



Emotions Project

Emotional Development and Wellbeing in Children and Adolescents

Newsletter December 2008



Project Update

The Monash University Emotions Project has now been running for over five years. It investigates the way children understand and manage their emotions and how emotions are related to wellbeing. In the first part of the project conducted in 2003-2006, nearly 1,400 children and adolescents from around Victoria completed yearly surveys about their emotions and wellbeing. In 2007, we were awarded a prestigious grant from the Australian Research Council to continue the research. Since then around 600 children and adolescents have continued their involvement, and an additional 350 children aged 9-12 years have joined the project.

This year around 350 mothers and 200 fathers also complete surveys about their children. These surveys will tell us how parents respond to their children emotions and how this might influence the way children learn to manage their emotions. This information can then be used by professionals working with families to help children develop in positive and healthy ways.

Next year will be the final year of Part Two of the project. Once again, participants will be asked to complete their surveys about one year after the last one was completed. We are also looking forward to starting a new project which will examine the ways that adolescents manage feelings about their appearance.



Research Students

Research students play an important part in the Emotions Project. They help us to collect information from participants, and in turn they use some of this information to complete their research thesis as part of their degree. This year our team was joined by Psychology Honours student Mei Quek Van Wyk. Mei submitted her thesis examining the relationships between parenting style, self-conscious emotions and self-esteem in October 2008.

Key Findings

- Our research suggests that the strategies that children and adolescents use to manage their emotions develop through a combination of personality and family environment. For example, children who enjoy new situations, respond well to change, and live in caring and loving families are more likely to use helpful ways of managing emotions (e.g., thinking about the situation in a different way) and less likely to use unhelpful strategies (e.g., hiding their emotions).
- We have also found that the way children respond emotionally when they think they have done something wrong may affect their self-esteem. For example, children who feel ashamed and think they are a bad person tend to have low self-esteem. In contrast, children who tend to feel guilty and think their behaviour was wrong (but don't think they are a bad person) tend to have high self-esteem. The tendency for children respond with feelings of shame or guilt seems to be influenced by family environment and changes very little from childhood to adolescence.



Contact Us

If your contact details have changed or you no longer wish to be contacted by the Emotions Project team please let us know by phone on (03) 9905-3149 or by email at: emotions.project.psychology@med.monash.edu.au Quote the code number on the top right corner of your envelope label.



Seasons Greetings

We wish you and your family a happy and safe holiday season and best wishes for the New Year.

The Emotions Project Team