



# Family and Child Neuroscience Lab Newsletter

Summer 2020 Edition



Guest Editors: Nikisha Charles-Stazzone & Brian Bello

## Inside this Issue:

**Pg.1— Inside this Issue; Contact Us; RISE Project Updates; The FCN Family photo**

**Pg.2—Talking to Your Kids about Race; Our Family Grew!; A Message from Us**

**Pg.3— A Moment of Gratitude; FCN Lab Research Projects; Life in times of COVID**

**Pg.4—Get to Know Us! & Meet our New Lab Members!**

## Did you move or change your phone number?

If you have changed location or phone number in the past year, please send us your updated address and contact information so that we can share lab updates!

Give us a call at **303-871-3096**, send us a text at **720-507-7326** or email us at **fcnlab@du.edu**

Family and Child Neuroscience Lab  
University of Denver  
2155 S. Race Street, Denver CO 80208

## RISE Project Updates

Our study is all about understanding how everyday stress impacts mental and emotional demands related to pregnancy and parenting in mothers; understanding different strategies that mothers use to cope with stress including the use of cannabis; and understanding how stress impacts a newborn's body and brain development. We are learning a lot from you and we are humbled and inspired by your resilience! Thank you for sharing with us especially as we continue to navigate these uncertain times during the pandemic.

The FCN lab has maintained CDC and state safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic and we are conducting our visits remotely via video call and contact-less drop off and pickup of our self-administered sample box at participants' homes.

We are excited to share an update that there are 139 total participants recruited so far, 97 families enrolled in the study and 49 babies of the families have arrived!

We continue to recruit new participants for our study! If you or someone you know is interested in participating or learning more, please contact us ! We are enrolling pregnant women up to 14 weeks pregnant, including women who are using marijuana and marijuana products throughout their pregnancy. We are committed to integrating all communities into our study.

## The FCN Family! Keeping it together...remotely!



## Talking to Your Kids about Race

Discussing race is difficult, “messy” and necessary in our global village. Here are some starting points according to Parent Toolkit:

**Actually talk about it**—Children are learning by observing, from both what is explicitly said and what is avoided, which can cause harm if the conclusions they come to are not accurate. We need to teach our kids to be mindful of how others may be feeling and foster curiosity so that they can have an awareness of themselves and others around them.

**Set the example**—Make a point of seeking out information about and experiences with people different than yourself and family. Kids will pick up that cultural differences are not “right or wrong” and will appreciate the special connection that comes in finding common ground with others.

**Help your child navigate their curiosity**—Kids are known for making observations and asking questions; we want to encourage them to do so respectfully. When your child makes a statement, get curious and ask, “What makes you think that?” which can help you to understand where they’re coming from. If you are unsure of how to respond to a question they may ask, that’s okay! Take the opportunity to search for answers together with your child.

**Make it relatable**—Children are not strangers to the concept of fairness, which makes it easily relatable when explaining the concept of racism. Parents’ role is to teach kids, “Even though there is unfairness, there have always been people working to change it, and we can be a part of it, too.”(2019) A great exercise is the “spider web activity”; kids unravel multiple balls of string around a room, making a “tangled web”, then discuss with an adult the challenge of untangling the web and the parallels to creating a fair society.

**Be open about addressing mistakes**—Despite our best efforts, sometimes we still make mistakes. Parents must be especially careful to listen before reacting if their child reports an upsetting incident. What does your child need from you in this moment? Coach them to ask, “Tell me more” if someone says something offensive to engender conversation. “[E]ncourage your children to study the past so they can better understand the present”(2019) and have an awareness of what may or may not be offensive to different people.

**Be an advocate (for all!)**—When your children are knowingly saying something racist (or otherwise prejudiced), immediate intervention is the key to setting the boundary of what is not acceptable. “You are never being neutral when someone is being disrespectful or using bigoted language”(2019). It is okay to let others know, with the same immediacy, that their behavior is not welcome in your presence or that of your children.



- Taken from Parent Toolkit (2019) ‘How to Talk to Kids about Race and Racism’ - Retrieved from <https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race-and-racism>

### Our Family Grew!

Congratulations Rebekah on becoming a mom!

Our Research Coordinator, Rebekah Tribble had a beautiful baby girl in April 2020 named Kori!



### A Message from Us

To all of our amazing **RISE** Participants, THANK YOU!!! We have had a great time working with you all, meeting your little ones and learning about the rewards of new parenthood. This year has brought particular challenges and we are grateful that you’ve shared your time with us! We have made quite a few changes to our study practices to continue to collecting data and keeping you and our FCN team safe. See Pages 1 and 3 to learn more!

## A Moment of Gratitude

Studies show that acknowledging what we're grateful for fosters positive emotions which build up over time and create higher levels of satisfaction and wellbeing. It has been a challenging couple of months, so we took a moment to reflect on what we're grateful for in spite these tumultuous times ...

- Quality time with family and reconnecting with long-time friends
- Learning to relax and trust that it will be okay
- Finding meaning and strength in surviving each day
- Taking a different perspective

What are you grateful for?



## FCN Lab Research Projects



Leah is working on her dissertation investigating how childhood experiences influence new mothers. Have you ever wondered: how does my childhood impact me as a mom? Do I parent like my mom or dad? She is studying how childhood relationships with mom and dad influence new moms' parenting, oxytocin (a bonding hormone), and brain responses to baby. So far, we've found that higher maternal oxytocin while playing with baby is linked to more supportive parenting, particularly for moms who recall their own parents to be more controlling during their childhood. This suggests that oxytocin might help moms to support their children in ways that are different from the ways that they remember how their own parents supported them. This year, Leah, Rebekah, and Pilyoung also wrote a chapter about how fathers' brains change during postpartum. You can read more in the *Handbook of Fathers and Child Development - Prenatal to Preschool*.



Shannon is a 2nd year graduate student in the Developmental Psychology program at DU researching the mechanism of maternal brain changes during pregnancy, and how different stressors might affect these changes. She is using data from the RISE project to see how cannabis might change maternal responses in the brain during pregnancy when mothers are listening to infant cries. Shannon is also investigating how certain risk factors for postpartum depression might change maternal responses to infant cues. She found that mothers with a history of depression versus those without, but not depressed postpartum, have a lower neural response when listening to another baby cry in comparison to their own in the left posterior cingulate gyrus. This could mean that mothers who have a history of depression may not respond the same to any infant cry, but can still have an appropriate response to their own infant. Shannon is currently investigating the implications of this difference further.

## Life in times of COVID

COVID-19 is a new coronavirus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in China. Spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing, virus-carrying airborne droplets can remain in the air or on surfaces even after the ill person is no longer near. Common human coronaviruses cause upper respiratory tract infections with symptoms of the common cold and occasionally, lower respiratory tract infections, like pneumonia. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you have been exposed to someone with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 and are experiencing these symptoms, you should call your primary care physician or urgent care facility to see if you need to be tested.

### How does my family protect against Covid-19?

◊ Avoid shaking hands with others right now. If you do, wash your hands or use sanitizer right away, especially before touching your face.

- ◊ Limit the amount of time spent in public places and avoid people who are sick, including those who are presenting symptoms.
- ◊ If you have a fever or other symptoms, stay home. If your children have a fever, do not send them to school. Consider working from home if your workplace allows it.
- ◊ Wash your hands as much as you can, especially before you eat anything, before making food for other people and after you use the restroom. Wash your hands anytime you touch a doorknob, or high touch surfaces; if there is hand sanitizer around, use it.
- ◊ Practice social distancing by staying away from crowds or congregations of 10 or more people. Even within small groups of fewer than 10, people should maintain six feet of distance between each other to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Updates on Covid-19 and testing sites can be found at [denvergov.org](https://denvergov.org)

## Meet our New Lab Members!



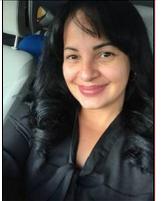
**Madeline Caruso** (Research Assistant) recently completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Denver with majors in Psychology and Biology. She joined the Family and Child Neuroscience Lab this spring, and works on the RISE Project collecting data and conducting interviews. She hopes to continue working with mothers and their infants in the future, whether that be in research, health care, or education. In her spare time she enjoys cooking, making pottery, and enjoying the outdoors!

**Nikisha Charles-Stazzone** (Research Assistant) majored in Political Science and Italian in her undergraduate studies at Hunter College before completing a Master's of Science in Education in Rehabilitation Counseling. As a member of the RISE Project team, she enjoys welcoming new moms to the study and coordinating visits. She is also a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor where she gets to explore professional pathways with youth and adults with disabilities to help them meld skill, passion and ability to achieve their goals. She loves traveling with her husband, indoor gardening and sunset watching.



**Genevieve Patterson** is a 1<sup>st</sup> year graduate student in the Clinical Child Psychology Ph.D. program at the University of Denver. She received her undergraduate degree in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science from the University of Arizona. Following graduation, Genevieve worked at UCLA in a lab focusing on brain development in autism spectrum disorders. Genevieve is interested in understanding the neural mechanisms underlying developmental trajectories in at-risk populations in order to develop better early interventions and inform public policy. In her free time, she is an amateur competitive ballroom dancer and enjoys hiking and bouldering.

**Jacqueline Martinez** (Research Coordinator) For the past two years Jacqueline has helped coordinate the RISE Project. Jacqueline is bilingual and continues to be committed to helping the lab reach the Latino/Hispanic community. She currently holds a Master's degree in Psychology: Marriage and Family Therapy and has over five years of experience in developmental research and providing talk therapy. She enjoys spending time with her family and being outdoors.



Family Child Neuroscience Lab  
University of Denver  
2155 S Race Street  
Denver, CO 80208  
fcnlab@du.edu