

Laboratory for Social-Emotional Development and Intervention

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Our Research

In our laboratory, we examine the development of emotions in children and adolescents, such as sympathy, guilt, and respect. We are especially interested in how these emotions relate to young people's understanding of everyday situations involving social conflict. In a related line of research, we investigate how emotions promote prosocial behavior and impede aggression and mental health problems.

We use this knowledge to design, implement, and evaluate prevention and intervention programs for children and adolescents. We aim to work with educators to set up these programs, which would help promote well-being, positive relationships, and learning among children.

Dear Parents, Children, and Practitioners:



Thank you for participating in a research study at our developmental psychology lab and for supporting our research throughout the years. We hope that you and your child enjoyed your experience at the laboratory, school, or community setting, and that you will find this newsletter interesting and informative. As we could not do this work without your valuable contribution, we are excited to share with you some of our interesting findings.

*- Dr. Tina Malti
Lab Director*

Empathy and guilt promote helping, sharing, and cooperation:

In a recent study published in the journal *Child Development*, we found that children with high empathy were more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours such as sharing, cooperating, and helping from 6 to 12 years of age. Children who felt guilty after not helping were more willing to share valuable resources with peers (Malti et al., 2016).



Aggressive children feel lower levels of moral respect:



Children ages 5, 7, and 10 who engage in goal-directed, calculated aggression feel lower levels of respect for peers who engage in fair behaviour than children who engage in impulsive, reactive aggression. Due to this lack of moral respect, they may be less motivated to engage in fairness-related behaviours, thus perpetuating their aggression. (Peplak & Malti, 2016).

ON - GOING • STUDIES

How Are Children's Emotions Formed?

Why might one child feel good for committing a transgression, such as stealing a chocolate from another child, while another feels bad or guilty? Why might two children feel such different emotions in response to the same situation? In this study we examine how emotions, such as sympathy and guilt, are formed in childhood and adolescence. More specifically, we investigate how children's attention influences their feelings of sympathy and guilt. To do this, we observe children's eye movements during social conflict scenarios in relation to their emotional responses. This research will help us understand how to shift their focus in a way that promotes the development of moral emotions.

Not Feeling Sorry for Others: Understanding the Development of Bullying

Do children bully others because they lack sympathy? Or because they have trouble expressing their concern for others in positive ways? In this study, we investigate children's physiological (i.e., bodily) responses to situations that involve bullying others. We want to understand if and how the regulation of arousal in these situations promotes feelings of sympathy that help children avoid bullying others. This knowledge will help treatment efforts determine when and how to target these skills and reduce the risk of bullying as children develop.

Kate Fell in a Puddle: How Does that Make You Feel?

Our research indicates that how children feel and regulate emotions in social conflict situations influences their behaviour. While much research has been devoted to the role of anger in aggression, emotions such as *schadenfreude* have received less attention. *Schadenfreude* is a feeling of pleasure in the misfortune of another and stems from feelings of envy and deservingness. In this project, we investigate how 12- and 15-year-olds experience *schadenfreude*. Based on this, we will develop a measure for a larger study to investigate children's and adolescents' feelings of *schadenfreude* in multiple social contexts, toward various targets, and how these feelings relate to their regulatory capacities and aggressive behaviours across development.

Developmental Determinants of Youth's Mental Health

Research indicates that 15 to 20 percent of children and youth have one or more mental, behavioural, or emotional problems. These issues affect learning, relationships, and well-being. Our project explores how youth perceive their mental health, their mental health needs, and which developmental factors contribute to their mental health. In collaboration with Peel Children's and Youth Initiative, we study 14- to 24-year-olds in the Peel region using both surveys and through focus groups. Understanding youth's perceptions of their mental health and the developmental determinants of their mental health can help improve strategies and policies to enhance youth mental health in a developmentally sensitive way.

COMMUNITY • INVOLVEMENT 3

In collaboration with Dr. Stuart Kamenetsky from the University of Toronto Mississauga, we have partnered with the Peel Children and Youth Initiative (PCYI) in commencing a research study that examines children and youth's understanding of mental health, and the various positive and negative factors that are linked to mental health outcomes. At the SEDI lab, we will collect data from ~200 youth to investigate these questions.

For more information about PCYI, please visit:
pcyi.org

Dr. Tina Malti was interviewed by the University of California, Berkeley, regarding the importance of promoting empathy in schools. In the interview, Dr. Malti discusses social-emotional health, stating that it is:

“... important for our academic learning, our psychological well-being, and our overall success in life.”

For the full story, see: greatergood.berkeley.edu



Postdoctoral fellow Dr. Ju-Hyun Song and Dr. Tina Malti wrote an article in *The Conversation* entitled “Here’s How to Raise a Child to be Sympathetic”. Find the full article here: theconversation.com

For updates on our research and community involvement, please visit our media outlets!



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tinamalti.com

RESEARCH • FACTS

- The link between spikes in daily anger and aggression is weakened when children feel bad about own wrongdoing (Colasante & Malti, 2016).
- Children's commonly reported emotions in response to transgressions are associated with their facial reactions (Dys & Malti, 2016).
- Commencing interventions earlier in development and targeting more dimensions of empathy and caring is associated with better social functioning (Malti, Noam, Beelmann, & Sommer, 2016).
- Children who take group music lessons over 10 months show larger increases in sympathy and prosocial behaviour than children who receive no such lessons (Schellenberg, Corrigan, Dys, & Malti, 2015).

Recent • Publications

- Dys, S. P., & Malti, T. (2016). It's a two-way street: Automatic and controlled processes in children's emotional responses to moral transgressions. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 152, 31-40. doi: 10.1016/j.jecp.2016.06.011
- Malti, T., Noam, G. G., Beelmann, A., & Sommer, S. (2016) Good enough? Interventions for child mental health: From adoption to adaptation. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 45(6), 707-709. doi:10.1080/15374416.2016.1157759
- Malti, T., Ongley, S. F., Peplak, J., Chaparro, M. P., Buchmann, M., Zuffianò, A. and Cui, L. (2016). Children's sympathy, guilt, and moral reasoning in helping, cooperation, and sharing: A 6-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 87, 1783-1795. doi:10.1111/cdev.12632
- Peplak, J., & Malti, T. (2016). “That really hurt, Charlie!” Investigating the role of sympathy and moral respect in children's aggressive behavior. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/00221325.2016.1245178



Ju-Hyun Song received her PhD from the University of Michigan. She joined the SEDI lab at the University of Toronto Mississauga as

a post-doctoral fellow in May 2016. Her research focuses on early moral emotions and self-reflective processes (e.g., guilt, sympathy, trust, perspective taking, emotion regulation) and how they influence social behaviors in children. She is interested in applying developmental mechanisms for effectively screening child-level risks and strengths and designing interventions for antisocial behaviors.



Dr. Malti was awarded the **CIHR** Foundation Scheme Grant, worth over \$1,000,000 in funding!

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PhD Candidate Tyler Colasante received the **SSHRC** Doctoral Fellowship.

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PhD Student Joanna Peplak received the **SSHRC** Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canadian Graduate Doctoral Scholarship.

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Dr. Malti received the **NSERC** 2016 Discovery Grant entitled “Affective Processing of Moral Events: A Developmental Approach.”

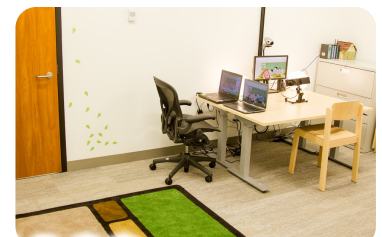
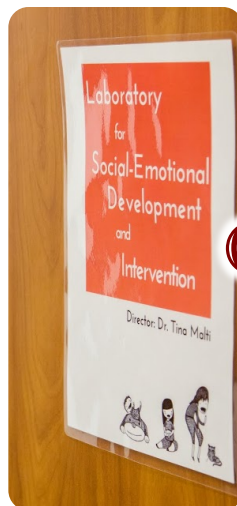
Contact

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Our Lab Space



Thank you to all the families, educators, and practitioners for participating in our research, and to our sponsors: