

All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Fall 2018

Greetings, and Happy Fall!



All of us at All Our Families hope everyone had a good summer! As we move through September and October, many families find themselves settling back into the routines that fall bring; school, sports, music lessons and other activities your family enjoys. With Thanksgiving right around the corner, we hope that you are able to take a moment and reflect on the people and things in your life that you appreciate. At All Our Families, we are so grateful the contributions participants make to the study.

Many of you have had the chance to fill in the 8-year questionnaire, thank you for your continued support in this study. For those of you who have not yet received it, watch for an email around your child's 8th birthday; the questionnaire can be completed either online or on hard copy. In addition, those of you who participated in the Phonological Awareness substudy will receive an invitation to be part of the next phase of that study. The ongoing information you have shared with us has been so important from a research perspective; making the All Our Families a unique source of information for research on mothers, families and numerous facets of child development.

We continue to read your feedback and try to respond in our newsletter with the information you are requesting. We have heard that the 8 year questionnaire is time consuming, and requires persistence. This questionnaire contains a long, but important and well established assessment on child behaviour and development. The responses to this behavioural assessment are critical to our researchers and are one of the reasons the AOF data set is so valued. Very few studies have this high quality data on development at this stage, and we very much appreciate your commitment to answering these questions.

In this issue, there is an update on research using the All Our Families data, an expert Q&A on school phobia and bullying, as well as an update on the 8-year questionnaire progress and the beginning phase of the development of a 12-year questionnaire. You will find pictures from our Team Building day; a pot-luck lunch followed by cupcake decorating at Crave Cupcakes! And in recognition of a new school year, our staff and students will share their own school memories. We have also included a short reader survey at the end of the newsletter – we value your feedback! Finally, a reminder that our newsletters are published twice a year, but you can find past newsletters, study updates and other information on our [website](#), or by following us on [Twitter](#) and/or [Facebook](#).

Happy Thanksgiving!

Suzanne Tough

Study Updates

The All Our Families team looks at language and anxiety

We know that up to 20% of children show early delays or deficits in language development. However, past research did not tell us how these early difficulties in communication might affect other areas of emotional development.



Using the information our families provided, we found that poorer communication skills at age 2 are related to greater separation anxiety symptoms in children at age 3, especially in families with a lower income. We know that one of the ways children self-regulate (manage their emotions and behaviour), particularly in situations where they are separating from their parents, is through language. For example, children with early language delays might not be able to share their worries or concerns when parents say "we will be back soon."

Thanks to our All Our Families participants, we better understand how language difficulties affect other areas of children's well-being. Looking ahead, helping families build on their children's language and communication skills might improve adjustment and separation anxiety problems as children begin to go to daycare or preschool.

This information was presented at the ACHRI Summer Student Research day by Chloe Devereaux, a summer student and PURE (Program for Undergraduate Research Experiences) award recipient working with Dr. Sheri Madigan.

The All Our Families team looks at childhood adversity, stress, and social support in pregnancy

Our research group was interested understanding how women differ in levels of stress and social support during pregnancy, as well as what led to these differences. Using information that our families provided, we found that women can be categorized into three groups based on their patterns of stress and social support in pregnancy:



Group 1: women with low stress and lots of support (most of you);

Group 2: women with moderate stress and moderate support (some of you, and our paper provides resources to help);

Group 3: women with high stress and low support (a very few, and our paper suggests more resources to help).

When we compared the characteristics of the groups, we found that women with high levels of stress and low support were more likely to have experienced abuse when they were children. On the other hand, women with moderate stress and moderate support were more likely to have had challenging family experiences as children, including divorce or an ill parent.

This research shows that it is important for health care providers to ask mothers about how they are feeling, especially about their stress and supports, remind them about the benefit of reaching out, and help them find ways to obtain this support.

This information was published in an academic journal called [Clinical Psychological Science](#). Dr. Nicole Racine, a post-doctoral fellow with the team and the lead author of the study, presented this work to researchers and clinicians at the World Association for Infant Mental Health Conference in Rome, Italy this past June. Dr. Tough presented this work at a leading conference on maternal mental health in Bangalore, India, this past September. We are sharing our research findings with researchers, clinicians, and policy makers around the world so that we can help improve women's mental health in pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Eight is Great, indeed!

We are at our halfway mark with our latest questionnaire, Eight is Great! Thank you to all our participants who have completed and returned them. If some of our participants are curious why they haven't received their copy yet, keep an eye out in your email inbox for your link around your child's 8th birthday. To date, the study has sent out over 1,500 surveys to our moms and over 60% have filled them in and returned them. We are aware this questionnaire contains a long set of questions on child behaviour and development, but it is important and well established. The responses to this questionnaire are critical to our researchers and are one of the reasons the AOF data set is so valued, and we appreciate you taking the time to complete it. And remember, there is always the option of filling out the survey in hardcopy, just send us a quick email and we will be in touch!



12 Year Development



The All Our Families study is working on the next phase of the study! As it takes approximately 2 years to develop a questionnaire, we are in the initial phase of development of the 12 year questionnaire. The first AOF child turns 12 in August 2020. Early steps include review of existing questions, researching topics relevant to the age group, looking for appropriate and valid questions (scales), and developing new content. And most importantly, looking at ways to keep it as short as possible! Please go to the brief reader survey at the end of the newsletter to give us feedback about a questionnaire your child can answer him/herself.

Staff News

We are happy to announce that Nikki Stephenson, our Research Program Manager, returned in August from her maternity leave following the birth of her second child. Nikki will be splitting her time between the All Our Families study and beginning her PhD in Community Health Sciences, specializing in Epidemiology. She will be looking at the trajectory of child development of children born preterm to 5 years of age and identify what factors and characteristics influence their learning and behaviour. This research is important in understanding the long-term outcomes of premature birth and the role and magnitude of certain factors on child development. This will help in the development of interventions to ensure each child reaches their potential.



We are pleased to welcome the newest trainee to the team – say hello to Anna MacKinnon. Anna MacKinnon is a new Postdoctoral Fellow in Community Health Sciences and the Department of Psychology. She is a clinical child psychologist and her research background is in perinatal mental health and child development. She studied how oxytocin (the “love hormone”) helps prepare for motherhood by increasing awareness of social cues, and in turn how parenting behaviour promotes children’s perspective-taking skills. With our team, Anna will be looking at how neighbourhood factors influence mental health outcomes for children and their families. Look for Anna’s contributions to our [Ask an Expert](#) section of the newsletter.



Science in the Cinema "Tully" - Free Event



Dr. Nicole Letourneau, PhD will be speaking at the October 17, 2018 Science in the Cinema event. Dr. Letourneau is a professor at the University of Calgary, an author and researcher of postpartum depression.

This is a free event at the Plaza Cinema, 1133 Kensington Road NW from 6:00 to 9:00 pm. Attendees will watch the film “Tully” starring Charlize Theron, and a discussion on the science behind postpartum depression will follow with an interactive question and answer period. Admission is free and all attendees will receive a free bag of popcorn. Movie is rated R and warning of strong language, nudity and some sexuality.

Research to Real Life: Alberta Birth Common Data (ABCD)

Please see [this link](#) to the latest ABCD Stewardship Report. The ABCD is collaboration between AOF and another cohort, APrON (Alberta Pregnancy Outcomes and Nutrition) study on developing common follow up questions. This agreement enables investigators to potentially access responses of 5,000 families to the same question to further investigate topics around child and maternal health.

Research to Real Life: Anna MacKinnon, Ph.D. and Nicole Racine, Ph.D. Q&A

We have received many questions and comments from families over the years on child development tips and advice. In this newsletter, we have asked Drs. Anna MacKinnon and Nicole Racine to address a couple of common concerns. Anna is a clinical psychologist with a focus on perinatal mental health and child development, and Nicole is a clinical psychologist with a focus on children's mental health and parent-child relationships.

Q: "My child is having difficulty transitioning back to school and seems reluctant to go to school each day. How can I help?"

The first few weeks of transitioning can be both an exciting and challenging time for families. After being away from school all summer, different routines, and vacations, some children find it difficult to transition back. Although being more hesitant or reluctant to go to school can be a **normal** part of adjusting to the back to the school routine, this may be a sign of larger emotional problems that could be worth discussing with a health care professional if it occurs every day, or persists over a long period of time (e.g., every day for several months),

The best way to deal with worries about school is to face them, plan ahead, and discuss them.

Facing worries or fears is the best way to cope with them. Even though your child may be reluctant to go to school, it is very important that they attend. Avoiding school only keeps the fears and worries going. When children don't attend school they miss the opportunity to learn, engage with their peers, and practice their social skills. Going to school is a positive thing!



Worries and reluctance are lowest when children are getting enough **sleep**, **eating well**, and **engaging in physical activity**. By helping to keep the basic parts of your child's life in check, this can help improve their general sense of well-being.

Listening to your child talk about their concerns can help to put their mind at ease. Is there something particular they are worried about? What are they anticipating might happen? A good time to listen to these concerns can be at bath time, during dinner, or before bed. Children feel good when they have an empathic listener.

Helping your child **plan or problem solve** about their worry is an important way for them to develop their confidence in facing fears. Help your child think about how they would cope with or manage their worry. For example, coming up with strategies they could use if their best friend was not in their class. This is an opportunity to coach your child on how they would deal with a real or imagined situation.

Emphasizing the good things about back to school like the opportunity to see friends, learn new things, or engage in a special activity that the child enjoys can be particularly helpful.

Remaining calm and monitoring your own worry can also be an important part of supporting your child. Children follow their parents' lead so modelling calm and positive behaviour about school is key.

Additional strategies that may be helpful for children who are worried about school include:

Keeping things predictable with before and after school **routines** such as how they get to school, who brings them to school, and having a snack or reading after school can help them know what to anticipate and reduce worries.

Coaching your child to take a few deep breaths in through their nose and out through their mouth when they are feeling worried or stressed.

Maintain **communication** with your child's teacher and ask how your child seems to be coping or doing while they are at school. If your child is having persistent difficulties this would be a good time to talk to a health care professional.

Setting aside **special time** each day (i.e. 15-20 minutes) to do an one-on-one activity that the child chooses like walking the dog, playing a game, or reading can be something the child consistently looks forward to and helps reduce worry and increase well-being.

Anxiety BC provides evidence-based information and resources for parents on helping children cope with worries related to school.

Q: I'm concerned my child might not be interacting appropriately with others and at time may engage in bullying behaviour. What should I do?

Bullying is a relationship problem where children learn to use power and aggression to get what they want and need from others. Although engaging in teasing, having difficulties sharing, or arguing over what is fair, can be a **normal** part of developing social skills, it is important for parents to foster positive environments and promote their child's ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships with others. The ability to engage in healthy relationships are tools your child will use throughout their lifetime!

Bullying can take different forms including physical (e.g., hitting or kicking), verbal (e.g., name calling, mocking, or teasing), or social (e.g., intentionally excluding someone, withdrawing friendship, or damaging friendships). All forms of bullying can be hurtful to others.

Addressing bullying behaviour directly is important before it becomes a more established problem. Parents and teachers play a critical role in identifying and managing bullying behaviour. It is important to stop and address the issue when it occurs.

Set limits on behaviours that are not appropriate. I.e., "It's not okay to hit your friend".

Be **consistent** in identifying the bullying and establishing the consequence. I.e., "You need to say sorry for hurting your friend's feelings".

Be **positive and praise** respectful behaviour towards others. I.e., "It's great that you used your words to express how you were feeling to your friend".

Role model healthy and appropriate relationships with other adults.

When children learn to express and identify their emotions, they can more easily communicate these with others. Children who engage in bullying have often been bullied themselves. Teaching your child to express how they are feeling towards others and to ask an adult for help when needed in a social situation can help them to build good social skills and healthy relationships.

For more information and resources on relationship difficulties in children consult Canada's leading authority for bullying prevention ([PREVNet](#)).



Blast from the Past: School Memories



What do you think your child will remember about this time in their life? What are your memories of your 8-year old school self? We asked our team to reflect on their early school days and share a story. Dr. Suzanne Tough leads the way with her wonderful story about overcoming obstacles. Check out these stories and pictures!

My Mom had a belief that all children in Canada should learn to swim and skate - recreation for all seasons and to ensure you could participate in activities with your friends - at school, birthday parties and on holidays. All three of her children were enrolled in swimming lessons by the time I was 6. She would haul us to a neighbourhood backyard outdoor pool where we were instructed along with other children on how to put your face in the water, blow bubbles, jump into the pool, and float on our front and back. Most of the children accomplished this with little angst, and sometimes with laughter. Not me, I was terrified. I perhaps accomplished the kicking my feet while holding to the side of the pool, and blowing bubbles. I could not float on my back. I could not jump into the water. I failed.

Not deterred, the instructor offered lessons again - and I went. I failed.

Not deterred, the instructor offered my Mother more lessons for me, and for free. I failed.

Now 8 years old and in grade 3, and after numerous lessons and much embarrassment, I was still a non-swimmer. That year we moved to Ottawa and I started grade 4, and was enrolled again in swimming lessons. This time I was big enough to take the city bus to the local YMCA and join the 5 year olds in the learn-to-swim group. This was both embarrassing and terrifying. I remember taking the bus during the sleeting snow days in Ottawa, new to the city, terrified of swimming and friendless in our new neighbourhood. My mother was understanding yet firm when I cried and complained that I just could not learn this. She calmly reassured me that now, more than ever, I would want to know how to swim given the plentitude of pools, lakes and cabins in the Ottawa area.

And indeed, one gray day after my 9th birthday, bobbing in the pool trying to get on my back - it worked, I floated. And... inspired by this, I found the courage to jump off the diving board. I was elated and relieved. I passed!

From that point on swimming came more easily and I achieved my instructors and life guard certificates, enabling satisfying part time work through my teen years. To this day, I have found recreation and fitness in swimming. I reflect with gratitude on my Mother's calm insistence, for she would not let me give up, and she did not give in to my tears and tantrums. As a parent and now a grandparent, I appreciate knowing that sometimes we do the best for our children when they like us the least.

Thanks for the opportunity of reflection that sharing this picture brought.

 <p>DONNA SLATER</p> <p>My school memories are enjoying the 'free' bottle of milk each day at morning break, playtime, and school dinners, especially when treacle sponge and custard was for pudding!</p>	 <p>MATTHEW RUSSELL</p> <p>One good memory was trying new food in school. One day my neighbor brought beef jerky to class and asked me to try her "bat wing." I tried it, loved it, and eventually learned it was beef jerky—it really did look like a bat wing should though. Mmmm, tasty bat wing...</p>	 <p>ERIN HETHERINGTON</p> <p>I had a crush on a boy who had the same name as my brother, which sometimes led to some confusing conversations.</p>
<p>MARY CANNING</p> <p>I forgot about picture day and came to school wearing a very pale yellow dress. It was a catastrophe of Grade 4 proportions. I sobbed and sobbed because we were told to "wear something bright for picture day" and I thought it was as serious as breaking the law. I was afraid that I was going to get in trouble with the photographer (who actually didn't care).</p>	 <p>NIKKI STEPHENSON</p> <p>In Gr 2, I was selected as Student of the Week so I was supposed to have my picture in the local paper holding the SPCA animal of the week. The night before the paper photoshoot I was introduced to the concepts of Newton's 3rd Law and how it relates to boomerangs. The force of gravity, lift, and torque all applied unevenly to the wings, resulted in the boomerang returning to the thrower at a considerable force! The outcome of this experiment was a trip to the ER for stitches on the forehead just in time for my spot in the local limelight. My parents were so proud of their budding scientist, that's how I tell the story anyway.</p>	 <p>ANNA MACKINNON</p> <p>In grade 3 I lost my two front teeth, my class performed a dance routine to "Singing in the Rain", and we cooked a big breakfast for our parents in our classroom.</p>
 <p>NICOLE RACINE</p> <p>My Dad got us dressed for the first day of school and he put our dresses on backwards (buttons at the front). We all had no idea until my mom told us that night.</p>	 <p>MUCI WU</p> <p>In music class, we had to bring a CD from home to share. I brought in whatever I could find - which was an old Trisha Yearwood CD. I had forgotten part of the project was talking about why we liked the CD and what songs we liked best. I had no idea so I made up how great I thought she was, not having listened to a single thing of hers!</p>	 <p>BEVERLY COLLISON</p> <p>Having moved to a new province, I was excited and nervous on my first day of gr 3. My mom offered reassurance when I asked how I would know who my new friends would be, suggesting that I would "just know." After we found our desks, I eagerly scanned the room and saw a girl with the most beautiful red shoes. I knew that we must be friends! I asked her if she wanted to share recess snack and her friendly reply confirmed our friendship. We were best friends all through elementary school.</p>

For the Love of Baking: AOF Goes to Crave

In the summer, our team spent a fun afternoon learning to decorate cupcakes at Crave as our semi-annual team retreat. Each of us mixed our own custom coloured icing, learned the techniques to swirl the icing onto our cupcakes, and had the option to load sprinkles and Smarties on top. It's safe to say we all went home with a sugar-high. Thanks for having us, Crave!

Short Reader Survey

We are working on a separate, age appropriate Child Questionnaire for when your child turns 12. As children get older, we know they start to form their own opinions, and we are considering asking your child some questions they would fill in themselves. We will also prepare a parent questionnaire, which will include questions about your child that you will answer.

From the Spring 2018 Newsletter, this is what you told us you'd like to see in the AOF newsletters:

