

Every Mind Matters

SUMMER 2016



THE PSYCHOLOGY
FOUNDATION
OF CANADA

LA FONDATION
DE PSYCHOLOGIE
DU CANADA

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Summer Greetings



Harriet Lewis, President

SUMMER IS FINALLY here and we hope that everyone takes the opportunity for much-needed relaxation. The work of the Foundation continues and we are happy to say that three communities are working with us under the aegis of the Trillium project: the First Nations communities in Fort Hope and Weagamow, and the Afghan community in the greater Toronto area.

Our annual Meeting in June was an occasion to welcome new trustees: Leanne Lewis, a passionate and

experienced advocate for parents, families and youth; and Dr. Leslie Atkinson from Ryerson, Dr. Yvonne Bohr from York, and Dr. David Danto from Guelph-Humber, all experts on child psychology. We said goodbye, with regret and thanks, to Dr. Martin Antony of Ryerson, who heads out on a year's sabbatical.

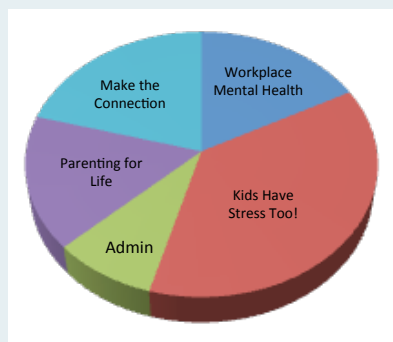
Thanks to everyone who participated on stage or in the audience at our wonderful night of Rocking the Blues Away at Koerner Hall. Special thanks again to Andrea Freedman Iscoe, the musicians, our staff and the many volunteers who made the event run so smoothly.

We can now look forward to our Annual Breakfast for Champions at the Toronto Board of Trade on Wednesday, November 30. Save the date! We look forward to seeing you there.

Until then, have a great summer!

This Issue: The School-Age Child

- PFC Program News: Parenting the School-Age Child 7–12
- PFC Research News: The Decline of Play and Rise of Stress in Children
- Hand-out for Parents: Your School-Age Child



Where your support goes

Please help us do this important work! Go to www.psychologyfoundation.org and click on "Donate."

"CONFIDENT KIDS, PRODUCTIVE ADULTS"

The Psychology Foundation of Canada is a national registered charity dedicated to applying the best psychological knowledge to create practical programs helping children become confident and productive adults. Our initiatives include creating educational resources, developing training programs for professionals, and delivering community-based education.

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PFC PROGRAM NEWS

Parenting the School-Age Child 7–12 Years

IN 2005, WHILE LOOKING for ways to expand our award-winning *Parenting for Life* program, we undertook a survey of available parenting programs and materials in order to identify potential gaps in parenting resources. Our survey revealed that while many materials and curricula focused on the early years (0–6) and adolescence (13–19 years), there was a lack of content designed to support the development of school-age children (7–12).

To fill this gap, we worked in partnership with Yorktown Family Services to develop *Parenting the School-Age Child 7-12 Years*, a parent education curriculum designed to help parents navigate the developmental changes and shifting parenting roles of the elementary school years. The program content and Facilitator's Guide were developed in 2006 and field-tested by an expert team of psychologists, child mental health professionals and parent educators. The content was then revised and the second (and current) version was published in 2008.

The Facilitator's Guide provides everything parent educators need to deliver the course to parents,

including detailed instructions and worksheets for learners. The course covers key developmental topics, such as promoting independence and self-esteem, developmental changes, social-emotional changes, parenting styles, building harmony at home and resolving conflict. *Parenting the School-Aged Child 7-12 Years* has been used by parent educators in several provinces, including Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. The Facilitator's Guide can be ordered by visiting the [Resources](#) page on our website.

Parenting the School-Aged Child 7-12 Years was sponsored by KODAK Canada and The Gordon Bell Foundation for Addiction Prevention.



Our regional representatives

For information about local training events, please contact:

National and Central Region (ON, MB):

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SAVE THE DATE!

Our **Breakfast for Champions** will take place on Wednesday, November 30, at the Toronto Board of Trade.

The guest speaker for this event is Dr. Corey Keyes, a mental health expert from Emory University. We look forward to seeing you there!

Research News

The Decline of Play and the Rise of Stress in Children

RECENT RESEARCH has shown a worrying trend in the direction of markedly increased stress for today's children and young people. In 2000, psychologist Jean Twenge, of San Diego State University, reported that anxiety levels in "normal" children were higher than those of psychiatric populations from the 1950s. Moreover, children's anxiety levels were higher in the 2000s than they were during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when many families were dealing with severe economic stresses and insecurity.

Some of this increase in self-reported stress in today's children and youth may be due to increased public awareness and discussion of stress and anxiety. But, even so, the trend is still alarming and some researchers are looking for explanations.

One very interesting analysis comes from Peter Gray, a psychologist at Boston College, who links the rise in psychopathology in American children to a corresponding decline in free, unstructured play. In a 2011 article published in the *American Journal of Play*, Gray cites research findings that build a compelling case for his argument.

Children's free play has been in steady decline since its peak in the 1950s, while anxiety levels are higher than they were during the Great Depression.

- Children's free play – play that is not controlled or structured by adults and where children decide what to do – has been in steady decline since its peak in the 1950s. Even between 1981 and 1997, there was a 25 percent decrease in the amount of time American children spent playing, based on reports from a large representative sample of American parents.

- In a 2004 survey, 70 percent of mothers reported that they had played outdoors daily as children, while only 31 percent said their own children played outdoors every day.

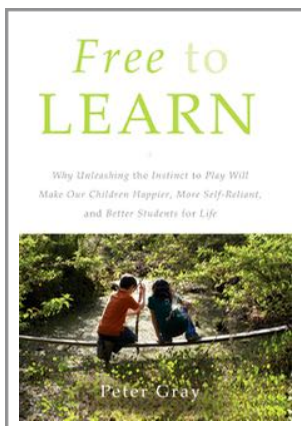
- Another international survey found that mothers understood the link between outdoor play and children's happiness. Just over half of mothers surveyed said that playing outside at a playground or park was the activity that made their children the happiest.

Gray identifies five ways that free play promotes children's mental

health. "Play helps children a) develop intrinsic interests and competencies; (b) learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules; (c) learn to regulate their emotions; (d) make friends and learn to get along with others as equals; and (e) experience joy."

Gray argues that this decline in play is part of the reason that "five to eight times as many young people today have scores above the cutoff for a diagnosis of clinically significant anxiety or depressive disorder than was the case half a century ago." He concludes that restoring free play is "not only the best gift we could give our children, it is also an essential gift if we want them to grow into psychologically healthy and emotionally competent adults."

The full text of Dr. Gray's article is available [online](#).



Dr. Gray's most recent book, *Free to Learn: Why unleashing the instinct to play will make our children happier, more self-reliant, and better students for life*, is published by Basic Books.

Hand-out for Parents

YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

ONCE CHILDREN START going to school, their world changes. They start spending more time away from you, and they are more influenced by friends and teachers. So their needs, and your parenting role, also change. Here are some key ideas for parenting your school-age child.

Play – especially free play – is important

Compared to past generations, today's children spend more time playing electronic games and watching TV, and more of their activities are organized by adults. But free, unstructured play is very important; it helps children:

- Learn how to make decisions
- Learn how to get along with others
- Recover from stress
- Develop skills
- Experience joy

So try to give your child an opportunity to play every day, if possible.

Encourage independence

During the elementary school years, children want more independence and they need to start learning how to handle it.

- Let your child make age-appropriate choices.
- Give your child chances to think and to solve his own problems, instead of always providing instant solutions.
- Show your child how to be increasingly independent in a safe and responsible way.

Be stress aware

Research shows that today's children have higher levels of stress than in the past. Parents have an important role to play in helping children deal with stress.

When your child is upset or misbehaving, try to develop the habit of asking yourself, "Why is my child acting like this? Could it be stress?"

If you can figure out what is stressing your child, deal with that first before turning to discipline. Children



under stress are much less able to control themselves, listen well, accept consequences or learn.

Keep connecting

As children mature and spend more time away from us, we may need to work harder to keep a strong connection:

- Be ready to listen when she is ready to talk.
- Show an interest in your child's interests and concerns.
- Show your child that you like her and enjoy her company. We spend a lot of time telling, reminding and criticizing. Talk about her positive qualities, too.

Teach negotiation and conflict skills

Start now to develop the negotiation and conflict skills you will both need during the teen years:

- Don't forget to listen as well as talk.
- Use short phrases when reminding your child. Say, "Cassie, boots," rather than "Cassie, if I have to tell you one more time to put away your boots I'll..."
- Let your children "win" sometimes, when they have negotiated well (and politely) and can show you they have a good plan.
- When the issue is not negotiable, offer your child alternatives. "You have to do your homework, but you can either do it now or right after supper."
- Try to respond to your child's behaviour in ways that don't promote conflict. Be willing to negotiate – but remember, you're still the parent.