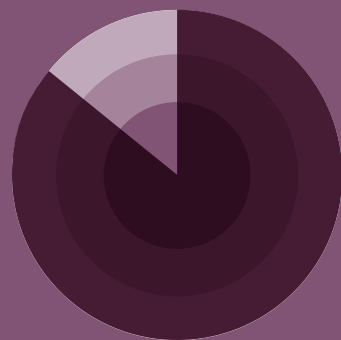


the science of kindness



70% of parents often worry “the world is an unkind place for my child.”



86% of teachers often worry the same.

Less than half of teachers think that parents are doing enough to raise their kids to be respectful, kind and empathetic.



More than a quarter of kids have had at least one adverse childhood experience such as abuse or neglect.



At the intersection of kindness and science, UW team gets to Sesame Street.

If it were up to Elmo, the world would be a kinder place — down to the very trashcan Oscar the Grouch calls home.

Sesame Street, one of the most viewed and longest-standing children’s show, is emphasizing kindness in its upcoming season with the help of the Center for Healthy Minds.

Driven by an increasing number of news stories on anger, fear, bullying, and violence, as well as an overall sense of negativity permeating social discourse, the initiative focuses on social emotional skills vital to kids’ well-being and life success. And the stakes are high, with one in five children in the United States currently experiencing or will experience a mental disorder in their lives, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

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“The kind of interventions and practices we’re studying have a great deal of relevance and promise for the types of problems we’re facing today in our culture,” says Richard Davidson, Founder of the Center for Healthy Minds and the William James and Vilas Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry. “These strategies help people to recognize that we’re all the same — we all share a desire to be happy and free of suffering, and when we embrace that perspective, divisions become more permeable and less formidable as obstacles.”

Representing the Center and sharing insights from the team’s mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum, Associate Scientist Lisa Flook and Outreach Specialist Laura Pinger joined writers, producers and educators at Sesame Street’s headquarters in New York City in the summer of 2015 to present their experiences and scientific results from classrooms.

Early findings from the study suggest that kids who had participated in the curriculum earned higher marks

in academic performance measures and showed greater improvements in areas that predict future success than kids who had not. While these encouraging findings emerged from our initial study, there are still many more questions than answers at this point and the serious research is just beginning. A growing body of research underscores the importance of social and emotional learning, including cultivating positive qualities such as kindness, during key periods in development.

The Center’s curriculum, initially enabled by the generosity of donors like you through a pilot study, is one of multiple projects that is now supported by a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education investigating well-being in children and in the classroom.

Read the full story at go.wisc.edu/kindness



Changing the Trajectory

Sarah Short received her Ph.D. from UW– Madison and has recently returned to serve as the Center’s new Scientific Co-Director. She joins us from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, where she previously served as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry’s Early Brain Development Program.



Was there an “Aha!” moment you realized you wanted to do science?

Yes, there have been several, but the first time I had this realization was when I worked at an in-day treatment center for at-risk youth. These kids would come in, and everyone would work really hard all day just to make a tiny bit of progress. Then they would go home to challenging environments, and the next day we’d start back at square one again.

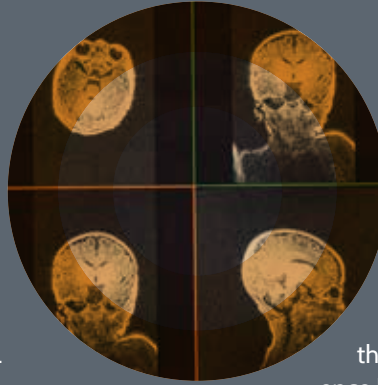
It made me realize I wanted to put my efforts into a research career focused on identifying early risk factors and methods of prevention. I’ve always had a desire to help people, and it seemed through research I might be able to have a broader impact that could benefit more people.

Why study memory in children?

Memory is a foundational cognitive skill that is critical for daily functions and learning in general. Memory deficits are also common in many psychiatric and neurodevelopmental disorders. For these reasons, my research has focused on improving knowledge of early brain development with the ultimate goal of promoting resiliency and healthful long-term outcomes for developing and at-risk children. The more we know about the brain networks and processes that support foundational cognitive skills early in life, the better equipped we are to design interventions and educational programs to promote well-being.

How do you plan to lead research efforts amid funding challenges, especially as federal research dollars decline?

Research across the board is suffering the effects of our current federal funding structure. If you’re fortunate enough to secure funding, there’s often just enough to run the experiments and collect the data, but then not enough support to analyze the data, write up the findings and disseminate the results. The tenuousness of the current funding situation, also presents barriers for longitudinal research, which is one of our richest sources of information. More and more, scientists are finding support from private donors, and the Center for Healthy Minds is a clear example of how such generosity is expanding opportunities for research and positive impact.



LAST QUARTER, the Center reached more than 640,000 through its direct channels. Through media exposure, the Center had a potential reach of 35 million people during the same time period.

A CENTER STUDY, recently published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, compared brain function, endocrine function and behavior in identical twins. The value of this type of comparison is that any difference between the two identical co-twins must be environmentally produced since they are genetically identical. This powerful strategy enables us to zero in on the circuits in the brain and systems in the body that are shaped by experience. The study showed that the co-twin with the higher level of the stress hormone cortisol also had a slower recovery of the amygdala, a part of the brain central to processing emotion, in response to a challenge. This co-twin also reported less healthy styles of coping compared with the less anxious twin.



CENTER FOUNDER Richard Davidson was selected to participate in a private meeting with Surgeon Surgeon General in January. Their agenda? To put emotional well-being on the map as a public health issue.

DAVIDSON DREW an online audience of 11,000 people through his course on well-being for LifeReimagined®, a subsidiary of AARP. Access the free course yourself at go.wisc.edu/DavidsonCourse



Celebrate Our New Home!

Save the Date: Thursday, May 4, 2017 5-7 p.m.

625 West Washington Ave. Madison, WI

West Washington Ave., here we come! With your generous support and a new facility provided by UW-Madison, the Center continues to grow, accelerating new scientific discoveries and creating positive change in the world. We're dedicated to conducting rigorous science and providing the evidence to create real and lasting change – and you have been a vital part of our growth and success.

We look forward to celebrating with you, fellow Center members, staff and faculty.

RSVP by emailing membership@centerhealthyminds.org or by calling 608-263-3672