Hello from the Stony Brook University Temperament Study! Our newsletter has always been an attempt to keep you up-to-date with what’s going on with the project. Please let us know if there are other things that you’d like to see in future newsletters. As a reminder, you can find all previous newsletters online at: http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/sbutmntstudy/.

**Progress Report**

We would like to thank you all again for your continued participation in the study, as we embark on the next phase, Age 12. We are happy to report that the proposal was approved a few months ago and the funding should be kicking in shortly. As you know, we are hoping to follow your children up until young adulthood, when we will ultimately be able to determine if there were signs early on, that could explain, who they have become.

We know some of the children in the study have already reached 12 years of age, with even a few being 13. We hope to start scheduling visits for these children starting in mid to late June. The rest of you will be contacted, as your child approaches his/her 12th birthday. This phase will involve your child coming to Stony Brook for one visit lasting about three and a half to four hours, only requiring one parent to accompany him/her. We will be asking the other parent to complete a questionnaire online, as we have in the past. We will also be sending home a saliva kit, though this time, it should be an easier task. Not only have most of you already done this during other phases, but we are requiring only three or four samples over the course of a month’s time. We will then be coming for a home visit for a short time to ask a few more questions and pick up the saliva samples. This visit should only take about an hour to an hour and a half and will be scheduled whenever is most convenient for you. As always, we will be compensating you, based on what you complete.

In the past, it’s been difficult reaching some of you over an extended period of time. We realize that everyone’s lives are very busy and sometimes returning calls during what’s considered normal business hours can be a real challenge. Please know that leaving a message after hours, giving your status in terms of availability for a visit and/or just a good time to reach you back directly, can be really helpful, and save lots of time in continued attempts and/or leaving a lot of unanswered messages. We are more than willing and able to call you back at any hour, any day, whatever works for you, to make this happen. Please contact our Project Coordinator, Laura Klein, at 631-632-4115 or email her at temperament.study@stonybrook.edu, if this is a better means of communication for you to discuss your future participation. Your support is essential and much appreciated. Every one of you really counts!
The Development of Sensitivity to Reward: 
Current Findings and Future Directions for the Stony Brook Temperament Study

One of the major goals of the Stony Brook Temperament Study is to examine how personalities develop, and what factors influence children’s emotions and behavior across development. We recently completed an exciting project that provides insight into the brain processes underlying positive emotionality, a temperament trait characterized by the expression of positive emotions, including smiling, laughing, and showing interest, that emerges in early childhood and is relatively stable across development (Putnam, 2012).

As you may recall, when your child began our study at age 3 or age 6, we administered a set of structured activities in the laboratory in order to measure children’s emotional responses. Perhaps your child still remembers that Whoopee Cushion prank or enjoys watching the DVD from your visit to the lab! As you know, children respond in many different ways to the same types of situations. While some kids may exhibit a lot of positive emotions (like smiling, laughing, jumping up and down with joy), other kids tend to express fewer positive emotions. When the children returned for the age 9 assessment, they completed a computerized task that involved winning and losing money, while we recorded the brain’s responses using electroencephalography (EEG). Our analyses of the data indicate that children who showed relatively greater positive emotionality in the lab at age 3 had a larger EEG response to reward at age 9. In addition, children filled out a questionnaire at that visit asking about their tendency to experience and display positive emotions. Children who reported experiencing more positive emotions at age 9 also showed an enhanced EEG response to reward at the same assessment. This is the first study to link early child positive emotionality to brain responses later in childhood, and it is particularly exciting because this association is observable across such a large portion of childhood (approximately 6 years). We have written a paper to present these results that is currently being reviewed for publication in a scientific journal (Kujawa et al., under review)

Importantly, there is evidence that sensitivity to reward continues to develop into adolescence. For example, in one study from the Netherlands, adolescents between the ages of 14 and 15 showed greater brain responses to rewards than children between the ages of 10 and 12 (Van Leijenhorst et al., 2010). Consistent with this, preliminary data analysis from our study suggests that pubertal development may be associated with greater sensitivity to reward among girls. We plan to follow up on this area of research by continuing to evaluate children’s brain responses to reward when your family returns to our lab at age 12.
The growth in reward sensitivity in adolescence is probably important in helping youth accomplish developmental tasks such as becoming more independent in school and socially. However, it may also contribute to problems with mood and impulse control that some adolescents experience (Davey et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2008). Your ongoing participation in our study may further help us to understand developmental changes in reward processing and how they might relate to both healthy and more problematic adjustment in adolescence.

Lastly, as you may have observed in your own child, there is evidence that relationships with peers take on increasing importance as children transition into adolescence (Somerville, 2013). That is, compared to younger children, adolescents are more sensitive to feedback from peers and may be more likely to change their behavior in order to be accepted by other adolescents. Thus, we are also looking into the development of the brain’s reactivity to socially rewarding feedback (i.e., feedback indicating social acceptance) and how it relates to early patterns of emotional expression in children. This is an exciting and novel area of research that we plan to begin during the age 12 assessment.

As always, we thank you for your ongoing participation in the Stony Brook Temperament Study. We recognize that your family’s time is valuable, and we want you to know that we are working hard to ensure that the results of the study influence the scientific community and contribute to positive outcomes for children and families.

References


The Early Adolescent Years

Managing the ups and downs that often come with the transition to adolescence can be both exciting and challenging at once both for parents and for teens. Here’s a brief glimpse of what to expect and some ideas about how to handle it.

Tips for Parents

+ Set clear boundaries and expectations. Providing clear and realistic boundaries that you discuss and agree upon together as a family may help your soon-to-be teen find success at home. Inconsistent rules or unclear expectations may lead to confusion and turmoil. To start, you might consider how often you are willing to allow your child to go out with friends, how much time is expected to be spent on homework, and any chores you would like your child to do around the house. Establishing incentives and rewards such as a weekly allowance may be useful in motivating your child at this age as well.

+ Be patient & flexible. While challenging for parents, this time can be hard on kids too. With increasing pressure at school, the possibility of bullying, and a lot of physical changes to contend with, transitioning to adolescence can be a fun but stressful time for your child. He or she may suddenly become quieter around you; this is okay. Try to give your son or daughter time to decompress after school before engaging them in conversation. Also, realize that part of growing up may mean that your child will be spending more time with friends. While this is normal and to be expected, you may experience feelings of sadness or loss as you watch him or her become increasingly autonomous and independent. This transition may be bittersweet, but realize that it’s all part of normal child development. You may also find that rebelliousness or moodiness is more common now. Often, this is just part of the growing up process for adolescents, and while it can be frustrating, remaining patient and understanding of the changes your child is experiencing can be very beneficial to you both.

+ Encourage cybersafety. In today’s world of burgeoning social media and internet accessibility, teens and adolescents are spending more time than ever in front of the computer screen. Consider discussing with your son or daughter some of the basics of cybersafety: set social media profiles to private, avoid communicating with people online who you don’t know personally, don’t publish your address or phone number online, and steer clear of cyber bullying. Try to keep the lines of communication open about the internet and other tough subjects; let your teen know that you are there for them and willing to talk calmly about these subjects should any issues arise.
Let dinner time be family time. Having a family meal together can be a challenge when children are busy with after school activities and homework, but maintaining that time to talk a couple of times a week as a family and share the events of your days can be a great bonding experience. Turning off the TV and other electronics during this time can encourage dialogue between the members of your family. Don’t fret if it doesn’t always happen, but strive for it whenever possible.

Tips for Teens

+ Enjoy this time to find out who YOU are. Everyone is different, and this is the stage of life when many people begin to think about their own unique identity. It’s okay if you’re different from your friends or peers; that’s part of what makes this an exciting time of discovery! Be true to yourself and enjoy the person you’re becoming.

+ Try to be patient with your parents. This can be a really fun and exciting time for you, but a nerve-racking time for your parents. Try to understand that it might be hard for them to watch as you grow up and need them a little less than before. Maybe they’re more worried about you now than they used to be, or maybe you’re finding it hard to know what to talk about with them these days. All of this is pretty typical, but you could make your life at home smoother by reaching out to your parents every now and then and then for a conversation or some one-on-one time with them.

+ Have fun, but stay safe doing it. You may be spending more time with friends or on social media websites these days, so just be sure you’re keeping yourself safe too. Online, that means keeping private information (phone number, address, etc.) and photos of yourself only accessible to other friends you know in real life. When you are out with friends, keep track of the time and remember to keep in touch with your parents if plans change. Don’t feel pressured into doing anything that makes you uncomfortable when you’re out with your friends.

+ Talk to people. Some adolescents feel very close to their parents, while others find that it’s harder to talk to them now than it was before. Regardless, just be sure you’re talking openly to someone who you trust and who cares about what’s best for you. You may be going through a lot right now with friends or feel a lot of pressure at school, so don’t be shy about sharing how you’re feeling or what’s going on in your life with those who are close to you. Maybe they will have some insight or advice that could be helpful.

This is a unique and often fun but turbulent time for families. Don’t hesitate to seek professional help for any issues that you feel are beyond the scope of normal adolescent behaviors (eating disorders, drug/alcohol problems, extreme rebelliousness, excessive anxiety, or persistent sadness, to name a few). Despite the bumps in the road, adolescence can be a great time for families to come together and work as a team to explore new opportunities for growth and overcome the hurdles they may encounter.
**Moving? New Phone? Questions/Concerns?**

We are looking forward to seeing you and your children again for the Age 12 Assessment.

If you have moved or changed your phone number, or have a question for our researchers, please call us at (631) 632-4115. You can also contact us via our email address, temperament.study@stonybrook.edu. Even if you have moved out of the New York area, we would still like to have you and your child participate in this phase of the study. Please contact us as soon as possible so we can determine how best to have you take part.

**Resources for Parents:**

Several parents have expressed interest in reading materials and other resources for parents. We would like to recommend some books that address common problems parents and children may encounter. These books are available through Amazon and most major booksellers:

1. Escaping the Endless Adolescence: How We Can Help Our Teenagers Grow Up Before They Grow Old

2. If Your Adolescent Has an Anxiety Disorder: An Essential Resource for Parents

3. Parenting Your Out-of-Control Teenager: 7 Steps to Reestablish Authority and Reclaim Love
   Treating the Tough Adolescent: A Family-Based, Step-by-Step Guide both by Scott Sells
   [http://www.amazon.com/Scott-P.-Sells/e/B001IXRT9S](http://www.amazon.com/Scott-P.-Sells/e/B001IXRT9S)
For problems that may require professional attention, please contact your pediatrician or consider the following resources:

- **SUNY Stony Brook, Department of Psychiatry - 632-8850;**
  [http://www.stonybrookmedicine.edu/patientcare/ourservices](http://www.stonybrookmedicine.edu/patientcare/ourservices)

- **Krasner Psychological Center - 632-7830;**

- **Mental Health Association of Suffolk County - 226-3900;**
  [http://www.mhasuffolk.org/](http://www.mhasuffolk.org/)

- **Stony Brook Child and Adolescent Psychiatry - 632-3096;**
  [http://www.stonybrookchildrens.org/specialties-services/pediatric-specialties/psychiatry](http://www.stonybrookchildrens.org/specialties-services/pediatric-specialties/psychiatry)

- **Child & Family Psychological Services - 265-9850;**

- **Brookhaven Youth Bureau, Medford - 451-8011;**

- **Response Crisis Hot Line – 751-7500;**

- **Pederson Krag MHC, Smithtown - 920-8300;**

- **Family Service League, Huntington - 427-3700;**

- **2-1-1 Long Island 211 or call toll free at 1-888-774-7633;**
  [http://www.211longisland.org/cms/](http://www.211longisland.org/cms/)

**Transitions:**

Autumn Kujawa, M.A. has been accepted into a predoctoral clinical internship at the University of Illinois-Chicago Medical School, and will begin this summer.

Sarah Black, M.A. has been accepted into a predoctoral clinical internship at the Northwestern University School of Medicine starting this Summer.