

season's greetings

from the Australian Temperament Project!



Year 2008 newsletter

Thank you for your continued support of the ATP. Here is our 2008 newsletter to keep you up to date with what has been happening with the project over the past year, and what we have planned for the future.

The ATP turns 25!

2008 saw the passing of an important milestone in the life of the ATP—it turned 25! As we celebrate this fantastic achievement, we want to thank you all for your wonderful loyalty and support over the years. The ATP could not have kept going this long without you.

Here is an update of some of the work we have been doing this year.

Your relationship with your sons and daughters

During the last survey we asked you some questions about your relationship with your ATP son or daughter. We found that most of you were in regular contact with your sons and daughters and were getting along well with them. For instance, we found that:

- almost all of you (94%) communicated with your son or daughter at least weekly;
- 79% rated your relationship with your ATP child at least an “8” out of “10”; and
- only 6% of you argued with your son or daughter once a week or more often.

Not surprisingly, those of you who shared a house with your son or daughter tended to have more frequent contact with them than those who did not live together. However, you also tended to argue with them more often! This does not seem to have impacted negatively on your relationship with your child, with both groups of parents rating their relationships with their children equally positively.

Your role as a parent

Little is known about how parents view their parenting roles once their children become adults. You provided us with some fascinating insights into this issue during our most recent survey.

When asked how you saw your parenting role, most of you agreed that it was your role to:

- pass on your values and/or life philosophy to your child (88%);
- care for your child when he/she was sick (87%); and
- provide various forms of advice (ranging from 59% for childrearing advice to 75% for financial advice).

However, the majority of you did not believe that it was your role to:

- provide your ATP child with food, clothing or other everyday needs (68%); or
- assist him/her with household tasks (59%).

Your views were more mixed when it came to whether or not you should financially support your child, regularly care for your grandchildren, or be your child's closest friend.

Not surprisingly we found that your son's or daughter's living arrangements influenced the way you perceived your parenting roles. That is, you were more likely to believe that it was your role to provide more tangible forms of support

(such as food, clothing, assistance with household tasks) if your child still lived at home with you.

Drinking and alcohol-related harms

You are probably aware of the recent media attention about young people and drinking, and the harms that may result from heavy alcohol use. With the financial support of the R. E. Ross Trust, we have been looking at this issue using ATP data.

Harms were concerningly common among study members at age 19–20, with about three-quarters reporting that they had experienced one or more negative consequences in the past year, such as being sick or passing out (53%), memory loss (45%), becoming violent and getting into a fight (8%) or feeling irritable or depressed when alcohol wasn't available (7%).

Binge drinking often increased the risk of these harms. Some other factors that seemed important were:

- being involved in antisocial activities (e.g., vandalism, stealing);
- having friends who drank heavily;
- being very impulsive;
- living away from home; and
- getting drunk often (at age 17–18).

Changes in positive development over early adulthood

In our last newsletter we looked at the positive strengths your sons and daughters were developing when they were 19–20 years old. We are currently trying to understand how these strengths

AUSTRALIAN TEMPERAMENT PROJECT

A study of development from infancy to adulthood

Thanks for your fantastic support—we couldn't keep going without you!

have developed in their 20s. Using the information they provided at age 23–24 we found that on average, most strengths had increased over time. As a group, your sons and daughters were more:

- responsible, self-controlled and empathetic in their mid twenties;
- satisfied with life;
- trusting and tolerant of others;
- accepting of those with different ethnic origins;
- active in taking on social responsibilities; and
- confident that the police and large organisations act fairly and reasonably.

However, not many of them were active in community groups at age 23–24. Also, levels of confidence and trust in the media and in governments at all levels seemed to have decreased.

Predictors of positive development

When we looked at the factors from childhood and adolescence that predicted how ATP study members were going at 19–20 years old, we identified a number of characteristics that distinguished those who were developing well. These included:

- having self control (and especially good control of emotions);
- having good relationships with parents, other family members, and peers;
- caring about and feeling part of the community;
- being adaptable and agreeable; and
- feeling that school was a rewarding place.

News from the ATP team

In our last newsletter, we told you that Diana Smart had taken up a new senior leadership role working on *Growing Up in Australia* (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children). While Diana continues to play a key role in the ATP, Suzanne Vassallo is the new ATP Project Manager. Suzanne has been involved with the ATP since 2001, and was introduced in our 2004 newsletter.

Contact us

If you are moving or want to get in touch with the ATP team, contact us by:

Phone: 1800 352 275 (freecall)
Fax: 03 9214 7839
Email: atp@aifs.gov.au
Post: ATP, Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne VIC 3000, Australia

AUSTRALIAN TEMPERAMENT PROJECT

A study of development from infancy to adulthood

For project updates, please visit the ATP website: www.aifs.gov.au/atp

This year the ATP team welcomed Dr Craig Olsson. Craig will be taking a leading role in future research related to positive development.

Meet Craig Olsson

Craig has a PhD in Psychology and is based at the Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. He brings to the ATP a strong interest in the many and varied ways young people develop, and the impact of their genetic makeup, their personal qualities, and their family, school, community, and cultural experiences on their lives. Craig is involved in another long running study of young people that has followed them from ages 14 to 28 so far. Craig lives in Parkville with his wife (Cathy), two children Jai (1-year) and Flynn (3-years), a spoilt cat and a white fluffy Samoyed dog.

Future plans

This year we submitted an application to the Australian Research Council for funds to collect a 15th wave of data in 2010, focusing particularly on positive development. We are pleased to tell you that the application was successful, and the experts who reviewed our application were extremely positive. They said:

“The value of this longitudinal study cannot be overstated ...”

“There is a real need to examine the impact of factors in adolescence

into early adulthood, and this study is one of the very few that is able to do this.”

“The Australian Temperament Project ... is a nationally valuable resource.”

“The outcomes of this study will very clearly contribute to promoting and maintaining good health, preventative healthcare, and strengthening Australia's social and economic fabric.”

“This team has an outstanding record in obtaining appropriate funds to conduct high quality research, in planning and executing research protocols, in publishing their work, and in translating their research into practice.”

Thank you

Once again, we would like to sincerely thank you for your fantastic support of the ATP.

As the comments of the expert reviewers show, the ATP is highly regarded both in Australia and overseas, and the knowledge gained from this study is of real value to the community. This is certainly reflected by the high level of interest the study attracts from the media, government, researchers and members of the broader community. The ATP would not be in the position it is in today without your support.

Our best wishes to you and your family for the festive season. We hope you have a happy and rewarding year ahead in 2009.



The Australian Temperament Project is a joint project between the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Diana Smart & Suzanne Vassallo), the Royal Children's Hospital (Craig Olsson & Frank Oberklaid), the University of Melbourne (Ann Sanson & Margot Prior) and Deakin University (John Toumbourou). The project is led and supported by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and is also supported by a grant from the Australian Research Council.