

Emotions Project

Emotional Development and Wellbeing in Children and Adolescents

Newsletter December 2007



Project Update

The Monash University Emotions Project has now been running for over four years. In the first part of the study conducted in years 2003-2006, nearly 1,400 children and adolescents from around Victoria completed yearly surveys about their emotions and wellbeing.

The project was so successful that last year we were awarded a prestigious grant from the Australian Research Council to continue the research. This has meant a busy year contacting families and inviting them to continue the involvement in the project.

To date, over 700 families have been contacted, with around 530 children and adolescents agreeing to take part again. An additional 350 children aged 9-12 years have joined the project for the first time.

The Emotions Project continues to investigate the way children understand and manage their emotions and how emotions are related to wellbeing. This year we have asked about some different types of emotions and wellbeing, and how children and adolescents feel about their family life. By following the children and adolescents over many years we can see how emotions develop and change over time, and how emotional development affects later wellbeing. This information can then be used by professionals working with children to help them to develop healthy and helpful emotions.

Thank You

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the children, families, and schools who have helped to make this project a success.

In gratitude, we are sending everyone who completed a survey in 2007 a bonus **\$5 Coles Myer voucher**. This is just a small token of appreciation to help you with your Christmas shopping!

We understand the commitment required of children and families who take part in follow-

up studies like these. That's why next year we are hoping to increase the reward we give families for taking part in the project by providing a **\$20 Coles Myer voucher** for each survey completed (pending Ethics Committee approval). We will post out a survey about one year after the last one was completed, so make sure you keep your contact details up to date.



Publications & Conferences

- In July, two members of our team, Libby Hughes and Sean MacDermott, attended a conference held by the International Society for Research on Emotions and presented some of the findings from the Emotions Project. The project was well received, with much interest from other researchers from around the world.
- Two papers from the project were recently submitted to psychological journals for publication. The papers present our findings on the measurement of emotion regulation in children and adolescents. A number of other papers are currently being prepared for publication in 2008.



Website Launch

We are pleased to announce that our project website was launched in September this year. The site provides information about the project, the researchers, and how to contact us. It also includes some of the key findings of the study and a list of our presentations and publications. We will be adding to the site in the future, including regular updates for families and interested professionals. In the future, we hope to set up online surveys so we can reduce printing and postage of surveys.

Visit:

www.med.monash.edu.au/spppm/research/emotions-project



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. The project initially began with two PhD students, and this year we have been lucky to be joined by two other students. Below is a summary of who they are and what their research involves.

- Madeleine Jaffe, Psychology Honours candidate. *For her thesis Madeleine examined how children's emotion regulation is related to temperament and their relationship with their parents. She submitted her thesis in October 2007. Good luck, Madeleine!*
- Sean MacDermott, PhD candidate. *For his thesis Sean is examining the effectiveness of two measures of emotion regulation for use with children and adolescents.*
- Nick Richardson, Doctor of Psychology candidate. *For his thesis Nick is examining the way in which children's emotion regulation may account for relationships between temperament, parenting and internalising behaviours.*
- Shaun Watson, PhD candidate. *For his thesis Shaun is examining children's self-conscious emotions (e.g., shame and guilt), including cultural differences in participants with an East-Asian background.*

Farewell to Neville King

Associate Professor Neville King, is one of our chief investigators. Following 18 years of service at Monash University, Neville has decided to retire. However, although he is retiring, he will continue be involved with the study and so we will continue to benefit from his wisdom.



Emotions in the Family

An unexpected, but exciting part of our project has been the involvement of so many brother and sisters. To date we have about 160 families with two or more children taking part in the study.

We are also hoping to invite parents to participate in the project in the future. We have not decided when this will happen, but it will most likely involve parents completing a survey similar to the one their child has completed.

The involvement of parents and siblings will provide important information about different family environments and how they are related to the emotional development and wellbeing of children.

Key Findings

- Emotion regulation refers to the way people experience, influence and express their feelings. We found that the young people who have good emotion regulation skills tend to have lower levels of distressing emotions such as sadness and worry.
- We found that there are three factors important to good emotion regulation in young people. The first is the amount of control young people have over their behaviour and includes patience and low impulsivity. The second relates to young peoples' awareness and recognition of their feelings. The third factor relates to how appropriate young peoples' emotional responses are in particular situations. For example, responding compassionately to someone else's distress.
- Another key finding from this work is that adolescent girls tend to experience more depressive symptoms (e.g., sadness, poor self-esteem, withdrawal, crying, tiredness, etc.) than do younger children or boys. This is consistent with what other researchers have found.
- Our research is helping to understand why some people are more likely to experience these and other kinds of emotional problems, and importantly why some people are not.



Lost & Found

In follow-up studies like this it is very important to have as many children as possible remain involved. We have tried our best to contact all the families who took part in the project in 2003-2006 to invite them to continue their involvement. Unfortunately, there are about 120 families who we have no current contact details for and many others who have not responded to our invitation. If you think you know someone who was part of the study but who has not heard from us, please have them call us on (03) 9905 3149.



Contact Us

If your 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
