



Newsletter

DECEMBER 2008

We are always pleased to hear from you about your experiences with the study or your ideas for the future of the study.

Please email: growingup@aifs.gov.au with any comments, or write to us (Reply Paid 66107) at the address below.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

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Greetings!

Best wishes of the season to all our study families. Let me introduce myself: my name is Diana Smart and I joined the *Growing Up in Australia* team at the Australian Institute of Family Studies as General Manager about a year ago.



It is wonderful being part of the team working on this amazing study. I have prior experience with longitudinal studies, being one of the lead researchers with the Australian Temperament Project, a study that has followed more than 2,000 children in Victoria since they were babies—and they are now 25 years old! It is very interesting comparing situations for children then and now—some things have changed a lot, and some not much at all.

As always, thank you for your continued participation in this study. The third round of interviews is now almost complete, with interviewers catching up with more than 8,500 families this time. Most of these families had taken part in the second round of interviews, but pleasingly we were able to interview over 200 families who had not been able to take part last time.

For the first time, we also interviewed (by telephone) parents of study children who no longer live with the child's other parent, where we were given contact details. If you were involved in this part of the study, thank you.

We are thinking ahead too and already preparing for the next wave (Wave 4), due to take place in late 2009 and continue through 2010. We have tested some exciting new ways of collecting the information—for example, giving parents and the 10–11 year old group of children the opportunity to use a computer to read and answer some of the questions, and collecting some information from parents by telephone.

The 10–11 year old children will be able to listen to the questions via headsets—testing has shown that children really enjoy being able to answer questions this way. The younger group of children will be asked a few questions by the interviewer, just as the older group of children did in Wave 2 in 2006.

We also want you to know that the study will continue beyond Wave 4. The Australian Government has committed to making it an ongoing project, which is wonderful recognition of its importance. The value of the study will be greatly increased by being able to follow the children as they grow up, and we sincerely hope that you and your child will continue to be involved.

Warm regards

Diana Smart



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Family Studies

Growing Up in Australia is the longitudinal study of Australian children. It is designed to identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families and for early intervention and prevention strategies.

Growing Up in Australia is following representative samples of approximately 5,000 infants and 5,000 4–5 year olds and their families, from 2003–04 until 2010 and beyond.

You can visit the *Growing Up in Australia* website at any time to find the latest information on the study. Every three months we produce a general newsletter for the website with updates on the study's progress.

www.aifs.gov.au/growingup



The Longitudinal Study of
Australian Children

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Your study information at work!

Government inquiries

One of the main purposes of *Growing Up in Australia* is to inform policy. Information from the study has been used in two important government inquiries:

- Inquiry into the Health Benefit of Breastfeeding, Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, March 2007; and
- Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave, Productivity Commission, June 2008.

You may well have seen discussions in the media about these. Both of these government inquiries will lead to major policy initiatives from government.

Publications

Two major reports were released earlier this year based on Wave 1 data: *How Well are Australian Infants and Children Aged 4 to 5 Years Doing?* and *Parenting and Families in Australia*. The research shows that most children are faring well, although children are more likely to have positive outcomes where their mother has higher educational qualifications, there is higher family income, their parents have higher status occupations and there is an absence of financial stress. These reports can be viewed at www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/prps-nav.htm

The June 2008 release of the Institute's journal, *Family Matters* no. 79, features a number of articles that focus on the study. The *Growing Up in Australia Annual Report 2006–07* was released in June 2008 and the *Annual Report 2007–08* in December 2008. If you would like a copy of these publications, please contact growingup@aifs.gov.au with your postal address information.

Life at series

We hope you received your postcard about the re-screening of *Life at 1* and the new episodes of *Life at 3* shown on ABC1 during late September to early October, and were able to watch the show. Although the families in the documentary undergo additional activities, they still go through a similar interview process to the one you have been through, and fill out the same parent forms and diaries. We hope you enjoyed seeing some

We recently met with about 50 Wave 3 interviewers. It was wonderful to hear how much they enjoyed working on the study and how welcome families made them. They shared some of their experiences with us (no names given, of course) and it really highlighted how every one of you has a story, in much the same way as those that have been shown in *Life at 3*. Thank you for continuing to share your story with us!

of the ways in which the results of this study are used, and how they are interpreted by experts. You can visit the *Life at* website for links to the results that were used: www.abc.net.au/tv/life



Between-waves surveys

The two years between interviews is a long time in a child's life, so we like to keep in touch with the children's progress via a "between-waves" questionnaire sent through the post.

The main themes explored in the 2007 questionnaire were children's use of technology and media (e.g., TV, computers, Internet, electronic games systems, etc.), and parents' work and child support arrangements.

We will be mailing out another questionnaire in 2009. Children's use of media and technology will continue to be a major theme, as well as an update on children's health issues. As most of the younger children will have started school by 2009, we will be asking about their transition to school.

If you have any forms to complete and return to us for Wave 3, we would still very much like to receive them.

We know that completing these forms can take time, but the value of the study is greatly increased by having all the information completed. And your point of view is very important.

Your child's information

We understand that parents are interested in how their children perform in the various activities they do with the interviewers, or might like to know their child's answers when interviewed.

Firstly, with regard to the activities children do with the interviewers. These measures are relatively brief and are not completed under usual testing conditions or administered by experts. The results can also be very much influenced by the time of day they are completed and how children are feeling. These issues will balance out across a large group of children, but mean that results for individual children are less precise. For these reasons, we are not able to give specific results for individual children. If you are interested in this type of information, you could seek a more detailed assessment and your child's teacher or family doctor may be able to assist or direct you to other professionals.

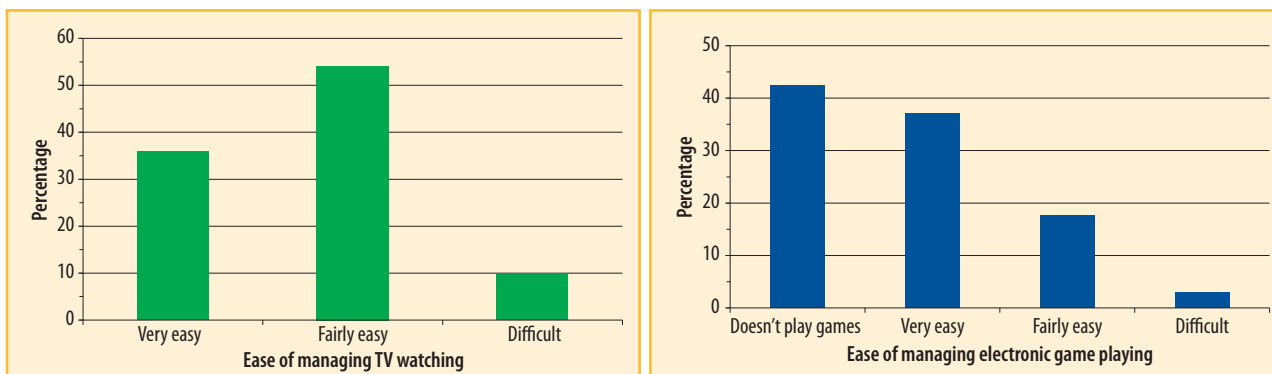
Secondly, when we interview the children we ask about how their lives are going. It is important we respect children's privacy, which will become even more important as they grow older. The *Privacy Act* specifies that we cannot provide information about one person's answers to another person without the consent of the person who gave the answers. Because of this, we cannot provide parents with information about their child's interview answers without the child's consent.

We are happy for you to contact us if you wish to discuss this further.

Children's use of media and technology, 2007

Most parents of the 3–4 year old children found it fairly or very easy to manage their child's television, video and DVD watching. Most parents also had rules about TV watching—94% had rules for the type of programs the child could watch and 62% had rules for the amount of TV the child could watch.

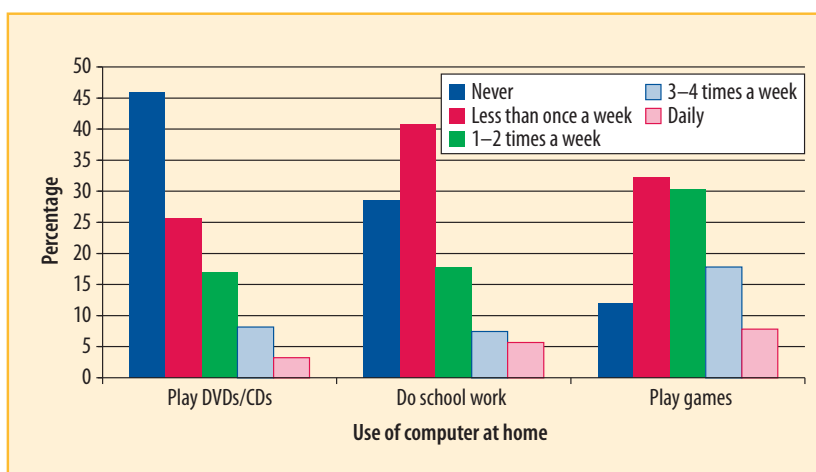
Just under 60% of children aged 3–4 years played computer or electronic games at home, and almost all parents found this very or fairly easy to manage.



Children aged 3–4 years: Parent's ease of managing children's TV, DVD and video viewing and children's electronic game playing

About 90% of children aged 7–8 years had a computer at home, and almost 20% had a computer in their bedroom. The use of the computer, for any purpose, was more frequent among children who had a computer in their bedroom.

Children of this age were more likely to use the computer for playing games than doing school work. Nine in ten children play games on the computer compared with seven in ten who use it for school work. Just over half of the children also use the computer to play DVDs or CDs.



Children aged 7–8 years: Use of the computer at home

Don't forget!

You are unique and irreplaceable! If you move house or change your contact details, please let us know. Please ring 1800 005 508, use the change of address form on the calendar, or email growingup@abs.gov.au

And **THANK YOU** for continuing to be part of this very important study. Only through your continued support can we obtain the best possible information for the benefit of all children.



Growing Up in Australia:

Helping make sure all children have a good start in life