

WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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Spotlight on Research Wisconsin Twin Project Recruitment and The Waisman Center

The Wisconsin Twin Project is located in the Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Serving as a multi-disciplinary center, the Waisman Center aims to provide knowledge about human development, developmental disabilities, and neurodegenerative diseases. The Waisman Center offers a wide variety of services to scientists, patients, and their families by conducting research, training future scientists, and providing outreach programs.

The Waisman Center has a Research Participation Core that recruits participants for different researchers within the facility. Staff members at the Wisconsin Twin project have held responsibility for recruiting families with twins since 1994. *Beginning with twins born in Wisconsin in 2005, the Waisman Center Research Participation Core will assume responsibility for recruitment into our project. The Wisconsin Twin Project will continue to handle the recruitment for families with twins born prior to 2005. We ask that you inform any new parents of twins of this change, as we do not want them to miss the recruitment letter.* The changes to recruitment will not affect your participation with us; rather, it is just an effort to consolidate recruitment at the Waisman Center.

With this change we believe it is of interest to educate you about the amazing facility in which we are housed. The Waisman Center was established in 1973 in response to a presidential panel decision to create several establishments to further the understanding, treatment, and prevention of mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. Madison was chosen because of the outstanding research conducted at the University of Wisconsin. The center is named after Harry A. Waisman, a pediatrician, biochemist, and leader in research on

mental retardation. He is considered to be a pioneer in the field after having supported the enactment of legislation mandating testing of newborns for phenylketonuria (PKU), a metabolic condition that, if left undetected or untreated, may lead to mental retardation.



The William F. and Betty Jo Heckrodt Translational Research Tower and entrance to the Waisman Center. Photo courtesy of J. H. Findorff & Son, Inc.

Serving over 2,500 people a year, the Waisman Center houses 60 laboratories used for behavioral and biomedical research, a brain imaging center, and clinics serving developmentally disabled individuals and their families. The projects vary from stem-cell research to speech, language, and communication processes research. Additionally, the Waisman Center houses a preschool which integrates children with a range of developmental abilities. A total of 25 academic departments of

UW-Madison are represented, and over 250 graduate and post-graduate students receive training each year. The Waisman Center provides interdisciplinary training for future researchers and clinicians. Annually, more than 250 scientific papers and books concerning research on genetic basis for inherited diseases, nervous system development, and research on families and children are published by scientists working at the Waisman Center.

The Waisman Center is organized into several units: molecular and genetic sciences, sensory and cognitive processes, communication processes, clinical services, and social and affective processes (which contains the Wisconsin Twin Project). Our research focus is the genetic and environmental influences on normal development of twins in the family context. We are interested in challenges and risk factors, as well as adaptive processes and competency factors that contribute to child development. We employ a range of research methods including structured interviews with caregivers, observer ratings, child self-report, home-based behavioral batteries, biological measures of basal and reactive cortisol, palm prints, birth records, DNA samples, cognitive testing, and questionnaires. Twin methodology provides us with sophisticated analysis of genetic, environmental, and interaction effects on child development and related risk and protective factors.

Research projects at the Waisman Center receive funding from diverse federal, state, and private sources. Federal sources include the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Mental Health and the Department of Education, amongst others. Private funding comes from sources such as the Michael J. Fox Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, National Down Syndrome Society, and the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association.

The Waisman Center is well known for its Early Childhood Program, a school for both typically and atypically developing children from birth to age 8 with a variety of developmental abilities. The innovative teaching style focuses on learning through interactive play to enhance social-emotional, physical, cognitive and language development. Children engage in self-directed play, arts, science, music and other activities meant to challenge social and learning opportunities. The program fosters a community feel with small student to teacher ratios, which allows children to build and maintain

friendships. Teachers within the Early Childhood Program hail from a variety of different backgrounds, including child development, special education, early childhood development, and school psychology. The teachers create activities utilizing various teaching techniques which allow the children to be individuals in a group setting. Occasionally, families participating in the Waisman Early Childhood Program are asked to participate in an assortment of research projects being conducted by scientists at the Waisman Center.



The Family Village Website: A Waisman Resource for Any Family

A visit to the Waisman Center is not necessary to reap all the benefits it has to offer. The Family Village website serves as a community of child development related resources, with a focus on disabilities. The website offers information, support, and even establishes communication with others affected with disabilities for those with disabilities, as well as family members. The Family Village also provides various disability related media and literature.



At the online Family Village Library, one can browse topics ranging from general information about cognitive and developmental disabilities to specific diagnoses. The general information section offers support relating to adults with disabilities, disability awareness, prenatal testing and diagnoses, siblings of persons with disabilities and starting a self help or support group. Also, there are suggestions concerning adaptive recreational activities for teachers and parents and people with disabilities.

The Family Village website offers numerous means of forging communication between people with disabilities and their family members. The Family Village Coffee Shop allows visitors to make connections through discussion boards, chat rooms and traditional matching programs. Visitors may opt to connect with people by location or disability. Similarly, the Post Office offers numerous message boards where visitors may choose which one will best meet their needs. Message board topics include same diagnosis, undiagnosed conditions, locations, general information, and the opportunity for professionals post regarding disabilities.

Visitors may choose to relate based on common interests. The House of Worship provides resources that give visitors the opportunity to interact through religious or spiritual beliefs. The Recreation and Leisure link presents organizations to become involved in through special interests such as travel, media, arts, and sports. Depending on the organization, people may simply connect online or have the opportunity to meet and partake in the specific activity. To unite on an educational level, the Family Village School offers school related resources for families, teachers and a Just Kids section. Parents can gain a better understanding of how the educational system is set up to assist their child, as well as acquire support regarding having a disabled child in school. Teachers may find suggestions in planning effective lessons and efficiently incorporating disabled students in classroom with other students. The Just Kids link allows kids to connect with other disabled kids by interacting, sharing their own stories, reading others stories and learning more about their disabilities. Recently information regarding disability-related legislation and civil rights, disability culture, and living with a disability was added to the website.

The Waisman Center's online Family Village community provides innumerable opportunities to gain information regarding specific diagnoses, support from others dealing with the same developmental disabilities, and knowledge on how to live successfully with a disability or with a person with a disability. Even if your family does not have a member with a disability, we hope that this website can offer invaluable information to you or someone you know.

For Additional Information about the Waisman Center

Waisman Center www.waisman.wisc.edu
Family Village www.familyvillage.wisc.edu
Waisman Resource Center 1-800-532-3321

And, visit our newly renovated website!

Wisconsin Twin Project <http://psych.wisc.edu/wtp>

It Takes Two Indoor Snowflakes

(from www.multiples.about.com)

You'll need a string, white pipe cleaner, blue food coloring (optional), boiling water, and a wide mouth glass jar. Note: Adults should supervise this project -- boiling water can burn! Food coloring can stain clothing and work surfaces; use with caution.

1. Cut a pipe cleaner into 3 equal lengths. Arrange the pieces in a crisscross pattern -- one vertical, and the other two forming an "X" on top.
2. Twist the pieces together in the middle to join them together and spread out the ends evenly. This is the base skeleton of your snowflake shape.
3. Tie string around the tip of one of the pipe cleaner spokes, and then connect it to the next spoke.
4. Continue tying the string around the tip of each pipe cleaner spoke until you've gone all the way around, forming a hexagon shape.
5. Tie another length of string to the tip of one of the spokes (to allow the snowflake to dangle in the solution in the jar).
6. Fill a wide-mouth jar with boiling water.
7. Add Borax to the boiling water, 1 tablespoonful at a time. Use 3 tablespoonfuls per cup of water. Stir gently to dissolve. Optional: add one or two drops of blue food coloring to give the snowflakes a bluish tint.
8. Slowly lower the pipecleaner snowflake into the water, suspending it in the mixture. Tie the loose end of the string to a pencil across the top of the open end of the jar so that the snowflake can dangle.
9. Let the jar rest overnight. In the morning, shiny crystals will have formed on the pipecleaners and string -- an indoor snowflake!

Twins and Autism

We estimate that there are as many as 130 pairs of twins under the age of 18 years in Wisconsin in which one or both twins has autism, or some other form of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS or Asperger Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in these disorders, and we have just received a large grant from the National Institute of Health to begin a twin research study to help understand these complex disorders.

Thus far, we have located over 90 twin pairs in which one or both has autism or a related challenge; however, this is an insufficient number to do our research. We would appreciate a phone call or email from the parents of any twin with autism (identical or fraternal, boy or girl, regardless of whether the co-twin has a disorder or not) living anywhere in Wisconsin. We would appreciate our readers mentioning our efforts to parents of twins with autism spectrum disorders. All we need to know at this time are the age and diagnosis of the twins, as well as contact information for the future. We would like to know about the existence of all such twin pairs, even if they might not choose to participate in the study. If you want to relay information to us about a twin or set of twins with autism or other related disorder, please contact Dr. Hill Goldsmith at (608) 262-9932 or hgoldsm@wisc.edu.

Please let us know if your address or phone number changes.

Email: wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu
Phone: (608) 265-2674



Visit our **NEW** website!
<http://psych.wisc.edu/wtp>



Thank You!

As an expert on your own twins, you possess important knowledge. We appreciate the time you take to talk on the phone, fill out questionnaires, and visit with us. Each piece of information furthers research in child development.

We value your input!

DO YOU HAVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR SUGGESTIONS?

- If your twins are under the age of 3 years, contact Carrie Arneson at clarneso@wisc.edu or (608) 265-2674.
- If your twins are over the age of 3 years, contact Nicci Schmidt at nlschmidt2@wisc.edu or Cory Schmidt at ckshmidt@wisc.edu or (608) 265-2674.
- If you want to relay information to us about a twin or set of twins with autism or other related disorder, please contact Dr. Hill Goldsmith at (608) 262-9932 or hgoldsm@wisc.edu.

Address Service Requested

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