



Children's Hospital Boston

*Children's Hospital Boston
Laboratories of Cognitive Neuroscience*

Summer 2008 Newsletter



Hello from Dr. Nelson

*Director of Research, Division of Developmental Medicine, Children's Hospital Boston
Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School*

Hello to all from the Labs of Cognitive Neuroscience! I hope everyone is staying cool and having plenty of outdoor fun now that summer is really in full swing! Whether you have already taken part in our studies or have recently joined our growing participant database, I greatly appreciate your interest in our research. Your support of and participation in our studies is invaluable to us in answering many important questions related to infant and child cognitive development.

As you can see from the many updates below, summer finds us as busy as ever, with lots of community events and new faces around the LCN. Please feel free to explore our website or contact our research team directly to learn more about the nature of our studies and how you and your child might participate. Thank you again for your interest in the Labs of Cognitive Neuroscience. I look forward to meeting you at a study session in the near future!

Warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Charles A. Nelson".

Charles A. Nelson, Ph.D.

Inside the Lab:

Current Opportunities for Study Participation

As a registered member of our participant database, you are eligible to receive notifications by mail or e-mail when opportunities for research participation are available that fit your or your child's age range. Wondering what study opportunities might be available to you, your family members, or your friends in the near future? Browse the [Ongoing Research](#) section of our website, and take a look at the research studies in our laboratories enrolling infants, children, and adults for participation. And if you spot a study opportunity which might be of interest to someone you know, feel free to forward this newsletter or tell them about our [participant database](#)!

Featured Study: The Infant-Sibling Project

Currently, children with language impairments or autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are not usually diagnosed until they are 18 months of age or older. This is largely because doctors do not yet have reliable signs by which they can make clear and accurate diagnoses before this age. In this study, LCN researchers are collaborating with Boston University's Lab of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience in order to identify very early signs of language or social communication problems that emerge in young children at risk for language impairment or ASD. Our goal is to find signs that suggest risk for these disorders within the first few months of life, before babies reach their first birthday. If diagnosis can be moved back to the first year of life, then early intervention, which is known to have a significant positive impact on children with these disorders, can begin much earlier than is currently possible, allowing children at risk for developing them the best opportunity to achieve their full potential.

In order to identify early signs of these disorders and capture important changes that occur rapidly during the first year of life, researchers are using observational interviews, behavioral assessments, and measures of brain activity to chart the development of language and social behaviors in children during this period. To create a comprehensive picture of this period of development, researchers are working with three groups of children: younger siblings of children with language impairments, younger siblings of children with ASD, and younger siblings of typically developing children. Looking at these three groups together gives us the greatest chance of identifying the early signs we are looking for.

Currently, we need participants in all three of these groups. Infants can join the study at as young as three months, and no later than twelve months.

If you are interested in participating, please e-mail project.infantsibling@gmail.com, or call the lab at 617-355-0400.

New Faces in the Lab

This summer and fall we are welcoming several new students and post-doctoral researchers to the labs. From Marte Otten, who will be doing studies looking at social-category perception in adults, to Sharon Fox, who will be expanding the labs' work in face-processing, these new faces bring with them a wealth of knowledge and new inspiration for research studies and ideas. Keep your eye on the [Meet the Lab Members](#) section of our website, as well as the [Ongoing Research](#) section, to see more about these new additions and the work they will be doing here.

Calling all Play Groups!

Are you a member of a neighborhood play group? A parenting message board? A babysitting co-op? If so, we could really use your help! While we do our best to connect with area parents through a variety of means, there is nothing like a personal referral from someone who has been here for a study with their child and had a good experience. If you are part of a group of parents who might be interested in participating in studies and you would be willing to help us spread the word, a quick posting to a message board or e-mail to a listserv would be much appreciated! If you'd like a short blurb about the labs to include with a posting or e-mail, please feel free to contact Rebecca, our Recruitment Coordinator, at rebecca.hansen@childrens.harvard.edu. Thanks, as always, for your help and support!

In the News:

"The Art of Perception" on the Harvard Medical Labcast

Dr. Nelson's work in the development of face-processing is featured in this podcast from Harvard Medical School. He speaks on how this system develops in the brain, from facial recognition in the first year of life to the discrimination of emotion as children get older. He also talks about the larger goal of the project, which is to gain a better understanding of how this system gets constructed in order to shed light on various disorders that show differences in face-processing, such as autism. To listen to the podcast, [click here](#).

"It's Scary Sometimes: With children being adopted from abroad at older ages, concerns for their health grow," from *The Boston Globe*

Speaking from his experience working with Romanian Orphans as part of the [Bucharest Early Intervention Project](#), Dr. Nelson is quoted about the potential impact on children who are internationally adopted at an older age, which means many of them spend a longer time in an institution or orphanage in their home country. To read the full article, [click here](#).

Please visit the "[In the News](#)" section of our website for more press coverage about the laboratories' research!

In the Community:

The LCN at the "Living Laboratory" at the Museum of Science!

(Discovery Center Exhibit, Tuesdays from 2:30-4:45 & The Human Body Connection Exhibit, Fridays from 10:00-1:00)



Can you tell these monkeys apart?

As part of the museum's effort to make the science of cognitive development more accessible to parents and kids, researchers from the LCN have joined researchers from Harvard University and MIT in the museum's "Living Laboratory." We will be there each week to give children the opportunity to participate in a study, as well as to help parents understand how their child learns about the world. The current study is a face-perception study with a fun, simple task that involves trying to tell the difference between two monkey faces! Please keep your eye out for us when you're there--stop by, say hello, and test your face-perception skills!

Martha Eliot Community Health Fair, September 13th from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm

For the second year, we will be participating in the Community Health Fair at the Martha Eliot Health Center in Jamaica Plain. This is a great event for the whole family; they offer everything from health screenings, to face painting and moonwalks, to double-dutch demonstrations. The event is free, and so is the delicious healthy food that they provide! As always, we will have our big brain puzzle with us, so please stop by and give it a try! For more information, please [click here](#) to visit the MEHC website.

Watertown Faire on the Square, September 27th, 10:00-4:00

This September will also be our second year participating in the Watertown Faire on the Square, another great family event. In addition to lots of yummy food and booths featuring local artists and vendors, there will be a wealth of activities for kids, including lots of musical performances and even a ferris wheel! For more information, please visit their [website](#). We hope to see you there!

"Your Baby's Brain," Sunday, September 27th, 3:00-4:30

Dr. Nelson will present a talk entitled "Your Baby's Brain: How Infants Learn, See, and Think" at ISIS Maternity's Needham center. The talk, part of ISIS Maternity's expert speakers series, will be followed by a question and answer session with Dr. Nelson. Registration is required for the event, which is free for ISIS Maternity members. For more information or to register, please visit their website at www.isismaternity.com.