

All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Spring 2019



Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your invaluable contributions to this study. We are currently well over half-way through the 8-year data collection wave, and 63% of those invited have sent their questionnaire back. If you have received your 8-year questionnaire invitation, we look forward to getting it back from you - even if your child is getting close to 9 - we would still value your responses. We can do the best research when as many people as possible participate, it makes our findings more valid and relevant to more families. For those children who are involved in the Phonological Awareness substudy, we are pleased to see the response rate is around 87%. As always, we read and appreciate the feedback you provide in the comments section. Your input helps shape the content of the newsletter, so please continue telling us what you want to hear about.

We have many exciting study updates in this newsletter! Our own Erin Hetherington successfully defended her PhD and will officially graduate in June of this year. Congratulations Dr. Hetherington! Our **Research to Real Life** section profiles a recently published article about screen time and learning difficulties using the All Our Families data, and Dr. Beverly Collisson will speak to the value and importance of continuing to read aloud to your school-age children. In our **Ask the Experts** section, Dr. Rochelle Hentges will address creating stability for children in the face of separation and divorce, and Dr. Sheri Madigan will discuss fairer parenting. At your request, included in this edition is a **list of resources for families** with links to services for health, recreation, learning supports and family activities.

Our work with the development of the 12 year questionnaire is coming along well. For the first time, we are working on a brief questionnaire for your All Our Families child to complete. As we talk to youth about this opportunity, we are learning that they are eager to share their ideas about what is important in their lives, and how we should best ask questions. As your All Our Families child gets older and more independent, we know that they can provide rich information and insight into their own lives. You will be pleased to know that we are working to shorten the questionnaire that you will receive. We will continue to provide updates on both as the work moves along.

This has been a rewarding year for All Our Families and for me as a scientist. I have been recently honoured through the **United Nations SHEinnovates Initiative** recognizing women who have developed successful careers in novel areas. When I completed my PhD I was the first doctoral student to graduate from Public Health Sciences at the University of Alberta in 1996. The most exciting part of this initiative is the emphasis on mentorship and inspiring the next generation of women in science - something I feel privileged to do, and is exciting.

You will see a couple of opportunities to give us some feedback. We are collaborating with the Max Bell Foundation and Burns Memorial Fund to better understand how we can strengthen our neighbourhoods to help children and youth thrive. This survey on **'Natural Supports'** will be used to inform the development of a Policy Framework and further the work of the **Change Collective**. We are also interested including some of your contributions for the fall newsletter and offer an opportunity to be included on a media contact list. 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 following us on **Twitter** and/or **Facebook**.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Tough

Staff News



On March 8th of this year, Dr. Suzanne Tough, Principal Investigator for the All Our Families Study was recognized in New York City by the [United Nations Women Global Innovation Coalition for Change](#). This year on International Women's Day, the UN celebrated 100 women globally whose work promotes the support and empowerment of women. In addition, Dr. Tough was also recognized locally in the launch of the [SHEInnovates Alberta chapter](#), the first global chapter in the world. SHEInnovates, part of UN Women, will work to remove barriers to women and provide tools and resources to promote women's success in leadership and innovation. Please see the [link to read more](#) about this great honour!

Congratulations, Dr. Tough!

This spring marks a tremendous milestone for our very own Erin Hetherington. On March 31st, Erin, PhD candidate, defended her doctoral thesis entitled "**Social Support in a Pregnant and Postnatal Population**". Erin looked at how support from friends and family can impact health outcomes. She found that social support can reduce the impact of stress, and may help reduce the risk of preterm birth. She also looked at how social support relates to mental health, and found that having support from friends and family will reduce the risk of postpartum depression and anxiety. Social support was good for all mothers, but was particularly effective at reducing risk among women who had had previous anxiety or depression.



Finally, Erin found that most women report stable, high levels of support. Women who started with low support but were able to increase their support over time were more likely to be working, and have more chances to interact with a wide variety of people outside the home. Erin was supported by a prestigious Vanier Scholarship for her PhD work which attests to the originality and importance of her work. This work could not have been possible without the contributions of the All Our Families participants.

We are so proud of you, Dr. Hetherington and wish you all the best in your future endeavours!

Study Updates

Summer project: Impact of the recent economic recession on our AOF families



One of our exciting summer projects this year aims to understand the impact of the recent economic recession on Calgary families. We have received many responses on our Eight is Great questionnaire from families sharing with us their experiences related to economic and employment stress and the impact it has had. Through this summer project, we hope to gain a better understanding of the challenges families with young children face and determine what helps them cope. The findings of this project will be shared with the City of Calgary, First 2000 Days Network, and other organizations through our current existing relationships to contribute to improving supports for families experiencing hardships. By our next newsletter in the fall, we hope to share some of our findings with you!

Oops! We made a technical mistake and need your help regarding our Eight is Great questionnaire

It has recently come to our study's attention that we included the wrong age-specific questions for **Section 8 (Your Child's Behaviour & Development)** of our most recent survey follow-up; Eight is Great! *We sincerely apologize for this error* and have since sent out the correct age-specific questions to those of you who have already completed the questionnaire.



For our participants who have yet to receive the Eight is Great questionnaire for your child turning 8 years old, our study has now made the adjustment to this section of the questionnaire so there is nothing to worry about going forward!

We eagerly invite all participants who received an invitation to Section 8 in late March/ early April to complete this as soon as possible so we can accurately gather information on your AOF child. If your child is no longer 8, don't worry. These questions are for children between the ages of 8 to 11 years old and we adjust for your child's age when we use the data. If you have any questions about this or did not receive an invitation (but should have), please email us at allourfamilies@ucalgary.ca.

Project Participation Opportunity: Alberta Family Perceptions of Neighbourhood Natural Supports

REQUEST

Natural supports are mutual relationships that include close connections, such as family and friends, and broader connections, such as neighbours and coaches. **This project is collecting information on families' experiences and views of 1)** the connectedness of their home neighbourhood; **2)** current opportunities available within their neighbourhood that can enable the creation of natural supports; and **3)** barriers and enablers to participation in these opportunities.

Caregivers of families with children currently living in the same household are invited to participate in a survey. **This survey** is in English, and has 12 questions that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Those who complete the survey will be able to enter into a draw to win one of several gift cards offered.

BACKGROUND

Natural supports can lessen the effects of stress and difficult experiences by providing opportunities for learning, as well as receiving encouragement and advice. To increase natural support opportunities within Albertan neighbourhoods, we need to know what is happening within neighbourhoods, and what families would like to see developed.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING

The findings of this project will help inform the use of natural supports in neighbourhoods to enable the creation of more supportive environments for children, youth and families in Alberta.

NEXT STEPS

If you would like to participate and you have children currently in your care, please visit the link to complete this survey. If you would like additional information or have any questions, please email Jessica-Lynn Walsh at jlwalsh@ucalgary.ca, or you may also call if preferred at 403-441-8464.

This project is being conducted by a Master's and Policy Fellowship student, Jessica-Lynn Walsh, and an undergraduate student, Jordan Overwater, at the University of Calgary on behalf of Policy Fellows Nancy Reynolds and Suzanne Tough, PhD. The work is supported by the Max Bell Foundation and the Burns Memorial Fund. This project has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB 19-0295).

What is Mother's Day?



Some of the earliest versions of celebrating mothers occurred in ancient Rome and Greece, with festivals being held to honour mother goddesses. This evolved throughout Europe into "Mothering Sunday," a Christian festival held on the fourth Sunday in Lent. Originally intended for worshippers to attend the church near their home (mother church), this custom grew into a day when children would provide mothers with gifts of appreciation. This waned in popularity until the early 1900s, at which time Mother's Day as we now know it emerged in the U.S. To honour her own late mother, a woman named Anna Jarvis had a vision of a day set aside to celebrate mothers and their families. She campaigned hard for this day to achieve status, and as a result, in 1914 the second Sunday of May was officially recognized as "Mother's Day." A simple white carnation was

often given as a token or badge. In an ironic twist, once the floral and greeting card industry heavily commercialized the day, Anna disowned her own creation, feeling the meaning of the event was lost.

Worldwide, and through time, Mother's Day dates and traditions vary, but the idea is the same: celebrate mothers.

To some, it is a day to receive a school-made card and awkward clay bowl, possibly breakfast in bed or chocolates and flowers, and then perhaps a telephone call to your own mother later in the day. For others, it may be time spent with your own family, or with several generations of children, mothers and mothers in law together in celebration. As the face of the modern family has evolved, some of us have more than one 'mother'.

Alternatively, Mother's Day may be difficult or painful, depending on past or present relationships. Growing up with a mother who may have suffered from mental illness, or struggled with alcohol and/or substance abuse can strain or alienate a relationship. Estrangement can also result from conflict, separation or divorce, or losing a mother to illness or accident. In those situations, Mother's Day can trigger sadness, ambivalence, or even anger. For families struggling with infertility, it can be a harsh reminder of wishes unfulfilled. It is important to recognize and acknowledge those feelings and emotions as legitimate.

In the end, most of us have experienced the loving kindness associated with the 'maternal' nature of many women and caring adults. In reality, mothers and mother figures come in all shapes and sizes. A "mother" can be a mother-in-law, step-mother, an aunt or big sister, family friend, a kind neighbour or co-worker. In honour of Mother's Day, we can celebrate the women in our lives who matter to us!

Purpose of Longitudinal Studies

Did you know that the All Our Families study is one of the largest longitudinal cohort studies in Canada? While there are other large cohort studies, the AOF is unique in recruiting women during pregnancy, its diversity of population and large range of outcomes.

"Cohort" refers to a group of people who together, share similar traits. "Longitudinal study" indicates the information is gathered over a long period of time. The shared trait of the All Our Families participants is that all participants were expecting a baby when recruited into the study, and data is collected over time, or longitudinally. The data has provided fantastic, rich information that has allowed researchers, nationally and internationally, to look at trends in mothers and developing children, family strengths and gaps in services of a typical Canadian urban city. This in turn has helped researchers guide policy makers toward decisions that best meet the needs of families.

Research to Real Life

Reading to your School-Age Children

Did you know that reading aloud to your children should continue even when they become fluent readers themselves? While some parents may stop when their children reach school-age and are reading on their own, research tells us that reading aloud exposes children and teens to a variety of infrequently used, specific words that they may struggle to understand when reading silently or alone.

In school, words that are introduced to students are classified according to three tiers as they increase in complexity. Some examples of these include:

Tier 1 (basic, commonly used): attention, happy, curious

Tier 2 (mature, frequently used): itemize, misfortune, abolish

Tier 3 (low frequency of use): lava, conflict, legislature

Words in all of these tiers are important for ongoing vocabulary development and reading comprehension. When parents read out-loud to their children and teens, they provide opportunities to work through new vocabulary, strengthen pronunciation, and support a greater understanding of new words.

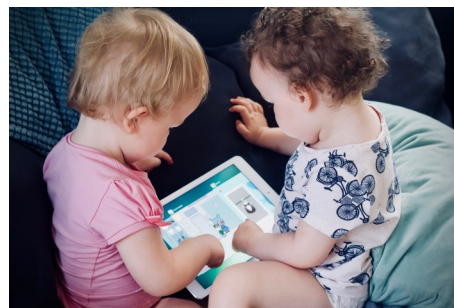
Youth and teens tell us that they enjoy and value reading aloud! Not only does family read-aloud provide opportunities to explore sensitive content in a safe and supportive environment, it serves as an avenue for family bonding and conversation.

Looking for read-aloud stories for all ages? Check out *The read-aloud handbook* (5th edition) found at the Calgary Public Library. This book suggests classic stories that families can read together and promote a shared love of reading

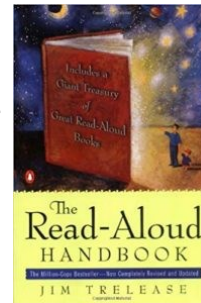
Beverly Collisson, PhD, R.SLP, CCC-SLP, is a Clinician Scientist in the Department of Pediatrics, Cumming School of Medicine and Owerko Centre, Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute. Dr. Collisson's research is centered on atypical language development.

Link Between Children's Screen Time and Learning Delay

Using data from the All Our Families study, [Dr. Sheri Madigan](#) was the lead author on a paper recently published in JAMA focusing on the link between children's screen time and learning delays. In the article, Dr. Madigan, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary, discusses how preschool age children's exposure to screens (televisions, gaming systems, and internet connected devices) impacts school readiness at age 5. She also outlines strategies families can use to enjoy screen time in a healthy manner.



You can find a summary of the article in [this link](#), as well as a link directly to the [article in JAMA](#).



Ask the Experts: Sheri Madigan, Ph.D. and Rochelle Hentges, Ph.D.

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. Sheri Madigan and Rochelle Hentges to address a couple of common concerns that have been voiced in our surveys.

Q: "I'm concerned about playing favourites with my children. What are some ways I can avoid this parenting behaviour?"

Do you worry about playing favourites? Many parents treat each of their children differently. In their latest article published in [The Conversation](#) (click for full article), Drs. Sheri Madigan and Jennifer Jenkins discuss the impact of favouritism on children's health and relationships, and some of the driving factors that influence sibling favouritism, such as stress. In the linked article, they include five tips for fairer parenting, such as carving out one-on-one time with each child and focusing on each child's individual strengths rather than comparing children.



Be aware. The first step is to be aware that it happens, and to seek out help or support from partners, family members, friends or health professionals — to try to understand why it happens. As a reminder, playing favourites is more likely to occur when your stress levels are high.

Listen. When your child complains or you see fights between siblings in which they mention one getting more than another, try not to discount it. Be receptive to the child's feelings and think about why they might be feeling this way.

Provide an explanation. Sometimes, children do need to be treated differently, like when one child is sick, hurt or has special needs. When this happens, explain it to avoid any misunderstanding.

Avoid comparing children. While it may be a natural tendency to say "why can't you be more like your sister?" this sets up an unfair comparison. Try to focus on what each child does well, without pitting them against one another.

Carve out individual time for each child. As much as possible, try to find 10 minutes each day to spend one-on-one with each child so that each has your full attention. Do any activity that they love to do with you.

Q: I'm in the process of separation from my partner and worried this will impact our children. What are some things I can do to make it less stressful for them?

Divorce can be a tumultuous time for the entire family. Thankfully, there are some things that parents can do to help guide their children through this difficult time. Research has shown that children of divorced parents fare no worse than children with still-married parents as long as divorced parents maintain a good co-parenting relationship that minimizes conflict and emphasizes stability.

The most important aspect of creating stability after divorce is ensuring **emotional stability**. In other words, your children should feel confident that both parents still love them and are available to comfort and support them through this challenging time. A couple going through a divorce will often have feelings of anger, sadness, and betrayal. Try to find appropriate sources of support (e.g., family, friends, a therapist or counselor) that you can share these feelings with that won't damage your children's relationship with the other parent.

Providing sources of **physical stability** can also help children in the transition from married to divorced parents:

If both parents generally attended the child's school, recreational, or sporting events, try to continue with this pattern even after divorce.

Custody arrangements can take many different forms (e.g., every other week, weekdays versus weekends). No matter what custody arrangement is agreed upon, try to be as consistent as possible. This doesn't mean that there can be no flexibility in drop-off time, but try to minimize any changes or last-minute switching of custody days whenever possible. Children can feel powerless during a divorce, but knowing consistently where they will be staying and which parent they will be seeing can lessen these feelings.

Usually after a divorce, at least one parent's residence changes. This can often result in one of the houses feeling less like a "home" to a child than the house he/she grew up in. Try to make both parents' residences feel like "home" by letting the child make some decisions regarding their new room (e.g., paint colours, bed linens). If they have a favourite object or toy, try to make sure it goes with them to both homes (or find a duplicate to keep at both homes).

If possible, try to keep rules and schedules as consistent as possible between parents. If this is not possible (e.g., due to differences in opinions on child rearing), then refrain from making negative comments about the other parent's decisions in front of the child.

For more information or support, [Rainbows](#) is a national non-profit that offers support and services for children going through parental divorce, separation, or death.

Rochelle F. Hentges, Ph.D studies child social and emotional development in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary. She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Rochester, where she studied how marital conflict affects child development. Dr Hentges is undertaking Post Doctoral Fellowship work with the All Our Families team.

Resources for Families

Through the newsletter and comments on questionnaires, we have received requests from families for more resources for families and youth. Below are a number of resources and links on a variety of topics, including community resources, after-school programs, recreation, health and family activities.

[Government of Alberta Parent Link Centres](#)

This website focuses on children ages 0-6 years. Includes resources for parents on topics such as language development, parenting tips, healthy growth, and more.

[InformAlberta](#)

This site is a province-wide on-line directory. It contains general information about local community resources (by postal code), health, social, and government services across the province. Resources include Child and Youth programs, after school programs, homework clubs, mental health services, and many others.

[Calgary Public Library](#)

Under the "School" heading, parents and kids can log in and access online books, animated books, activities, quizzes and supports for learning topics such as math, languages and science for all school ages. Also, library locations, hours, programs and services for families and youth. Many resources require a library card, but library cards are free for children and adults!

[City of Calgary AfterSchool](#)

This website is specifically for listing after-school programs for children and youth that parents can access – includes a search tool to find resources near them. These programs run from September-June and are free or low cost.

[City of Calgary Recreation Facilities](#)

The city's guidebook to services and programs offered through the city, both free and fee-based. This includes arts and art centres, skating rinks, soccer, swimming, and more! For the complete City of Calgary Recreation guide, you can go to [their home link](#) for all services for all ages (programs for adults and youth).

[Alberta Health Services Parents Information Series](#)

A website dedicated to answer frequently asked questions around healthy lifestyle choices and good decision making. Topics on this site include building confidence, active listening, and many more.

[Alberta Health Services Clarity on Cannabis](#)

Information for parents and caregivers about cannabis. This fact sheet focuses on grades 6-12 and cannabis use, and includes helpful links and resources for both parents and youth.

[Alberta Health Services Family & Community Resource Centre](#)

Community links alphabetized listing resources for families on areas such as child care, disability, health care, English as a Second Language (ESL), domestic violence, and many more.

[Family Fun Calgary](#)

This website lists activities and events in the Calgary area. From the home page, you can search the calendar by day, week or month for a variety of family events.

Short Reader Surveys

Our study has been gaining a lot of attention over the past few years and we occasionally receive requests from the media to interview our participants. Due to strict privacy requirements we always decline, but we would love to offer this opportunity to you! Would you be interested to have your name on a registry so we can contact you to participate in media interviews in the future? [If so, please let us know.](#)