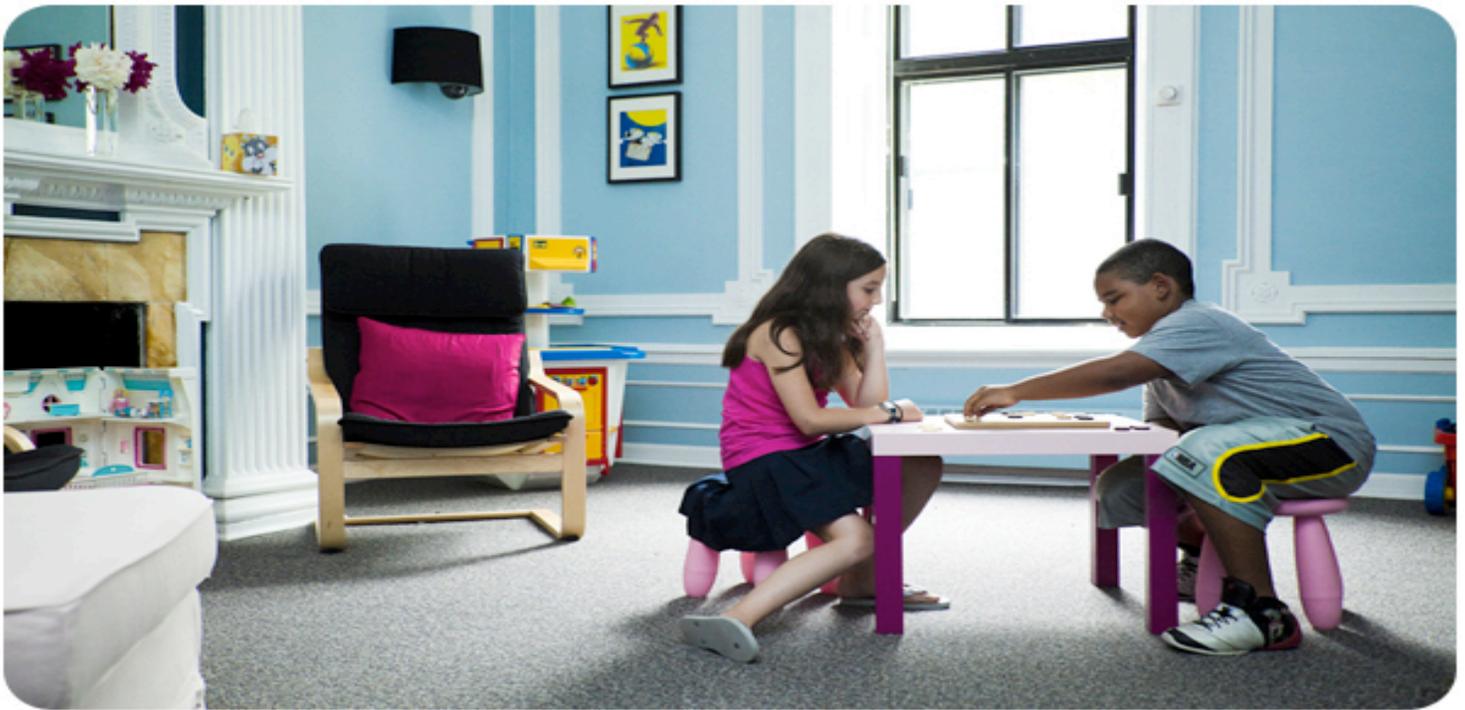


# our developing children

The Talwar Child Development Research Lab

FALL 2012



The Talwar Child Development Research Team is pleased to present our first newsletter

Providing information to you about our recent efforts, exciting discoveries, and new opportunities to join us in learning more about children's social behavior.

Dr Victoria Talwar and her research team at McGill University remain dedicated to exploring children's social and emotional development through research. Our aim is to provide parents and professionals (e.g., teachers, social workers, legal professionals, pediatricians, etc.) with information addressing common questions and concerns related to children's lie-telling,

spirituality, awareness of mortality, and cyberbullying. For instance, "Is it normal for my child to occasionally lie?"; "How can we, as adults, encourage honesty in children?"; and "how can we appropriately respond to children's questions about death and prepare them for inevitable loss?"

We would like to take this opportunity to extend a very special thanks to you and your children for expressing an interest and a willingness to participate in our research studies. Without you, our work would cease to exist. With this in mind, our team strives to make everyone's experience a truly fun and rewarding one. We hope this newsletter not only provides you with practical information, but also allows

you to see the important contribution you and your children have made to advancing the field of child development and the treatment of children in various settings.

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**THANK YOU!**  
**MERCI!**

Research supported through the following granting agencies:

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)



# Our Research Team

**Lab Director:**  
Victoria Talwar PhD



Dr Victoria Talwar is an Associate Professor at McGill, who has worked in the area of child psychology, specifically social-cognitive development, for the past 14 years.

**Cindy Arruda,**  
PhD. Candidate

Cindy is finishing a doctorate in Human Development. Her dissertation focuses on the deceptive behaviors of boys with and without behavioral difficulties.

**Christine Saykaly,**  
PhD. Candidate

Christine is currently finishing a PhD in the School and Applied Child Psychology program. Her dissertation assesses children's tendencies to provide true and false eye-witness testimonies.

**Paraskevi Engarhos,**  
PhD. Student

Paraskevi is in her first year of PhD studies in the School and Applied Child Psychology Program. Her MA thesis examined children's understanding of death.

**Karissa Leduc**  
B.A. Student

Karissa is currently completing her Bachelor's in Psychology. She assists in the coordination of several projects and is exploring young children's non-verbal lie-telling behavior.

**Sarah-Jane Renaud,**  
PhD. Candidate

Sarah-Jane is completing a PhD in the School and Applied Child Psychology program. Her dissertation examines children's understanding and conversations about death.

**Shanna Williams,**  
PhD. Candidate

Shanna is currently completing a doctorate in School and Applied Child Psychology. Her dissertation project explores the emergence and predictive factors of lie-telling.

**Sarah Yachison,**  
PhD. Student

Sarah is a first year PhD student in School and Applied Child Psychology. Her MA thesis investigated children's non-verbal behaviors and perceptions while lying.

## Undergraduate Students

We have several psychology undergraduates doing special projects on the development of lie-telling in children in order to complete their BA Honors degree.

**Carlos Gomez-Garibello,**  
PhD. Candidate

Carlos is doing his doctoral studies in the Human Development program. His dissertation explores cross-cultural differences in children's aggressive and bullying behavior.

**Kelsey Moore,**  
PhD. Student

Kelsey is pursuing a PhD in School and Applied Child Psychology. Her dissertation investigates spirituality and its relationship with children's social and emotional well-being.

**Elissa McCarron,**  
M.A. Student

Elissa is a first year MA student in Human Development. She recently completed her undergraduate degree at Mount Allison University and is interested in exploring lie-telling in children.

## Volunteers

A notable mention to all of our wonderful volunteers, who dedicate several hours a week to helping us with data entry, fact checking, and testing.

# From Research to Real Life: Helping Children to Cope with Death

Death is a universal part of life and most young people will experience the death of a loved one at some point in their childhood. Thus, death is an important topic to explore with children, both prior to and during loss.

## Children's Understanding of Death

In general, children acquire a mature understanding of death around their 10th birthday. At this age, most children comprehend four concepts related to death - 1) the deceased cannot come back to life; 2) the body of the deceased has stopped working; 3) every living thing will eventually die; 4) the cause of death is biological. However, recent studies interviewing children about their understanding of the death of plants and animals suggests children as young as 4 years of age can possess an understanding of these concepts.

## The Mourning Process

Although children possess different stages of understanding based on their age, they all go through a mourning process. This can be an effective time to discuss and accept the loss while preserving the memory of the deceased. [Here are 3 things you can do to assist your child through this process:](#)

- 1) VALIDATE:** allow your child to feel whatever they feel
- 2) INFORM:** to avoid confusion, try to answer your child's questions in an accurate and straightforward manner (e.g., using the term "died" rather than "passed away")
- 3) COMFORT:** clearly explain what the loss means and how it will affect their life in the future

Children are capable of adapting and effectively mourning the loss with the support of positive relationships, parental warmth, and open parent-child communication. However, it is best to take opportunities to prepare children for experiencing loss before it occurs. You can do this through engaging in open conversations about the cause of death and encouraging questions whenever your child is willing to do so. Children's books can also be an effective way to explore the issue and spark further conversation (e.g., "When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death" by Laurie Brown). For even more information on this topic check out "Children's Understanding of Death" by V. Talwar and M. Schleifer.

## LIFE: The study

In an effort to gain further insight into this topic, researchers at the Talwar Child Development Lab explored parent's perceptions of their young children's understanding of death and examined how their perceptions related to how their children actually felt about death. The study, entitled LIFE, asked parent-child dyads to watch a Sesame Street video in which Big Bird learns that his friend, Mr. Hooper, has died. Subsequent conversations between parent and child were filmed and analyzed.

Findings suggest that parents address a wide range of death-related concepts when conversing with their children about death (e.g., death is irreversible, death is inevitable, etc.). Furthermore, results reveal that parents tend to have a relatively accurate view of their children's comprehension of death; generally able to accurately judge their children's understanding of the subject. Interestingly, parents who talked about death in more negative ways tended to have children with higher levels of overall fear regarding the topic. This suggests that communication and discourse can have a significant impact on how young children think and feel about death.

## Media Exposure

### FILM

In 2008, ABC Nightline featured our lab in a piece called "Sweet Little Liars." The program provided viewers with greater insight into the development of deception and the creative ways in which we attempt to study children's lie-telling tendencies. An article on the televised special can be found at: [abcnews.go.com](http://abcnews.go.com)

Dr. Victoria Talwar shared her top tips on lie-telling and encouraging honesty in children on the popular Rachael Ray show in July, 2008. A part of the episode called "My Kids Lie" can be viewed at [www.rachaelrayshow.com](http://www.rachaelrayshow.com)

More recently, our facilities and staff in action was captured over 3 days in June as part of an upcoming documentary on Radio-Canada about the moral journey of children.

### PRINT

The McGill Reporter newspaper recognized the important implications of Dr Victoria Talwar's work back in 2007. Her research on child testimony and socio-emotional development has helped revamp Canada's child witness laws. Visit <http://www.mcgill.ca/reporter/39/18/talwar/> to read the article.

The Wall Street Journal recently interviewed Dr Victoria Talwar as part of an article on the development of lying in children. The 2010 piece entitled "How to handle little liars" can be found on the newspaper's website at <http://online.wsj.com>

In 2011, Dr Victoria Talwar's research on the relationship between disciplinary techniques and children's socio-emotional development was featured in The Guardian newspaper. The article, which suggests punitive punishment techniques are relatively ineffective for teaching children to listen and behave, can be found at [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

# What's New at the Lab

Interested in participating in our studies? Check out these exciting opportunities to become involved.

## **2YR (3 year olds)**

Investigates the emergence of deception and the relationship between lie-telling and other abilities such as self-control and vocabulary in toddlers. The study takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. Monetary compensation is given for time.

## **BEHAVE (6-11 year olds)**

Boys will perform a series of games and tasks investigating their cognitive skills, lie-telling practices, perspective taking abilities, and externalizing behavioral tendencies. Parents will also be asked to complete a series of questionnaires. Study involves 2 sessions (1 hour each). Monetary compensation is given for time.

## **CHEATING (6-8 year olds)**

Children will complete a series of paper based questionnaires about their perceptions of math class, math homework, and academic dishonesty. Parents will also be asked to complete several related questionnaires. The study takes 30 minutes to complete.

## **SPIRIT (7-11 year olds)**

Children are asked to fill out a paper based questionnaire regarding their views of spirituality. The study takes approximately 10-15 minutes and can be done online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/36BHCD7>.

Children who complete the survey will be automatically entered in a draw to win a gift certificate to Toys r' us or Indigo worth 50\$.

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

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.

## **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. 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:**

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