

All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Spring 2021

Greetings from the All Our Families Study

Dear Participants,

Welcome to spring! It's hard to believe it has been just over a year since the start of the pandemic, and all the upheaval that has gone with it. Here we are, circling around to the second Mother's Day with limited contact with loved ones and friends. There have also been recent interruptions with classroom closures and vaccine shortages. I can appreciate the balancing act many of you have undertaken trying to juggle family, school, work and recreation. It is also true that many are juggling a financial impact of the pandemic challenging us to reconfigure our time, finances, activities, and expectations. A bit tricky indeed! And yet, you carry on using your imagination and courage creating stories for the future that will be told time and again "remember what we had to do the spring of 2021".



I offer a story from my own experience which I hope brings a smile to your face and reminds you that you are not alone: I have 2 grown daughters with young families, both of whom work. One daughter works in acute care on 12 hour shifts, with a partner who is out of town on work throughout the month. Consequently, they periodically need overnight help. On one of these occasions, at 2 am, I heard the familiar call of a small child 'Grandma, Grandma, I have to pee! I have to pee!' And there I was, a flash back to my years as a parent of young children helping a toddler get to the toilet on time. Which - full disclosure, I did not get right- but next time! Despite the interrupted sleep, this was a tender moment of familiarity and connection. These

experiences are happening to many of us every day as we try and find a way to move forward and it brings into focus that many of you, our All Our Families moms, are going through the same challenges - which are increased when school or day care shuts down. I am deeply grateful for the time and attention you have given us despite all of your many other distractions. You are Super Heroes, indeed!

By now many of you will have completed the second wave of the COVID surveys, and also may have introduced your All Our Families child to the world of longitudinal research studies. We especially appreciate the comments you provide at the end of the surveys. For those of you who may have taken a break from our surveys, please know you are always welcome to pick up again into the study.

In this newsletter, there will be some team updates as the All Our Families staff is growing! In our **Ask an Expert** section, Dr. Brae-Anne McArthur will write about what you can expect with your 'tween's' development. **Our Research to Real Life** section profiles a paper by Dr. Erin Hetherington and Dr. Sarah Edwards using AOF data to discuss vaccine hesitancy. There will also be our regular **study updates**, as well as a fun indoor **gardening craft**, suitable for any age!

Of course, a big shout-out to all of you for Mother's Day.

Suzanne

Study Updates

We are beginning to have a good look at the data you have provided on the first COVID-19 survey. Overall, we are pleased to report that your children are doing well, and are less influenced by these challenges than we may think. Most of your children reported high levels of optimism and happiness, regardless of changes in circumstances at home. The proportion of children who are depressed is less than 10% and fewer than 15% are anxious. Resilience abounds!

A few other findings from the first survey:

- **75%** of youth report an increase in hobbies
- **95%** of mothers report children doing more chores
- **74%** of moms report their child is keeping up with school work



We have sent out the second COVID-19 survey, and thank you to all that have completed it! Here are a few stats:

- **55%** of moms completed the 2nd maternal survey
- **49%** of moms consented their child to participate in the second youth survey.
- Of the 49% consented youths, **88%** of youth completed the second survey.
- There are approx. **1100 maternal** participants who **completed both** maternal COVID surveys
- There are approx. **700 youth** participants who **completed both** youth COVID surveys

Spring into Action in Calgary!

It's Mother's Day! And if it's Mother's Day, it must be spring! Spring in Calgary means variable weather. The average temperature for Calgary in May is a high of 16 to a low of 4, and we can still expect a couple of days of snow in our spring months. The typical frost-free period for Calgary is usually projected from May 20th to September 20th.

The City of Calgary offers great [gardening tips](#) on picking perennials for Calgary. Annuals can be planted every year and are expected to survive only one season. [Greengate Gardening Centre](#) provides tips on annuals that do well in Calgary.



There are a few seeds you can start outdoors in spring. Beets, carrots, green onions, peas, sweet peas, spinach are a few examples of plants that can be started outside as soon as the ground can be worked, late April or early May. Check out this [planting calendar](#) for more tips!

Gardening not your passion? The City of Calgary has information on parks and pathways for walking and biking. [This webpage](#) provides maps, apps and information on pathway closures to help you get out and active in our city.

Following its success last year, the City of Calgary has also announced some weekend road closures to allow bikes and pedestrians 'social distanced' space to enjoy. One lane throughout a section of Memorial Drive NW (from 9th to Centre Street, as well as the lower deck of the bridge), is closed to vehicles on weekends only.

If you're interested in getting out of the city, Banff's Bow Valley parkway will once again be closed to public vehicles all summer. This closure will be from the east end of the Bow Valley Parkway where it meets Highway 1, to the junction with Highway 93 south.

Want to be outside, but don't have a bike? The City of Calgary lists some [family friendly parks](#) throughout the city. You can also check out other Calgary area activities at [Family Fun Canada](#).

Research to Real Life

Just like you, we are getting tired of COVID-19 - concerns about our loved ones, the physical restrictions, and not being able to hug our friends. Thankfully, there have been COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved in Canada and vaccination roll outs have begun.

Experts are still working on making a vaccine that is safe for kids. Once a vaccine is approved for younger children, it will be important for experts and our government to know how to best communicate with the public about the vaccines.

For up to date information for Albertans on Covid-19, vaccines and roll outs, you can go to the [Alberta Health Services website](#)



From May to June 2020, Dr. Erin Hetherington and Dr. Sarah Edwards asked All Our Families moms about what their thoughts were about vaccines for their children. Of over one thousand moms, approximately 60% reported that they intended to give their 9–12-year-old child the COVID-19 vaccine, 9% would not, and 31% were unsure if they would allow their child to receive a vaccine. Some things that moms told us were important was to understand the side effects and long-term safety.

[Click to read full article](#)

Staff News - Get to know our new AOF team members!

AOF welcomes Tona Pitt and Heather Nixdorff to the team with a Q & A!

Tona joined the All Our Families team this year as a Research Analyst. He completed his BSc in Kinesiology and MSc in Population/Public Health at the University of Calgary. His training and previous work has primarily been in injury epidemiology with a focus on child health, active transportation, and injury prevention.



Heather joined AOF in November 2020 as the Knowledge Translation and Research Coordinator. She completed her master's in environmental public health at the University of Alberta. Heather's passions are in community-based research and engagement surrounding a variety of topics including water access and refugee health. She will be departing overseas with Médecins Sans Frontières as Health Promotion Coordinator in the fall.

What is your role with AOF?

Heather: As the Knowledge Translation and Research Coordinator, I collaborate with the team to create presentations, reports, newsletters, and infographics. I also edit the website and manage the social media sites. An additional part of my role is qualitative analysis – looking at the comments from the surveys to see what the moms and youth have to say.

Tona: As the Research Analyst for AOF, I am generally responsible for the analysis of the incoming survey data that goes into the reports and presentations. As well, I work with the analysis of other data/epidemiology related projects as they come up in AOF.

How do you find balance outside of work?

Heather: I love being outside. Any chance I get, I will be in the mountains. I also really love cycling. I love how much of a city I can explore on my bike and how it gives such a different perspective of my environment.

Tona: Spending time with my family is the most important, but sports are a big part of my life as well. During the pandemic I've been involved a lot more in outdoor activities like running, golfing, and biking.

What is your favourite part about working with AOF?

Heather: Definitely the people. I felt immediately welcomed by the team when I started. There is a great team dynamic, and a strong work ethic.

Tona: The team has been very welcoming and I have felt comfortable right away. The group also has a really clear vision to improving health in families—the impact of the research is always top of mind and I think that's part of what makes the team work so well together.

What is something not many people know about you?

Heather: I love video games. I used to play it for hours as a kid and could beat all of my older cousin's friends in the games we would play. I don't play as much anymore, but I still do enjoy it if I have a lot of down time.

Tona: I have my black belt in Judo. Sports, especially grappling, have always been a part of my life, but I started doing Judo when I was 7. Once I started studying at the University of Calgary, I transitioned to the Dino's wrestling team.

Ask an Expert: Brae-Anne McArthur - Child Development

We have received many questions and comments from families over the years on child development tips and advice. In this newsletter, we have asked Dr. Brae Anne McArthur to address a couple of common concerns. Brae Anne is a clinical psychologist with a focus on child and adolescent mental health.



Q: My child is approaching the "tween" years – what can I expect?

Compared to the childhood (under 9 years) or teen years (13 -19 years), the "tween" stage (9 – 12 years, or middle schoolers) has unique developmental changes. During the tween years, the brain undergoes a lot of remodeling and growth. Due to these large changes in the brain, the tween period involves:

- increases in reasoning and problem-solving skills, self-regulation (such as managing behaviours, emotions and reactions)
- increases in executive functions (for example, planning, focusing attention, remembering instructions)
- sense of gender identity
- the beginning of sexual and romantic attractions
- more complex social and moral reasoning (e.g., the ability to hold and consider multiple perspectives, conflicting views, and to understand stereotypes and social roles)

The tween years are a 'sensitive period' in which youth have the best chance of reaching their full potential when they are exposed to stimulating environments, learning experiences, and social interactions that promote and strengthen their capabilities. This is a wonderful stage for the development of life skills and hobbies that can shape future interests and provide coping skills to manage future challenges.

Peer Relations. In the tween years, there is generally a transition from depending on family to increased independence. The tween becomes more focused on their peers, and will place more importance on friend groups and acceptance. Thus, peer relations during this period are crucial for developmental health.

Physical Activity, Sleep and Screen Time. Another important step in their development during the tween years is creating healthy lifestyle habits, such as physical activity, sleep and screen use. Research has shown that as youth enter the teen years, they experience a decline in physical activity, increased sleep difficulties, and greater screen use. Healthy habits during the tween years play a vital role in mental health and well-being as tweens move into adolescence.



Mental Health. Because of the increases in brain development and developing social maturity, the tween time can reveal some ups and downs in mood. As this stage brings a natural elevation of the role of peers and increased awareness of 'social roles,' comparing oneself to others is typical. Emotional and hormonal changes will also be seen. Tweens can experience low mood and anxiety as they navigate this important stage of development. The good news is that this stage does not last forever, and positive self-views and optimism can be helpful as they develop a sense of who they are and what they value.

Q: How can I support my tween during this developmental transition?

There are many strategies families can follow to support and parent tweens. Following are the 3 R's.

Routines: At the tween stage, it is important to engage youth in a conversation about daily routines and habits. Research shows that when tweens are involved in developing their daily routines and plans, they are more likely to follow through with them. The following recommendations are suggested for tweens based on the [Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth](#):



- 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity
- Uninterrupted 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night
- No more than 2 hours per day of recreational screen time

These guidelines can be helpful to establish some goals and boundaries for daily activities, but what is *most important* for tweens is that they are getting a good balance of activities throughout the day (e.g., sleep, healthy meals, recreation, school, screen time, family and social time).

Resources: Life skills and diverse interests during the tween stage can help enable children to have healthy options for the future and present. Resources for tweens would include development of hobbies (e.g., art, music, hiking, building, etc.) and life skills (e.g., managing finances, scheduling and planning, etc.), as well as access to online supports for social and academic interaction (e.g., extracurricular activities, school clubs, online forums, etc.). Other important resources include mentorship (coaches, teachers, neighbors) and community resources (skate parks, pathways, playgrounds).

Parents can support tweens by helping their child develop new skills and interests and connecting or utilizing resources in the community. For example, parents can take their tween to a local library to get a book on a topic of interest, or they could provide their tween with information about upcoming programs or clubs in the community.

Relationships: Continue to foster a loving and positive relationship with your tween, one where they feel safe to reach out to you when they need help rather than trying to tackle a problem alone. Recent All Our Families research shows that connection to parents during COVID-19 was an important part of positive youth mental health outcomes.

It is also important to help your tween connect with peers and other supports, by encouraging them to develop healthy relationships with others (e.g., friends, neighbours, coaches, teammates, classmates). Keep in mind that online social interactions can be helpful, but are different from face-to-face or in-person interactions with peers, and there is a need to balance in-person and online social interactions during the tween years.

Something Fun - Make Your Own Grass Heads!

Making grass heads is a fun activity for the whole family! It allows for lots of creativity, and you get to give your new friend a haircut!

