The CTSI Community Engagement Team Presents:

"Engaging Young Voices: Innovative Approaches to Research with Children”

March 31, 2026

PennState
Clinical and Translational Science Institute

Welcome and Introductions

Welcome everyone! We are so glad you are here!

Penn State Clinical and Translational Science Institute Community Engagement Team

Paula Moodie, MSW
Project Manager

Jess Schrodel, MEd
Project Manager

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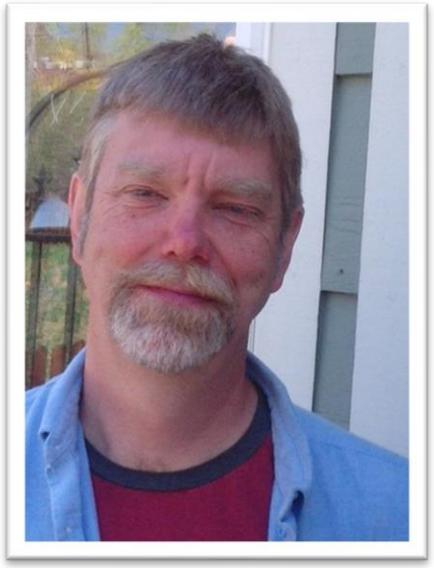
Thank you for being here today!

The Penn State Community Engagement Team is delighted to present our Winter-Spring 2026 educational mini-series focused on three underrecognized communities in research:

Guest Presenters

Dr. Emily Hohman

Tabatha Hahn



Dr. Jarl Ahlkvist

Dr. Deepa Sekhar

Logistics

- This presentation is being recorded.
- Please raise your "hand" to ask questions.
- Please use the chat feature to make comments, share resources, and make connections!
- Presentation materials will be shared post-session.

Agenda

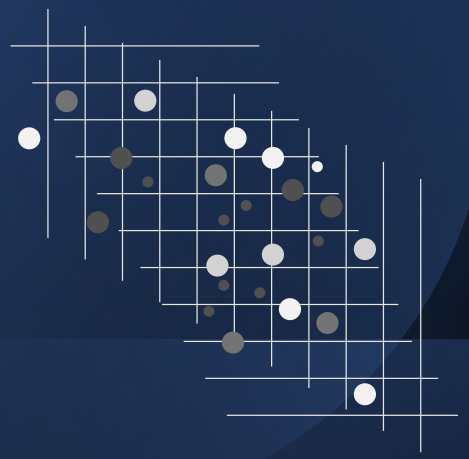
- Background Info
- Real world example 1: Motivation and lessons learned working with children – Emily Hohman, Ph.D.
- Real world example 2: Motivation and lessons learned working with children – Tabatha Hahn and Jarl Ahlkvist, Ph.D.
- Overview of Adolescent Health Network – Deepa Sekhar, MD
- Q&A
- Resources

Learning Goals & Objectives

- Participants will explore the importance of research with children.
- Participants will examine real-world examples of research conducted with children and adolescents.
- Participants will discuss best practices and lessons learned from engaging with young people in research.

Background

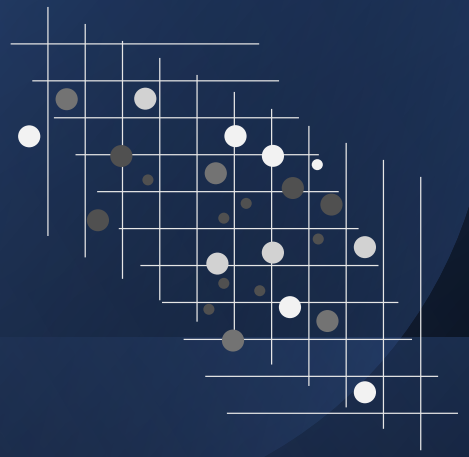
The Importance of Research with Children



1. Children Have Unique Developmental Needs
2. Improving Health and Well-Being
3. Informing Evidence-Based Policies and Practices
4. Protecting Children's Rights and Voices
5. Understanding Early Influences on Lifelong Outcomes

Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2020). *The ethics of research with children and young people* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
Coyne, I. (2010). Research with children and young people: The issue of parental (proxy) consent. *Children & Society, 24*(3), 227–237.
Greig, A., Taylor, J., & MacKay, T. (2013). *Doing research with children: A practical guide* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations.
National Research Council & Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Children's health, the nation's wealth*. National Academies Press.

The Importance of Research with Children



- Although children make up about one-quarter of the U.S. population, they remain significantly underrepresented in clinical trials
- Despite three decades of efforts to increase pediatric trials, adult clinical trials have continued to grow while pediatric trials have not
- Pediatric research faces several barriers:
  - Children are biologically diverse (e.g., prepubertal vs. postpubertal)
  - Industry-funded RCTs focus mainly on adult markets
  - Children cannot consent, complicating enrollment
  - Care for complex pediatric conditions is concentrated in fewer hospitals, limiting research access.
- The AAP notes that without pediatric studies, clinicians must extrapolate adult data to treat children. This may be ineffective or harmful, and for child-specific conditions, treatments may never be developed

https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-children-underrepresented-drug.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Race and Ethnicity Reporting and Representation in Pediatric Clinical Trials - PubMed

Clinical Trials for Special Populations: Children, Older Adults, and Rare Diseases - ScienceDirect

The Status of Pediatric Randomized Clinical Trials - The Journal of Pediatrics

Emily Hohman, Ph.D.

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Top Ten Tips for Research with Children

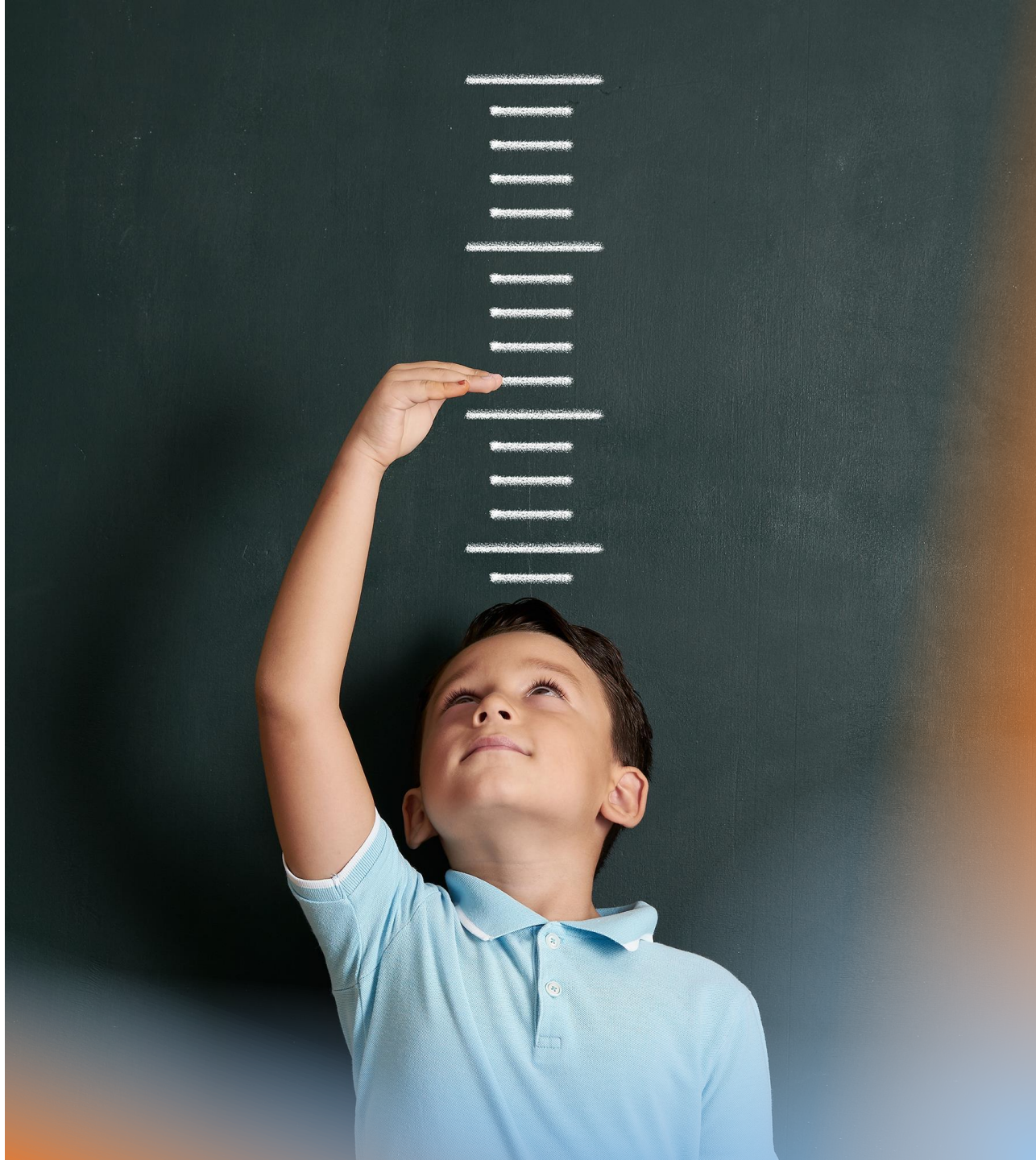
Emily Hohman

Associate Research Professor

Child Health Research Center

Why study children?

- Children are not just small adults
- Potential to impact lifelong health
- Working with children and families is fun



EarlyInsight

for new parents

Tween S.P.A.C.E. STUDY

Sleep Patterns, Appetite Control, and Environment

WEE Baby Care Study

PARENT CHILD TEACHER ONE PATH

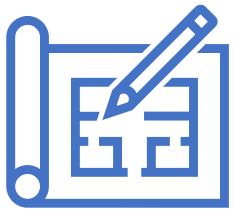
SUPER SPUDS!

The I-EAT

Interoception and Eating

STUDY

Top tips for research with children



Study design

Recruitment

Data collection

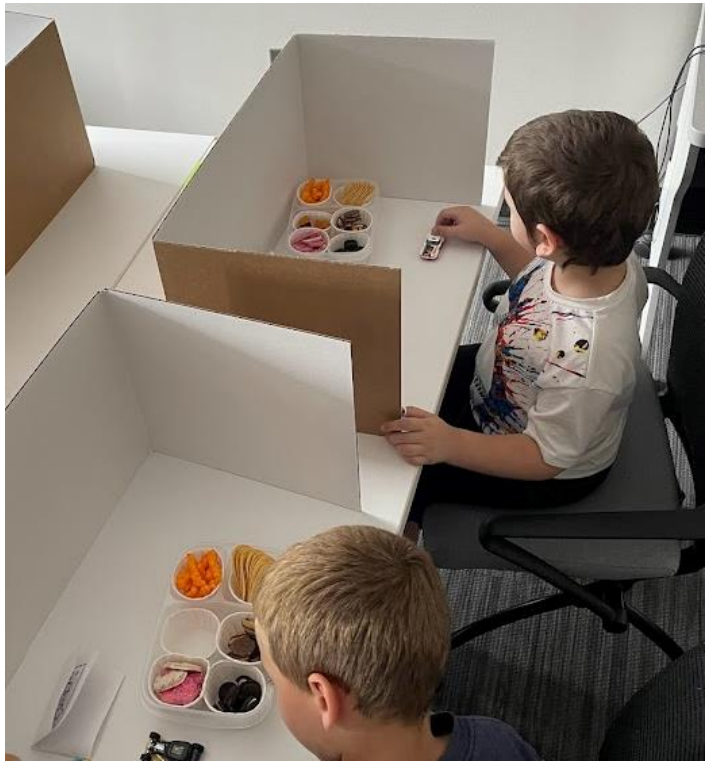
Tip #1 – Have an awesome team

Tip #2 – Plan for the whole family

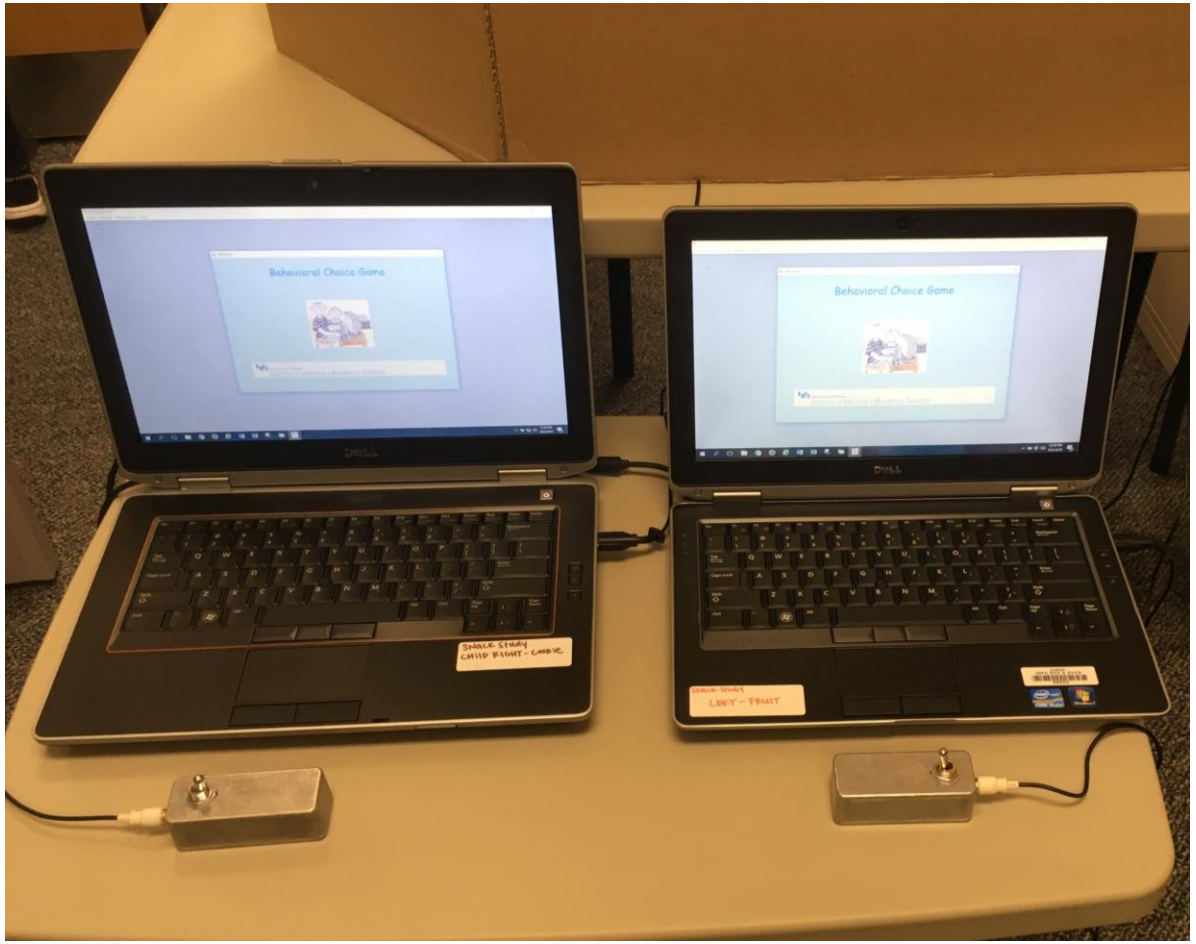
- Will multiple children per family be allowed to participate?
- Will parents be participants or just children?
- If multiple visits, does the same parent need to come every time?
- Will families need childcare during visits?

Tip #3 – Pilot test EVERYTHING with kids

- Children have unique and sometimes unexpected reactions to research measures



What is boring for adults may be fun for kids


Behavioral Choice Game
Behavioral Choice Game

Tip #4 – Use Existing Recruitment Resources

firstfamilies.la.psu.edu

PennState College of the Liberal Arts

HOME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RESEARCH AT PENN STATE LINKS CONTACT US

Type to Search...

Welcome to the FIRSt Families Database

The Families Interested in Research Studies (FIRSt) database, established in 2003, connects Penn State researchers and families with infants and young children in central Pennsylvania who are interested in participating in research. The database also includes pregnant mothers.

All information in the database is confidential and is only shared with researchers who are conducting research approved by the University's Office of Research Protections.

PennState

STUDYfinder

researchmatch

Tip # 5 – Build Partnerships

Tip #6 – Go Where Families Are

Tip #7 - Use friendly language

- "Project" instead of "study"
- Study tasks are "games" or "activities"
- Avoid possibly stigmatizing language
  - "Family Health and Eating Lab" rather than "Center for Childhood Obesity Research"

Tip #8 - Make it Fun

ONE PATH Board Game
Name:
PENN STATE
Delay of Gratification
Child ID #: _____ Classroom: _____ Date: _____ Completed by: _____
Materials needed:
Counterbalancing sheet (fill in # of stickers for each trial)
Game board
Writing utensil
Mochi game piece
Pointer
Stickers
Sticker choice cards
Zoo map
Envelope
Before data collection day:
Fill in classroom/date
Fill in # of stickers for each trial using the counterbalancing sheet
Cut out all sticker cards
Put sticker cards in correct order
Layout of materials:

“Camp Day”

- Girls NEEDS Project
  - Longitudinal cohort – girls ages 5-15
  - Came for 1-2 “camp days” every other summer
  - Theme with games and activities
  - Research measures spread throughout the day

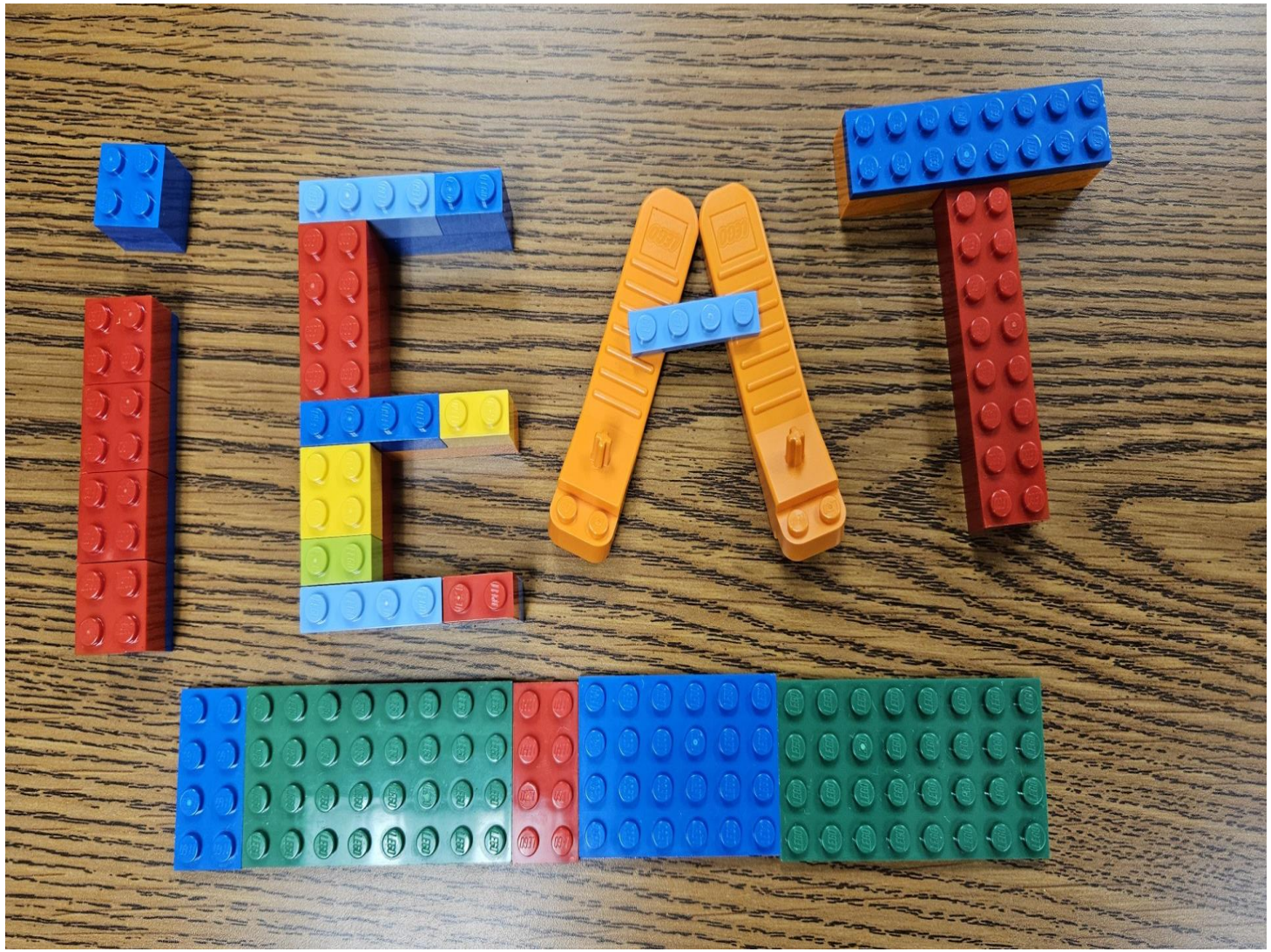
“Camp Day”

- INSIGHT 6 year visit
  - Held as a camp day over summer
  - 3-4 kids attended each day
  - Group and individual activities

Tip #9 - Manage Expectations

Tip #10 - Make research a good experience

- Safety, age-appropriate autonomy, and child comfort are top priority
- Know when it is important to strictly adhere to protocol and when you can be more flexible
- Age-appropriate assent
- A positive experience makes it more likely that families will participate in the future



THE FUTURE OF CHILD HEALTH: SUPPORTING EVERY CHILD IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

When: Wednesday, April 8, 2026, 12:30 to 5:00 PM EST

Where: In-person or Virtual, Boardroom at The Nittany Lion Inn (200 W Park Ave), State College

Who should attend: Clinicians, community partners, parents, policymakers, researchers, and students interested in child health and equity

Join us for a timely symposium exploring how children with developmental delays, disabilities, health care needs, and early adversity grow and learn. A panel of experts will share how early experiences, family support, and access to resources shape children's cognitive, physical, and emotional development.

This symposium will explore what helps children and families thrive, highlighting challenges and strengths. We'll focus on advocacy, structural influences, and practical, real-world strategies to support child health.

Attendees will also have time to connect, share ideas, and learn from others working to improve the well-being of children and families.

Scan Now for Free Registration

Click Here for Free Registration

https://redcap.link/CHRCSymposium

Advanced registration is required.
Lunch *provided for in-person attendees.*
Co-Sponsored by Penn State's Child Health Research Center, Child Maltreatment Solutions Network, and The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Susan Rivera, PhD
University of Maryland
Exploring Atypical Brain Development: Insights from Eye Tracking and Neuroimaging

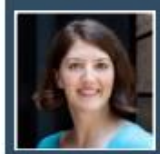
Kerri Staples, PhD
Texas Woman's University
Movement Matters: Supporting the Health and Participation of Children with Autism

Kristin Rispoli, PhD
Michigan State University
Adapting a School Consultation Model to Support Mental Health in Neurodiverse Children

Sarah Jaser, PhD
Vanderbilt University
Targeting Sleep to Support Pediatric Diabetes Management

Catherine Taylor, PhD
Boston College
Bringing Child Abuse Prevention Science into Health Care – A Call to Action

Kierra Sattler, PhD
University of North Carolina Greensboro
Foster Care Experiences and Child Maltreatment: Risk and Resilience Processes



Hannah Schreier, PhD
Penn State's Child Health Study: Connections Between Child Maltreatment Experiences and Youth Health

Philip Fisher, PhD
Stanford University
Scalable Interventions to Address Early Life Adversity

Tabatha Hahn, MA
and
Jarl Ahlkvist, MA, Ph.D.

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Research with Low-Income Adolescents in the BaSICS Program

Tabatha Hahn

Jarl Ahlkvist

Engaging Young Voices:

Innovative Approaches to Research with Children

March 31, 2026

Working with Youth to Evaluate the BaSICS program

- Why research on the BaSICS Program is important.
- Strategies we've employed that led to successful engagement with young people and their families.
- Overcoming obstacles in our research with children and families.

Principles Guiding our Work with Youth Coping with Poverty Related Stress

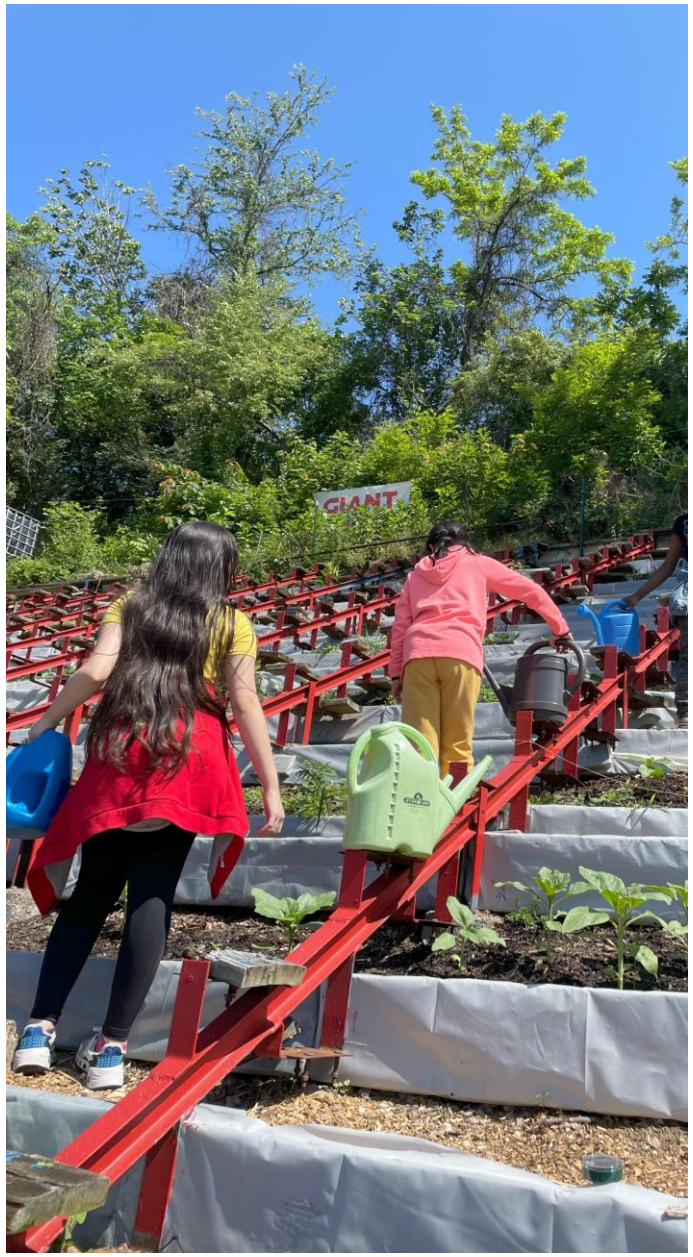
- **Strength-Based**
  - Participants viewed in context—stress-adapted rather than "deficient."
- **Trauma-Informed**
  - Fosters coping and growth mindset, instead of "damaged goods" or victimization.
- **Coping Skills as Essential Building Blocks**
  - Need for wide, flexible repertoire of coping strategies.
- **Cultural & Social Identity Development**
  - Cultural & social identity informs how we respond to stress and is a *coping resource*.
- **Collective Empowerment through Social Action**
  - Connecting with others and participating in collective social action = *collaborative coping*. Enables individual agency and fosters

BaSICS

Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills

The 3 BaSICS Program Modules

BaSICS



Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills - BaSICS

- Foster positive youth development
- Prevent depression, post-traumatic stress problems
- Alleviate negative effects of poverty's chronic stress via development of:
  - Engagement coping skills
  - Agentic personal and collective identity
  - Collective power and social action
  - Youth-led community service project
- **16 two-hour sessions**
- **Groups of approx. Ten 11 - 13 year-olds**
- **3 Facilitators per group**
- **Held at schools and/or community health centers after school.**

Evaluating the BaSICS Program

- Parent/child dyad complete 4 assessment timepoints during the study.
  - Half of the recruited group receives the BaSICS program and half do not (control group).
- Parents complete questionnaires about themselves, their family, and their child
- Child Assessment:
  - Surveys and questionnaires about themselves, family, and community.
  - Induced Stress Task-Trier Social Stress Test
  - Coping Assessment
  - Saliva samples to analyze stress response (cortisol and HPA/SAM

Strategies and Overcoming Obstacles

Meet youth and parents where they are!

- Flexibility
- Strength-focused, Trauma-Informed Care
- Staying connected through the process
- BaSICS program is fun!

Building and maintaining partnerships within the community

- Attending community events
- Providing trainings
- Connecting with community partners for the youth lead community project.

We are currently enrolling!

- For more information you can visit our website: https://careslab.la.psu.edu/
- Or contact Tabatha Hahn tnh131@psu.edu

BaSICS II: Confirmatory Efficacy of the BaSICS Project

- *5-year NIMH Funded clinical trial to conduct a multisite evaluation of the BaSICS Project Across Central PA.*
  - *Dauphin County*
  - *Centre County*
- *Further establish BaSICS in treating and preventing mental health problems in youth.*

Thank you!

Our Funders:

National Institute of Mental Health (R01 **MH134938, R33 MH**107631)

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (HD078753)

Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency

Our Community Partners:

BRIDGE Eco-village

Camp Curtin YMCA

Hamilton Health Center

Boys and Girls Club

Harrisburg School District

Steelton Highspire Public Schools

Bellefonte School District

Penns Valley School District

State College Area School District

Penn State Health

Centre Volunteers in Medicine

CaRES Coping and Regulation of Environmental Stress Lab

BaSICS

Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills

Deepa Sekhar, MD

PennState
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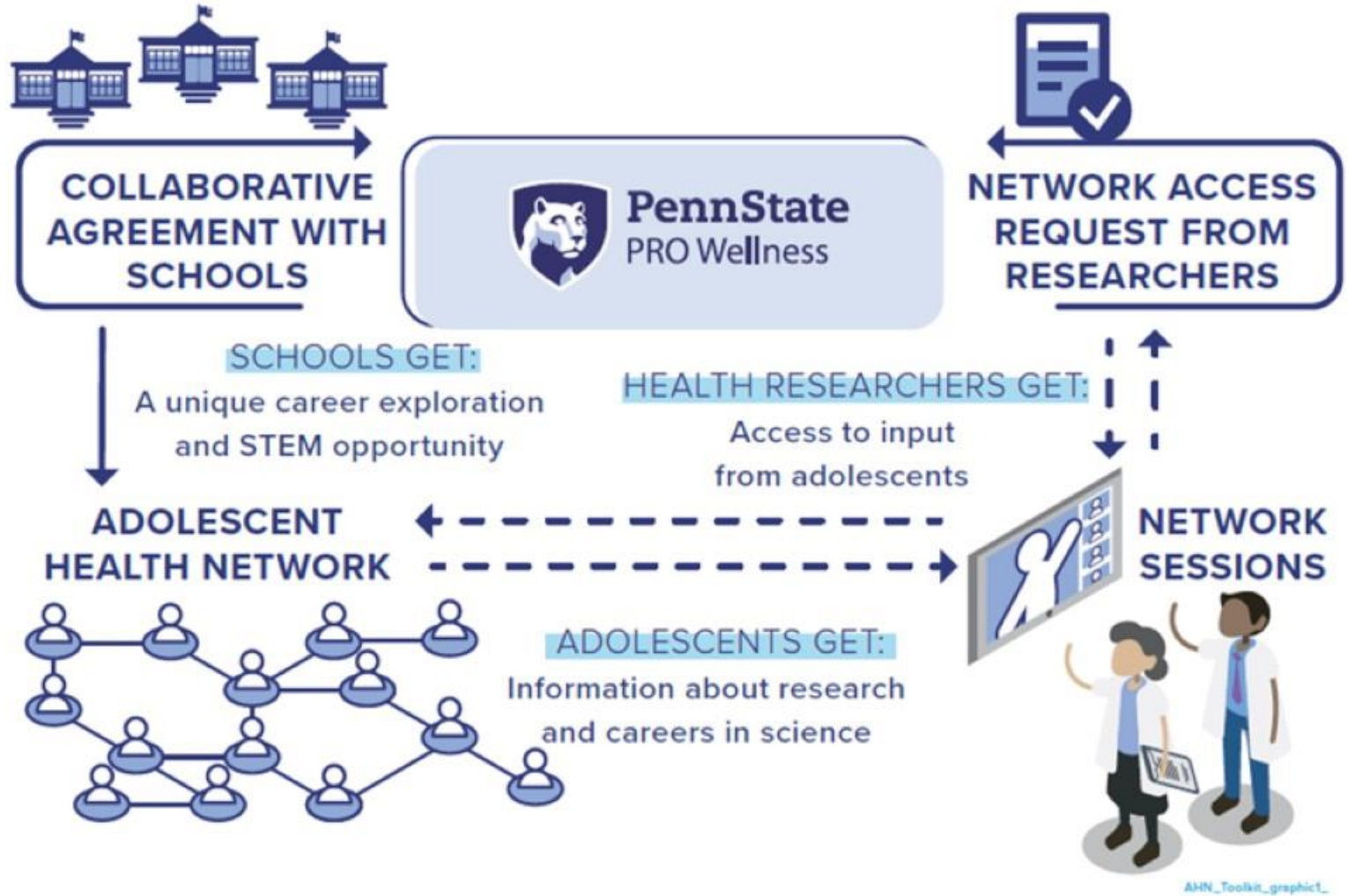
The Adolescent Health Network

- PCORI Engagement Award 2020-2022
- For students - career enrichment/club
- For researchers - access to adolescent input



AHN Procedures Overview

- Adolescents complete online training
- Session sign-up (1-hour Zoom, capped at 12 participants)
- Not a focus group; teens providing their expertise

Since its January 2022 launch the AHN

- Engaged nearly 100 adolescents and 17 Pennsylvania school districts
-
- Ran 53 sessions with health researchers from 13 institutions
-
- Supported 7 proposals, 4 funded projects, and 4 publications

For more information, an interest form can be found here:

https://redcap.link/AHN_ResearcherInquiry

Q & A

Resources

- https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-children-underrepresented-drug.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Race and Ethnicity Reporting and Representation in Pediatric Clinical Trials - PubMed
- Clinical Trials for Special Populations: Children, Older Adults, and Rare Diseases - ScienceDirect
- The Status of Pediatric Randomized Clinical Trials - The Journal of Pediatrics
- https://youtu.be/tRWwxi72Ea8?si=0dCmfQsc1EEDNisX
- Ethical considerations of children's involvement in school-based research: balancing children's provision, protection, and participation rights - Carol Robinson, 2025
- Involving children and young people in research - ScienceDirect
- Understanding Ethical Issues of Research Participation from the Perspective of Participating Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review - PMC

Upcoming Lion Mobile Clinic Events

Children's events:

Saturday, April 4, 2026	**Block Party (Leadership Centre County)**	9:30 set up; 10-2	Snow Shoe Fire Hall (102 Railroad St, Snow Shoe, PA 16874).
Saturday, April 11, 2026	**CenClear pediatric exams**	time tbd but ~9-3	Bigler, PA (Clearfield Co)
Sunday, April 26, 2026	**Wild Wellness Festival & Market**	12-5	Arboretum
Wednesday, May 27, 2026	**Tioga County 4-H & Wellsboro Area School District-8th grade Safety Day**	?	Hills Creek State Park, 111 Spillway Road Wellsboro, PA 16901
Saturday, June 27, 2026	**Rustic Ridge**	11-2	Rustic Ridge Farm 5193 Morgan Run Road, West Decatur, PA, United States, 16878
Saturday, July 18, 2026	**Grange Family Festival**	tbd	Grange Fair Grounds, Centre Hall

To learn more, please visit: [LION Mobile Clinic | Penn State Health]

Call-To-Action

Zoom Poll: How likely are you to be more inclusive of children in your research?

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Contact the CTSI Community Engagement Team

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