



Hello EGDS Birth Parents!

It is hard to believe that it has been 10 years since the Early Growth & Development Study began! I feel incredibly honored to have been a part of the study from the beginning and to see how the project has grown over the years. My role in the family of studies has changed over time, but I started with recruiting birth parents in 2002. While I spend most of the time now behind the scenes, my favorite aspect of the study is when I have an opportunity to talk with our participants. I still remember my first calls to birth parents and how nervous I was explaining the study and inviting a new birth mother or birth father to participate. We were not sure how birth parents would feel about participating in our study, knowing that each person had recently made a difficult and serious decision that involved many different feelings and emotions. We quickly learned that most birth parents were very eager to participate and sincerely appreciated the opportunity to share their story and their feelings about their experience. We are very grateful for this and as a result, you have become part of the largest study EVER of birth parents and adoptive families. We are so thankful that you have continued with us for a decade and we have enjoyed learning about how your lives have moved forward.

Our biggest struggle over the years has been keeping track of all of you! While we feel that we have done a pretty good job, we thank you for thinking to call us when you move or have a new phone number. Please continue to keep in touch and let us know how to reach you. We anticipate carrying on the Early Growth & Development Study for years to come, even if it's just a quick check in once or twice a year. You always have a place with the EGDS family.

Best,
Amy Whitesel
Project Director
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“The Early Growth & Development Study has given me a male’s perspective on losing a child to adoption and still being able to observe and follow the child’s growth and development from a unique perspective. I also have young grandkids and the study allows me to participate in their lives, bond with them, and parent them, too. I find the study’s surveys insightful and informative and I appreciate the financial compensation for my time and effort. I will always be available for the research and progression of the studies. Thank you for all of your efforts and please keep in touch.”

-Birth Father participating since 2010



Celebrating a decade of family research

**The Early Growth & Development Study
commemorated a significant milestone in 2012:
The 10th anniversary of the study’s beginning**

10th anniversary
Early Growth & Development Study

Focus on: *family*

Since 2002, the Early Growth & Development Study (EGDS) has developed into five, federally-funded projects that study the relationship between nature and nurture and how the two work together and separately to affect how children develop.

The concept for the project was born in the mid- 1990's when a group of researchers wanted to learn more about how families help their children develop to their fullest potential. Never before had a study examined such issues specifically in the context of adoption, with a strong focus on heredity and families, and children's social and behavioral development. Only one other large-scale adoption study existed in the US, the Colorado Adoption Project, and it started in the 1970's when adoption practices were much different than they are today.

Guided by the work in the Colorado Adoption Project, the EGDS research team knew how impactful a new adoption study could be for the adoption community. They took careful steps when developing the project to ensure respect for participants and their privacy, as well as to pick questions and assessments that would have the most impact and value in the field of child development. This dedication to scientific integrity continues to be a hallmark of our study. The EGDS first received federal funding from the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development in 2002, nearly ten years after that very first meeting when researchers discussed the possibilities for this study.

The ongoing study began with 384 adopted children and their adoptive parents, 536 birth mothers, and 163 birth fathers. This study was called

"EGDS-Toddlers" and it ran between 2002 and 2007. Next, the "EGDS -School" study (2007-2013) was funded to follow those children, families, and their birth parents as the children entered the school-age years up to age 7. "EGDS-School" focuses on school readiness and children's attention and ability to control their behavior.

"EGDS is discovering much more precisely the potential each child inherits from his birth parents and the ways in which adopting parents can assure the full realization of that potential as the child develops"

- David Reiss, Principal Investigator, Yale University

The "EGDS-Phase 2" study, also funded from 2007 to 2013, includes an additional 337 birth mothers, 188 birth fathers, and 204 adoptive families to examine the influences of the prenatal environment, the family environment, and heredity on child development.

The "EGDS-NIMH" study began in 2010, and follows 561 adoptive families who are currently enrolled in any EGDS study. The "EGDS-NIMH" study examines mental health development during middle childhood. The families in the "EGDS-NIMH" study are currently being visited when the child is between age 6 and 8 years old and the study runs through 2015.

Finally, the "EGDS-Health" study began in the fall of 2011, and includes EGDS adoptive and birth families. The study focuses on understanding pathways to children's healthy eating, activity, and weight.

Focus on: *future*

Many people ask, "What are you finding in the study?" or "When will results be available?" The answers to these questions are complicated. The cycle of our grants is for five years and we spend most of that time collecting information from our participants. Once the data are collected, we aggregate, or put all of the data together. To the naked eye, the data may just look just like a bunch of numbers, but to the research team this is fascinating information that tells us about our sample. Putting the data together and checking it for errors before we examine it (such as correcting how a date was entered) takes a tremendous amount of time. Once we have enough data that are cleaned and ready to be examined, members of our team work together to write papers explaining the findings and answering the research questions. The research team then submits the finished papers to scholarly journals in hopes that they will be reviewed competatively by experts in the field and approved for publication. This whole process can take years!

We hope that our results will be used to help families and children reach their fullest potential. We expect that the study's findings will assist in developing educational programs that will aid parents in learning new strategies to enhance their child's development. The best data used to create these programs will come from our participating families and we thank you for your generous contributions to this effort!

"I enjoy expressing my opinion with hopes that it will help to enlighten people's minds with insight from someone who has actually experienced an adoption, and the staff make it easy."

-Birth mother participating since 2009

The Origin of Our Logo

Ten years ago, the Early Growth & Development Study logo was created in a collaborative effort between the study's investigators and staff. Capitalizing on the study's name, we decided on a natural image. This idea also fit well with the study's long-term goals to enhance child development; to optimize the adoption process for children, birth parents, adoptive families, and adoption agencies; and to educate the general population about adoption. Thus our logo was born: a young plant emerging from a root system representing children and the adults supporting them. We chose purple as the logo color because of its historical meanings as an uplifting, calming color associated with transformation. To celebrate our 10th year and thank you for your ongoing support, we have included a plantable seed "leaf" that will bloom into an array of wildflowers. *New growth is always possible!*



Focus on: Denise Ford

Since the study's inception, more than 50 interviewers have traveled around the country and the world to conduct in-person interviews with participants in the Early Growth & Development Study. One person, however, stands out for her longevity as an EGDS interviewer. Denise Ford is the only interviewer who has been with the project since 2002. We spoke with her from her home in Fresno, California, about how she has honed her expert travel and interviewing skills for the past 10 years.



*"The thing I've enjoyed the most about being a part of the study is that I've met some amazing people. Some people I am able to go back to visit many times and others I'm meeting for the first time. And seeing different parts of the country is nice as well, especially in the spring."
-Denise Ford, EGDS Interviewer*

EGDS: In 10 years, you have completed 389 phone interviews and 629 in-person interviews. When you hear those numbers, what do you think?

Denise Ford (DF): Looking back, since it's over the course of 10 years, it doesn't seem like that much. There certainly were months when the travel seemed a bit crazy. I think it's great I got to see all of these families.

EGDS: Do you remember your first interview?

DF: My first interview was an adoptive family who lived a few hours away from me. I recruited the adoptive mother and she was really nice. Before the in-person visit, we had already spoken many times over the phone, so I wasn't worried about the adult

interactions. I think I was a little nervous about how the baby would react: Would she cry? Or want to take a nap? I was also worried about the logistics (did I pack all of the materials? Would I remember the timing of all of the activities?)

EGDS: Are there things that have stuck with you or that you still think about over the years that a participant has said to you?

DF: As the kids get older I hear funny things from them. One little boy yelled to me, "Hey scientist, we're done with our games." His parents had explained to him that he was a part of a scientific study. He was disappointed I wasn't a Paleontologist.

EGDS: How did you get your start in research?

DF: I've been working in research since 1984. I started as a teacher in a playgroup at the University of Oregon. I think if I were in college now I would become a Forensic Investigator.

EGDS: What do you enjoy doing when you're on the road? When you aren't traveling for this job, what do you do in your free time?

DF: I like to stop by the state's botanical garden and walk around and get some exercise. When I'm at home I'm fixing, trapping, and releasing feral cats. I've fixed 106 cats in my neighborhood!

EGDS: What does your husband think about you being on the road so much?

DF: He's a very good sport. He's a hard worker in his own right. We met later in life. We lived most of our lives without each other. I think that really helps since he's busy himself. Rescuing and caring for the cats keep him busy as well.

Denise has traveled to 38 states and Costa Rica as an interviewer for this study. She chose Australia and New Zealand as the destinations she would most like a participant to move to so she can travel there for an in-person interview.

Focus on: community



We formed strong relationships with adoption agencies across the United States to recruit birth parents and adoptive families for participation in our study. Over the course of the EGDS projects, we have worked with 45 agencies across the nation. Many birth parents and adoptive families who completed newborn, domestic adoption placements through these agencies were invited to participate. Currently, our recruitment and data collection sites include the Oregon Social Learning Center, Pennsylvania State University, University of California at Riverside, and George Washington University. We also have researchers located at Yale University, University of Pittsburgh, University of New Orleans, the University of California at Davis, University of Minnesota, Duke University, Emory University, and University of Leicester (located in England). Although the main foci of the study are on understanding more about child development, we have also had the unique opportunity to learn about the joys and challenges of the adoption process. We hope to continue to share this knowledge with the adoption community. One of our primary goals is for birth parents, adoptive families, and adopted children to receive the best services and support possible. We also want to assist the adoption community in educating the general public about adoption, especially regarding issues such as openness, birth father relationships, and transracial adoption.

Across the family of EGDS studies, the primary areas that we are exploring include topics such as:

- The roles of parenting, marital relationships, and heredity on child development.
- The effects of the adoption process on children, birth parents, and adoptive parents.
- The unique ways in which mothers versus fathers can affect how their child develops.
- How children's early qualities, like their sleep patterns and fussiness, relate to their behavior later in development.
- The effects of pregnancy-related events and experiences on both birth parent adjustment and adopted child adjustment.
- The ways in which adoptive and birth parent dietary and exercise habits might influence children's dietary and exercise habits.
- Factors involved in the successful transition to school.

"Adoptions Together received positive feedback from adoptive and birth parents about the opportunity to participate in a study on child development. We are always seeking ways to help birth parents stay connected to the agency and their adoption decision and this study validated their ongoing importance to their child and adoptive family. In addition, the researchers are compassionate and respectful and it was rewarding for agency staff to be able to interact with them and contribute positively to the wealth of information about child development."

- Susan Ogden, Domestic Adoption Director at Adoptions Together.

Focus on:

kudos

All grants that are submitted to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) undergo a rigorous review process to determine funding. Reviewers submit summary statements for each application that include comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed study. Below are excerpts from the recently-funded “EGDS-Mental Health” grant summary statement that highlight the significance of the project.

“The research team is outstanding. The investigators have a history of productive collaboration.”

“This study addresses important questions of high significance.”

“The original EGDS design is incredibly innovative and remarkable in its success.”

“This application takes advantage of the wonderful infrastructure and wealth of data already collected by the EGDS - reasonable sample size, longitudinal data, information on birth and adoptive parents.”

Since the study’s inception, we have published more than 30 articles in numerous scholarly journals including:

- *Developmental Psychology*
- *Child Development*
- *Journal of Family Psychology*
- *Development and Psychopathology*
- *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*
- *Infancy*
- *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*
- *Adoption Quarterly*
- *Infant Mental Health Journal*

Results from the study have been featured in various local, national, and international media outlets including:

- *San Francisco Chronicle*
- *US News and World Report*
- *MSN*
- *Health.com*
- *British Psychological Society*
- *Yahoo*
- *NPR*
- *BabyCenter.com*

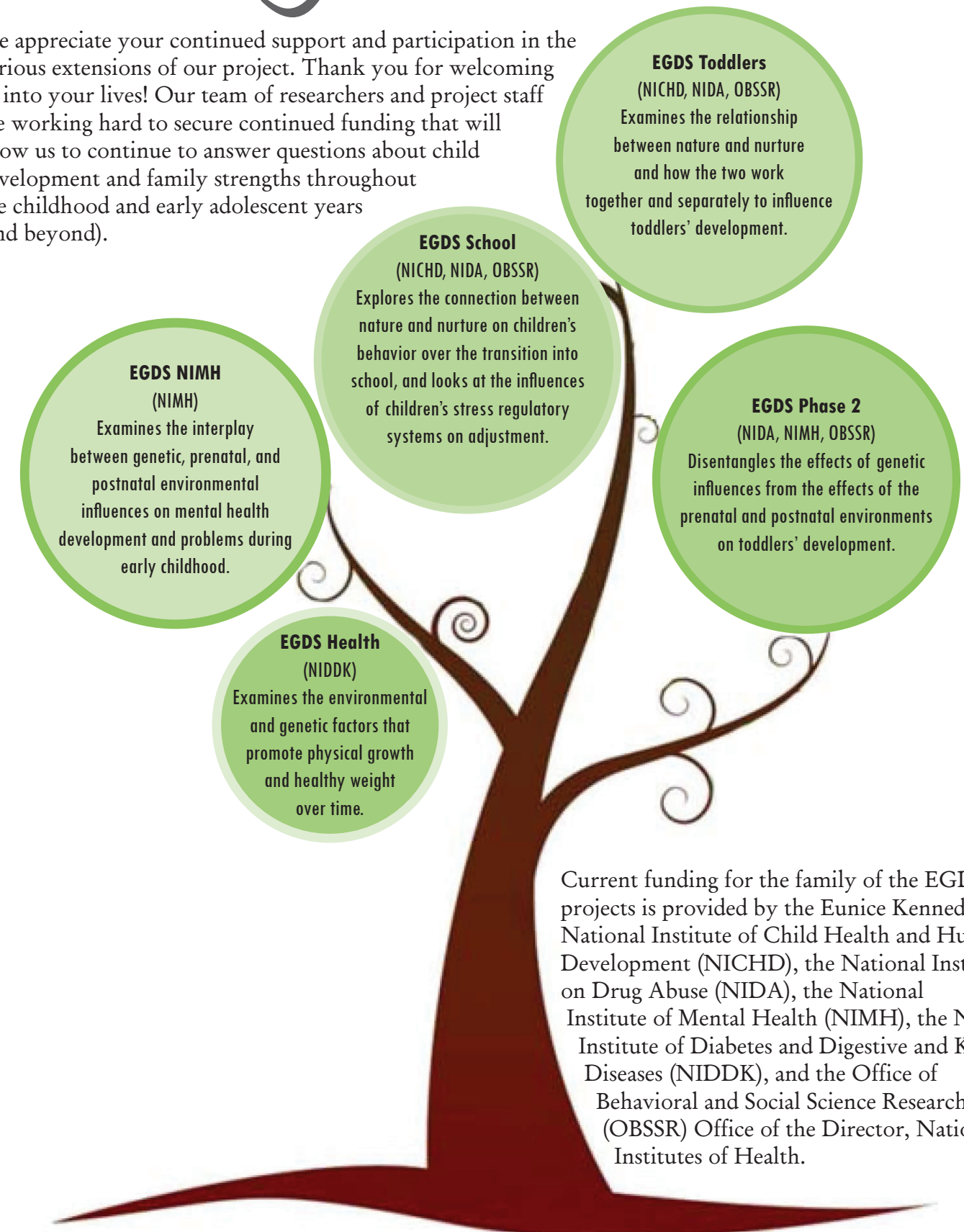
The study would also like to acknowledge the 8 advisory board members who met with project staff in 2002-2003 during the development stage. There are countless features of the study design which reflect on their collective wisdom.

Visit our website
for up-to-date study
information
www.egdstudy.org

Focus on:

growth

We appreciate your continued support and participation in the various extensions of our project. Thank you for welcoming us into your lives! Our team of researchers and project staff are working hard to secure continued funding that will allow us to continue to answer questions about child development and family strengths throughout the childhood and early adolescent years (and beyond).



Current funding for the family of the EGDS projects is provided by the Eunice Kennedy National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), and the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (OBSSR) Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health.