

*Social Perception in Williams Syndrome Project & Social
Emotional Development of Children Project
Boston University School of Medicine*



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Project update

Hello to everyone, and happy spring! We invite you and your family to take a few minutes to read about our newest developments and changes at Boston University School of Medicine!

Currently, we have completed our last round of testing, and are busy looking at our findings to write up into scientific papers for publication. We have submitted a grant renewal to the National Institutes of Health for the Social Perception project, and are designing our new round of experiments to begin this fall!

We plan to continue investigating how individuals with Williams syndrome process social information. However, our main focus has now shifted to new and innovative ways of researching social processing at an automatic/implicit level. In collaboration with **Dr. Ami Klin**, of **Yale University**, we will begin using a tiny camera to track where people with Williams syndrome are looking when viewing different pictures and movie clips. We expect that the use of eye-tracking methods will allow us to better understand how people with Williams syndrome pay attention to the social and nonsocial aspects of the environment. We also plan to continue collecting physiological information through skin conductance measures.

During the summer, we will continue to develop these experiments with our collaborators, and look forward to showing them all to you in early fall!



On a different note, we are planning to begin investigating the social and emotional development of young children with Williams syndrome. We are preparing a battery of activities that we hope the children will enjoy, and would also like to talk with parents about their children, and their families' experience with young children with Williams syndrome. 17 families have already participated in the preliminary stages of this new project, and we look forward to working with you and your children, ages 3-5, this fall! Be on the look out for more information on these projects in the next upcoming months!

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Research team news

This summer, we will also be seeing some changes in our research team as well. Leigh Borum, one of our current research assistants, will be leaving our lab in June to pursue different career directions. Lucia Ciciolla, who graduated from Wellesley College with a degree in psychology, will be our new addition to the team. Lucia has experience with psychological testing, and looks forward to meeting and working with you this fall.

Conference Presentations

In April, we attended the Society for Research in Child Development's biennial Research Meeting. Daniela Plesa-Skwerer gave a presentation titled *Electrodermal responses to dynamic presentation of facial expressions of emotion in Williams syndrome*. Many of you took part in this experiment, which consisted of watching several short videos of different people's faces and of various nature scenes. While watching these videos, we were recording your skin conductance responses. What is so interesting about our findings is that although individuals with Williams syndrome show a great interest in people, particularly faces and expressions, many of our participants showed lower physiological arousal to faces than our IQ-matched control group.

Nicole will also be giving a presentation in May at the American Psychological Society's Annual Meeting titled *Implicit processing of emotions in Williams syndrome*. In this presentation, she will discuss how individuals with Williams syndrome process facial expressions. We wish her luck in raising awareness of Williams syndrome among psychologists and mental health specialists at this exciting event!

Future Directions

As previously mentioned, we will continue to develop our new experiments, write up our research findings, and gear up for new rounds of testing in the fall on both of our projects. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all of you for your continued support and participation in our quest to better understand the social development and understanding of individuals with Williams syndrome. Without you, our research would not be possible. If you have any questions, or would like more information about our studies, please do not hesitate to contact Nicole by e-mail: ncrawfor@bu.edu or by phone: 617/414-1309.

We look forward to seeing all of you soon, and wish you a happy, warm, fun-filled summer!

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