

UBC Parenting Lab

January 2015 | ISSUE 17



Newsletter Update

**DEPARTMENT OF
PSYCHOLOGY**
2136 West Mall
Vancouver, BC
V6T 1Z4

TELEPHONE
(604) 822-9037

TOLL-FREE NUMBER
(outside lower
mainland)
1-866-558-5581

EMAIL
cjlab@psych.ubc.ca

ONLINE
[www.parentinglab.
psych.ubc.ca](http://www.parentinglab.psych.ubc.ca)



From the Director of the Parenting Lab, Dr. Charlotte Johnston:

Happy New Year from the UBC Parenting Lab. Our research program is humming along, thanks to the wonderful help of so many children and parents who have participated here at UBC, in their homes, and via computer. We really owe each and every person who participates a big thanks!! We hope you might consider participating in future studies, and we'd be happy if you tell your friends and family about us. On the pages that follow, you'll see some of the results from past studies reported.

Our lab is currently home to five graduate students, three research assistants, and three undergraduate researchers. Yuanyuan Jiang, Natalie Miller, Dave Williamson, and Sara Colalillo are PhD students, and Joanne Park is finishing her MA program about to embark on her PhD. Yuan is busy with a new baby girl and preparing for her year of internship training. Natalie is gathering data for her dissertation (help her out if you can, see her ad on the back page). Dave has finished his candidacy and is now preparing his dissertation, and Sara is writing her candidacy paper (and is trying to recruit more mothers to complete a paper based on her master's thesis). And, everyone is busy working on analyzing and writing up various parts of the projects that we've conducted over the past years. We continue to appreciate the help of Amira, Kurtis, and Lorilee the lab assistants, and Kate, Mimi, and Chris are our wonderful undergraduate students who are working on their projects in the lab.

As always, we express our thanks for our research funding and student scholarships from agencies such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and UBC.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

RESEARCH REPORTS

Parental ADHD Problems During Structured Laboratory Observations

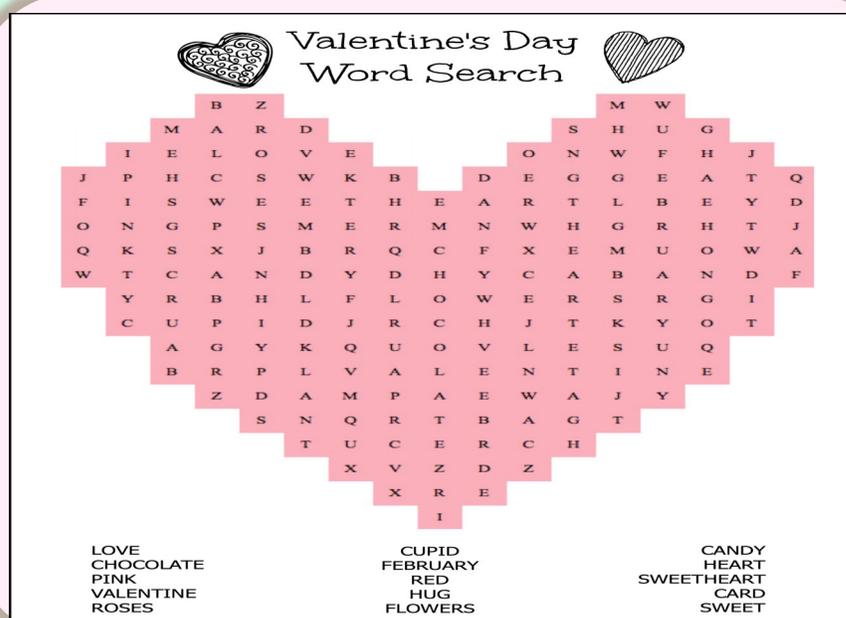
This is a project conducted by Dr. Johnston, along with students David Williamson, Katie Ross, and Jake Mullan. This was a small project within a larger study that we have been conducting looking at parent-child interactions in families of children with and without ADHD, where mothers and fathers might also have high levels of ADHD difficulties. 155 parents and their sons came into the lab and participated in structured activities where the parent had to play with the child, have the child complete some chores (e.g., unpacking groceries, sorting cutlery), and work with the child on sport and construction skills (e.g., putting a toy golf ball, building a wooden picture frame). Parents were given instructions for what to do in each of these situations in numbered envelopes that they opened when the assistants knocked on the one-way window. In this small project, we examined whether the parents' level of ADHD made it more difficult for them to remember and follow these instructions or to complete the tasks with their child. For the first 90 seconds of each situation, we recorded whether the parent exhibited any uncertainty or difficulties regarding the instructions (e.g., opened the wrong envelope). We found that, for both mothers and fathers, there was a statistically significant association between the parents' level of ADHD symptoms and their difficulties with the instructions. These associations were small, but they were not accounted for by the child's ADHD symptoms or the parent's level of education. We think these findings point to the very real challenges that face parents with ADHD symptoms, and show how these symptoms can interfere with a parent's ability to organize parenting tasks. We want to emphasize that there are many other aspects of this larger study, and we'll be reporting more results in coming newsletters. In particular, our findings are suggesting that, although parents who have difficulties with ADHD may be challenged by some aspects of parenting such as organization, there are other parts of parenting and the parent-child relationship that go well for them.

Similarities and Differences in Parents' Attributions for Themselves and Their Children

This report is part of a larger study, and was prepared by graduate students Sara Colalillo and Joanne Park who were curious how mothers and fathers explain events that happen to them and events that happen to their children. Our participants were parents of 9- to 12-year-old children. Mothers and fathers read a series of negative scenarios; sometimes the situation implicated them (e.g., Your vacation plans are cancelled), and other times the situation implicated their child (e.g., Your child's field trip is cancelled). Next, parents were asked to provide reasons for why that event happened. We found that, overall, parents used similar kinds of reasons to explain situations that happened to themselves and situations that happened to their children. For example, if parents viewed the cause of a negative event as related in some way to themselves, they were also likely to say that the cause of a negative event that happened to their child was related to something internal to their child. Interestingly, we found that both mothers and fathers were more likely to assume blame/responsibility for negative events that happened to them than to assign blame/responsibility to their children when they imagined negative events happening to their children. This could be related to the protective nature of the parent-child relationship. From this study, we have learned that, in general, mothers and fathers generate similar reasons to explain personal and child-related events. Nevertheless, we also see that there are some interesting differences in how parents think about negative situations that they themselves experience v. negative situations that they imagine their children experiencing.

Parenting Thoughts: Automatic or Controlled

This is one of the latest studies we've conducted, and this part of the study was run by Laura Belschner, a visiting graduate student from Germany. The study, which took place between February and October of 2014, involved 127 mothers who participated on-line. The study focused on assumptions or attributions that parents make about their children when disciplining them, and in particular we tried to assess both assumptions that parents are aware of and well as assumptions that may occur more automatically and of which parents may be less aware. Previous research has mostly assessed how parents attribute meaning to their children's behaviour by simply asking parents to fill out questionnaires. The problem here is that when making such self-reports, parents give careful thought to the questions. However, these self-report methods are less able to capture the spontaneous, automatically occurring (or implicit) attributions that parents may make in real life. So, in this study, we asked mothers to make their interpretations of child misbehaviour while distracted and busy multitasking, in an effort to get at these more automatic or implicit attributions. Mothers were randomly put into two groups – high and low cognitive load – where they were asked to memorize either a difficult or easy string of numbers while they were deciding why the child in a written vignette had misbehaved. We reasoned that because of the cognitive effort required to memorize the difficult string of numbers, mothers in this condition would have less time to deliberate about their answers to the attribution questions, and instead would rely more on their automatic, spontaneous judgements. Our results confirmed our hypothesis. We found that compared to mothers who remembered an easy string of numbers, mothers who were under high cognitive load (remembering the difficult number string) made attributions for child behaviour that were more closely linked to how they responded to their children, at least for positive parenting behaviors (e.g., friendly talk with your child, helping with homework), although the same difference was not found for attributions in relation to ineffective parenting practices. We think this may mean that the more automatically occurring interpretations that parents make about children's misbehaviours have a role in influencing their positive responses to their child.



RESOURCES

This website is devoted to youth mental health. It has many useful features, and is designed to allow youth to explore their mental health. It also provides information and links to existing mental health care resources for friends & family members.

<https://www.walkalong.ca/>

Thanks to the Division of the American Psychological Association devoted to child and adolescent clinical psychology, along with Dr. William Pelham and his team at Florida International University, 23 keynote addresses on evidence-based practices with kids are now FREE and easy to access on YouTube!

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY37evDO8CnRPpDD2MAx8WiE9Aq9PBdTt>

Rogers, S. J., Dawson, G., & Vismara, L. A. (2012). **An early start for your child with autism: Using everyday activities to help kids connect, communicate and learn.** New York: Guilford. A recent book that may be helpful to parents whose children have autism spectrum disorders. Excellent team of authors and suggestions based on best available research evidence.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

The Emotions Study

Study Criteria: Mothers of 7-10 year old boys or girls

Study Description: We are studying emotions and how they influence the ways that individuals make judgments about other people and objects in the environment. Participating mothers will visit the Parenting Lab at UBC to answer questionnaires, view short film clips, and do a simple categorization task. Appointments can be scheduled at a time convenient for mothers.

Compensation: Mothers will receive a \$15 honorarium.

Social Skills Study

Study Criteria: Boys 9 to 12 years and one parent

Study Description: This study examines how boys perceive

and interact with their peers and requires 2 hours of boys' time and 1 hour of parents' time. Parents complete several questionnaires, and boys complete computer tasks and some questionnaires. Lab and home visits are available.

Compensation: Boys receive a \$20 honorarium and the opportunity to earn up to \$5 during one of the computer tasks.

If you are interested in participating in either study, please call us at

604-822-9037 or email us at

cjlab@psych.ubc.ca