

## 5. Views of Personal Relationships

Considerable research has documented the importance of personal relationships as “protective factors”<sup>1</sup> against a variety of adolescent risk behaviors. For example, results regarding factors associated with emotional health, youth violence, substance use, and sexuality from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (Add Health), the largest, most comprehensive survey of adolescents to date, provide “consistent evidence that perceived caring and connectedness to others is important in understanding the health of young people today” (Resnick et al. 1997, p. 830). Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports from a synthesis of evidence from 52 countries that positive relationships with parents and with other adults protect adolescents against early engagement in sexual activity, substance use, and depression (World Health Organization 2002). However, some adolescents find it difficult to establish positive relationships with adults and/or peers, including some youth with disabilities (Gresham and MacMillan 1997; Marder, Wagner, and Sumi 2003; Nowicki 2003).

NLTS2 provides the first opportunity to examine the personal relationships reported by youth with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines the views they report regarding their relationships with their families and friends and with other adults, and the extent they rely on these people for support. Results are reported for youth with disabilities as a group and as they differ for youth across disability categories. Differences for selected demographic subgroups are reported when they are statistically significant. Comparisons also are made with youth in the general population when data are available.

### Views of Relationships With Others<sup>3</sup>

**Parents and family.** WHO, in its 52-country research synthesis of factors related to adolescent health (World Health Organization 2002) has concluded that “families matter” in reducing the likelihood that adolescents will engage in substance abuse or early sexual activity and experience depression. Specifically, youth who form a positive relationship with parents and have parents who encourage self-expression are less likely to engage in these behaviors, whereas living in a family that experiences conflict is associated with a higher likelihood of risk-taking behavior. Positive parental relationships are thought to have this kind of effect because they provide a general sense of stability, a positive emotional bond, a structure of expectations for positive behavior, and an openness to guidance, training, monitoring, and supervision (Ferguson 2004). These findings are mirrored in a variety of studies in the United States (e.g., Jaccard, Dittus, and Gordon 1996; Jordan and Lewis 2005; Miller 1998; Smith et al. 1995). Reporting data from Add Health, Blum and Rinehart (1997) report that parent and child “connectedness,” defined as the “degree of closeness, caring, and satisfaction with parental relationships [and]

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<sup>1</sup> Protective factors have been defined as “those aspects of the individual and his or her environment that buffer or moderate the effect of risk” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

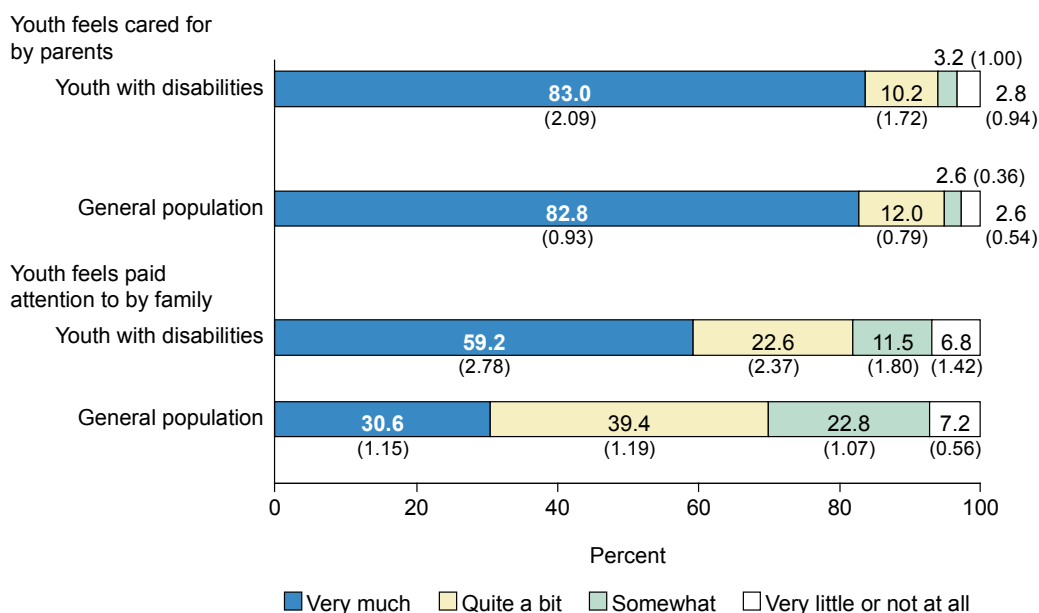
<sup>2</sup> Readers are reminded that findings are national estimates for the subsample of youth with disabilities who could report their own perceptions and expectations, not a sample of all youth with disabilities in the NLTS2 age range. See chapter 1 for further details on the group that is the focus of this report.

<sup>3</sup> All general population findings in this section are calculated using youth interview data for 15- through 19-year-olds from Wave II of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) (Udry 1998). NLTS2 and Add Health items and response categories for these variables are identical.

feeling understood, loved, wanted, and paid attention to by family members” (p. 15) is a significant positive factor that relates to greater emotional health among adolescents and a lower likelihood of involvement in violence, substance use, and early sexual activity.

Youth were asked to communicate the extent to which they feel cared about and paid attention to by their families, based on a 5-point scale—“very much” (5-points), “quite a bit,” “somewhat,” or “very little” or “not at all” (1 point). According to their own reports; more than 80 percent of youth with disabilities and youth in the general population feel that their parents care about them “very much” (figure 15); only 3 percent of each group report feeling their parents care about them “very little” or “not at all.” Youth with disabilities are less likely to report that their family pays “very much” attention to them (59 percent) than that they are cared about “very much” ( $p < .001$ ). Nonetheless, youth with disabilities are significantly more likely than youth in the general population to report a high level of attention from parents ( $p < .001$ ). Feeling cared about and paid attention to are related; values on the 5-point response scale for the two items are correlated ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ).

Figure 15. Youth with disabilities’ reported feelings of being cared about by parents and paid attention to by their families

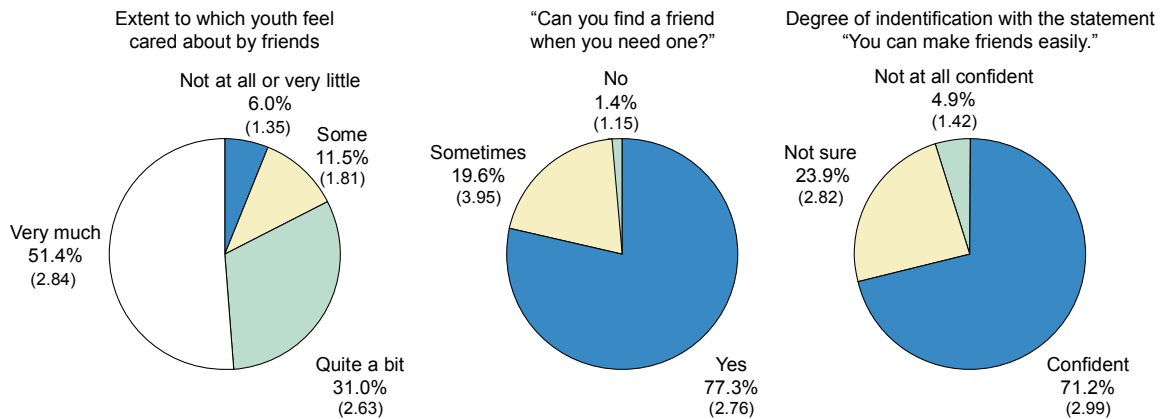


NOTE: Response categories “very little” and “not at all” have been collapsed for reporting purposes. Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLT2S2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave II youth interviews, 1996.

**Friends.** Relationships with friends also have been found to be associated with youth behaviors in either a prosocial or antisocial direction (e.g., Boyce and Rose 2002; Smith et al. 1995). An examination of youth’s perceptions of being cared about by friends reveals that their views are quite similar to their reports of being cared about by adults; 51 percent of both youth with disabilities and youth in the general population say friends care about them “very much” and about one-third (31 percent and 34 percent, respectively) say they are cared about “quite a bit.” Six percent and 2 percent of the two groups report being cared about by friends “very little” or “not at all.” Further, a large majority of youth with disabilities (77 percent) believe they can “find a friend” when they need one (figure 16). In addition, almost three-fourths (71 percent) of youth with disabilities feel confident that they “can make friends easily,” whereas 5 percent indicate they are not confident of that at all.

Figure 16. Youth with disabilities’ reported views of friends



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), youth in-person interviews, 2002 and 2004, and Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

Correlations between these views of friendships are statistically significant. Youth with disabilities who report feeling cared about by friends also tend to say they can make friends easily and find a friend when they need one ( $r = .22$  and  $.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and those report being able to make friends easily also are more likely to stay they can find a friend when they need one ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Sources of Support<sup>4</sup>

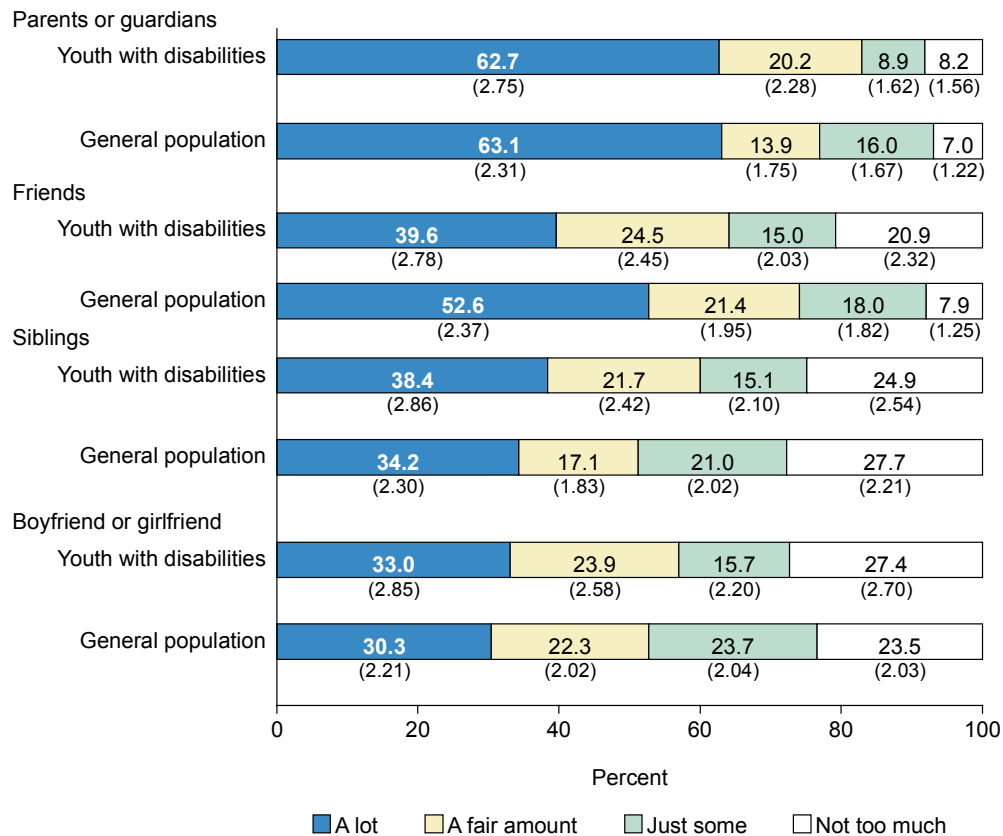
Given the variety of developmental changes and challenges youth face in adolescence (Dacey, Kenny, and Margolis 2000), many rely on others—family and friends, school staff, and other adults—for support in making choices and coping with stressors, as described below. To assess their patterns of sources of support, youth with disabilities were asked to respond to the following: “Let me read you a list of some kinds of people that someone might turn to when

<sup>4</sup> General education comparisons in this section use data from The Shell Poll (Shell Oil Company 1999). NLTS2 and Shell Poll items and response categories for these variables are identical.

making important decisions or facing problems. Please tell me whether you personally rely on this type of person a lot, a fair amount, just some, or not too much.”

**Reliance on family and friends.** Youth with disabilities indicate that when making important decisions or facing problems, they most often rely on their family members and friends for support (figure 17). Parents are by far the most common source of support; almost two-thirds of youth with disabilities (63 percent) indicate they rely on their parents “a lot,” and another 20 percent say they rely on them “a fair amount.” Approximately 40 percent of youth indicate they rely on friends and siblings “a lot,” and between 20 percent and 25 percent report they rely on them “a fair amount.” Girlfriends and boyfriends also are relied on frequently, with one-third of youth indicating they rely on them “a lot,” and one-fourth saying they rely on them “a fair amount” for decisionmaking and problem-solving assistance.

Figure 17. Reported extent of youth’s reliance on family and friends for support



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

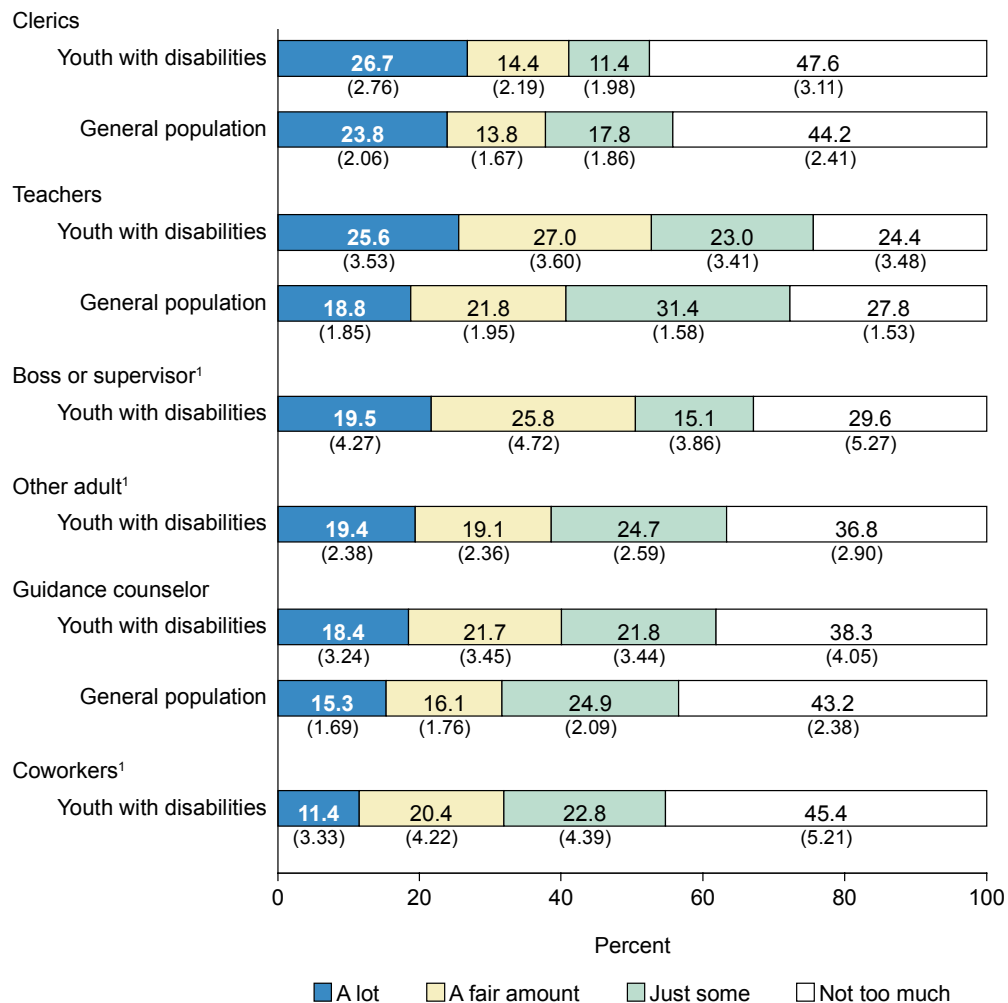
SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; Shell Oil Company, The Shell Poll, 1999.

Comparisons between youth with disabilities and youth in the general population in the extents to which they report relying on family members and friends revealed only one statistically significant difference. Among youth with disabilities, 40 percent indicate they rely

on friends “a lot,” significantly fewer than the 53 percent of youth in the general population who do so ( $p < .001$ ).

**Reliance on others.** Other adults with whom youth have repeated contact—teachers, for youth who are in school, and clerics, for youth who have a religious affiliation—are relied on “a lot” by about one-fourth of youth (figure 18). About one-fifth of youth who are in school rely on guidance counselors “a lot,” and a similar proportion of working youth rely on their boss or supervisor to that degree; other adults are a frequent source of support for about one-fifth of youth with disabilities. Coworkers are not a common source of support. There are no statistically significant differences between youth with disabilities and youth in the general population in their degrees of reliance on people in these roles.

Figure 18. Reported extent of youth’s reliance on persons outside their family



<sup>1</sup> Comparison data are not available for youth in the general population.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; Shell Oil Company, The Shell Poll, 1999.

## Disability Category Differences in Views of Personal Relationships

### Perceptions of Relationships With Others

**Familial relationships.** The percentage of youth with disabilities who feel cared about by parents “a lot” ranges from 76 percent of youth with autism to more than 90 percent of youth with orthopedic impairments (table 13). There is somewhat more variation in the amount of attention youth feel comes from their family. Although the percentages of youth who feel that their family pays “a lot” of attention to them range from 56 percent to 65 percent across most categories, exceptions are the 50 percent of youth with emotional disturbances and the 51 percent of youth with other health impairments. Youth in both disability categories are significantly less likely to report feeling that their family pays “a lot” of attention to them than are youth with multiple disabilities (72 percent;  $p < .01$  for both comparisons). About 1 in 10 youth with autism, mental retardation, or emotional disturbances say their families pay attention to them “very little” or “not at all”; in the case of the latter group, this is significantly more than the 1 percent of youth with orthopedic impairments who report those feelings ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 13. Youth’s reported perceptions of being cared about by parents and paid attention to by their families

Care and attention	Learning disability	Speech/ language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent / standard error											
Youth feel cared about by parents												
A lot	84.8 (3.06)	88.7 (2.82)	81.3 (4.54)	79.6 (3.74)	85.6 (4.31)	85.9 (4.38)	91.2 (3.25)	80.7 (3.70)	75.5 (6.38)	85.8 (6.29)	87.3 (4.95)	81.4 (7.02)
Quite a bit	10.7 (2.63)	7.9 (2.40)	4.8 (2.49)	12.0 (3.01)	11.2 (3.87)	9.7 (3.73)	7.1 (2.95)	13.5 (3.20)	14.8 (5.27)	8.6 (5.05)	10.8 (4.62)	12.4 (5.95)
Some	1.8 (1.14)	1.9 (1.22)	5.8 (2.72)	4.3 (1.88)	3.1 (2.12)	2.4 (1.91)	1.4 (1.33)	5.0 (2.04)	6.1 (3.54)	4.7 (3.79)	1.6 (1.84)	2.0 (2.55)
Very little or not at all	2.7 (1.37)	1.5 (1.09)	8.1 (3.18)	4.0 (1.82)	0.1 (0.46)	2.0 (1.77)	0.4 (0.72)	0.7 (0.80)	3.6 (2.78)	1.0 (1.78)	0.4 (0.90)	4.2 (3.63)
Youth feel paid attention to by family												
A lot	60.4 (4.17)	55.8 (4.42)	64.9 (5.53)	49.6 (4.62)	58.6 (6.06)	55.7 (6.27)	63.8 (5.52)	50.9 (4.68)	51.9 (7.45)	60.6 (8.83)	72.4 (6.63)	56.3 (8.95)
Quite a bit	22.0 (3.53)	30.2 (4.08)	15.2 (4.16)	27.2 (4.11)	29.3 (5.60)	30.1 (5.79)	22.3 (4.79)	30.6 (4.31)	23.2 (6.29)	17.6 (6.89)	15.3 (5.34)	24.7 (7.79)
Some	11.7 (2.74)	9.8 (2.64)	9.3 (3.36)	13.3 (3.14)	7.4 (3.22)	9.2 (3.65)	12.4 (3.79)	12.1 (3.05)	15.1 (5.34)	14.6 (6.38)	6.4 (3.62)	10.6 (5.56)
Very little or not at all	5.8 (2.00)	4.2 (1.78)	10.7 (3.58)	9.9 (2.76)	4.7 (2.61)	5.0 (2.75)	1.4 (1.36)	6.4 (2.29)	9.7 (4.42)	7.2 (4.67)	5.9 (3.50)	8.3 (4.98)

NOTE: Response categories “very little” and “not at all” have been collapsed for reporting purposes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

**Friend relationships.** Just as they are among the most likely to report very little or no attention from parents, at 12 percent, youth with mental retardation are more likely than youth in two categories to report feeling cared about by friends “very little” or “not at all” ( $p < .001$  compared with youth with visual impairments;  $p < .01$  compared with youth with learning disabilities; table 14). Thirty-eight to 62 percent of youth report feeling cared about “a lot” by friends; the only statistically significant difference is between youth with visual impairments and youth with autism (62 percent vs. 38 percent,  $p < .01$ ). Between 2 percent and 10 percent of youth in most disabilities report feeling cared about “very little” or “not at all” by friends; youth with mental retardation exceed this range, reporting this perception significantly more often than youth with visual impairments (18 percent vs. 2 percent,  $p < .001$ ).

There are few differences across categories in the extent to which youth report they can find a friend when they need one; from 71 percent to 82 percent of youth across most categories report that view. The exceptions are youth with autism or traumatic brain injuries, among whom 47 percent and 59 percent, respectively, report they can find a friend; this rate for youth with autism is significantly lower than for youth in most other categories ( $p < .001$  compared with youth with learning disabilities or hearing or speech/language impairments;  $p < .01$  compared with youth with emotional disturbances; visual, orthopedic, or other health impairments; or multiple disabilities).

The greatest variation across categories is apparent regarding youth’s confidence that they “can make friends easily.” Seventy percent or more of youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, mental retardation, or hearing impairments report they are confident they can, whereas 39 percent of youth with autism report that feeling ( $p < .001$  for comparisons with youth with learning disabilities or emotional disturbances,  $p < .01$  for comparisons with youth with mental retardation or hearing impairments). With the exceptions of youth with mental retardation or hearing or orthopedic impairments, youth with autism are more likely than youth in all other categories to say they are “not at all confident” they can make friends easily ( $p < .001$  for all comparisons).

Table 14. Youth’s reported perceptions of relationships with friends, by disability category

Relationships	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent / standard error											
Youth feel cared about by friends												
A lot	52.9 (4.25)	50.9 (4.68)	50.4 (5.86)	42.9 (4.61)	48.0 (6.14)	62.1 (6.16)	59.8 (5.62)	49.6 (4.62)	37.5 (7.17)	56.7 (8.92)	59.5 (7.25)	49.2 (9.12)
Quite a bit	34.0 (4.03)	30.6 (4.31)	18.4 (4.54)	30.4 (4.28)	31.9 (5.72)	27.6 (5.68)	26.2 (5.04)	27.2 (4.11)	31.8 (6.90)	27.0 (7.99)	21.5 (6.07)	29.6 (8.33)
Some	9.7 (2.52)	12.1 (3.05)	13.0 (3.94)	17.9 (3.57)	15.3 (4.42)	8.7 (3.58)	8.5 (3.20)	13.3 (3.14)	23.9 (6.32)	6.0 (4.28)	8.6 (4.14)	16.9 (6.84)
Very little or not at all	3.4 (1.54)	6.4 (2.29)	18.2 (4.52)	8.8 (2.64)	4.8 (2.63)	1.5 (1.54)	5.5 (2.61)	9.9 (2.76)	6.8 (3.73)	10.3 (5.47)	10.4 (4.51)	4.7 (2.61)

See notes at end of table.

Table 14. Youth's reported perceptions of relationships with adults and friends, by disability category—  
Continued

Relationships	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent / standard error											
Response to question "Can you find a friend when you need one?"												
Yes	79.0 (4.05)	78.3 (4.14)	70.5 (6.48)	77.0 (4.93)	81.6 (5.22)	80.3 (5.98)	78.6 (5.57)	73.8 (4.89)	47.2 (8.28)	58.6 (9.59)	79.2 (7.22)	72.5 (8.83)
Sometimes	19.6 (3.95)	21.4 (4.13)	25.2 (6.17)	20.1 (4.70)	14.5 (4.74)	19.7 (5.97)	20.6 (5.49)	22.9 (4.68)	45.1 (8.25)	37.7 (9.43)	19.3 (7.02)	22.4 (8.25)
No	1.4 (1.15)	0.3 (0.52)	4.3 (2.89)	2.9 (1.95)	3.9 (2.61)	0.1 (0.44)	0.8 (1.21)	3.3 (1.99)	7.7 (4.43)	3.7 (3.69)	1.5 (2.16)	5.1 (4.34)
Confidence that youth "can make friends easily"												
Confident	73.3 (4.41)	66.0 (4.77)	70.3 (6.56)	71.2 (5.31)	69.5 (6.23)	58.7 (7.49)	62.0 (6.61)	63.2 (5.37)	38.8 (8.05)	61.5 (9.44)	67.6 (8.33)	59.2 (9.84)
Not sure	23.0 (4.19)	30.2 (4.63)	21.3 (5.88)	22.7 (4.90)	23.4 (5.73)	37.7 (7.37)	28.5 (6.14)	32.2 (5.20)	33.9 (7.82)	37.9 (9.41)	27.5 (7.95)	35.8 (9.6)
Not at all confident	3.8 (1.90)	3.8 (1.92)	8.4 (3.97)	6.2 (2.82)	7.0 (3.46)	3.6 (2.84)	9.5 (3.99)	4.7 (2.35)	27.4 (7.36)	0.6 (1.49)	4.8 (3.82)	5.0 (4.38)

NOTE: Response categories "very little" and "not at all" have been collapsed for reporting purposes.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; youth in-person interviews, 2002 and 2004.

### Sources of Support

There are statistically significant differences across disability categories in the degree to which youth rely on family and friends and on others in the community.

**Reliance on family and friends.** Across disability categories, from 58 percent to 82 percent of youth indicate they rely on parents for support "a lot" (table 15). Youth with multiple disabilities are more likely to report this level of reliance than youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or speech/language or other health impairments ( $p < .01$  for all comparisons).

In contrast, fewer than half of youth in all categories but traumatic brain injuries indicate "a lot" of reliance on friends. Youth in this latter category join youth with visual or speech/language impairments in being significantly more likely to report this level of reliance on friends than are youth with autism or deaf-blindness (23 percent and 21 percent, respectively;  $p < .01$  for all comparisons).



Table 15. Reported extent of youth's reliance on family and friends, by disability category

Reliance for support	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent / standard error											
Youth rely on parents:												
A lot	59.9 (4.19)	62.6 (4.32)	75.6 (4.99)	62.0 (4.53)	57.8 (6.06)	68.5 (5.87)	73.8 (5.05)	59.1 (4.62)	68.9 (6.89)	61.7 (8.78)	82.1 (5.67)	68.1 (8.50)
A fair amount	22.9 (3.59)	22.8 (3.75)	7.3 (3.02)	19.4 (3.69)	21.2 (5.02)	18.9 (4.95)	13.3 (3.90)	23.0 (3.96)	13.4 (5.07)	14.4 (6.34)	9.2 (4.27)	17.1 (6.87)
Just some	9.7 (2.53)	6.8 (2.25)	7.8 (3.12)	8.5 (2.60)	6.8 (3.09)	6.6 (3.14)	9.0 (3.29)	6.4 (2.30)	12.7 (4.96)	15.9 (6.61)	3.4 (2.68)	10.7 (5.64)
Not too much	7.5 (2.25)	7.8 (2.39)	9.3 (3.38)	10.1 (2.81)	14.2 (4.28)	6.0 (3.00)	4.0 (2.25)	11.4 (2.99)	5.0 (3.25)	8.0 (4.90)	5.3 (3.31)	4.2 (3.66)
Youth rely on friends:												
A lot	41.2 (4.22)	46.5 (4.49)	32.1 (5.44)	37.9 (4.53)	31.6 (5.71)	47.7 (6.29)	43.1 (5.75)	38.7 (4.57)	22.6 (6.30)	52.7 (9.02)	35.6 (7.10)	21.4 (7.48)
A fair amount	28.5 (3.87)	22.1 (3.73)	12.2 (3.81)	19.8 (3.72)	28.0 (5.51)	25.4 (5.48)	15.7 (4.22)	19.7 (3.73)	12.7 (5.02)	21.5 (7.42)	19.1 (5.83)	36.3 (8.77)
Just some	12.5 (2.84)	13.8 (3.10)	22.8 (4.88)	17.1 (3.52)	18.5 (4.77)	10.5 (3.86)	21.8 (4.79)	19.6 (3.72)	32.0 (7.03)	12.0 (5.87)	15.0 (5.30)	23.2 (7.70)
Not too much	17.9 (3.29)	17.6 (3.43)	32.9 (5.47)	25.1 (4.05)	21.8 (5.07)	16.4 (4.66)	19.4 (4.59)	22.0 (3.89)	32.7 (7.07)	13.9 (6.25)	30.2 (6.81)	19.2 (7.19)
Youth rely on siblings:												
A lot	36.9 (4.29)	35.4 (4.37)	45.6 (5.95)	42.9 (4.91)	30.6 (5.82)	36.9 (6.55)	36.3 (5.76)	31.4 (4.59)	25.2 (6.75)	41.4 (9.27)	47.4 (7.68)	26.6 (8.24)
A fair amount	24.2 (3.81)	23.3 (3.86)	16.2 (4.40)	15.1 (3.55)	23.7 (5.37)	23.5 (5.76)	13.8 (4.13)	16.9 (3.70)	20.7 (6.30)	19.5 (7.45)	23.7 (6.54)	24.5 (8.02)
Just some	15.8 (3.24)	14.1 (3.18)	12.0 (3.88)	11.4 (3.15)	24.0 (5.39)	19.6 (5.39)	23.0 (5.04)	22.1 (4.10)	18.9 (6.08)	11.3 (5.96)	7.5 (4.05)	20.0 (7.46)
Not too much	23.1 (3.75)	27.1 (4.06)	26.1 (5.25)	30.6 (4.57)	21.7 (5.21)	20.0 (5.43)	27.0 (5.31)	29.6 (4.51)	35.1 (7.42)	27.8 (8.43)	21.4 (6.31)	28.9 (8.45)
Youth rely on a boy- or girlfriend:												
A lot	32.6 (4.22)	32.7 (4.52)	30.2 (5.88)	37.3 (4.95)	25.1 (5.63)	31.5 (6.77)	35.4 (5.83)	36.3 (4.93)	18.8 (6.91)	39.5 (9.65)	38.5 (7.83)	29.4 (8.59)
A fair amount	25.8 (3.94)	20.9 (3.92)	20.1 (5.14)	23.0 (4.31)	25.6 (5.67)	23.1 (6.14)	12.5 (4.03)	18.4 (3.97)	11.1 (5.56)	13.7 (6.79)	14.8 (5.71)	13.7 (6.48)
Just some	17.1 (3.39)	15.1 (3.45)	13.3 (4.35)	12.2 (3.35)	15.2 (4.66)	16.7 (5.44)	9.7 (3.61)	15.4 (3.70)	13.4 (6.03)	16.1 (7.26)	9.8 (4.78)	9.2 (5.45)
Not too much	24.4 (3.86)	31.2 (4.47)	36.3 (6.16)	27.6 (4.58)	34.0 (6.15)	28.7 (6.59)	42.4 (6.02)	29.9 (4.69)	56.6 (8.77)	30.6 (9.10)	36.8 (7.76)	47.7 (9.42)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

The extent to which youth rely “a lot” on siblings does not significantly differ across categories. From 25 percent of youth with autism to 47 percent of youth with traumatic brain injuries rely “a lot” on siblings; none of the disability group differences are statistically significant.

From 19 percent of youth with autism to 40 percent of youth with traumatic brain injuries say they rely “a lot” on a boyfriend or girlfriend. None of the disability category comparisons indicate statistically significant differences between groups in the percentage of youth who report relying on a boyfriend or girlfriend “a lot.”

**Reliance on others.** There is greater variability across disability categories in the degree to which youth rely on teachers than on people in other nonfamilial roles (table 16). Percentages reporting they rely on teachers “a lot” range from 12 percent of youth with speech/language impairments to 45 percent of youth with mental retardation, the only significant difference in this level of reliance on teachers across categories ( $p < .001$ ). Reliance on clerics “a lot” ranges from 9 percent among youth with hearing impairments to 31 percent among those with mental retardation; the difference between these two groups, as well as between youth with learning

Table 16. Reported extent of youth’s reliance on persons other than family and friends for support, by disability category

	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
Reliance for support	Percent / standard error											
In-school youth rely on teachers:												
A lot	23.9 (5.05)	12.1 (3.70)	45.2 (8.37)	22.1 (5.57)	27.4 (8.60)	20.6 (5.89)	38.1 (7.62)	24.0 (5.63)	36.2 (9.93)	23.1 (8.99)	28.8 (9.36)	‡
A fair amount	30.2 (5.43)	31.5 (5.27)	11.5 (5.36)	22.4 (5.60)	14.7 (6.83)	36.7 (7.02)	28.1 (7.05)	23.3 (5.57)	21.0 (8.42)	18.1 (8.22)	24.9 (8.93)	‡
Just some	23.8 (5.04)	22.0 (4.70)	23.9 (7.17)	17.5 (5.10)	27.7 (8.63)	21.0 (5.94)	12.0 (5.10)	26.6 (5.83)	25.8 (9.04)	22.3 (8.88)	13.3 (7.02)	‡
Not too much	22.1 (4.91)	34.4 (5.39)	19.4 (6.65)	38.0 (6.52)	30.3 (8.86)	21.8 (6.02)	21.9 (6.49)	26.1 (5.79)	17.1 (7.78)	36.5 (10.27)	33.0 (9.71)	‡
Youth rely on clerics:												
A lot	27.9 (4.19)	24.5 (4.11)	30.7 (5.83)	20.6 (4.31)	9.0 (3.75)	18.2 (5.44)	24.1 (5.24)	25.3 (4.69)	13.8 (5.61)	28.5 (9.06)	23.7 (7.03)	‡
A fair amount	13.4 (3.18)	20.5 (3.86)	13.2 (4.28)	16.1 (3.91)	13.9 (4.53)	19.1 (5.54)	11.6 (3.92)	20.4 (4.34)	10.4 (4.97)	10.4 (6.12)	17.9 (6.34)	‡
Just some	11.0 (2.92)	13.1 (3.22)	11.0 (3.96)	12.3 (3.50)	16.5 (4.86)	18.5 (5.47)	16.6 (4.56)	10.0 (3.23)	20.8 (6.60)	7.2 (5.19)	8.8 (4.69)	‡
Not too much	47.7 (4.66)	41.9 (4.72)	45.1 (6.29)	50.9 (5.32)	60.5 (6.40)	44.2 (7.00)	47.7 (6.12)	44.3 (5.35)	55.1 (8.09)	53.8 (10.00)	49.6 (8.27)	‡
Employed youth rely on boss or supervisor:												
A lot	17.2 (5.72)	24.3 (6.30)	25.7 (11.62)	23.3 (7.60)	10.5 (7.78)	29.2 (13.86)	17.3 (12.56)	28.3 (7.18)	‡	28.8 (17.28)	‡	‡
A fair amount	27.6 (6.78)	27.9 (6.59)	13.3 (9.03)	23.8 (7.66)	10.6 (7.81)	17.8 (11.66)	4.8 (7.10)	25.9 (6.99)	‡	18.7 (14.88)	‡	‡
Just some	15.4 (5.47)	15.8 (5.36)	12.2 (8.71)	15.8 (6.56)	28.8 (11.49)	20.3 (12.26)	15.7 (12.08)	11.8 (5.15)	‡	25.8 (16.70)	‡	‡
Not too much	39.9 (7.43)	32.0 (6.85)	48.9 (13.30)	37.1 (8.69)	50.1 (12.69)	32.6 (14.29)	62.3 (16.09)	33.9 (7.55)	‡	26.7 (16.88)	‡	‡

See notes at end of table.

Table 16. Reported extent of youth's reliance on persons other than family and friends, by disability category—Continued

	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
Reliance for support	Percent / standard error											
In-school youth rely on a guidance counselor:												
A lot	14.3 (4.29)	14.4 (4.09)	33.7 (8.18)	30.6 (6.48)	17.6 (7.79)	10.7 (4.73)	25.6 (6.94)	16.3 (5.07)	25.0 (9.18)	17.0 (8.32)	27.6 (9.49)	‡
A fair amount	23.1 (5.17)	24.8 (5.03)	14.4 (6.08)	16.0 (5.15)	17.1 (7.70)	27.6 (6.83)	14.5 (5.60)	26.1 (6.02)	26.6 (9.37)	18.0 (8.51)	29.6 (9.69)	‡
Just some	24.7 (5.29)	15.8 (4.25)	15.8 (6.31)	11.9 (4.55)	16.1 (7.52)	24.4 (6.57)	21.8 (6.57)	19.5 (5.43)	19.3 (8.37)	27.2 (9.86)	15.4 (7.66)	‡
Not too much	37.9 (5.95)	45.0 (5.79)	36.1 (8.31)	41.5 (6.93)	49.2 (10.23)	37.4 (7.40)	38.1 (7.72)	38.1 (6.66)	29.0 (9.62)	37.7 (10.74)	27.5 (9.48)	‡
Employed youth rely on coworkers:												
A lot	9.1 (4.31)	8.5 (4.08)	20.0 (11.26)	15.2 (6.52)	5.7 (5.96)	12.7 (10.50)	13.9 (11.91)	19.2 (6.31)	‡	22.8 (15.64)	‡	‡
A fair amount	19.1 (5.89)	31.5 (6.79)	14.1 (9.80)	27.8 (8.14)	18.8 (10.05)	36.0 (15.14)	6.5 (8.49)	22.4 (6.68)	‡	8.4 (10.34)	‡	‡
Just some	23.7 (6.37)	17.7 (5.58)	22.6 (11.77)	20.1 (7.28)	25.4 (11.20)	24.2 (13.51)	21.4 (14.12)	22.4 (6.68)	‡	36.1 (17.90)	‡	‡
Not too much	48.1 (7.48)	42.2 (7.22)	43.3 (13.95)	36.9 (8.77)	50.1 (12.86)	27.1 (14.02)	58.2 (16.98)	36.0 (7.69)	‡	32.8 (17.50)	‡	‡
Youth rely on other adult(s):												
A lot	35.4 (4.31)	37.4 (4.48)	40.5 (5.98)	39.6 (4.91)	39.7 (6.16)	41.4 (6.49)	28.9 (5.42)	40.3 (4.87)	35.3 (7.42)	38.7 (9.27)	37.3 (7.48)	44.6 (9.27)
A fair amount	27.9 (4.04)	25.1 (4.02)	13.5 (4.16)	19.1 (3.95)	28.5 (5.69)	20.7 (5.34)	23.7 (5.08)	22.5 (4.14)	28.3 (6.99)	32.4 (8.90)	17.9 (5.93)	26.6 (8.24)
Just some	20.2 (3.62)	20.4 (3.73)	11.5 (3.88)	17.8 (3.84)	20.1 (5.05)	25.0 (5.71)	23.8 (5.09)	21.4 (4.07)	22.1 (6.44)	15.8 (6.94)	24.8 (6.68)	19.9 (7.44)
Not too much	16.6 (3.35)	17.2 (3.50)	34.4 (5.78)	23.4 (4.25)	11.7 (4.05)	12.8 (4.40)	23.7 (5.08)	15.8 (3.62)	14.2 (5.42)	13.1 (6.42)	20.0 (6.18)	9.0 (5.34)

‡ Responses for items with fewer than 30 respondents are not reported.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; youth in-person youth interviews, 2002 and 2004.

disabilities and those with hearing impairments, is statistically significant ( $p < .01$  and  $p < .001$ , respectively). There are no statistically significant differences across disability categories in youth relying “a lot” on their guidance counselor, their boss or supervisor, their coworkers, or other adults for support.

### Demographic Differences in Views of Personal Relationships

Not many statistically significant differences emerge regarding the views examined in this chapter for youth with disabilities who differ in age, gender, household income, or race/ethnicity. For example, there are no differences between any subgroups in their views of how much

friends, parents, or other adults care about them or how much their families pay attention to them. However, there are some exceptions:

- Nineteen-year-olds are less likely than younger workers to rely on a boss or supervisor for support; two-thirds say they rely on a boss or supervisor “not too much,” compared with 16 percent of 15- and 16-year-olds and 25 percent of 17-year-olds ( $p < .001$  and  $p < .01$ , respectively).
- Girls are more likely than boys to turn “a lot” to friends (49 percent vs. 34 percent,  $p < .01$ ).
- White youth with disabilities are more likely than African American youth to say they rely for support “a lot” on friends (46 percent vs. 22 percent,  $p < .001$ ).

## Summary

This chapter has reported on a variety of perceptions reported by youth with disabilities regarding their personal relationships. For the most part, youth report having strong, positive relationships with their parents; 8 in 10 say they feel very cared for by their parents and 6 in 10 say they receive a lot of attention from them. Parents also are the people youth with disabilities are most likely to rely on for support.

School staff figure prominently as sources of support for some youth; one-fourth report actively turning to teachers for support, and almost one-fifth rely heavily on guidance counselors. Clerics are an important part of the support system for about one-fourth of youth. About half of youth with disabilities report they feel very cared about by friends, and three-fourths say they can find a friend when they need one and can make friends easily. Friends are an important source of support for 4 in 10 youth with disabilities.

Despite these overall positive findings, a small minority of youth with disabilities report quite negative views of their personal relationships. For example, 3 percent report they feel their parents care about them “very little or not at all,” and more than twice that percentage say they are paid attention to by their families that little.

There are few statistically significant differences in the views regarding relationships with parents, other adults, and friends, expressed by youth with disabilities and youth in the general population. Among the few differences that are evident, youth with disabilities are more likely than youth in the general population to report receiving a lot of attention from their parents, and they are less likely to report that they rely on friends for support to a great degree. Further, youth with disabilities are more likely than those in the general population to have strongly negative views of their personal relationships; although fewer than 1 in 12 report these feelings, youth with disabilities are more likely to report that they felt both lonely and disliked most or all of the time in the preceding week.

The majority of youth in all disability categories report positive views of their personal relationships, although differences, particularly in the strength of feelings, are apparent between groups. For example, youth with mental retardation are more likely than those in several other categories to report being cared about by parents and other adults “very little” or “not at all.” Similarly, youth with autism are less likely than youth in virtually all other categories to say they can find a friend when they need one or to be confident they can make friends easily.

A few differences in youth with disabilities' perceptions of their personal relationships are apparent for youth whose demographic characteristics differ. For example, there are gender and racial/ethnic differences in sources of support indicating that both females and White youth with disabilities rely on friends more actively than do males and African American youth.