

All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Spring 2018

Happy Mother's Day!

The All Our Families study turns 10 years this May, an exciting milestone! We have created a [timeline in this newsletter](#) that charts our journey.

I want to take a moment to wish all of you a Happy Mother's Day and thank you again for your continued support in this study. Over 85% of our participants have reflected that they are happy, satisfied with life, and see it as worthwhile despite the challenges and concerns of parenting and maintaining relationships. This sense of satisfaction is nice to remember on Mother's Day.

The information provided to us is so important, as the All Our Families Study has become widely known in the community as a source of information on child development and family well-being.



We have many updates for you! We have all of our 5-year old data compiled and ready for use, and we have included some [quick findings](#) in this newsletter.

Some of our families have received the *Eight is Great* questionnaire, available both online and in hard copy, and we extend our thanks to those who have returned it. We have already sent over 1,000 questionnaires, and are looking forward to responses about middle childhood. We are reminding families to watch for it in their email inbox around their child's 8th birthday. Those who participated in the Phonological Awareness study when their child was 5 will soon be receiving an invitation in their email to the next phase of that sub-study.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the candid feedback and comments on the 5-year questionnaire. As families grow, and grow up, we hear your thoughts and concerns about the busyness and stress that is combined with the joy of raising a family. We have been told about challenges related to "time crunch", little time for self, marital conflict, sibling rivalry, and school and childcare difficulties. We will share general topics of interest from families with experts, beginning with this issue where [Dr. Sheri Madigan will address temper tantrums and supporting siblings of children with complex needs](#). We will also include links to [trusted resources](#) that may be of value. We appreciate the openness we are receiving from our families and allowing the study to grow with them.

I also would like to address the survey length. Our families' comments about the time required to complete them have been heard. In developing the survey, each question is evaluated for its importance to understanding current issues related to child development and family health, however, we are looking at other strategies to reduce the burden. In this newsletter, you will have a chance to let us know if other approaches may meet your needs better. Length will be an important consideration. I want to repeat how much we value our participants' involvement with All Our Families.

All the best to you for Mother's Day!

Cheers,

Suzanne Tough

Study Updates

The All Our Families team looks at social support and mental health



Using the information our families provided, we found that women with stronger social supports (e.g. family, friends) were less likely to experience depression or anxiety in the first year after the birth of their baby. Women who had challenges in the past with poor mental health were especially likely to benefit from social support. From these answers, we were able to calculate that if extra support was provided to seven women who had previous mental health challenges, one case of postpartum depression and one case of postpartum anxiety would be prevented. This information was presented at a

conference attended by community organizations, pediatricians, and researchers from across Canada who are interested in pregnancy health. The researcher who did the analysis, Erin Hetherington, won an award for Best Oral Presentation.

So if you know anyone who is pregnant, consider reaching out and listening to their concerns, you will be helping their mental health. Your support makes a real difference!

The title of the talk was “Social Support and Mental Health at 4 months and 1 year postpartum: Results from the All Our Families Study” and the conference was the Canadian National Perinatal Research Meeting in Banff, AB.

The All Our Families team looks at communication and language in children

As many as one in five of children are considered “late talkers” and slow to develop language and communication skills. Many of these children catch up before school age, but others will continue to have problems with language, leading to later difficulties in school. Many pediatricians take a “wait and see” approach, as there is no good way to tell who will catch up versus who will continue to struggle with language.



We used the *Ages and Stages* communication scale at ages 1, 2, and 3 years to examine how children differed in their language growth over time. This is what we found:

- ◆ Most children (81%) showed age-appropriate language skills from one to three years.
- ◆ 19% showed some delays in language and we found these children could be classified into one of three groups:
 - ◆ **Group 1:** About 13% of children failed to meet most communication milestones at age 1 but had caught up by age 3.
 - ◆ **Group 2:** About 1.5% of children failed to meet most communication milestones at age 1 and continued to show very low language skills at ages 2 and 3 years (these children were also 4 times more likely to have had a birth defect).
 - ◆ **Group 3:** Close to 5% of children met about half of the expected language milestones at ages 1, 2 and 3.

Boys, preterm babies, and those with a family history of language delays were more likely to be in one of the delayed language groups. Children who caught up were more likely to come from families with higher incomes and maternal education than those who continued to struggle.

Thanks to our families, we found the *Ages and Stages* was helpful to identify children who would catch up by age 3, and those who might continue to have difficulty. Filling out this questionnaire at both 1 and 2 years old could improve early detection of children who are most at risk for ongoing language problems.

Wrap up of 5 year, look forward to the 8 year!

We have wrapped up data collection and data entry for the 5 year survey. Thank you to our families who have taken the time to complete the questionnaire. With their help, we received nearly 2,000 surveys back and our team is ready to tackle the data and answer some important research questions! We have added some quick findings from the 5 year survey to this newsletter.

You have heard us talk about our 8-year study *Eight is Great* in previous newsletters, it has been one year since our launch and we are so excited to see the surveys being completed! We have moved to an online system of collecting the surveys, which allows for participants to stop and take breaks as needed and return to it when they have time again. Parents should be seeing an email from us around their child's 8th birthday to complete their next questionnaire. There is always still the option of filling out the survey in hard copy if preferable, just send us a quick email and we will be in touch!



Staff News



Matthew Russell is a new Postdoctoral Fellow with the Owerko Centre and the School of Public Policy. Matt's research background is in social and cultural psychology, where he studied how our upbringing (e.g. growing up in Canada or in Japan) affects how we think. Matt will be working on research on how to better support families with children with disabilities.

Jessica-Lynn Walsh is a new Master's Student working with the study. She recently graduated from Trinity College Medical School in Ireland, and is currently enrolled in a thesis-based Medical Sciences Master's working with Dr. Tough. The focus of the work she is doing is to identify how communities can best support families – what is currently happening, and how these supports can be further promoted.

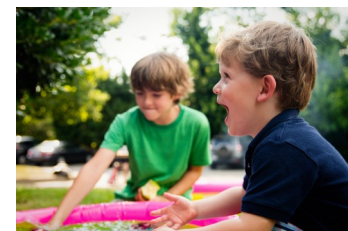


Hello, I am David Wudel and I have the honour of working at the Child Development Centre where I work at the front desk. I will be connecting with our participants to see how they are doing with the 8 year survey. When I call, they might notice that my voice is different – but don't worry – I am a real person, so please don't hang up! I have Cerebral Palsy and it influences my voice, but not my ability to enjoy and engage in meaningful conversation. I look forward to chatting with our families soon and answering any questions they may have.

Research to Real Life: The Brain

Do you know how our brains develop over time? Do you know that your child's early experiences are the building blocks for good health throughout their life?

Created in 2007, the [Alberta Family Wellness Initiative](#) has provided support and education to many local projects and agencies that focus on family and community health, education, and early interventions. Their website has some great, short, friendly videos that explain the science behind how everyday experiences help shape you and your child's brain and behaviour.



[How Brains are Built](#) demonstrates how early childhood experiences become the building blocks for children's brain health and development. [Air Traffic Control](#) explains how children develop executive functioning, a skill involved with tasks such as managing time, paying attention and remembering important details.

Research to Real Life: Dr. Sheri Madigan Q&A

We received many questions and comments in our surveys from families over the years on parenting tips and advice, so we are introducing a new section in our newsletter to respond.

We have asked [Dr. Sheri Madigan](#) and one of her students, Nina Anderson, to shed light on these topics. Sheri is a researcher on the AOF team and a Canada Research Chair in Determinants of Child Development in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary. Her main research areas are parenting, maternal health, and child development.

Q: My five year old still has temper tantrums. Is it normal, at this age? How best to deal with a temper tantrum?

Temper tantrums are quite common during the preschool years. When tantrums continue past 4 years of age, it is possible that they may be a cause for concern. The best course of action in identifying whether tantrums are problematic is to make note of the specific behavioural outbursts.



Consider **how often**, and for **how long**, the tantrums occur. While it is normal for preschoolers to have occasional outbursts, daily temper tantrums, or prolonged tantrums (i.e., longer than 5 minutes), may be a sign of a larger problem.

Next, it is important to consider the **context** in which the tantrums occur. Tantrums that occur outside of the home, like at school or daycare, that seem to be out of the blue may be of concern.

Finally, consider the specific **features** of the temper tantrum. Being aggressive during a tantrum, such as kicking a sibling or being violent towards an animal, may signal a problem. Having difficulty recovering from a tantrum, where children show continued irritability and anger, may signal a problem.

The signs mentioned above may indicate a behavioural or an emotional problem, however, they must be considered in light of the age and developmental level of the child. Other situational factors should also be considered. Tantrums are more likely to occur, for example, when there are major changes to a child's life such as moves, parental conflicts, or a new sibling. This may result in unexpected behaviour. If you are concerned about your child's behaviour, it is important to consult a health care professional.

The best way to deal with tantrums is to prevent them in the first place. Therefore, it is helpful to identify potential tantrum triggers, and create the plan of action to address the trigger.



Changing activities can often result in tantrums. The best way to manage this trigger is to maintain daily routines when possible, which helps the child know what to expect. Providing reminders of scheduled activities can be helpful, such as giving the child a reminder that bedtime is soon. Of course, there will be times when disruptions to routines occur. In these instances, it can be helpful to have snacks available, in case your child becomes tired or hungry.

Frustration often leads temper outbursts. While it is not possible to completely eliminate frustrating events from a child's life, parents can take certain precautions. For example, child-proofing off-limits areas and keeping non-child friendly items away from vision and reach can be helpful.

Children often have tantrums to **avoid certain activities**. As mentioned previously, maintaining routines and providing clear expectations is a good first step in minimizing this trigger. Next, offering choices and listening to a child's requests can help prevent tantrums by providing children with a feeling of control.

Tantrums can result when a child is simply **seeking attention**. In this case, providing children with regular positive attention, such as spending time with the child, praising the child, letting them take the lead during play (while the parent provides a running commentary "wow you stacked the blue block on top of the red block, wonderful!") and rewarding the child for positive behaviour, can be very helpful.

In cases when a tantrum occurs, it is important to **remain calm** and to not escalate the situation. Since the child is seeking attention, **ignoring the behaviour** can be helpful. However, if the child becomes aggressive or violent the parent should hold them (as gently as possible) until they calm down. Giving **time-outs** for all tantrums can be effective in reducing future outbursts. Finally, **do not reinforce** the child's behaviour by giving in to their request.

For additional learning resources, we recommend [The Incredible Years](#) by Carolyn Webster Stratton.

Q: What are some of your favourite bedtime stories to read to your children?

Many members on our All Our Families team have children under the age of 10, so we asked them to tell us their child's favourite book, and here are their top choices:



Age 1: *"Old MacDonald Had A Farm"*- Little Scholastic Hand Puppet Board Book and *"Wherever You Are My Love Will Find You"* by Nancy Tillman

Age 2: *"Munch!"* by Matthew Van Fleet and *"Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear"* by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle

Age 3: *"Amos's Sweater"* by Janet Lunn

Age 4: *"Give Me Back My Dad!"* Robert Munsch

Age 5: *"Walter the Farting Dog"* William Kotzwinkle

Age 6: *"The Book With No Pictures"* by B.J. Novak

Age 7: *"Judy and Stink Moody"* book series by Megan McDonald

Age 8: *"Upside Down Magic"* series by Sarah Mlynowski, Lauren Myracle and Emily Jenkins

Age 9: *"Danny, the Champion of the World"* by Roald Dahl

Q: When one child in the family has complex medical or psychological needs, how can a parent continue to provide support and attention to the other children in the household?



When one child has special needs, it is certain that they will require additional attention from parents. The first step to take in supporting and caring for siblings is to recognize the emotions and behaviours that they may exhibit.

For example, siblings may feel fear, anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, guilt, and/or sadness.

Examples of common behaviours include misbehaving, withdrawing, acting younger, demandingness, physical symptoms, or moodiness.

Being attuned to your child's emotions and behaviours will be helpful in addressing their needs.

Next, parents can take specific steps to help siblings cope:

Ensure that you schedule "alone time" with all children and remind them that they are all equally loved.

Explain the child's special needs to siblings using language they will understand, and acknowledge the sibling's feelings and worries. Being supportive of your child can help reduce fear and uncertainty. It can also be very helpful to have your child speak to a professional, who can help them build coping skills.

Have the child with special needs do as much for himself/herself as possible, and have the same rules for all children, when appropriate. This can reduce feelings of unfairness.

Be open about differential treatment. When one child requires extra attention, it is important to explain this to siblings.

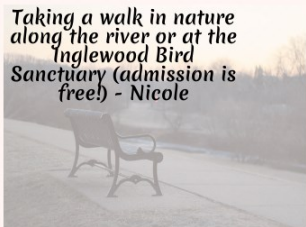
While younger children may have some difficulty understanding this, by the time children reach elementary school they are usually quite aware of differences and are able to understand explanations.

Though this response has acknowledged some of the challenges that parents and siblings may face, it is also important to note that siblings of children with special needs are exposed to many positive, character-building situations. Siblings are faced with unique situations to learn sensitivity, tolerance, compassion, and patience, which will benefit them greatly in other situations.

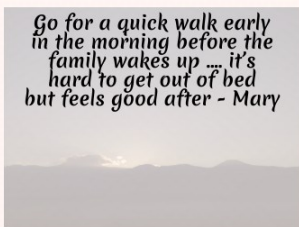
Mother's Day: how our team treats ourselves

With Mother's Day around the corner, we asked our team to tell us some of their favourite ways in taking some time to relax, recenter, and destress, whether it be by themselves or with some company. Some suggestions require only a few minutes of time and some might need a few hours. Here is what they had to say:

Taking a walk in nature along the river or at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary (admission is free!) - Nicole



Go for a quick walk early in the morning before the family wakes up ... it's hard to get out of bed but feels good after - Mary



Spritzing some lavender scented spray or essential oil on my pillow before bed - Nicole



Making a cup of really good tea or treating myself to a special coffee or drink I enjoy - Sheila



Coloring is very calming - they sell "adult" books. You can do with or without your kids - Muci



Take a hot bath with a good book - Sheila



Curl up with a good book to take a break from the daily stressors and schedules for a while. My favourite genre is fantasy and science-fiction for the escapism qualities these types of books have for me - Jessica



When my partner is away, a "girls night in" with one of my friends. We order pizza, have glass of wine, and have dinner with the kids. My girlfriend amuses herself while I put the kids to bed, then we have the rest of the evening to catch up. It's easier, cheaper and more comfortable than organizing a sitter and going out, but it gives us special "girl time" to catch up - Erin




Roam a favourite neighborhood, and browse shops and cafes (Inglewood, Kensington), or hang out at the farmer's market - Sheila



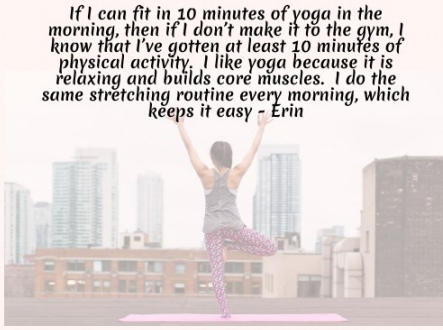
Try a new recipe - Nicole



DIY pedicure - good foot soak and buff, inexpensive nail polish of a fun color, then I can admire my pretty toes - Mary



If I can fit in 10 minutes of yoga in the morning, then if I don't make it to the gym, I know that I've gotten at least 10 minutes of physical activity. I like yoga because it is relaxing and builds core muscles. I do the same stretching routine every morning, which keeps it easy - Erin



Now We are 5: some quick results from the 5-year survey

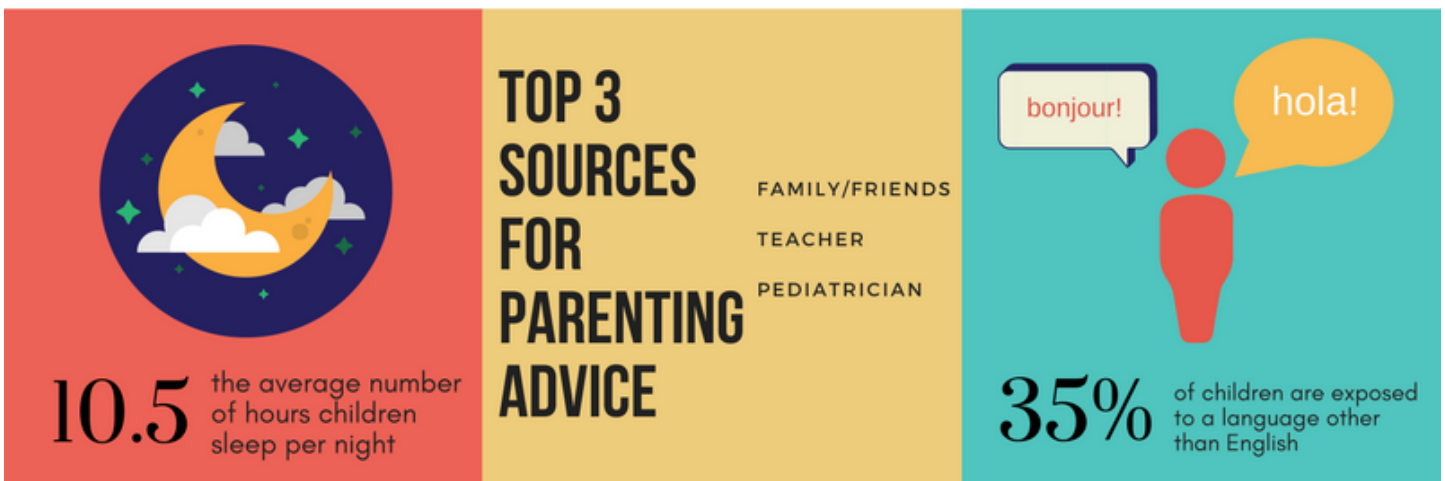
Recently, we have wrapped up data collection for the 5 year follow up, "Now We Are 5", and we are thankful to our participants for continuing to be a part of our study! Here are some quick facts we've discovered in our 5 year data.



FROM OUR SURVEY "NOW WE ARE 5"

5 FACTS AT 5 YEARS

IN THE ALL OUR FAMILIES STUDY



From All Our Babies to *All Our Families*

Participants recruited into the study completed questionnaires <25 weeks gestation, 34-36 weeks gestation, and 4 months postpartum.

2008

First baby born in the study.



2009

First baby turns 1 years old.



2010

First baby turns 2 years old, recruitment is still ongoing.

2011

Last baby born in August, recruitment into the study ends.



Study receives funding to follow up with participants beyond the prenatal period. Follow-up questionnaires sent to participants with 1 year and 2 year old children.

2012

3 year follow up begins.

Youngest baby in the study turns 1. Study wraps up data collection of the 1 year follow up.

2013

Study wraps up data collection of the 2 year follow up and begins data collection for the 5 year follow up.



Calgary is affected by flooding, the study receives funding to study the affects of this event in our cohort.

2014

End of 3 year follow up.

Members of our team travel to Spain to share our research findings.



2015

Members of our team invited to Brazil to share research findings.



2016

Team publishes paper on a new blood test that identifies women at risk of preterm delivery.



'Babies' in our study are all grown! We change our study name from All Our Babies to All Our Families.

2017

We start following up with families whose children turn 8 years old!

Trainee invited to present research in Spain.



TODAY

Our study celebrates turning 10 since we began as All Our Babies.



From All Our Babies to All Our Families: a study in review

This year we celebrate our study's 10 year anniversary, we began as All Our Babies and grew into All Our Families. Let us take a look at our study's major milestones over the past 10 years.