



# Infant Parent Project: A New Beginning

## Dr. Leerkes Receives Million Dollar Grant

The Infant Parent Project taught us a lot about parents' reactions to infant emotions, where these ideas come from, and how they relate to parent and child behavior. We learned that:

- Mothers tend to have more negative beliefs about infant crying when their own parents ignored or ridiculed their emotions in childhood BUT having a partner with positive beliefs about crying prevents this effect.
- Mothers who have more positive beliefs and goals about infant crying and feel more empathy when babies cry, are more likely to respond quickly when their babies cry, and to engage in comforting behaviors.
- Children whose mothers responded supportively to their crying in infancy and toddlerhood demonstrated more sophisticated **knowledge of emotions** and fewer behavioral problems at age 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

These results and new questions that emerged as a result of the Infant Parent Project were summarized in a grant proposal last year. We are excited to share the news that Dr. Leerkes has received a 1.4 million dollar grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to pursue these questions in a new and larger study of 250 families. This would not have been possible without your participation!

## Preschoolers' Knowledge of Emotions

Your child last visited us when he or she was 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  years old. During this visit we used puppets to examine preschoolers' knowledge of emotions, including how accurately preschoolers identifying emotions and the appropriateness of preschoolers' explanations for the causes of emotions.

When asked to **identify** the puppet's emotion based on its facial expression:

- 93% of preschoolers correctly identified happiness
- 84% of preschoolers correctly identified fear
- 86% of preschoolers correctly identified anger
- 88% of preschoolers correctly identified sadness

When asked to generate **causes** of the four emotions:

- 52% provided an accurate cause for *happiness*
  - For example, "Somebody shared their toys with him" and "She hugged her mama"
- 73% provided an accurate cause for *fear*
  - For example, "He was scared of the dark" and "A tiger growled"
- 51% provided an accurate cause for *anger*
  - For example, "A mean little girl took her favorite toys" and "He was in timeout"
- 65% provided an accurate cause for *sadness*
  - For example, "Somebody called him names" and "She fell and bumped her head"

This will be our last newsletter. If you have other questions about the project, please feel free to contact us at (336) 256-0099. Thank you for working with us over the last several years. We have learned so much from you and your children!

## Research Team Updates

◆ **Dr. Leerkes** and her family welcomed baby Zachary to the fold this March. ◆ **Regan Burney** is now the project coordinator for the Triad Child Study. She is also excited to share the news that she is expecting her first child in March! ◆ **Stephanie Parade** was named the Outstanding Graduate Student of the Year in 2009 and is preparing to graduate this spring. ◆ **Kathy Siepak** and daughter Megan moved to Texas where Kathy is now an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin.



We are recruiting families to participate in Dr. Leerkes' new project, the Triad Child Study. If you have friends or family members who are expecting their first child and may be interested in participating in the Triad Child Study please have them call (336) 256-0099 or email [trichild@uncg.edu](mailto:trichild@uncg.edu) for more information.

### Make It, Shape It, Give It!

Kids often want to get involved in holiday gift giving. With this recipe kids can make sculptures for friends and family.

#### What you will need:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water
- Food coloring

Mix flour, salt, and water. Make sure mixture has a doughy consistency and is not too sticky. Add more flour if necessary.

Add food coloring for fun and allow your child to shape the dough into a sculpture such as a candle holder or small dish. Allow to air dry and give as a gift!

### Traveling with Kids

With the upcoming holiday season, many families will be traveling with their kids. Here are some tips to make your vacation a satisfying and rewarding experience.

**Plan Ahead.** A week before your trip start a packing list. By writing down what you'll need ahead of time you'll be less likely to forget important necessities or to bring along unnecessary items.

**Play it Safe.** Although kids may be sniffle free when leaving home, kids often get sick when they travel. Bring along the first aid kit and pediatric medicine so you don't have to search for an open drug store in the event of an accident or illness. Be sure to use hand sanitizer to prevent the spread of germs.

**Keep them Occupied.** Whether you are traveling by car, plane, or train find ways to keep your child occupied. Books, puzzles, and small toys are always good options, but simple games like "I Spy" can keep your child busy for hours. Have plenty of snacks and water on hand. If possible, travel during naptime or in the evening while your child normally sleeps.

**Don't forget the Camera.** Although you may be excited to test out the new camera, kids want to be able to document the trip as well. Pick up a cheap disposable camera for your child to play with.

Esther M. Leerkes, Ph.D.  
Infant Parent Project  
Human Development & Family Studies  
UNCG  
P.O. Box 26170, 248 Stone  
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170

Mailing Label

