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TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF DEPRESSION FROM PRESCHOOL TO LATE CHILDHOOD

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Mentor: Andy Belden

Early teacher-child relationships can protect against or exacerbate risk factors for a variety of academic and mental health outcomes. While there is evidence that strong teacher-child relationships in adolescence protect against depression, to our knowledge there are no studies that have investigated associations between early teacher-child relationship quality and depression in preschool through late childhood. The current study used prospective data from a longitudinal study of $N = 305$ preschool students recruited with an overrepresentation of depressive symptoms, a non-depressed psychiatric group (ADHD/ODD, Anxiety), as well as healthy typically developing group. Conflict in the teacher-child relationship one year after baseline mediated the relationship between depression severity at baseline and depression severity seven years after baseline. Teacher-child closeness and depression severity one year after baseline were not significant mediators. Given that chronic stress is a major risk factor for depression, these results might be explained by the chronic stress experienced in a conflictual teacher-child relationship. These results have important implications for future research on the development of depression as well as interventions involving early teacher-child relationships.