

Research Guide

College and Career Competency: *Networking*

Definition:

A social network is the “web of social relationships that surround individuals” (Heaney & Israel, 2008, p. 190). A network is part of the broader category of social support, which is present when a person perceives they are cared for, esteemed, and connected to a large group of concerned people (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Malecki & Demaray, 2002). Networking, then, is the ability to create and utilize social ties to gain support.

Essential Components for Students:

1. Create ties with peers and adults.
2. Utilize ties for support to overcome barriers and achieve goals.
3. Support others to overcome barriers and achieve goals.

Research:

- In research involving middle and high school students, researchers found that school outcomes improved when students had a supportive network comprised of teachers, parents, and friends. These outcomes included improved attendance, increased amount of time spent studying, higher school engagement, and greater **self-efficacy**. Support from teachers was found to be a central factor (i.e., necessary for positive school behaviors) but insufficient by itself. Rather, support from parents and friends was also necessary (Rosenfeld et al., 2000).
- Stable social networks can have a positive effect on **self-efficacy**; they provide help when the individual encounters stressors (Davidson & Demaray, 2007).
- According to Test (2016), for students with disabilities, stable social networks and connections to community service providers lead to better postschool outcomes.
- Social support provides a peer network that students can turn to when confronted with bullying. These networks provide support and security and help counter the negative effects of bullying (Schwab, 2013).
- Participating in sports can provide opportunities for greater social integration and protective social networks for adolescents at risk for suicide (Sabo et al., 2005).
- Social support, as provided in social networks, has a positive effect on physical and mental health and social functioning. Social support, or perceiving that you are cared for, esteemed, and surrounded by caring people, involves five elements: 1) attachment/intimacy, 2) social integration, 3) nurturing, 4) reassurance of worth, and 5) availability of assistance (Weinert, 2003).
- Research has found that perceived social support is related to positive psychological and physical outcomes for children (Malecki & Demaray, 2002).

- In a study of the social networks of fifth- and sixth-graders, researchers found that children derived different things from their varied relationships. For example, parents were turned to most often for affection and a sense of worth, while friends provided the biggest source of companionship (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).
- Social support is multidimensional, consisting of three broad types: tangible, informational, and emotional. The support is communicated via behaviors that the support provider engages in, including listening, appreciating, and challenging. Social support provided by the family, peers, the school, and the community is associated with resilience. Different types of social support are associated with different positive school outcomes. For example, middle school students were affected by listening to support provided by peers. Intervention strategies for at-risk youth should build on the understanding of the different types of supports, the relationships among the support providers, and specific school outcomes (Richman et al., 1998).
- In a study conducted with students in grades 3–6, researchers found that the children’s social support network included members beyond those typically found (i.e., parent, sibling, teacher, and friend). The expanded network membership included coaches, therapists, and parents’ friends. The size of the child’s network differed with sex and grade; females listed more members than males, and older students listed more members than younger students (Dubow & Ullman, 1989).
- A study confirmed that parents “are a crucial factor in the lives of their early adolescent children.” Also, perceived support from classmates played a more significant role in adolescent adjustment outcomes over time than support from a close friend (Demaray et al., 2005, p. 703).
- Regarding job searches, networking has been identified as [the best way to find a job](#). Right Management, a company that offers outplacement services and career coaching, surveyed 59,133 clients they had advised over three years. In 2010, 41% of the clients said they landed a job through networking.

Assessments:

- The level of perceived social support can be assessed using [the Personal Resources Questionnaire](#) (PRQ2000), which is a 15-item instrument (see below) that uses a 7-point Likert scale to measure social support. It is self-administered and free, but users must contact Dr. Weinert prior to use (Weinert, 2003).

Q-1. There is someone I feel close to who makes me feel secure

Q-2. I belong to a group in which I feel important

Q-3. People let me know that I do well at my work (job, homemaking)

Q-4. I have enough contact with the person who makes me feel special

Q-5. I spend time with others who have the same interests that I do

Q-6. Others let me know that they enjoy working with me (job, committees, projects)

Q-7. There are people who are available if I need help over an extended period of time

Q-8. Among my group of friends we do favors for each other

Q-9. I have the opportunity to encourage others to develop their interests and skills

Q-10. I have relatives or friends that will help me out even if I can’t pay them back

Q-11. When I am upset, there is someone I can be with who lets me be myself

Q-12. I know that others appreciate me as a person

Q-13. There is someone who loves and cares about me

Q-14. I have people to share social events and fun activities with

Q-15. I have a sense of being needed by another person

- [The Social Support Questionnaire](#) (SSQ; Sarason et al., 1983) is a 27-item, self-reported instrument that measures social support using a 6-point Likert scale. Each question has two parts: first the respondent lists people who can be counted on to provide the support referenced in the question; second, the respondent circles how satisfied they are with the overall support, with 6 being *very satisfied* and 1 *very dissatisfied*. Note that some of the questions would need to be adapted to students. [A shortened, 6-item version](#) of the SSQ (Sarason et al., 1987) is available. All of the questions on the shortened version are suitable for students.
- The Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS) is a reliable and valid instrument that can be used to understand perceived social support by children and adolescents. The CASSS is a 40-item, self-reported instrument that measures perceived support from four sources (parents, teachers, classmates, and friends). Both the frequency and importance of statements are rated using Likert scales. There are two versions of the CASSS: Level 1 for grades 3–6, and Level 2 for grades 6–12. For more information on the CASSS, see [Northern Illinois University \(n.d.\)](#).
- Another assessment that measures components of networking is the Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton et al., 2006). This self-report instrument measures teacher/student relationships and peer and family support for learning, which are all important domains for networking. For more information on the instrument and to obtain a copy, see [the Institute on Community Integration \(n.d.\)](#).

Instructional Practices:

- [An exercise](#) that teachers can use to help students build networking skills involves pairs of students conducting informational interviews, moving around the room in a “speed dating” format. Students have 3 minutes to create a comfortable interaction either by making conversation or asking questions (what clubs they belong to, etc.).
- Peer interactions, such as those through a social network, can help individuals develop social skills, including working together as a team and asking for and receiving feedback. Cooperative activities in classrooms, as well as participation in clubs (e.g., Future Farmers of America, student council, science club), sports, and the arts (e.g., drama, musicals, choir), help develop effective social interactions with peers (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013).
- Cooperative learning instructional programs consist of different strategies that involve students working in small groups to help one another learn (Slavin, 1996). As a result of cooperative learning, students—especially adolescents—develop a positive peer orientation and expand their social network. Cooperative learning strategies can include student teams, cooperative reading and writing, and the jigsaw method (Slavin, 1996). A number of free resources are available to teachers who want to use cooperative learning activities to help their students learn and apply networking.
 - Coffey (2008) describes a number of cooperative [learning activities](#). These include jigsaw, think-pair-share, round robin, and inside-outside circle.
 - Background on the jigsaw exercise, as well as tips for implementation, are available from [The Jigsaw Classroom](#). Ideas for different jigsaw activities are also available from [Chad Manis \(n.d.\)](#).
- Encouraging classmates to rely on peer experts in the classroom helps students gain an appreciation for others and the knowledge/advice they can offer. In doing this, students create and utilize ties and support each other; in other words, they practice the essential components of networking. More specifically, creating [a classroom yellow pages](#) helps students get to know

one another and identify their strengths. Students can then go to their fellow classmates for help on topics advertised in [the classroom yellow pages](#).

- Mock interviews between students or teacher and students are another strategy for developing networking with others. Teachers can begin using this strategy by teaching expectations for a good interview to students that includes concepts like articulating what you know, etiquette for meeting new people, and ways to ask informative questions. Although mock interviews are often used in preparation for a job, these can also be used when students review content with each other. For example, students would use a rubric or checklist to assess mock interview concepts related to networking in addition to their content review. See Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES (n.d.) for [activity details and checklists](#) that pertain more specifically to employment mock interviews but could also be used when students practice key concepts of the interview process with any subject matter.
- Encouraging or facilitating volunteer opportunities both at school (e.g., concessions at supporting events) and in the community (e.g., animal shelter) can help develop effective social interactions with peers and adults.

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