



Preschool Social Development Project Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 1

Spring 2011

UB Social Development Laboratory

Letter from the Director:

Greetings from UB and the Social Development Lab! We have just completed our initial coding and processing of the observational measures, interviews and teacher-reports that we collected at our first time point this past fall semester. In this Newsletter, the first of two for the Preschool Social Development Project, we hope to share with you our initial findings, our future plans and results from past projects. My team and I have really enjoyed working with your children (over 70 children from four local child care centers) and the many teachers and school directors who have given of their time to contribute to science and increase our understanding of young children's peer relationships. You have been our partners in this study and on behalf of the entire project team, we thank you! Please let us know if you have questions about our project, the findings or our future studies. Our final newsletter will be available in August and will be posted on our website or emailed to you.

We are excited to be back collecting data from your child's classroom this spring. We will once again be collected classroom and playground-based observations of peer relationships and social behavior. We will be individually interviewing participating children to ask about their peer experiences and thoughts on social behaviors. We will also ask you to complete a brief parent packet for us to tell us about your child, parenting practices, and thoughts about social behaviors. We will send these packets home with your child and provide an envelope for returning the packet directly to us. We also invite you to come visit us in our new laboratory facilities on the north campus and participate in a new study (Early Childhood Thoughts and Behaviors Project, see page 4 for details). We thank you in advance for participating and helping us learn even more about young children's developing peer and other social relationships!

Best wishes for a wonderful spring!

-Dr. Jamie Ostrov

Special points of interest:

- Thank you for your participation!
- Are you moving? Please contact us to tell us how to send you future newsletters and updates (we never sell or distribute your information).
- See Page 2 for more findings
- Ask the Developmental Psychologist (page 3)
- Future plans (page 4)

Inside this issue:

Findings	2
Recent publications	2
Ask Dr. Ostrov	3
Staff updates	3
Upcoming projects	4
Website	4
Recipes for Kids	5

Preliminary findings:

Teachers reported that 80% of the children were often prosocial or engaged in inclusion activities (e.g., inviting another child to play a game), with 65% of these prosocial children recognizing the feelings of others.

Over this past fall, teachers reported that 70% of children are often (or almost always) kind to peers with 84% of children showing sympathy towards others. Our observations noted that relational aggression (e.g., social exclusion) was associated with sociability and friendliness, showing some relation to both positive and negative behaviors.

Teachers also informed us that 87% of children are cooperative some of the time and 47% are almost always helpful with their peers. These findings indicate that children are engaging in prosocial behaviors, which are generally associated with positive outcomes, especially related to forming friendships and peer groups in the future.

Physical and Relational Aggression were associated with Relational and Physical Victimization

Our observations suggested that physical (e.g., hitting) and relational aggression (e.g., social exclusion) were not associated with each other for individual children. This means that children that engage in relational aggression may not be engaging in physical aggression and vice versa. However, physical and relational victimization (receiving these behaviors) was associated, suggesting that if you are a victim of one type of aggression, you



may be at greater likelihood to be a victim of the other type.

In addition, physical aggression was associated with physical victimization; whereas relational aggression and relational victimization were associated. These findings suggest that the way we behave toward peers may be related to the kinds of behaviors we receive from our

peers. Both types of victimization (relational and physical) were associated with tattling, which suggests that these children although they are safely communicating their concerns to teachers, may also be engaging in inappropriate and perhaps overly dependent behavior on the teacher.

Teachers reported that 65% of children were never told “you are not my friend anymore” (i.e., relational aggression) and another 13% hardly ever are told this. Teachers also indicated that 75% of children are never pushed or shoved by their peers. This finding indicates that children’s engagement in physical and relational victimization are relatively low.

Even more findings...According to the children (interviews)...

Our research with interviews suggests that children do understand the questions being asked of them about their interactions with peers and are accurate reporters of their individual social experiences. This means that children are providing high quality data that can be used to understand how they interact and understand social situations.

The data collected by the teachers was associated with the children’s interviews, meaning that the data from the children provided a unique understanding of prosocial and aggressive (relational and physical) behaviors. According to our teachers, children that are “helpful” or frequently “do nice things

for other” are more likely than others to report that they “include others in play” according to our interview.

In addition, children that were “verbally threatening to physically harm peers” (according to teachers) were less likely to report being helpful to their peers in the interviews.



Our recent publications from past studies (all available on our website)...

- Godleski, S. A., & Ostrov, J. M. (2010). Relational aggression and hostile attribution bias: Categorical versus dimensional approaches of data analysis using the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD) data. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38, 447–458.
- Ostrov, J. M., (2010). Prospective associations between peer victimization and aggression. *Child Development*, 81, 1670-1677.

Ask the Developmental Psychologist

“What is the difference between bullying and aggression?”

Bullying is a very “hot” topic today with increasing attention and coverage by the media, schools, and government agencies. However, there is a great deal of confusion about the definition of bullying. In fact, I was invited to join a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Panel and the charge of the group is to make recommendations for a unified definition of bullying. Scientists define bullying as a subtype of aggression in which there is a power differential. That is, the bully may be older, bigger or have more social power than the victim. These experiences are frequent or chronic and part of an on-going problematic relationship. In contrast, aggression may occur between friends (equal status peers) and may only occur once. Bullying is usually used to fulfill a goal (i.e., to get something or improve social status). Aggression may be reactive or impulsive in nature and does not always include goal attainment as the function.

Thus, all bullying is aggression but not all aggression is bullying.

My child cries and protests at drop off to the center, what can I do?

This is a common occurrence in early childhood and is usually not a reason for concern. My response depends on how old the child is and their past history. If the child had been well adjusted and did not protest in the past and is now distressed at drop off this is usually due to the birth of a new child, serious illness of a parent, loss of a grandparent, or even a family pet. The child may require some extra reassurance and “special” time with the caregiver to alleviate their fears. Parents that scaffold the situation for their child by talking about the drop off ahead of time and even practicing the routine within the context of play (for older chil-

dren) can help children to learn a new script (i.e., I go to school but my caregiver returns after outside time or afternoon nap). Children in early childhood thrive on routine and keeping to a predictable schedule is helpful. Having a typical good bye ritual and keeping to it is most helpful. Teachers usually report that the crying stops within a few minutes of the departure of the parent. It is difficult for the parent but this process is part of the typically separation-individuation process that needs to happen for children to become well adjusted individuals. If distress continues for long periods of time and the child seems upset in a variety of contexts over an extended period of time you should consult your pediatrician or care provider for a possible referral.

Staff Updates

Marissa Green will be attending graduate school to obtain her Ph.D. in school psychology in the Fall 2011, Congratulations to her!

Tim LaVigne will be attending graduate school to obtain his Ph.D. in clinical psychology in the Fall 2011, Congratulations to him!



“ Positive friendships may serve as a crucial socializing context, in which children can obtain instrumental and emotional support from close friends and, thus, can be protected from malicious peers or bullies. All of these factors could reduce the levels of peer victimization”

-Kawabata, Crick et al (2010, Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology)

Staff Members

Director:

- **Jamie M. Ostrov, Ph.D.**

Graduate Students and Coordinators:

- **Stephanie Godleski, M.A.**
- **Emily Hart, M.A.**
- **Kim Kamper, B.A.**
- **Jen Gambino, Head Research Assistant**

Volunteers:

- **Tim La Vigne, B. A.**
- **Jocelyn Weaver, B. A.**

Research Assistants:

- **Samantha Barone**
- **Natalie Czup**
- **Marissa Green**
- **Leah Jacobs**
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Please let us know if you are moving or changing schools—We want to be able to send you future newsletters with the final results from the project!

Upcoming projects in the Lab

This spring we are still recruiting for a laboratory-based study.

This study will address how family factors as well as social-cognitions or the way that children think about their relationships with others and social situations may impact the development of social skills and peer interactions. We are looking for families with a 3–5-year old child and a parent/legal guardian willing to visit our laboratory. This is a 1x visit to the laboratory and will take about 30–45 minutes per family visit. Families will receive \$20 in gift cards and a small toy for your time. For information please contact devlab@buffalo.edu or 716–645–0257 and please mention the Early Childhood Thoughts and Behaviors Project.

This project will take place in our new UB North Campus (Park Hall) Laboratory.

We are on the web: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/psychology/labs/SocialDevLab/home.htm>





Activities for Kids

Play Dough Recipe

Below is a play dough recipe similar to the commercial type and more durable. Keep in a plastic bag or closed container when not being used.

- 1 cup of flour
- 1 cup of water
- 1 T. of oil
- 1 T. alum
- 1/2 cup salt
- 2 T. vanilla
- food coloring for desired intensity

Mix all dry ingredients. Add oil and water. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until it reaches the consistency of mashed potatoes. Remove from heat and add vanilla and color. Divide into balls and work in color by kneading.



How To Make Oobleck

(from Dr. Seuss's *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*)

Is it liquid or solid?

1. Mix 1 part water with 1.5 to 2 parts cornstarch. You may wish to start with one cup of water and one and a half cups of cornstarch, then work in more cornstarch if you want a more 'solid' oobleck.

It will take about 10 minutes of mixing to get nice oobleck.

1. Mix in a few drops of food coloring if you want colored oobleck.

