

# our developing children

The Talwar Child Development Research Lab

SUMMER 2014



**In recent decades, an increasing number of children have been asked to testify about crimes they have witnessed or endured.**

Last spring, children aged 9 to 12 participated in two-part mock-courtroom study. The aim of the study was to investigate a better, more supportive way to interview children in court. Currently, during cross-examination, lawyers are able to ask multiple-clause statements, double negative questions, and use suggestive questioning strategies. This project aimed to see whether using child-friendly, open-ended questions free of such difficult questions could help in the assessment of children's true and false reports.

Over the course of a home-visit, children played various games with a research assistant. One of the games was the Hasbro's™ Operation Game. Children were asked to be either truthful or deceitful about playing this game. Half the children were asked to lie (either to falsely state they played the game when they had not, or to deny playing the game when they had played). The other half were assigned to a truth-telling condition).

Six to eight days later, children came to the lab to be interviewed in our mock courtroom. These interviews were recorded and then shown to

undergraduate students to determine whether or not they could tell which children were being honest, and which were not. We found some interesting results!

1. The questions in the current study improved the ability to detect truthful statements. Our findings show that adults were significantly better than chance (i.e., their decisions are better than simply flipping a coin!) for the two true conditions.
2. However, this questioning style did not help for false stories. Participants were at chance levels (the same as if they had simply flipped a coin) when children stated they did not play the game when in fact they had. Interestingly, they were significantly below chance at correctly identifying when children lied about playing the game (when they had not played!).
3. In terms of credibility, participants perceived children in the true assertion condition to be the least credible while children in the false assertion condition were seen as most credible.

A special thanks to all of the families who participated in this research project!

**THANK YOU!** Research supported through the following granting agencies:

**MERCI!**

Fonds quebécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC)

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

National Science Foundation (NSF)

Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI)



# What's Happening at the Lab

Interested in participating?  
Check out these studies:

## **CYBER II (8-12 years)\*NEW\***

Children will complete an interview regarding their perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying events. They will also read some stories about different scenarios involving online and offline interactions. The study takes approximately 45 minutes to complete.

## **SPIRIT II (7-11 years)**

Children are asked to fill out a paper based questionnaire regarding their views of spirituality and their own social-emotional wellbeing. Children's responses will then be compared to similar aged peers with cancer to explore the prevalence of spiritual beliefs when coping with significant adversity. The study takes approximately 1 hour and a gift certificate is given for time.

## **RECALL (6-12 years)**

Children will complete a series of activities. They may then witness a researcher take money from a wallet and may be asked to lie about the incident. They will then be interviewed about the prior event using an interview technique known to increase adult's lie-detection rates. The study takes 1 hour and monetary compensation is given for time.

## **MORAL (4-7 years)**

Children will witness a research assistant accidentally break a ball. They will be asked to keep a secret about the event. Children will be read a neutral or morally related fable by another researcher before being interviewed about the incident. The study takes 30 minutes.

## **2YR.2 (2-3 years)**

Children will complete 4 activities during this study. One activity is a tempting situation which may result in an attempt to deceive. The overall goal is to study children's early cognitive development and lie-telling abilities. The study takes approximately 30 minutes.

## **In preparation**

We kindly ask that you refrain from telling your children about the purpose of our research to ensure a natural response. We recommend preparing children for the visit by discussing the activities they will be asked to do (e.g., playing games, answering questions, listening to stories).

## **Our debriefing procedure**

Given the nature of our research, we believe it is important to properly debrief children after our studies on deception. This includes an explicit acknowledgment and praise of children's decisions to be truthful, role modeling of honest behavior, and a demonstration of the positive consequences that can arise from telling the truth. Lying is a common place practice among children and adults alike, however studies suggest we may be more likely to foster honesty in children by reinforcing instances of honest behavior, rather than focusing on and punishing dishonest behavior.

## Contact us

For more information or to participate in one of our studies ...

**(514)398-8059**

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WE TEST ON EVENINGS  
AND WEEKENDS AT  
YOUR CONVENIENCE!

CHILDREN RECEIVE A  
SMALL PRIZE FOR THEIR  
EFFORT AND TIME.  
MONETARY  
COMPENSATION IS  
OFFERED FOR SOME  
STUDIES.

WE WELCOME SIBLINGS  
OF PARTICIPANTS TO  
COME AND ENJOY OUR  
WONDERFUL PLAYROOM  
THAT IS PACKED FULL OF  
GAMES & TOYS.

STUDIES TAKE PLACE  
AT OUR RESEARCH  
LAB:

**DUGGAN HOUSE  
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## A BIG CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES

**Sarah-Jane Renaud,**  
PhD.

Sarah-Jane successfully completed her PhD in School and Applied Child Psychology. Her dissertation examined children's understanding and conversations about death.

**Carlos Gomez-Garibello,**  
PhD.

Carlos defended his doctoral dissertation on cross-cultural differences in children's aggressive and bullying behavior. He graduated with a PhD in Human Development.