When people seek emotional support, how do they decide whom to talk to? While network analysis and common sense would suggest that people will go to those they are closest to— their strong ties— recent qualitative and quantitative work suggests otherwise. I examine these new ideas using nationally representative surveys of U.S. adults and online experiments, and find that, in practice, people do not relate to their strong ties as often believed, that avoidance is among the primary aspects of their relation to strong ties, and that experimentally inducing people to approach strong ties differently significantly improves their wellbeing. Results point to alternative strategies for understanding personal networks and for mitigating social isolation.

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