, may provide valuable insights into children's self-disclosure.

Drawing from an existing dataset, the current study sought to investigate children's anticipated disclosure to mothers regarding hypothetical situations of being harmed and harming their friends. Specifically, we aimed to examine differences in disclosure patterns, children's expectations of maternal responses, the perceived helpfulness of these responses, and their implications for future disclosure. Additionally, we explored the potential moderating effects of age and gender on children's anticipated disclosure and maternal responses in these hypothetical scenarios, as well as links to relationship quality. Ultimately, this study sought to provide valuable insights into children's willingness and expectations vis-a-vis the disclosure of emotionally salient information to their parents, particularly in relation to experiences of being harmed and harming others. To provide context for these questions, the following literature review will first review scholarship on children's experiences of harming and being harmed, followed by parental roles and responses in navigating these emotionally laden experiences. Finally, I will provide a brief overview of the existing literature concerning potential age and gender differences in disclosure patterns and parental responses.

Distinctions Between Harming and Being Harmed

Children's narratives of their experiences serve as an important context to understand and make sense of past events (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Miller et al., 2012; Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). Often, these narratives are co-constructed during conversational exchanges with others – specifically, engaging in conversations with parents, especially about positive and negative

experiences, can provide children with opportunities for self-reflection, which is essential for their sociomoral development (Miller et al., 2012; Recchia et al., 2014; Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). Understanding and processing harmful actions can be particularly challenging for children. Young children, with their limited understanding of the psychological dynamics of moral wrongdoing and consequences, may be unable to fully make sense of their actions or the actions of others (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014). Thus, they may benefit from the support and guidance of parents and caregivers to make sense of past events. With the development of social-cognitive skills and moral reasoning capacities, children's construction of meaning about harm also becomes more sophisticated (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). As a result, children's narratives and understandings of peer conflict also develop with age.

The ways in which children make sense of harm may depend on their positioning within the event – that is, whether they harmed others or were harmed by others. Wainryb et al. (2005) examined children's narratives of experiences across these two contexts, revealing distinct patterns in their accounts of causing harm or being harmed. When children described experiences of being harmed by a peer (i.e., as a victim), they tended to focus on the harm done to them and the unfairness of the situation, whereas when the same children described causing harm to a peer (i.e., as a perpetrator) they tended to justify their actions, while also noting the impact of their actions on the victims. In this sense, perpetrators typically acknowledged the harm and gave contextual explanations for their behaviour. Similarly, when examining how children make sense of their experiences of being harmed by peers, Saint-Martin et al. (2023) found that children referenced their responsibility for the harm more frequently when they believed they had contributed to the situation. Conversely, when they felt they had not contributed, the responsibility was shifted more towards the peer.

Wainryb et al. (2005) also identified other significant differences between children's narratives of victimization and perpetration experiences. While both victim and perpetrator stories were similar in length and detail, they differed in focus. Victims tended to emphasize the harm done to them and their emotional responses, while perpetrators focused more on motivations, retribution, and unintended consequences in their narratives. Overall, these findings suggest that children may have different interpretations of their conflicts and their participation in them depending on their positioning within the event. That being said, children's constructions of meanings about events do not occur in a vacuum, and are often informed by their conversations with others about their experiences. The following section will describe the role of parents in this regard.

Role of Parents of Intervening in Instances of Children Being Harmed and Harming

Others

When children disclose peer conflict, parents may play an important role in helping children make sense of their experiences of harming and being harmed by peers (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014). For example, mothers generally acknowledge their children's emotions and provide support, irrespective of their children's role in the conflict (Wang & Song, 2014). When children report being harmed by peers, mothers tend to evaluate harmful actions and suggest strategies for resolution, such as harm avoidance or seeking assistance from adults (Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Wang & Song, 2014). They also emphasize their children's responsibility for self-protection, particularly when children feel they have not contributed to the harm (Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Conversely, when children harmed or upset a friend, mothers tend to encourage their children to reflect on their behaviour and responsibility by acknowledging their wrongdoing (Wang & Song, 2014).

Arguably, these differences in parental responses across situations may impact children's perceptions of their involvement in conflicts and their willingness to disclose details about such incidents to their parents. For example, mothers' support and empathy may lead children to feel understood when children are harmed by their peers. In these situations, mothers negatively evaluate their peers' harmful actions and emphasize their responsibility (Saint-Martin et al., 2023). To the extent that mothers validate children's emotions, this may encourage them to disclose incidents of being harmed and make them feel more comfortable discussing emotionally laden experiences and seeking parental help.

When parents respond to their children's experiences of causing harm, they may offer a variety of strategies. For example, similar to instances of experiencing harm, mothers tend to discuss the importance of empathy and perspective-taking (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014; Wang & Song, 2014) and provide strategies on how to address these types of conflicts (Scirocco et al., 2018; Wang & Song, 2014). However, although mothers may offer some useful guidance when children cause harm, they might also respond in a manner that children experience as less consistently supportive or helpful. For example, mothers tend to emphasize the negative consequences of their children's actions and highlight their impact on others, which may provoke feelings of guilt (Scirocco et al., 2018; Wang & Song, 2014). Mothers also sometimes make negative characterological attributions to explain children's actions or use punitive measures such as removing privileges, leading to feelings of shame or resentment (Recchia et al., 2014). In turn, these responses from mothers may discourage children from disclosing instances of wrongdoing or seeking parental help, to avoid further judgment or punishment. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of parents' communication with their children and the

strategies they use to navigate instances of peer conflict for children to discuss these transgressions, irrespective of their positioning within the conflict.

While the current study focuses on children's discrete experiences of harming and being harmed by others, research on bullying (i.e., more chronic experiences of being harmed by peers) also provides context for this thesis. Sawyer et al. (2011) emphasized that it is important for parents to identify and understand bullying behaviours to effectively support their children. Failure to recognize incidents of victimization might discourage children from confiding in their parents in the future. Existing research indicates that children are less likely to share their experiences of victimization when their parents are uninvolved, unsupportive, or distracted (Tokić Milaković & Pećnik, 2011). Instead, active listening, empathy, and validation are necessary for children to feel comfortable opening up (Weinstein et al., 2021). Notably, parents may sometimes suggest less constructive strategies for handling bullying, such as reacting passively or aggressively, seeking revenge, or ignoring the abuse (Sawyer et al., 2011). Encouraging prosocial behaviours, such as empathy and problem-solving, helps children navigate conflict while fostering resilience and positive relationships. Guiding children to seek advice from adults rather than simply avoid or ignore the bullying can also offer valuable insights and solutions (Gentzler et al., 2005; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014), equipping them to respond to bullying more effectively.

Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory

The findings regarding helpful parental responses and strategies in response to children's peer conflicts are further supported by the theoretical tenets of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT highlights three fundamental psychological needs that are shared by all people, including children: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within the

context of parent-child interactions, autonomy refers to the need for self-expression and self-direction, relatedness refers to the need for meaningful responsiveness and connections, and competence refers to the need for effective capability (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weinstein et al., 2021). Fulfilling these fundamental psychological needs may play a role in children's willingness to disclose information to their parents, highlighting the importance of effective parental responses and strategies.

When these psychological needs are met, it can create an environment that encourages open communication and supports children's moral development. Specifically, supportive and validating parenting behaviours, such as active listening, empathy, and validation, contribute to fulfilling both children's autonomy and relatedness needs (Weinstein et al., 2021). Creating environments that foster open communication from an early age is crucial for adolescents to share their feelings and needs (Gentzler et al., 2005; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). Studies have shown that children of mothers with strong communication skills are more likely to disclose personal information (Mounts & Valentiner, 2021), whereas controlling parents may discourage open communication and cause children to withhold information (Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). In line with SDT, parents play an important role in supporting adolescents to make independent decisions by offering guidance, which can fulfill their autonomy and relatedness needs.

While autonomy is critical at all ages, as children transition into adolescence, their need for autonomy becomes an increasingly central concern. In early adolescence, children may desire more privacy about their lives, while parents may still want to be kept more aware of children's choices (Branje, 2018). Adolescents thus tend to employ various strategies for managing information, such as full or partial disclosure, lying, or avoidance to fulfill their emerging need for autonomy (Rote et al., 2020; Smetana & Wainryb, 2021; Tasopoulos-Chan et al., 2009).

Consequently, conflicts may arise between parents and adolescents. However, these disagreements and challenges can provide children with valuable opportunities for moral development and learning. Children may feel more comfortable voicing their disagreements when they feel safe to do so (Darling et al., 2006). Effective communication and conflict resolution strategies can lead to better emotional communication and coping skills, improving relationships and encouraging open communication (Branje, 2018; Gentzler et al., 2005; VanDenBerg et al., 2023). When adolescents feel that their autonomy is respected and their emotions are validated, they may be more likely to disclose information to their parents.

With this in mind, existing literature emphasizes the benefits of emotionally supportive communication within parent-child relationships for children's sociomoral development (Recchia & Wainryb, 2023), particularly in the context of children's emerging autonomy. Effective parental advice and guidance play a crucial role in helping children navigate social interactions with peers. Parents who understand their children's emotions and experiences are more likely to offer helpful advice while respecting their children's need for autonomy (Poulin et al., 2012). They also tend to be less intrusive and allow their children to handle the conflict on their own. Discussions about past experiences, especially negative ones, allow children to gain insights into their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Recchia & Wainryb, 2023), fostering both autonomy and moral growth. Overall, sharing information with parents helps children better understand emotions and gain new perspectives when navigating conflicts, which are essential aspects of their emerging independence.

The level of responsiveness (i.e., aligned with a sense of relatedness and connection) between parents and adolescents can also significantly influence children's disclosure. When children feel distant or overly controlled by their parents, they are less likely to disclose

information following negative reactions (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). Conversely, when relationship quality is high, characterized by emotional connection, trust, and responsiveness, youth are more likely to disclose information (Tokić Milaković et al., 2018), particularly if they perceive their mothers as responsive, supportive, and accepting (Villarreal & Nelson, 2022). Parents who are attuned to their adolescents' emotions and capabilities have a better understanding of their children's experiences (Mounts & Valentiner, 2021; VanDenBerg et al., 2023), making children more receptive to their parents' guidance and advice (Gregson et al., 2016). In the context of peer harm, children may be more likely to disclose instances of causing and experiencing harm by peers when they feel emotionally connected to their parents, as a high-quality relationship fosters an environment where they feel safe to share their experiences and seek advice from their parents.

While numerous studies have examined autonomy and relatedness within the context of parent-child relationships, there is relatively limited research focusing on competence. Although some studies have found that children's need for competence did not uniquely predict their disclosure (Tokić Milaković et al., 2018; Weinstein et al., 2021), one study suggests that parental listening and support can help adolescents feel more competent while discussing challenging topics (Poulin et al., 2012). That is, supportive practices such as effective advice-giving and guidance about peer-related problems can meet children's competence needs when dealing with peer relationships (Poulin et al., 2012). Additionally, empathetic and validating parental responses to adolescents' disclosure can positively impact both their competence and autonomy (Weinstein et al., 2021). Conversely, parental psychological control, such as intrusive behaviours and excessive interference, can lead to lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression (Smetana & Daddis, 2002) and can hinder adolescents' ability to develop the social

skills necessary for healthy peer relationships (Poulin et al., 2012). Overall, then, SDT is a useful framework for highlighting the varied ways in which maternal responses and strategies may inform children's disclosure behaviours.

Age and Gender Differences in Self-Disclosure and Parental Guidance

As noted above, children's need for autonomy in parent-child relationships may shift with age. However, age may also influence children's conflict experiences in other ways. With age, children gain a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics involved in conflicts, which helps them develop a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences (Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Wainryb et al., 2005). Younger children often focus on concrete actions and outcomes, placing greater emphasis on the harm done to them, whereas older children display a more abstract understanding, and consider motivations and mental states in conjunction with consequences (Wainryb et al., 2005). Furthermore, according to Saint-Martin et al. (2023), mid-adolescents demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility when they perceive that they have contributed to conflicts. They also tend to acknowledge the responsibility of both themselves and their peers for the harm caused. Conversely, younger children may have difficulty accounting for the psychological aspects of conflicts, including feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Saint-Martin et al., 2023). The differences in disclosure patterns across ages suggest that as children grow older, they may benefit from different types of strategies and responses from their parents based on their level of understanding. In turn, this may impact how children of different ages perceive and disclose their experiences of being harmed or harming others.

As children develop moral reasoning skills, parents adjust their strategies and guidance accordingly. Specifically, mothers tend to offer more concrete and reparative strategies for younger children, such as adult intervention and exploring consequences of harm (Recchia et al.,

2014; Scirocco et al., 2018). For older children, mothers focus on offering insights that reflect broader lessons to be learned about both the children and peers (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). As children transition into adolescence, they become more skilled in interpreting past events and taking the lead in discussions, often contributing without prompts from mothers (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Mothers also tend to offer more abstract and hypothetical strategies to encourage children to reflect their experiences with age (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014). Maternal responses during discussions shift from being more directive in early childhood to being more collaborative and open-ended in adolescence. Despite children becoming more independent and skilled as they get older, mothers continue to provide developmentally appropriate guidance to further their children's moral understandings (Recchia et al., 2014).

While studies have tested for gender effects in parental responses to children's disclosure, findings have been mixed. Some studies have failed to reveal significant gender differences (Gentzler et al., 2005; Poulin et al., 2012; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010), while others observed variations in maternal responses related to the child's gender. For instance, when discussing instances of causing harm, mothers tended to encourage self-assertion and downplay responsibility when talking to their daughters, whereas they emphasized the emotional consequences for the self and others when talking to their sons (Scirocco et al., 2018). When discussing instances of being harmed, mothers tended to emphasize behaviours related to self-protection more with sons compared to daughters (Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Given these observed differences, we examined the potential moderating role of gender on parental responses in the context of children's disclosure of peer harm.

The Current Study

The present study drew on an existing dataset to examine children's anticipated disclosure to parents about hypothetical situations of being harmed and harming a friend, in conjunction with their descriptions and evaluations of the maternal responses that they anticipate receiving. Focusing on the child's perspective aligns with research emphasizing children's voluntary disclosure as essential to understanding their social and moral development (Gentzler et al., 2005; Kerr et al., 2010; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). This approach highlights how children interpret harm, anticipate maternal responses, and navigate emotionally laden experiences, deepening our understanding of their disclosure patterns. We sought to answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Are there differences in the extent to which children expect to disclose hypothetical experiences to their mothers, depending on whether they harmed or were harmed by a friend?

RQ2: What are children's expectations regarding their mother's responses in each of these situations?

RQ3: Do children find maternal responses equally helpful in each of these scenarios?

RQ4: How are ratings of helpfulness related to levels of future disclosure in each hypothetical situation?

Additionally, we examined whether age and gender moderated children's anticipated disclosure and maternal responses in these hypothetical scenarios, as well as the contribution of overall relationship quality to predicting the patterns of interest.

For RQ1, in line with the existing literature, we hypothesized that children would expect to disclose experiences of being harmed by a friend more than experiences of harming a friend. Children may feel more comfortable discussing experiences of being harmed due to perceived support and understanding from their mothers (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014; Wainryb et al., 2005).

Conversely, sharing experiences in which they were the perpetrator of harm may be more challenging for children because they may feel guilty about their actions or anticipate potential consequences or disapproval (Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Wainryb et al., 2005).

Considering the important role of maternal conversations in the development of moral agency and the way in which mothers adjust their guidance across situations (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014; Wainryb et al., 2005; Weinstein et al., 2021), we also hypothesized that children would have different expectations regarding their mother's responses in situations where they were harmed compared to situations where they harmed others (RQ2). Specifically, when disclosing experiences of being harmed by a friend, we expected that children would anticipate more empathetic and comforting responses from their mothers, as well as guidance and problem-solving support to help them make sense of the situation. Conversely, in situations where children harm others, we predicted that they would anticipate different maternal responses that emphasize the negative consequences of their actions. This may include discussing the repercussions and consequences of their behaviour, as well as negative feedback that invalidates their feelings and actions (Scirocco et al., 2018).

Similarly, for RQ3, we predicted that children would not find maternal responses equally helpful across situations of harming a friend compared to being harmed themselves. We expected that children would perceive maternal responses as more helpful when disclosing experiences of being harmed, as mothers can help children understand their emotions and the actions of others (Recchia & Wainryb, 2023; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Conversely, when disclosing experiences of harming others, we predicted that children would perceive maternal responses as less helpful due to some expectations of negative judgment, invalidation, or anticipating repercussions or

consequences for their actions (Branje, 2018; Scirocco et al., 2018; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014).

Lastly, for RQ4, we expected that ratings of helpfulness would be positively related to the levels of future disclosure in each hypothetical situation. In line with the existing literature, we anticipated that children who perceive maternal responses as more helpful would be more willing to disclose their future experiences of being harmed and harming others (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Scirocco et al., 2018; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010; Weinstein et al., 2021).

Past research provides some insights into how children's disclosure may vary by age. Overall, adolescents tend to disclose less about their activities to their parents as they get older (Rote et al., 2020; Smetana & Wainryb, 2021; Tasopoulos-Chan et al., 2009). Additionally, in the context of peer harm, younger children may require more concrete guidance from their parents compared to older children (Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Wainryb et al., 2005). Mothers' responses may also vary as their children grow older. With younger children, mothers may use more direct strategies, while with adolescents, they may use more collaborative and open-ended discussions (Recchia et al., 2014; Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Scirocco et al., 2018). However, existing research does not directly address how age might moderate the event differences that formed the focus of the current study. Specifically, our review of past literature did not lead to specific predictions about how age might inform differences in disclosure across experiences of being harmed vs harming others. Therefore, we conducted exploratory analyses to examine the potential moderating role of age on children's disclosure and expectations and evaluations of maternal responses across different hypothetical peer conflict scenarios.

In the existing literature, as described above, findings concerning gender differences in parental responses to children's disclosure have been inconsistent. Some studies that have observed variations in parental responses found that mothers may use different strategies and responses when discussing instances of causing harm or being harmed with their daughters compared to their sons (Scirocco et al., 2018; Saint-Martin et al., 2023). Therefore, we conducted exploratory analyses to examine whether gender plays a role in children's anticipated disclosure behaviours and maternal responses in emotionally laden situations.

Lastly, existing literature has identified relationship quality as a key factor influencing children's willingness to disclose to their parents. Specifically, higher quality relationships, characterized by trust, responsiveness, and effective communication, have been linked to more open parent-child interactions (Gentzler et al., 2005; Gregson et al., 2016). When parents encourage open communication and are seen as responsive and understanding, children are more likely to share their experiences (Gregson et al., 2016; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010; Villarreal et al., 2022). However, while these studies highlight the importance of relationship quality, there is limited research on how it specifically shapes children's willingness to disclose experiences of harming and being harmed by a friend. Therefore, we will conduct exploratory analyses to examine whether perceptions of relationship quality contributes to the prediction of children's anticipated disclosure behaviours and maternal responses in emotionally laden situations.

Method

This thesis was based on portions of a larger dataset collected in 2019-2020 (PI: H. Recchia; SPF # 30011446). Specifically, the overall project is seeking to examine children's and mothers' perceptions of and responses to peer conflict, and to identify factors that account for within- and between-person variations. Thus, the current thesis focused on a subset of questions

that are addressed within the overall project. The sample for this thesis included 196 mother-child dyads in three age groups: 66 children in early elementary school ($M_{\text{age}} = 8.57$, $SD = 0.67$), 65 early adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.47$, $SD = 0.61$), and 65 late adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 17.58$, $SD = 0.67$). Participants were recruited through various methods, such as contacting participants from previous studies, advertising in community centers, local Facebook groups, newspapers, word of mouth, and distributing letters via schools. Among the 196 dyads that formed the focus of this thesis, 90 families (evenly divided across age groups and genders) were recruited as an 18-month follow-up based on their participation in a previous related study. Nevertheless, the current thesis is based solely on cross-sectional data from the 18-month follow-up. The overall sample included 92 boys and 104 girls. Sixteen families who did not complete the study protocol were not included in the current analyses. Mothers provided written informed consent, and children provided written assent. Each family received a \$40 gift card in appreciation for their participation.

Seventy-two percent of mothers ($M_{\text{age}} = 43.43$ years, $SD = 6.32$ years) identified as White, while others identified as Black (5.1%), Latin American (4.6%), South Asian (4.1%), Arab (3.6%), Chinese (1.5%), Filipino (1.5%), South-East Asian (1%), South-West Asian (0.5%), Korean (0.5%), Japanese (0.5%), and other (6.6%). Most mothers (67%) were born in Canada and approximately 61.8% of mothers had completed a university degree. English was the predominant language spoken at home (89%), followed by French (29%) and Spanish (2%). The majority of the children (90%) lived with their mothers full-time.

Procedure

As noted above, the current thesis was part of a larger project examining mothers' and children's perceptions and responses to instances of peer conflict. Only measures relevant to the

current thesis will be described. The questionnaire procedures were tailored to each age group of the participants. Prior to March 2020, in-person interviews were conducted with children in the early elementary age group (approximately 75% of the participants in this age group were recruited prior to this date). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we shifted to an online platform, Zoom, by submitting an ethics amendment. In either case, mothers completed a consent form, demographic information, and set of questionnaires. The child then met with the research assistant (either in person or online) and provided verbal assent. During the meeting, the research assistant read questions from the online questionnaire and noted the child's answers to each question. The procedure lasted approximately one hour. Breaks were provided during the interview. In contrast, the protocol for the two older age groups did not change as a result of the pandemic. Specifically, mothers of early and late adolescents completed an online consent form, demographic information, and questionnaire. Following this, a separate link was sent for the children to provide assent/consent (depending on whether they were over 18 years of age) and complete questionnaires independently in an online format. The procedure took approximately 45 minutes. Participants were welcome to take breaks by saving their progress on the questionnaire. A research assistant was available via phone or email to answer any potential questions.

Initially, three conflict situations were presented to children in counterbalanced order, accompanied by visual aids (see Appendix A): (1) "One day at school, your friend gets mad and insults you." (*harmed by a friend* event), (2) "One day at school, you get mad and insult your friend." (*harming a friend* event), and (3) "One day at school, you and your friend get mad and insult each other." (*mutual harm* event). For the current study, we focused on the first two hypothetical scenarios to gain a better understanding of how children anticipate disclosing

experiences of harming and being harmed by a friend to their mothers. These two scenarios provide a direct comparison of the participants' hypothetical involvement in each conflict, particularly where one participant is deemed specifically responsible for causing harm in comparison to the mutual name-calling scenario. Past research suggests that children's responses to hypothetical situations can provide insight into children's sociomoral decision-making processes and are related to how they respond in similar real-life contexts (e.g., Turiel, 2008).

Measures

To address our first research question (RQ1) concerning differences in the extent to which children expect to disclose hypothetical experiences to their mothers across the two events, we measured *children's self-disclosure to mothers* for each event. Specifically, using a four-point Likert scale, from *definitely not* (1) to *definitely yes* (4), we asked how likely participants would be to tell their mother about each event (i.e., "If this actually happened to you, what would you do afterward? Would you tell [your] mom about it?").

For RQ2, to assess *children's expectations of maternal responses*, participants were asked a series of questions for each event. Specifically, they were told "Now let's say that your mom found out about what happened," then asked (1) "What would your mom say to you?" and (2) "What else would your mom say or do?" In each case, children were presented with a series of possible options, some of which were selected for the purpose of the current study. For each item, participants responded on a four-point Likert scale from *definitely not* (1) to *definitely yes* (4). Items were selected and organized for the purpose of this thesis based on (a) item content as relevant to the aims of the study (e.g., we focused on responses centred on judgments of the child rather than the friend), and (b) comparability across conflict situations, in that some items were only presented for one situation. We assessed the internal consistency of five hypothesized

subscales of responses: (1) *Emotional Support and Validation*, (2) *Guidance and Problem-Solving*, (3) *Repercussions and Consequences*, (4) *Negative Judgment of Child*, and (5) *Minimizing*. After calculating Cronbach's alphas and examining item-total correlations, we combined the items from the *Repercussions and Consequences* and *Negative Judgment of Child* scales into one overall scale: *Repercussions and Negative Judgment*. The *Guidance and Problem-Solving* scale was dropped due to low internal consistencies (Harmed by a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .38$; Harming a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .43$). In total, then, we ultimately analyzed three categories of responses: *Emotional Support and Validation* (Harmed by a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$; Harming a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$), *Repercussions and Negative Judgment* (Harmed by a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$; Harming a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$), and *Minimizing* (Harmed by a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$; Harming a friend: Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$) (see Table 1). A full list of items is available in Appendix B.

Table 1*Maternal Responses to Hypothetical Situations of Being Harmed and Harming Others*

Types of Responses	Items
Emotional Support	“She would say that she loves you no matter what.”
and Validation	“She would talk to you about how you felt.”
	“She would say that it’s okay to be upset.”
	“She would help you find ways to feel better.”
Repercussions and	“She would say that you’re grounded.”
Negative Judgment	“She would say that you’ve lost privileges.”
	“She would say that it was your fault.”
	“She would say that you are not a good friend.”
	“She would say that she is disappointed in you.”
Minimizing	“She would say that it’s not a big deal.”
	“She would say that it’s not worth getting upset about.”
	“She would say that it was just a misunderstanding.”
	“She would say that sometimes this stuff just happens.”
	“She would say that fights are just part of life.”

For RQ3, to assess *children’s perceived helpfulness of maternal responses*, participants were asked the same question for each event. Specifically, using a four-point Likert scale, from *definitely not* (1) to *definitely yes* (4), we asked participants how helpful they believed their mothers’ responses would be (i.e., “Do you think it would be helpful if your mom said these things to you?”).

For RQ4, to assess *children's future disclosure*, using a four-point Likert scale, from *definitely not* (1) to *definitely yes* (4), participants were asked how likely they would be to disclose similar future instances to their mother for each event type. For instances of being harmed by a friend, participants responded to the question, "After talking to your mom, would you be likely to tell her the next time your friend insults you?" For instances of harming a friend, participants responded to the question, "After talking to your mom, would you be likely to tell her the next time you insulted your friend?"

To measure *children's relationship quality with their mothers*, we used 14 items adapted from the *People In My Life* (PIML) self-report questionnaire (Cook et al., 1995; Ridenour et al., 2006) (see Table 2). For each item, participants responded on a four-point Likert scale ranging from *almost never* (1) to *almost always* (4). A mean score was calculated for each participant by averaging their responses, with higher scores representing reports of higher quality relationships (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

Table 2*People In My Life Questionnaire*

Items
“My mom listens to what I have to say.”
“My mom accepts me as I am.”
“My mom does not understand what I am going through these days.” [reversed]
“My mom cares about me.”
“I can count on my mom to help me when I have a problem.”
“I get upset easily with my mom.” [reversed]
“My mom can tell when I am upset about something.”
“I talk to my mom when I am having a problem.”
“If my mom knows that something is bothering me, she asks me about it.”
“I feel angry with my mom.” [reversed]
“I share my thoughts and feelings with my mom.”
“My mom pays attention to me.”
“It's hard for me to talk to my mom.” [reversed]
“My mom is proud of the things I do.”

Plan of Analysis

An alpha level of $p < .05$ (two-tailed) was used for all analyses. A Bonferroni correction was applied for post hoc comparisons to control familywise error rates.

A mixed-model ANOVA was used to test RQ1 using SPSS (version 29). Specifically, reported frequency of disclosure was entered as the DV. Type of scenario was entered as a

within-subjects IV, while age group and gender were entered as between-subjects IVs to examine main effects and also determine whether they moderated associations between type of scenario and disclosure. For RQ2, we then conducted a series of three mixed-model ANOVAs to test unique and interactive effects of type of scenario (within-subjects) and age group and gender (between-subjects) on expected likelihood of each type of maternal response. For RQ3, we used a similar approach, by using a mixed-model ANOVA to test effects of type of scenario, age group, and gender on perceived helpfulness of maternal responses.

For the first three research questions, to explore associations with relationship quality, we then ran multiple linear mixed models (using the GAMLj module of jamovi; version 2.3.28) to explore associations between relationship quality and (1) disclosure, (2) the three types of maternal responses, (3) perceived helpfulness of maternal responses. Data for each scenario was nested within participants, and models included a random effect to account for participant variance. More specifically, with the effects of event type, age, and gender controlled, we added relationship quality as a predictor in each model, and also considered two-way interactions with relationship quality (i.e., relationship quality x gender; relationship quality x age; relationship quality x event type).

Finally, for RQ4, we used linear mixed models (using the GAMLj module of jamovi) to examine associations between helpfulness and future disclosure, and to examine whether associations varied across type of scenario (within-subjects), age group, and gender (between-subjects). Similarly, for our fourth research question, we explored associations between relationship quality, perceived helpfulness, and future disclosure. The analyses also explored whether these associations varied across event type (within-subjects), age group, and gender (between-subjects).

Results

How Likely Are Children To Disclose Being Harmed Compared To Harming Others To Their Mothers?

For our first research question (RQ1), we expected that children would report disclosing experiences of being harmed more than experiences of harming others. To examine this, we conducted a mixed-model ANOVA, with type of event (harmed, harming others) as a within-subjects factor and reported likelihood of disclosure as the dependent variable. Age group (elementary school, early adolescence, late adolescence) and gender (boy, girl) were included as between-subjects factors to examine main effects as well as to test whether they moderated associations between type of event and disclosure.

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of event type on willingness to disclose, $F(1,189) = 4.33, p = .04$, with a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .02$. As predicted, children described being more likely to disclose instances where they were harmed by a friend compared to instances where they harmed their friend (see Table 3).

With respect to variations across age groups, the analysis revealed a significant main effect of age on likelihood of disclosing, $F(2,189) = 6.69, p = .02, \eta^2 = .07$ (See Table 4). Overall, children reported disclosing less as they got older, regardless of the event type. Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Bonferroni correction to further explore the differences in willingness to disclose among the three age groups. The findings revealed that children in the elementary school group described disclosing more compared to the those in the early adolescence group, $p = .008$, and also compared to youth from the late adolescence group, $p = .004$. However, there was not a significant age difference between the early adolescence group and the late adolescence group, $p = .1$.

Lastly, the analysis also revealed a significant main effect of gender on willingness to disclose, $F(1,189) = 5.88, p = .02, \eta^2 = .03$ (see Table 5). Overall, girls were more likely to report disclosing compared to boys, regardless of the event type.

Relationship Quality

In additional exploratory analyses, we ran linear mixed models to examine associations between relationship quality and likelihood of disclosure, controlling for the effects of event type, age, and gender. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality on children's reports of their likelihood to disclose, $F(1,188) = 30.70, p < .001$ (see Table 6). Overall, children who perceived higher quality of their relationship with their mother were more willing to disclose, $B = .70, SE = .13$. This effect was not moderated by event type.

Age significantly moderated the association between relationship quality and anticipated disclosure, $F(2, 188) = 4.46, p = .013$. Specifically, in the two adolescent groups, a higher quality relationship was associated with more disclosure. Conversely, associations with relationship quality were not significant in the elementary school group (see Figure 1). There was a stronger association between relationship quality and anticipated disclosure for early adolescents compared to the elementary school group, $B = .92, SE = .32, p = .004$ (see Figure 1). However, the associations were not significantly different between children in the late adolescence and the elementary school groups, $B = .59, SE = .30, p = .05$, or between the children in the early and late adolescence groups, $B = -.33, SE = .31, p = .29$.

Figure 1

Effect of Relationship Quality on Reported Disclosure Likelihood across Age Groups

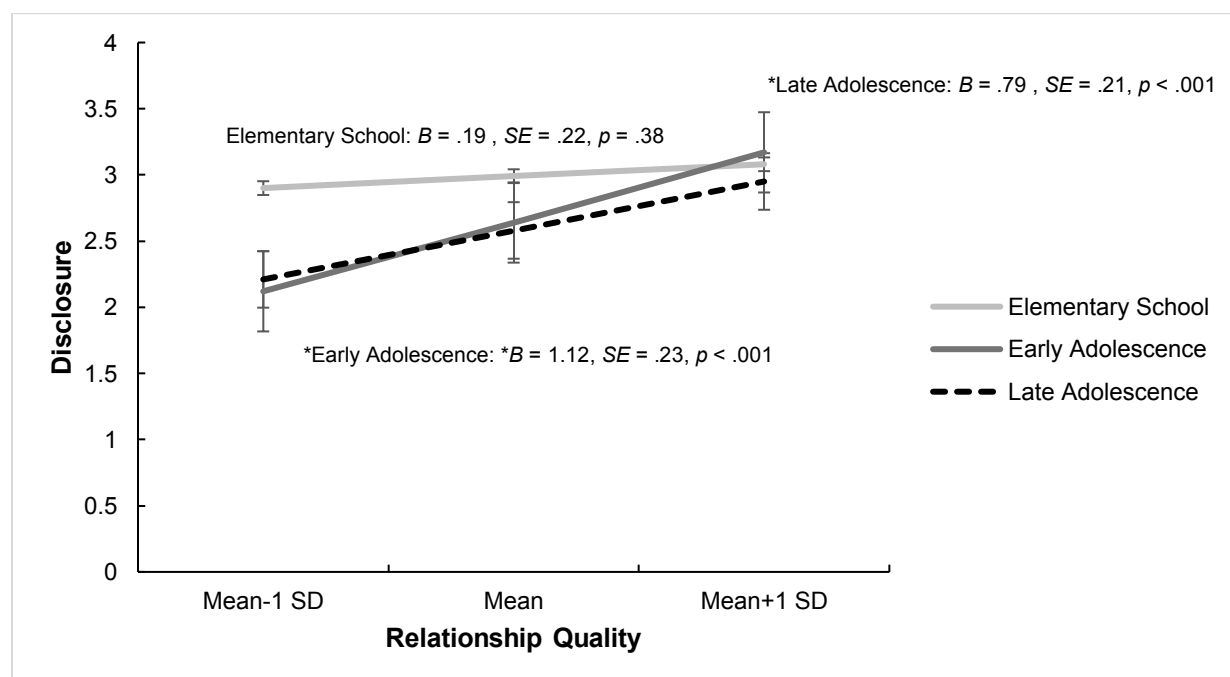


Table 3*Differences Between Hypothetical Situations of Being Harmed and Harming a Friend*

Variable	Harmed by a friend <i>M (SE)</i>	Harming a friend <i>M (SE)</i>	Univariate effect of event type
Disclosure	2.78 (.07)	2.66 (.07)	$F(1,189) = 4.33, \eta^2 = .02^*$
Likelihood			
Types of responses			
Emotional	3.39 (.04)	3.30 (.04)	$F(1,190) = 8.65, \eta^2 = .04^{**}$
Support and Validation			
Repercussions and Negative Judgment	1.47 (.04)	2.05 (.05)	$F(1,186) = 198.25, \eta^2 = .51^{***}$
Minimizing	2.72 (.04)	2.69 (.04)	$F(1,190) = .57, \eta^2 < .01$
Perceived Helpfulness	3.02 (.06)	3.15 (.06)	$F(1,186) = 5.63, \eta^2 = .03^*$

*Note.** $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4*Age Differences in Disclosure Likelihood, Types of Responses, and Perceived Helpfulness*

Variable	Elementary school <i>M (SE)</i>	Early adolescence <i>M (SE)</i>	Late adolescence <i>M (SE)</i>	Univariate effect of age
Disclosure Likelihood	3.04 (.11)	2.58 (.11)	2.54 (.11)	$F(2,189) = 5.88, \eta^2 = .07^*$
Types of responses				
Emotional	3.46 (.06)	3.30 (.06)	3.28 (.06)	$F(2,190) = 2.71, \eta^2 = .03$
Support and Validation				
Repercussions and Negative Judgment	1.84 (.06)	1.80 (.06)	1.64 (.06)	$F(2,189) = 3.08, \eta^2 = .03$
Minimizing	2.80 (.07)	2.65 (.07)	2.66 (.07)	$F(2,190) = 1.66, \eta^2 = .02$
Perceived Helpfulness	3.16 (.09)	3.04 (.09)	3.06 (.09)	$F(2,186) = .50, \eta^2 = .05$

*Note.** $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 5*Gender Differences in Disclosure Likelihood, Types of Responses, and Perceived**Helpfulness*

Variable	Boys	Girls	Univariate effect of gender
	<i>M (SE)</i>	<i>M (SE)</i>	
Disclosure	2.57 (.09)	2.87 (.08)	$F(1,189) = 5.88, \eta^2 = .03^*$
Likelihood			
Types of			
Responses			
Emotional	3.27 (.05)	3.42 (.05)	$F(1,190) = 4.91, \eta^2 = .03^*$
Support and			
Validation			
Repercussions	1.80 (.05)	1.72(.05)	$F(1,189) = 1.31, \eta^2 = .01$
and Negative			
Judgment			
Minimizing	2.65 (.06)	2.76 (.05)	$F(1,190) = 2.20, \eta^2 = .01$
Perceived	2.94, (.10)	3.23 (.07)	$F(1,186) = 7.12, \eta^2 = .04^{**}$
Helpfulness			

*Note.** $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

What Responses Do Children Expect from Their Mothers Across the Two Types of Events?

For our second research question (RQ2), we hypothesized that children would have different expectations regarding their mother's responses in situations where they were harmed compared to situations where they harmed others. Specifically, when discussing instances of being harmed by a friend, children may expect more empathetic and validating responses from their mothers. Conversely, when they harm a friend, they may expect responses that emphasize the negative consequences of their actions.

To examine this question, we conducted a series of three mixed-model ANOVAs to examine the unique and interactive effects of event type (within-subjects) and age group and gender (between-subjects) on the expected likelihood of each type of maternal response.

Emotional Support and Validation

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of event type on maternal responses categorized as *Emotional Support and Validation*, $F(1,190) = 8.65, p = .004, \eta^2 = .04$. As expected, children anticipated receiving more supportive responses from their mothers when discussing instances where they were harmed by a friend compared to instances where they harmed their friend (see Table 3).

The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of gender on willingness to disclose, $F(1,190) = 4.91, p = .03, \eta^2 = .03$. Overall, girls were more likely to expect to receive supportive responses from their mothers than boys (See Table 5). Conversely, the analysis did not reveal a significant main effect of age on willingness to disclose, $F(2,190) = 2.71, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03$ (see Table 4).

Repercussions and Negative Judgment

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of event type on maternal responses categorized as *Repercussions and Negative Judgment*, $F(1,186) = 198.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .51$. As predicted, children anticipated that mothers would emphasize consequences or negative judgments in their responses when discussing instances of harming their friend compared to instances of when they were harmed by a friend (see Table 3).

While there was a significant main effect of age on *Repercussions and Negative Judgment* responses, $F(2,189) = 3.08, p = .05, \eta^2 = .03$, post hoc pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction did not reveal any significant differences among the age groups (see Table 5). Additionally, the mixed-model ANOVA did not reveal a statistically significant effect for gender, $F(1,189) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta^2 = .01$.

Minimizing

The mixed-model ANOVA did not reveal any statistically significant effects for event type, $F(1,190) = .57, p = .45, \eta^2 < .01$ (See Table 3), age group, $F(2,190) = 1.66, p = .19, \eta^2 = .02$ (See Table 4), or gender, $F(1,190) = 2.20, p = .14, \eta^2 = .01$ (see Table 5) on maternal responses categorized as *Minimizing*.

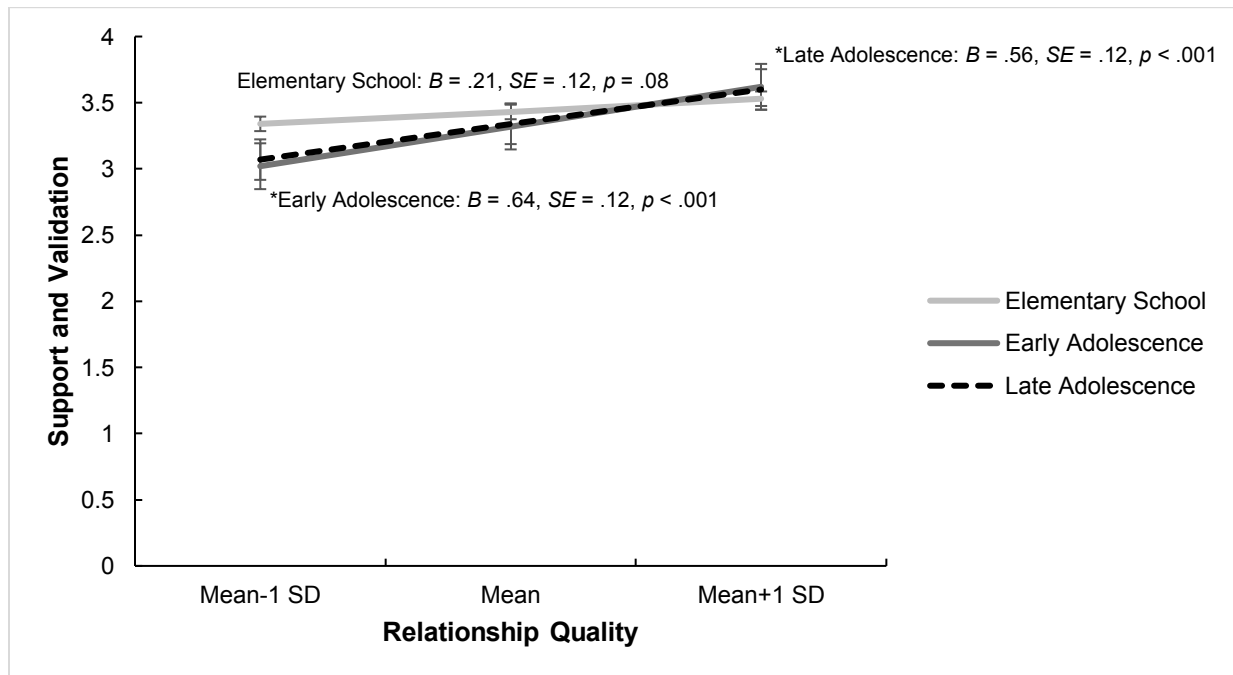
Relationship Quality

We ran linear mixed models to examine associations between relationship quality and the three categories of anticipated maternal responses, after controlling for the effects of age group, gender, and event type. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality on maternal responses categorized as *Emotional Support and Validation*, $F(1,186) = 46.85, p < .001$ (see Table 6). Overall, children who perceived higher quality of their relationship with their mother anticipated receiving more supportive responses from their mothers across both events, $B = 0.47, SE = .07$.

Age significantly moderated the association between relationship quality and anticipated supportive responses, $F(2, 188) = 3.61, p = .03$. There was a stronger association between relationship quality and anticipated supportive responses for early adolescents compared to the elementary school group, $B = .44, SE = .17, p = .01$. There was also a stronger association for late adolescents compared to the elementary school group, $B = .35, SE = .16, p = .03$ (See Figure 2). There was not a significant difference in the strength of the association between the early and the late adolescence groups, $B = -.08, SE = .17, p = .63$. Specifically, the association with relationship quality was significant for the two older groups, but not in the elementary school group (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Effect of Relationship Quality on Support and Validation across Age Groups



The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality on maternal responses categorized as *Repercussions and Negative Judgment*, $F(1,187) = 9.25$, $p = .003$ (see Table 6). Overall, children who perceived higher quality of their relationship with their mothers anticipated receiving fewer negative responses from their mothers across both events, $B = -.23$, $SE = .08$, $p = .003$. This effect was not significantly moderated by age group, gender, or event type.

Finally, the analysis did not reveal any statistically significant main effects or interaction effects for perceived relationship quality on maternal responses categorized as *Minimizing*, $F(1,186) = 1.85$, $p = .18$ (see Table 6). Similarly, age group, gender, and event type did not significantly moderate this association.

Table 6

Relationship Quality as a Predictor of Disclosure Likelihood, Types of Responses, Perceived Helpfulness, and Future Disclose

Variable	Univariate effect of Relationship Quality	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Disclosure Likelihood	$F(1,188) = 30.70^{***}$.70 (.13) ^{***}
Types of Maternal Responses		
Emotional Support and Validation	$F(1,186) = 44.48^{***}$	$B = .47 (.07)^*$
Repercussions and Negative Judgment	$F(1,187) = 9.25^*$	$B = -.23 (.08)^*$
Minimizing	$F(1,186) = 1.85$	$B = .35 (.16)$
Perceived Helpfulness	$F(1,192) = 6.58^*$	$B = .59 (.11)^*$
Future Disclosure	$F(1,194) = 20.88^{***}$	$B = .52 (.11)^{***}$

Note. *B* denotes the unstandardized coefficient for the main effect of relationship quality in the mixed models, controlling for the effects of age group, gender, and event type.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Do Children Find Their Mothers' Responses Equally Helpful for Each of the Events?

For our third research question (RQ3), we hypothesized that children may find maternal responses more helpful when anticipating to disclose experiences of being harmed compared to when disclosing experiences of harming others. To test this expectation, a mixed-model ANOVA

was conducted to examine the effects of type of event, age group, and gender on the perceived helpfulness of maternal responses.

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of event type on perceived helpfulness, $F(1,186) = 5.63, p = .02$, with a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .03$. Contrary to our hypothesis, children were *more* likely to perceive their mothers' responses as helpful when discussing instances of harming their friend compared to instances where they were harmed by a friend (see Table 3).

The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of gender on perceived helpfulness, $F(1,186) = 7.12, p = .008, \eta^2 = .04$. Overall, girls reported perceiving their mothers' responses as more helpful than boys. Conversely, the analysis did not reveal a significant main effect of age group on perceived helpfulness (see Table 4).

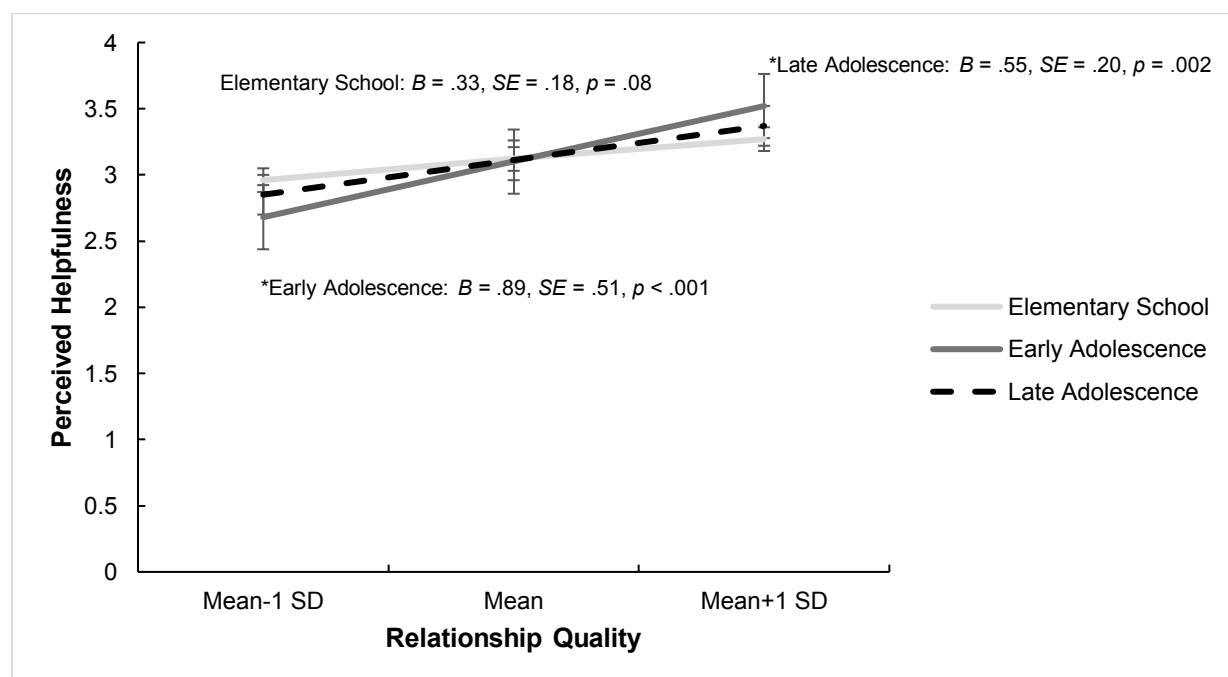
Relationship Quality

Linear mixed models were conducted to examine associations between relationship quality and perceived helpfulness. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality on perceived helpfulness, $F(1, 188) = 30.80, p < .001$ (see Table 6). Specifically, higher relationship quality was associated with greater perceived helpfulness, $B = .59, SE = .11$.

Age significantly moderated the association between relationship quality and perceived helpfulness, $F(2, 188) = 4.44, p = .013$. Specifically, a higher relationship quality was significantly associated with more perceived helpfulness only in the two adolescent groups (see Figure 3). There was a significant difference in the association between relationship quality and perceived helpfulness between the early adolescence group and elementary school group, $B = .56, SE = .26, p = .04$ (see Figure 3).). Conversely, there were no significant difference in the magnitude of the effect between late adolescents and the elementary school groups, $B = .23, SE = .25, p = .37$, or between early and late adolescents, $B = -.33, SE = .26, p = .21$.

Figure 3

Effect of Relationship Quality on Perceived Helpfulness across Age Groups



How Are Ratings of Helpfulness Related to Future Disclosure?

For our last research question, we expected that children who perceived maternal responses as more helpful might be more willing to disclose their future experiences of being harmed and harming others. To examine this, linear mixed models were used to examine associations between perceived helpfulness and anticipated future disclosure. The analysis also explored whether these associations varied across type of event, age group, and gender. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of perceived helpfulness on future disclosure, $F(1,375) = 67.30$, $p < .001$. As expected, when children reported perceiving their mothers' responses as more helpful, they also reported significantly greater intentions to disclose future experiences of harm, $B = .42$, $SE = .05$.

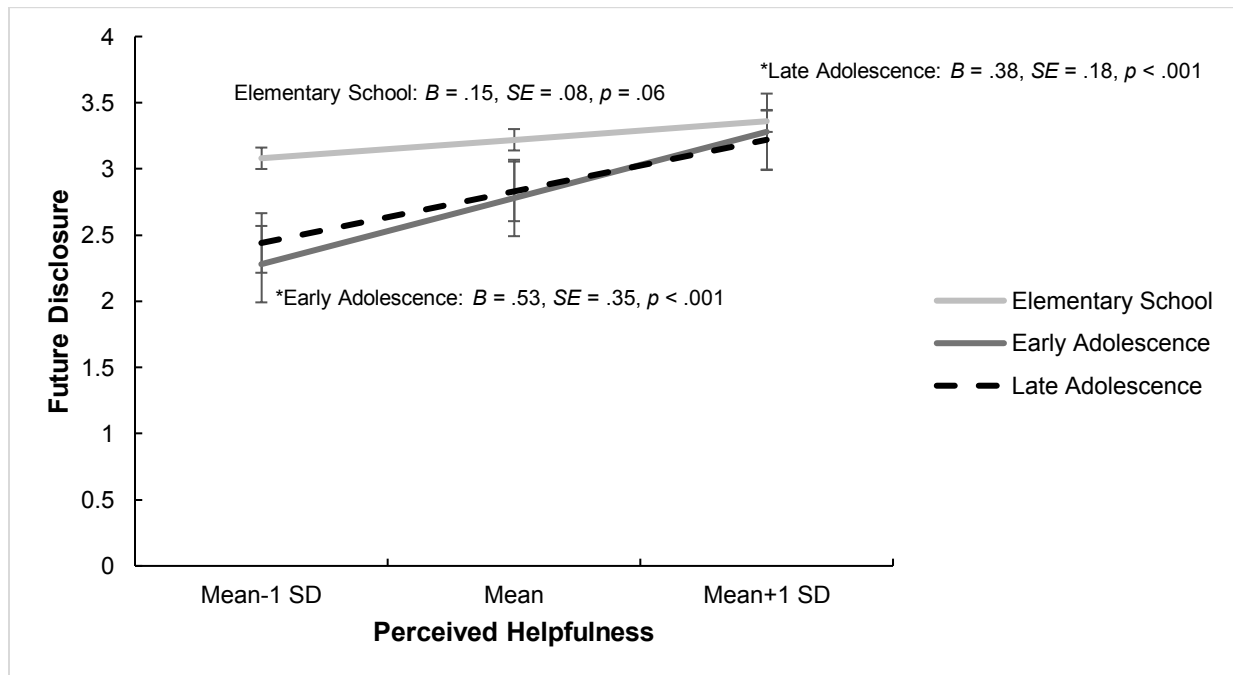
The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of age group on future disclosure, $F(2,187) = 7.90$, $p < .001$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction were

conducted to further explore these age differences. The findings revealed that early adolescents ($M = 2.78$, $SE = .09$) were significantly less likely to report their intent to disclose future experiences compared to children in the elementary school group ($M = 3.21$, $SE = .08$), $B = -.43$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$. Late adolescents ($M = 2.83$, $SE = .09$) reported significantly lower intentions to disclose future experiences compared to the elementary school group, $B = -.39$, $SE = .12$, $p = .002$. However, there was not a significant age difference between early and late adolescence, $B = -.05$, $SE = .12$, $p = .70$.

More germane to the question at hand, age also significantly moderated the relationship between perceived helpfulness and anticipated future disclosure, $F(2, 375) = 7.88$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 4). The association between perceived helpfulness and future disclosure was stronger for the early adolescence, $B = .44$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, and late adolescence groups, $B = .31$, $SE = .12$, $p = .014$, compared to the elementary school group. However, there was no significant difference in the magnitude of the association between early and late adolescence, $B = -.14$, $SE = .13$, $p = .29$.

Figure 4

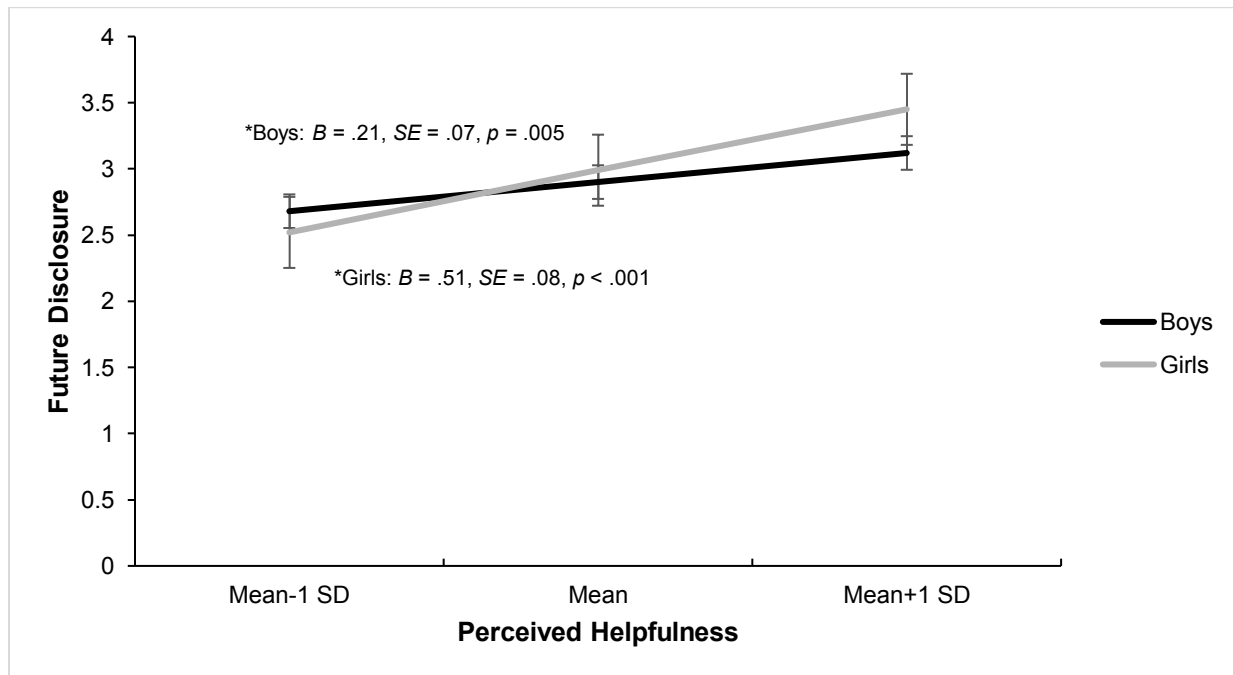
Moderation Effect of Age on Perceived Helpfulness and Future Disclosure



Gender also significantly moderated the relationship between perceived helpfulness and future disclosure, $F(1, 376) = 9.46, p = .002$. The association between perceived helpfulness and anticipated future disclosure was stronger for girls than boys, $B = .31, SE = .10$, although it was significant for both genders (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Moderation Effect of Gender on Perceived Helpfulness and Future Disclosure



Relationship Quality

Lastly, we ran linear mixed models to examine associations between relationship quality, perceived helpfulness, and anticipated future disclosure. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality on future disclosure, $F(1,194) = 21.08$, $p < .001$ (see Table 6). Specifically, higher relationship quality was associated with anticipating more future disclosure, $B = .52$, $SE = .11$. However, the analysis did not reveal a significant three-way interaction between relationship quality, perceived helpfulness, and future disclosure, $F(1,192) = .30$, $p = .60$.

Exploratory Analyses: Maternal Responses and Perceived Helpfulness

To aid in the interpretation of our findings, we decided to conduct a few additional exploratory analyses. Specifically, to further examine patterns related to children's perceived helpfulness of their mothers' responses, we ran linear mixed models to separately examine how

expectations of the three types of maternal responses (i.e., *Emotional Support and Validation*, *Repercussions and Negative Judgment*, *Minimizing*) predicted perceptions of helpfulness, controlling for the effects of event type, age, and gender. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of anticipated maternal responses categorized as *Emotional Support and Validation* on children's perceived helpfulness, $F(1,354) = 32.54, p < .001$. Overall, children were more likely to report perceiving their mothers' responses as helpful when mothers provided supportive responses, $B = .46, SE = .08$. This effect was moderated by gender, $F(1,356) = 8.85, p = .003$. Overall, the association between anticipated supportive responses and helpfulness was stronger for girls, $B = .69, SE = .12, p < .001$, compared to boys, $B = .23, SE = .10, p = .03$. This effect was not moderated by age, $F(2,352) = 2.02, p = .14$, or event type, $F(1,206) = 1.12, p = .29$.

The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of maternal responses categorized as *Repercussions and Negative Judgment* on children's perceived helpfulness, $F(1,362) = 4.26, p = .04$. Overall, children were less likely to report perceiving their mothers' responses as helpful when they expected their mothers to emphasize repercussions and negative judgment, $B = -.16, SE = .08$. This effect was not moderated by age, $F(2,359) = 1.20, p = .14$, event type, $F(1,217) = .38, p = .54$, or gender, $F(1,366) = .37, p = .54$.

Lastly, the analysis did not reveal any statistically significant main effects for maternal responses categorized as *Minimizing*, $F(1,366) = .01, p = .91, B = .008, SE = .07$, on perceived helpfulness. However, this effect was significantly moderated by gender, $F(1,366) = 10.55, p = .001$. Interestingly, girls were *more* likely to report perceiving their mothers' responses as helpful when mothers provided minimizing responses, $B = .25, SE = .11, p = .02$, while boys were *less* likely to report perceiving their mothers' responses as helpful when mothers provided

minimizing responses, $B = -.23$, $SE = .11$, $p = .03$. This effect was not moderated by event type, $F(1,204) = 3.02$, $p = .08$, or age, $F(2,364) = 1.61$, $p = .20$.

Exploratory Analyses: Maternal Responses and Future Disclosure

To further explore patterns related to children's anticipated future disclosure, we also conducted exploratory linear mixed models to separately examine how expectations of the three types of maternal responses predicted willingness to disclose future instances of harm, controlling for event type, age, and gender. These exploratory analyses revealed a significant main effect of maternal responses categorized as *Emotional Support and Validation* on children's future disclosure, $F(1,363) = 38.04$, $p < .001$. Overall, children were more likely to report expectations of disclosing in the future when they anticipated that mothers would provide supportive responses, $B = .53$, $SE = .09$. This effect was moderated by gender, $F(1,188) = 38.04$, $p = .03$. The association between anticipating supportive responses and the intention to disclose in the future was stronger for girls, $B = .72$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, than for boys, $B = .35$, $SE = .11$, $p = .002$, although the association was significant for both genders. Conversely, this association was not moderated by age, $F(2,361) = .79$, $p = .45$, or event type, $F(1,202) = 38.04$, $p = .15$.

Analyses also revealed significant main effect of anticipating maternal responses categorized as *Repercussions and Negative Judgment* on children's expectations of future disclosure, $F(1,358) = 6.03$, $p = .02$. Overall, children were less likely to anticipate disclosing in the future when they expected their mothers to respond in ways implying negative repercussions and judgment, $B = -.20$, $SE = .08$. Age significantly moderated the association between future disclosure and responses categorized as repercussions/negative judgment, $F(2, 355) = 5.68$, $p = .004$. There was a stronger association between anticipated future disclosure and negative repercussions and judgment for early adolescents compared to the elementary school group, $B =$

-.52, $SE = .17$, $p = .002$. There was also a stronger association for late adolescents compared to the elementary school group, $B = -.50$, $SE = .19$, $p = .01$. There was not a significant difference in the strength of the association between early and late adolescence, $B = .03$, $SE = .20$, $p = .89$. Specifically, the association was significant for the two older groups (early adolescence: $B = -.38$, $SE = .12$, $p = .002$, late adolescence: $B = -.35$, $SE = .16$, $p = .003$), but not in the elementary school group, $B = .14$, $SE = .12$, $p = .23$. This effect was not moderated by gender, $F(1,363) = .57$, $p = .45$, or event type, $F(1,218) = .49$, $p = .49$.

Lastly, there was not a significant effect of maternal responses categorized as *Minimizing*, $F(1,373) = 3.35$, $p = .07$ on children's future disclosure. This effect was also not moderated by event type, $F(1,205) = 1.14$, $p = .29$, age, $F(2, 369) = 2.30$, $p = .10$, or gender, $F(1,186) = 1.95$, $p = .16$.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine children's anticipated disclosure to their mothers about hypothetical situations where they either were harmed or harmed a friend, including the responses they anticipated from their mothers, as well as their evaluations of the helpfulness of these responses. Additionally, we investigated how children's ratings of the helpfulness of maternal responses might influence their willingness to disclose similar experiences in the future. Lastly, we explored the associations between relationship quality and children's willingness to disclose these experiences to their mothers in an exploratory manner. Specifically, we examined whether children's perceived relationship quality with their mothers contributed further to the prediction of anticipated disclosure, maternal responses, perceived helpfulness of maternal responses, and likelihood of future disclosure. Across all analyses, we also explored whether age and gender moderated the observed patterns.

How Much Do Children Expect to Disclose Experiences of Harming versus being Harmed by a Friend?

Our first research question examined whether children were more likely to disclose instances of being harmed by a friend compared to instances where they harmed a friend. As predicted, our results revealed that children were significantly more likely to anticipate disclosing experiences of being harmed than instances where they caused harm. This finding is in line with previous research on disclosure patterns, which suggests that children are more likely to disclose personal information in situations when they anticipate strong, open communication with their mothers (Mounts & Valentiner, 2021). In contrast, they may be less inclined to disclose situations in which they caused harm, possibly due to feelings of guilt or fear of negative parental reactions (Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010; Wainryb et al., 2005). These patterns of disclosure are consistent with the literature on children's narratives of peer conflict, where children often emphasize their emotions and the perceived unfairness of the situation when they are harmed, perhaps making them more likely to share these experiences with their parents (Wainryb et al., 2005). Conversely, when children disclose causing harm, they are more likely to justify their actions or focus on unintended consequences, possibly making them less willing to disclose due to fear of judgment or punishment (Recchia et al., 2014; Wainryb et al., 2005).

Although children were more likely to report disclosing being harmed than causing harm, the mean difference between their responses to the two vignettes was relatively small, and both values were above the midpoint (2.5) of the scale. Specifically, the mean for disclosing being harmed was 2.78 ($SE = 0.07$), while the mean for disclosing harm caused was 2.66 ($SE = 0.07$) on a 4-point Likert scale. Although this difference was statistically significant, the small effect

size suggests that children may recognize the potential benefits of disclosure in both situations. For example, while they might disclose being harmed in order to seek parental support, children might also recognize the benefit of discussing situations where they caused harm, as it provides an opportunity for them to gain insights into their thoughts and feelings (Recchia & Wainryb, 2023). Furthermore, particularly when children disclose wrongdoing or harm, this provides an opportunity to feel loved and accepted despite their occasional missteps or transgressions against others (Recchia & Wainryb, 2014). Indeed, such disclosure fosters autonomy and moral growth, as parents can help children navigate conflicts more effectively (Gregson et al., 2016; Recchia & Wainryb, 2023).

What Are Children's Expectations of Maternal Responses in Different Situations, and Do They Perceive These Responses as Helpful?

Our second research question examined children's expectations regarding their mothers' responses in each situation. As hypothesized, children reported anticipating receiving more emotional support and validation from their mothers when they were harmed compared to when they harmed a friend. This aligns with the existing literature where children expect supportive responses during emotionally laden experiences. Such responses significantly impact their emotional well-being and moral development (Weinstein et al., 2021). When children experience harm, they may seek emotional support and expect their mothers to respond with validation and understanding, creating a safe environment for disclosing such experiences.

Existing literature supports our study's findings regarding supporting and validating maternal responses. Children are more likely to disclose information when they feel emotionally connected to their parents, especially if their mothers are perceived as supportive and accepting (Tokić Milaković et al., 2018; Villarreal & Nelson, 2022). Moreover, parents who are attuned to

their children's emotions and abilities are better able to understand their experiences, making children more open to seeking their guidance (Gregson et al., 2016; Mounts & Valentiner, 2021; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010; VanDenBerg et al., 2023), particularly in situations involving peer harm. Our exploratory analyses further supported this, indicating that children perceive emotional support and validation as helpful, which increases their willingness to disclose instances of peer harm. Thus, mothers may be particularly likely to respond by recognizing their children's emotions and providing emotional support in situations where children are harmed by their friends, which may encourage children to share their feelings and experiences in this context.

While emotional support encourages children to be open about experiences of being harmed by a friend, our findings reveal that they anticipate receiving more repercussions and negative judgment from their mothers when they harmed a friend. For context, it is worth noting that the mean values were below the midpoint for responses to both vignettes, suggesting that this is not the predominant response that children expected from their mothers in either type of situation. Nevertheless, the observed differences align with existing literature suggesting that parents do respond to children's wrongdoing by emphasizing accountability and the consequences of their actions (Scirocco et al., 2018; Wang & Song, 2014). Our exploratory analyses revealed that children reported perceiving these responses as less helpful and were less likely to disclose instances of peer harm when they anticipated negative repercussions or judgment from their mothers. This pattern in relation to discouraging future disclosures was especially evident among adolescents. Such responses may include negative characterological attributions or punitive measures, which can provoke feelings of guilt or shame (Recchia et al., 2014; Scirocco et al., 2018; Wang & Song, 2014). When parents resort to punitive measures or

fail to validate their children's emotions, it can lead to feelings of shame or resentment, hindering effective communication and emotional growth (Recchia et al., 2014). If mothers focus on punitive measures rather than fostering understanding, children may feel less capable of managing their conflicts and emotions independently (Poulin et al., 2012; Recchia & Wainryb, 2023). Consequently, children's willingness to disclose negative experiences, particularly when they caused harm, may be discouraged in part due to expectations of unresponsive or invalidating parental responses, as observed in our study.

Lastly, our results did not reveal any significant differences regarding children's anticipated minimizing responses from their mothers across events. This was not due to a floor effect, in that the mean scores for minimizing responses were above the midpoint of the scale (2.72 for disclosing being harmed by a friend and 2.69 for disclosing harming a friend).

However, it is important to note that minimizing responses (e.g., "It's not a big deal" or "Fights are just part of life") could be interpreted in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, these responses might help children gain perspective and foster emotional communication and coping skills (Branje, 2018; Gentzler et al., 2005; VanDenBerg et al., 2023). For example, presenting conflict as a natural part of life can help reassure children and encourage them to manage challenges on their own. On the other hand, these responses may feel invalidating or dismissive, especially if they downplay children's feelings or experiences. When children feel misunderstood, minimizing responses could prevent them from disclosing such experiences. Interestingly, in line with this potential for interpretive diversity, we also found a gender difference in how these responses were perceived, with girls more likely to report perceiving minimizing responses as helpful, while boys were less likely to do so. This pattern is explored further in the *Gender Differences* section below.

For our third research question, we hypothesized that children would perceive maternal responses as more helpful when disclosing hypothetical experiences of being harmed by a friend compared to when they disclosed hypothetical experiences of harming a friend. However, our findings did not support this hypothesis. Instead, children found their mothers' responses to be slightly more helpful when discussing instances of harming a friend. One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that when children report disclosing harming a friend, they may perceive their mothers' responses as helpful in identifying ways to address their actions and help them navigate peer conflicts. Acknowledging a child's wrongdoing can promote accountability and may be seen as more helpful in resolving the conflict (Recchia et al., 2014; Wang & Song, 2014).

In contrast, when children report disclosing being harmed by a friend, they may anticipate support and emotional validation, but they may not perceive this as "helpful" in the same way, especially when mothers shift from offering moral guidance to providing support. In particular, it is possible that the term "helpful" may be interpreted by participants as reflecting concrete advice in resolving conflict or gaining insight from a situation, rather than receiving emotional support. In other words, the kind of responses and strategies children need and expect from mothers may differ based on their positioning within the conflict. For instance, children may expect emotional support when they are harmed by a friend, but may expect more practical support or moral guidance when they caused the harm to a friend.

How is Perceived Helpfulness of Maternal Responses Related to Anticipation of Future Disclosure?

For our last research question, we examined whether perceived helpfulness of maternal responses was associated with expecting to disclose similar experiences in the future. As

predicted, we found that when children reported perceiving their mothers' responses as more helpful, they were more likely to anticipate disclosing future experiences of harm and harm-doing. This could be influenced by children's emotional connection with their mothers, as those who perceive their mothers as supportive are more inclined to share their experiences. Consistent with findings from studies on parental involvement and self-disclosure (Gregson et al., 2016; Stattin & Kerr, 2000), our results highlight the critical role of perceived helpfulness in shaping children's willingness to disclose emotionally laden experiences in the future. Taken together, our study's findings suggest that fostering a supportive and validating environment may encourage children's willingness to share their experiences.

Variations across Age Groups

We also explored age differences in children's willingness to disclose instances of peer harm. Our findings indicate that children expected to disclose less as they got older, regardless of whether they were harmed or harmed others. This finding is in line with research indicating that, with age, children tend to become more independent and seek more autonomy from their parents. As a result, they may be less likely to share personal experiences with their parents (Branje, 2018; Rote et al., 2020; Smetana & Wainryb, 2021; Tasopoulos-Chan et al., 2009), including in situations involving peer conflict. Despite the decline in disclosure, it is important to highlight that youth still demonstrated a willingness to disclose their experiences. This may reflect that, even as they get older, adolescents still see value in sharing with their parents, regardless of their positioning within the event, inasmuch as mothers continue to provide developmentally appropriate guidance (Recchia et al., 2014). Relatedly, our analysis did not reveal significant age-related variations in the types of responses children expect from their mothers or in

perceived helpfulness, suggesting that maternal responses may be anticipated and perceived similarly across age groups.

Our findings revealed that both relationship quality and perceived helpfulness played a role in children's willingness to disclose, with age moderating these associations. Specifically, adolescents were more discerning in their disclosures, doing so when they perceived their mothers' responses as helpful and when they had a higher quality relationship. In contrast, younger children anticipated disclosing relatively indiscriminately; that is, their expectations of disclosure were relatively high regardless of how they anticipated their mothers to respond or the quality of their relationship. Our exploratory findings were also consistent with these patterns, revealing that age significantly moderated the association between future disclosure and expectations of responses centered on repercussions and negative judgment. There was a stronger association between such maternal responses and reduced future disclosure among adolescents, whereas this was not observed in younger children. Taken together, then, these findings imply that as children get older, they become more selective about the circumstances under which they disclose. This developmental shift aligns with research suggesting that as adolescents seek more autonomy, they become more intentional in deciding which information to share. They may balance their need for privacy with the benefits of parental guidance (Rote et al., 2020; Smetana & Wainryb, 2021). Moreover, when adolescents' autonomy is respected, their emotions are validated, and they experience higher parental responsiveness, they may be more likely to disclose (Branje, 2018; Gentzler et al., 2005), particularly in instances of peer conflict. This aligns with our finding that perceived helpfulness and relationship quality were especially important for adolescent disclosure.

Gender Differences

Our findings also reveal distinct gender differences in disclosure patterns, types of maternal responses, perceived helpfulness, and the association between perceived helpfulness and future disclosure. Girls in our sample were more willing than boys to disclose their experiences of peer harm. This suggests that various factors, including potential differences in how parents communicate with boys and girls, may contribute to children's decision about whether to disclose instances of harm (Gentzler et al., 2005; Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Scirocco et al., 2018). In this respect, girls were also more likely than boys to expect supportive and validating responses from their mothers overall. This could be attributed, in part, to differences in mothers' responses and strategies, as girls are more often encouraged to share their feelings, while boys may be more often encouraged to focus on emotional resilience and self-protection (Gentzler et al., 2005; Saint-Martin et al., 2023; Scirocco et al., 2018).

Additionally, girls generally reported perceiving maternal responses as more helpful, and this perceived helpfulness was more strongly linked their anticipated future disclosure, compared to boys. In particular, anticipated supportive maternal responses were associated with anticipated future disclosure more strongly among girls. Girls were also more likely to report perceiving their mothers' minimizing responses as helpful, while boys were less likely to do so. These findings suggest that gender may influence the responses that children receive, as well as how children perceive such responses. One possible explanation is that girls, being more frequently encouraged to express their feelings, might interpret their mothers' minimizing responses, such as "It's not worth getting upset about" or "Sometimes this stuff just happens," as attempts to alleviate their emotional discomfort, even if those responses do not always resolve the conflict. However, this unexpected finding warrants attempts at replication, and more research is

necessary to better understand whether tailoring responses based on gender would encourage disclosure.

Relationship Quality

Lastly, the present study highlights the role of relationship quality in children's willingness to disclose peer conflicts to their mothers. Consistent with previous research, our findings reveal that children's positive perceptions of their relationships with their mothers were linked to their willingness to share their experiences. This was also evident for children's future disclosures, as children who perceive a higher quality relationship with their mothers were more likely to anticipate disclosing future experiences of harm. These findings suggest that positive parent-child relationships foster open communication (Gentzler et al., 2005; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). Interestingly, our results also indicated that these associations were not significantly moderated by the type of event. Overall, this observed association may reflect the important role of the parent-child relationship quality in influencing children's willingness to share experiences of peer harm. However, it is also possible that children's willingness to disclose helps strengthen the relationship as well (Gregson et al., 2016; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014; Tokić Milaković et al., 2018). In other words, these correlational findings do not allow us to disentangle varied causal pathways that may explain associations between measured variables.

Additionally, our findings demonstrate that children who perceive a higher quality relationship with their mothers are more likely to anticipate supportive and validating responses. This association was stronger for youth in adolescence compared to children in elementary school. This could indicate that as children get older, their emotional connection with their parents becomes increasingly important for fostering a safe environment for disclosing peer-related experiences (Mounts & Valentiner, 2021; Poulin et al., 2012; VanDenBerg et al., 2023).

For instance, adolescents become more discerning in their disclosures and may place greater emphasis on the quality of their relationship with their mothers and the emotional support they expect. This developmental shift could explain why relationship quality plays a more significant role in adolescents' disclosures than those of younger children.

At the same time, children who reported higher relationship quality with their mothers anticipated fewer repercussions and negative judgments. In line with SDT, this finding emphasizes the importance of maternal responsiveness in fulfilling children's needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weinstein et al., 2021). Supportive and responsive parenting not only fosters children's autonomy and relatedness but also supports their competence when discussing challenging topics (Poulin et al., 2012; Tokić Milaković et al., 2018). Consequently, when children feel secure in their relationship with their mothers, they are more likely to be receptive to their guidance and advice (Gregson et al., 2016; Mounts & Valentiner, 2021; VanDenBerg et al., 2023). As our results demonstrate, a higher quality relationship with mothers is associated with fewer expectations of negative judgment and more supportive and validating responses. This highlights how maternal responses, particularly within the context of strong mother-child relationships, can shape children's willingness to disclose their experiences.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the current study aims to offer insights into children's anticipated disclosure behaviours to their mothers about hypothetical experiences of harming and being harmed by a friend, it is important to consider potential limitations. Firstly, not all participants will have experienced the hypothetical scenarios of peer harm as described in our study, and their real-life experiences may differ. For example, some participants might have more or fewer experiences

similar to those presented in the present study, and they might also interpret the situations differently depending on their past experiences. However, using hypothetical situations can provide some insight into children's moral decision-making processes, and in turn, predict their responses in similar real-life situations (Turiel, 2008). Future studies could also include observational or interview-based methods to examine whether children's anticipated disclosures following actual experiences of peer harm align with those predicted in hypothetical contexts.

Furthermore, the vignettes focused on harms between friends, and it is possible that children's anticipated disclosure patterns would differ in other relationship contexts or in relation to other topics. In our study, we found that children were more likely to disclose experiences of being harmed by a friend than instances where they caused harm. However, in different situations, such as information about hobbies, family conflicts, or academic issues, disclosure may be influenced by other factors, like concerns over parental reactions or the desire for autonomy (Smetana et al., 2019; Weinstein et al., 2021). Therefore, future research could explore how children's disclosure patterns vary across these various contexts to better understand the factors that influence their willingness to share experiences.

Moreover, we focused solely on children's expectations of *mothers'* responses and strategies, which limits the generalizability of our findings. Previous research has predominantly considered disclosure to mothers, but it is important to consider the role of other caregivers as well. For instance, research has shown that fathers' reactions to their children's negative emotions can predict their coping skills with negative events and emotions (Gentzler et al., 2005). Given the gender differences identified in our study, it is possible that other caregivers may employ different strategies that could influence children's willingness to disclose. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future studies to recruit both mothers and fathers, and other

parental figures to examine children's disclosure and responses to peer conflict. Future research should also examine how children's disclosures compare with their parents' responses. This could provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences in their perspectives and how these patterns shape the parent-child relationship.

Another potential limitation of the current study is that we excluded the *Guidance and Problem-Solving* subscale due to low internal consistency. Future research would benefit from including an improved version of this subscale, as existing literature highlights the importance of parents being attuned to their adolescents' emotions and capabilities (Mounts & Valentiner, 2021; VanDenBerg et al., 2023). When parents are sensitive to their children's needs, children may be more receptive to their parents' guidance and advice (Gregson et al., 2016). Given that competence is one of the three fundamental needs in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), future studies could also benefit from developing scales more explicitly grounded in SDT to examine how parenting responses, such as guidance and problem-solving strategies, address children's needs in situations related to peer harm.

Lastly, it is also important to acknowledge how cultural differences can influence children's disclosure and maternal responses. The majority of mothers in our sample were White and English was the predominant language spoken at home. Although few studies have examined cultural differences in children's disclosure, some research suggests that there may be differences across ethnic groups in children's strategies for disclosing information related to their activities (Tasopoulos-Chan et al., 2009). Furthermore, the effectiveness of particular parental responses and strategies may also vary based on cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Tasopoulos-Chan et al., 2009). Therefore, future research is necessary to explore how disclosure among children may vary across different cultural milieu.

Implications

Despite its limitations, our study offers valuable contributions to the literature on children's anticipated disclosure patterns and maternal responses in emotionally laden situations. Our findings reveal how children's willingness to disclose instances of peer harm is influenced not only by their positioning within the event but also by their perceptions of maternal responses. Additionally, our study underscores the role of the mother-child relationship in informing children's willingness to disclose personal experiences. Children with higher-quality relationships with their mothers were more likely to disclose, regardless of their positioning within the conflict. These findings provide further insight into the dynamics of parent-child relationships, particularly in terms of trust, emotional connection, and relationship quality (Gregson et al., 2016; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014; Tokić Milaković et al., 2018).

Additionally, our study provides valuable insights into how children's perceptions of the helpfulness of their mothers' responses influence their future disclosure decisions. Children's expectations of their mothers' responses, including whether they were perceived as emotionally supportive, significantly impacted their willingness to disclose future instances of peer harm. This aligns with previous research indicating that children's emotional communication skills are shaped by their expectations of parental strategies (Gentzler et al., 2005; Gregson et al., 2016).

Moreover, our study revealed significant differences in disclosure patterns between younger children and adolescents. Younger children were more likely to disclose indiscriminately, while adolescents were more selective, disclosing when they felt their mothers' responses would be helpful and supportive. This developmental change suggests that different strategies are needed when supporting children and adolescents in disclosing experiences of peer harm. At all ages, fostering a supportive and open environment may encourage disclosure.

However, particularly for adolescents, offering opportunities to discuss and being sensitive to when and what they feel comfortable sharing could lead to more meaningful discussions of harm and wrongdoing. It is particularly important to offer developmentally appropriate guidance that adolescents find useful, rather than intrusive or judgmental, in order to encourage open communication. For example, parents can approach conversations about peer conflict in a way that emphasizes understanding, rather than correcting or punishing. Allowing adolescents to share their thoughts, guide the discussion, and express their feelings can further encourage open communication. Additionally, parents and caregivers can create a safe environment by reassuring adolescents that their sharing will be free from judgment or punishment. This can, in turn, reduce any fear of negative repercussions. Overall, being sensitive to the developmental changes observed in this study can help parents provide effective strategies to strengthen their relationships and communication with their children (Gregson et al., 2016; Tokić Milaković et al., 2018).

Although this study focused on maternal responses, the findings also have meaningful implications for educational settings. As Gentzler et al. (2005) noted, school-based programs could emphasize the importance of sharing feelings, helping children understand how disclosing experiences like peer conflicts can be useful. Additionally, responding to children's disclosures in ways that are supportive rather than punitive may also encourage open communication in school settings. Based on our findings, creating a classroom environment that encourages open communication about peer harm, free from negative judgment or punishment, could help students feel more comfortable and willing to disclose their experiences and seek guidance (Gentzler et al., 2005; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). Responding with emotional support and validation may further encourage students to open up and ask for help in the future. These efforts

can help children and adolescents see educators as reliable and trustworthy sources of support, alongside parents, in helping them navigate peer harm.

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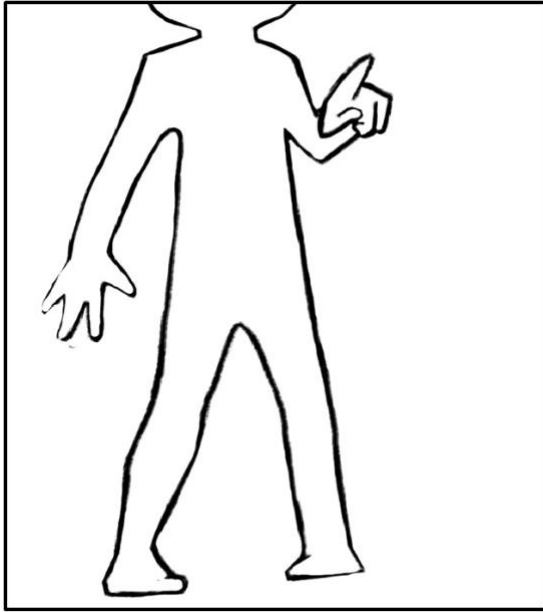
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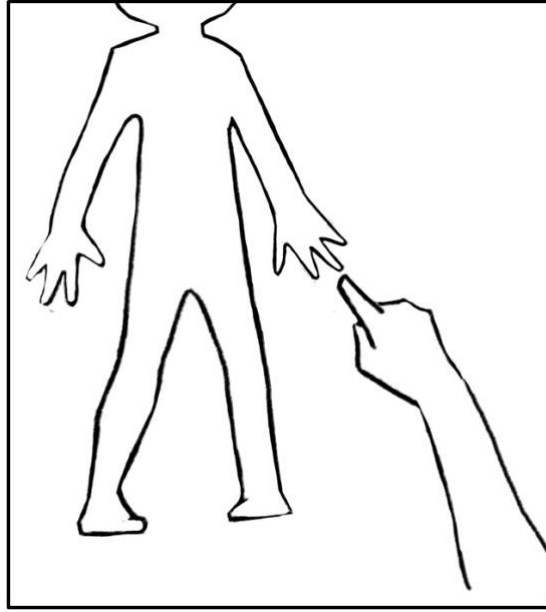
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Appendix A

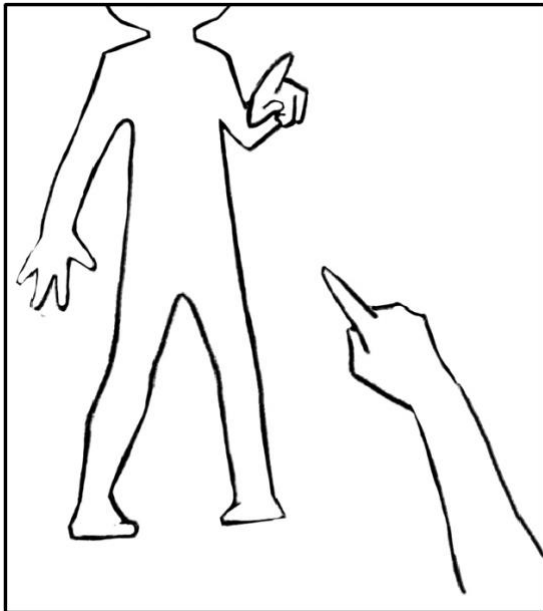
Visual Aids for Three Conflict Scenarios



Scenario A: Being Harmed by a friend



Scenario B: Harming a friend



Scenario C: Mutual harming (not included in the present thesis)

Appendix B

Complete List of Items of Maternal Responses to Hypothetical Situations of Being Harmed and Harming A Friend

Table 2	
<i>Maternal Responses to Hypothetical Situations of Being Harmed and Harming A Friend</i>	
Responses	Items
Common To Both Scenarios	<p>"She would say that she loves you no matter what."</p> <p>"She would talk to you about how you felt."</p> <p>"She would help you understand how your friend felt."</p> <p>"She would say that it's okay to be upset."</p> <p>"She would help you find ways to feel better."</p> <p>"She would say that it was your friend's fault."</p> <p>"She would say that it was your fault."</p> <p>"She would say that you did not do anything wrong."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend did not do anything wrong."</p> <p>"She would say that you are not a good friend."</p> <p>"She would say that she is disappointed in you."</p> <p>"She would say that you should talk to a teacher about it."</p> <p>"She would say that you should talk to her about it."</p> <p>"She would talk about what you could do next time so that it does not happen again."</p> <p>"She would say that the other person is not a good friend."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend could have stopped it from happening."</p> <p>"She would say that you should stop being friends with them."</p> <p>"She would say that you should stay away from your friend for a while."</p> <p>"She would say that you should talk to another friend about it."</p> <p>"She would say that you're grounded."</p> <p>"She would say that you've lost privileges."</p> <p>"She would say that you could have stopped it from happening."</p> <p>"She would say that it's not a big deal."</p> <p>"She would say that it's not worth getting upset about."</p> <p>"She would say that it was just a misunderstanding."</p> <p>"She would say that sometimes this stuff just happens."</p> <p>"She would say that fights are just part of life."</p>

Table 2*Maternal Responses to Hypothetical Situations of Being Harmed and Harming A Friend*

Specific Items for Being Harmed by a Friend	<p>"She would say that you are being too sensitive."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend had no right to treat you that way."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend must have had a good reason for acting that way."</p> <p>"She would say that it shows something about the kind of person that your friend is."</p> <p>"She would say that you must have done something to make your friend mad."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend was probably just having a bad day."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend must not have meant to do it."</p> <p>"She would say that you should stand up for yourself."</p> <p>"She would say that you should walk away."</p> <p>"She would say that you should insult your friend too."</p> <p>"She would help you understand why your friend did it."</p> <p>"She would say that you should get back at your friend."</p> <p>"She would say that you should ignore it."</p> <p>"She would say that you should avoid making your friend mad again."</p>
Specific Items for Harming a Friend	<p>"She would say that your friend is being too sensitive."</p> <p>"She would say that you had no right to treat your friend that way."</p> <p>"She would say that you must have had a good reason for acting that way."</p> <p>"She would say that it shows something about the kind of person that you are."</p> <p>"She would say that your friend must have done something to make you mad."</p> <p>"She would say that you were probably just having a bad day."</p> <p>"She would say that you must not have meant to do it."</p> <p>"She would help you understand why your friend did not like being insulted."</p> <p>"She would say that you should not do it again."</p> <p>"She would say that you should say you're sorry."</p>

Note. Items in bold from the "Common To Both Scenarios" section were included in the present thesis.