

season's greetings

from the Australian Temperament Project!



Year 2006 survey

In November, we sent out surveys to all ATP families, including yours. We hope you got it! It's been four years since the last survey, and we are keen to hear about your family's experiences, and how your sons' and daughters' lives are going. The new survey also gives us the opportunity to ask about some of your child's social experiences in the first few years of life which we have not previously been able to cover. We have also included some questions about how you see your role as parents now that your children are grown up. You are the only ones who can tell us about these important topics, and so we are seeking your assistance once again.

If you have not received your survey, please let us know and we'll send another.

Many thanks to all who have sent their surveys back already. We are really enjoying reading your comments and

reflections - keep them coming! If you haven't finished yours yet, it is not too late, and we would really appreciate you sparing the time to take part. If you prefer, you can answer the questions over the phone - just call Diana on 1800 352 275 (free call) or email atp@aifs.gov.au. You can also contact us this way if you'd like another survey to be sent, if you have any other queries or comments, or would like copies of our reports and publications.

As we had expected, we are seeing that your sons and daughters are leading busy lives - working, studying, traveling, marrying, and some have become parents. Some of you have contacted us to let us know your child is overseas at present. We would still like them to take part if possible, and would be happy to post questionnaires to them, or, if they will be back in the first part of next year, to wait until they return. (We know that keeping track of their movements will be a major task for us from now on, and we will appreciate your help with this!)

As the survey is still underway, we're not able to say much about the trends yet.

AUSTRALIAN TEMPERAMENT PROJECT

A study of development from infancy to adulthood

Year 2006 newsletter

Thanks for your fantastic support - we couldn't keep going without you! Here is our Year 2006 newsletter, to keep you up to date with what we've been doing.

But we have already noticed that many young people have experienced a relationship breakup that has been hard to deal with, and quite a number of families have been faced with the loss of a family member. We know these events are challenging and painful, however common they may be, and we hope that you are all managing to cope with them.

We will tell you more about the survey results in next year's newsletter, and you can always check the ATP website for the latest news and reports - www.aifs.gov.au/atp.

Our fame grows ...

We are frequently invited to talk about the ATP at Australian and international conferences, and there is great interest in your children's journey through life. For example, Ann talked about the ATP in Britain and South Africa, Diana in Malaysia, and Margot in New Zealand, during this year. There has also been much media interest, leading to many newspaper articles, radio interviews (e.g. with John Laws, Australia Talks Back, Radio National) and television appearances (e.g. Today Tonight - 3 times so far!). It can be tricky to avoid misinterpretation in the media,

Our best wishes to you and your family!

but so far our information seems to have been conveyed fairly accurately. This attention makes our study and its findings more widely known, and can help increase resources and initiatives for families and young people.

Some of you may have seen the two-part documentary *Life at 1* on ABC-TV in October, which looked at the lives of a small group of Australian babies and their families. The program was based on *Growing Up in Australia* (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children), which is following 10,000 babies and young children from across Australia through childhood. The ATP has been an invaluable source of learning for this new study, and Ann Sanson and Diana Smart both contribute to designing it. So this is another way in which your participation in the ATP is having ongoing positive effects!

The first episode of *Life at 1* focused on children's temperament and featured commentary from Ann, among others. Much of the knowledge about children's temperament comes from our study – the ATP.

Anxiety and depression

As well as our recent work on antisocial behaviour and driving styles (see the four big reports on our website), we have recently been looking at the onset and effects of anxiety and depression, which we know a number of our young study members have been dealing with. These are serious problems among this age group.

Using our many waves of information, we have been able to track levels of anxiety and depression over childhood and adolescence. Five main groups were found: those who had very low levels of these problems over the age span, those who were a little but not highly anxious/depressed, those who

We are moving

The ATP is located at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which is moving in mid February 2007. The Institute's new address will be Level 20, 485 La Trobe St., Melbourne, just opposite Flagstaff Gardens. You are very welcome to visit us at any time. Please note that our telephone and email details will stay the same.

were low at first but became higher over time, those who were high at first but decreased over time, and finally, those who had high levels most of the time. The finding that there was a group experiencing high anxiety and/or depression over such a long period signals how difficult it can be to shift these problems.

Our study also found that anxiety and depression were more likely to increase over time among girls than boys. Girls and boys with higher levels of anxiety and depression were more likely to have been shy and 'tetchy' as babies and toddlers, and to have had more difficult relationships with parents and friends as children and teenagers. A number of other factors were also important.

We were also able to look at what helped those who started out with high anxiety and depression in childhood to become less anxious and depressed as teenagers. These factors included good social skills, better parent and peer relationships, and more positive school experiences. So it seems that encouraging better relationships and building more supportive school climates may help young people to recover from anxiety and depression. This is another example of the valuable insights emerging from the ATP. We have several papers in the pipeline on this important topic, and it is one we will keep following in the future.



Future Plans

Next year we will be busy looking at the trends from this year's survey. Among the areas we hope to look at are your sons' and daughters' positive development (the things that are going well), your relationships with your sons and daughters, and your perceptions of your parenting role these days.

Our Thanks

Once again, our sincere thanks for your family's fantastic participation in the ATP. With each year, the project becomes more famous in Australia and overseas, in the media and community, and among researchers and governments. The knowledge gained is really making a difference. This could not happen without your wonderful support. We hope you have a great summer break and a happy and rewarding 2007!

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Remember, you can contact us at the Australian Institute of Family Studies

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post 300 Queen St., Melbourne,
3000 till mid February 2007;
Level 20, 485 La Trobe St.
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If you are moving, you can use the postal, phone or email details above to let us know your new address