Thank You!

In the last few years, we have been privileged to get to know you all and watch your child grow from a tiny baby to a confident three-year-old. This DVD presents some highlights from your child’s first three years. We’ve learned so much about early development from this study. Here are some of the things that we have learned:

The CCDS: The Families Who Participated

Over a two year period, we contacted families who lived in the areas covered by Cardiff and Gwent Health Care Trusts who were expecting their first baby. 332 of you agreed to participate in our study, and over 300 of you are still participating. It turns out that the CCDS provided a snapshot of first-time parents in the UK as a whole. When we first met you, 90% of you were in stable partnerships, though only 50% of you were married. In terms of your occupations, 51% of you worked in jobs that are categorised ‘middle class.’ On average, mothers were 28 years old (ranging from 16 to 43) and fathers were 31 (ranging from 15 to 57). 65% of you had been educated beyond GCSE. All of these statistics are very close to the figures for the UK as a whole. This means that we are studying child development in a very representative group of families.

All of you spoke frankly about your lives and the challenges of becoming parents. All of you were concerned about balancing work with your new roles as parents. Some of you experienced
health problems during the pregnancy; for example about 1 in 4 of you experienced high levels of anxiety or depression while pregnant. This was often related to poor housing or lack of social support, or problems experienced in the past. Such issues affected fathers as well as mothers. However, all of you expressed hopes as well as fears, and were trying to rise to the challenge of this major change in your lives.

The First Home Visit

We contacted you when your baby was approaching 6 months old. At that point, we were able to trace all but 8 of you, and 96% of you participated. We were interested in what babies pay attention to, what they might learn from other people, and how they react to everyday challenges, such as being placed in a car seat or meeting a new person. We also wanted to see them with the parent who looked after them during the day, playing games but also being fed.

The home visit taught us a lot about babies in general at this age, but we also came to realise that every baby is a unique individual. Some of the babies objected strongly to being placed in the car seat. This related to what you, your partner, and other family member or friend told us about your baby’s general inclination to get cross or hit or bite people. Different babies reacted to situations in their own unique ways. On the video, you will see your baby’s reaction to a very friendly puppet; at this age, most of the babies found the puppet’s attempts to tickle them rather funny, but some did not like it, and, as they grew older, most children began to find the puppet to be a bit over-friendly. This helped us to understand how most children gradually learn to defend their possessions and have a sense of personal space.

On the video we have also shown you how your baby already could work with you to learn how to use a new toy. This showed us that how parents speak to their babies at this age
is very important. How much you talked to the baby at this age was related to your baby’s own ability to communicate by pointing things out to other people at the time of the first birthday party.

The First Party

Although we couldn’t trace everyone, and a number of you had moved away from Cardiff, most of you were able to come to the first birthday party. At this age, we were very interested in your infant’s growing ability to understand the world and to be able to communicate with other people. On the video you will see your baby try to find a toy that has been hidden. At this age, many babies go back to the first place they found a hidden toy, even if they have just seen it hidden somewhere else! This shows how babies are just beginning to be able to hold two things in their mind at once. Babies who are learning more than one language are especially good at this. We also looked at the babies’ ability to look where another person looks, to imitate what another person does, and to take turns at games.

Again, one of our main interests was to see how babies react to unusual events, and so we invited your babies to take part in a Teddy Bears picnic with a very special guest. As you know some of the babies found the Teddy Bear amusing, others were a bit upset, and some checked back with you to see how they should react! We also wanted to see how babies at this age might play with other babies they had never met before. Some psychologists believe that babies are naturally aggressive and only gradually learn to share with others, but that was not the case in the CCDS. At the first party, the infants were more likely to share toys with each other than they were to snatch toys or to push or pull at each other. Indeed, only a handful of the CCDS babies ever tried to hit another partygoer. Our findings tell us that babies are naturally sociable but not necessarily aggressive.
The Second Home Visit

We made another visit to your home when your child was around 1 ½ years old. Those of you who have moved away from the UK kindly completed questionnaires about your child’s development. We are grateful to all the mothers, fathers, grandparents and other family members or friends who have completed questionnaires throughout the study. Mothers, fathers and other family members or friends tend to agree very well about each child’s strengths and difficulties. What you told us on the questionnaires has allowed us to see your children’s individual personalities develop over time. When possible, we were also very interested to see your child playing naturally with a familiar playmate. About three-quarters of you were able to find a friend with a child close to your child’s age to take part in the play session, and so we would like to pass on our thanks to your friends as well.

The Second Party

When your child was between 2 ½ and 3 years old, we held another party. We played games with each child individually and then held another Teddy Bears Picnic. At this age we were especially interested in your child’s growing ability to talk and think things through, especially when asked to be patient or careful or cope with the fact that things don’t always work, or play games that might seem rather silly, such as pretending that a paper party hat is a trumpet. We found that children at this age were sometimes willing to go along with our silly ideas, especially if they found them funny, but might also tell us how to do things properly, like putting the right shape in the right hole in the shape-sorter. Once again, the children responded in their own unique ways to the Teddy Bears Picnic. Some were startled by the Teddy Bear and happy when Teddy went away.
Others enjoyed Teddy’s company and were sad when they had to say goodbye to Ted.

**What Was Happening on the Inside**

Because infants cannot always tell us what they are feeling, we also measured their activity, their heart rate and the level of stress hormones they produced in their saliva. This is giving us a deeper understanding of the ways in which infants cope with everyday challenges. So far we have learned that different infants reacted in quite different ways to the challenge of the first home visit and the first birthday party.

**In the Future**

We have just begun our task of collating and analysing all the findings from the CCDS. We will be in touch again with further newsletters as new findings emerge. Once again, we are deeply grateful for your help and commitment to the study. It has been a privilege to get to know you and your children.