



### Dear Families:

We are so appreciative of the time and thought you have put into participating in research with us! We are writing to let you know about some of our recent results.

#### Cross-cultural Study of Emotion Socialization

In this study, we looked at how parents and children talk about emotions and how this was related to preschoolers' social and emotional skills. We have finished our work with American families and our colleague, Dr. Sukran Kilic of Aksaray University, is conducting the study with Turkish families so we can examine cultural similarities and differences.

Children participated in two emotion regulation tasks. In the first, we showed children a cute video of a puppy playing with a flower, and asked them to mask their positive emotion by making us think that they did not like the video. In the second, we gave children a disappointing gift (a wood chip) and we observed whether they showed or masked disappointment after unwrapping the gift. Afterwards, we gave children a real present that they would enjoy.

We found that children's behavior during the puppy video predicted teachers' reports of children's social skills, such as how children get along with others and how they interact in groups. We also found that parents who provided information, asked children questions, and incorporated their child's response when talking about family events had children who were better able to mask their disappointment after opening their gift and finding a wood chip. These findings are important because emotion regulation helps children smoothly transition into kindergarten. We're looking forward to learning more when Dr. Kilic has completed her work with Turkish families!

### HOW DO ADOLESCENTS LEARN ABOUT EMOTIONS FROM PARENTS AND FRIENDS?

In a 3-year study, we examined how adolescents learn about their emotions from interacting with parents and friends, and whether these interactions influenced their well-being during the transition to high school. You may recall doing a lot of questionnaires for us and mailing them back!

We found that parents remained stable across time in how they responded to teens' emotions. For girls, friends increased empathic responding to negative emotions (like anger, sadness, and worry) over time, whereas for boys these empathic responses by friends decreased over time. However, for both girls and boys, friends' responses to emotions that were punishing and neglectful decreased over time, and comforting responses increased. Interestingly, these changes in friends' responses happened after the transition to high school (between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade), suggesting that it was not the high school transition but rather other maturational or social role changes that resulted in changing friend responses to emotions.

When friends were unsupportive of negative emotions, this was related to girls' (but not boys') higher emotional distress. Regarding parents, unsupportive responses to teens' negative emotions were related to poorer emotion regulation and higher anxiety/depression in girls, but not in boys. We found that parent and friend responses to teens' anger in particular were important, with shared anger by friends related to more physical aggression by both girls and boys. Shared anger by parents, however, was related to less physical aggression by both girls and boys, but more relational aggression (such as teasing someone, spreading rumors, and excluding people) by boys.

Rachel Miller-Slough is continuing this work for her dissertation, by observing how teens (aged 13 – 18 years) talk with parents and close friends and how these conversations relate to emotional adjustment and social experiences. Parents, teens, and their friends are all paid \$10. *If you're interested in participating, please email us at [socdev@vt.edu](mailto:socdev@vt.edu) or call us at 540-231-8179!*

## Social Development Lab



### Helping and Aggressing in High School

For his dissertation, Dr. Shane McCarty (!) conducted two focus groups and a survey with students in a rural high school to understand students' perceptions of helpful and harmful social interactions at school. In this study, we found that across academic and social contexts, students view behavior as either *benefitting* or *harming others* and as *not impacting* or *extremely impacting* others. Students were also sensitive to the social power of students within the school who are performing a behavior. School atmosphere, the positive and negative ways students use their social power, and forms of bullying were discussed by students as playing a role in their perceptions of social interactions. Dr. McCarty is working with the high school to provide follow-up programming to foster a positive school climate.

### TUNING IN TO KIDS™: EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT PARENTING

We are excited to be working with Main Street United Methodist Church in Tazewell, VA to offer a parenting program for parents to help children develop emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence helps children to make and keep friends, concentrate at school, and calm themselves down when they're upset or angry, which can reduce conflict and prevent behavior problems. In the spring, we offered the group for parents of 9 - 14 year old children, to focus on tween-age issues. This fall, we're offering the group for parents of 4 - 12 year old children, and the 6-session program will take place Tuesdays, October 4<sup>th</sup> - November 8<sup>th</sup>. Because Tuning in to Kids™ was developed in Australia, we are adapting it to be culturally sensitive for our region.

### Parent-Child Talk about Health Habits and Pediatric Obesity

We are collaborating with Dr. Madlyn Frisard from Virginia Tech's Human Nutrition, Foods, & Exercise Department and with Dr. Joseph Skelton and the BrennerFIT program at Wake Forest Baptist Health Center to examine how parent-child conversations about health habits relate to children's obesity-related health indices. Our results suggest benefits of parents' emphasis on strategies and effort when talking about unhealthy choices. (for example, talking about taking a different route home to avoid getting fast food in the future). Our plan is to develop an addition for pediatric obesity interventions to foster this type of discourse and improve outcomes.

### Contact Information

Please don't hesitate to email us at [socdev@vt.edu](mailto:socdev@vt.edu) or call us at 540-231-8179 to:

- update your contact information for this newsletter or for future study information
- let us know that you would like to go green and receive this newsletter and future study information by email
- be taken off our mailing list
- request copies of scientific presentations and publications from our lab
- check in about study progress
- or for any other reason!

We hope you have a wonderful fall!

The Social Development Lab  
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