RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Children with Autism and typically developing children are needed to participate in an autism research project at the University of Kansas.

Dear Parents:

Autism is a neurological disorder that is marked by impaired development in social interaction and communication and a restricted repertoire of activities and interests. Although we know that autism is a neurological disorder, the root of the neurological dysfunction is unknown. Therefore, research efforts have been focused at trying to identify what brain areas may primarily contribute to the disorder. Hopefully, through various research efforts, we will obtain a clearer idea about the causes of autism. The research project that we will be conducting will study the function one two brain regions to determine if either of these areas may be a key to identifying and diagnosing children with autism.

What is the purpose of this research project?
The purpose of the research project is to determine if locus coeruleus and/or hypothalamic activity is dysfunctional in children with autism. The locus coeruleus and hypothalamic systems are involved in controlling pupil size and are involved in the control of attentional arousal. Therefore, this project will use activities that elicit this attentional responses and will examine salivary measures of these systems.

Who may participate in this project?
We are looking for children who are between the ages of 2 and 6 years of age and who have either (a) a diagnosis of autism or PDD-NOS or who are typically developing children. The children must not have neurological disorders (beyond autism), should be free of hearing or vision difficulties (corrected vision and hearing with glasses and/or hearing aids is okay) or other serious health problems such as heart disease. In addition, the children should not be taking any medications (vitamins are okay).

What type of activities will my child participate in?
You will be asked to take some saliva samples from your child on two typical days and complete a sleep questionnaire. Once completed your child will be seen at our Lawrence laboratory for one afternoon testing session. During this session, your child will complete a visual stimuli task, in which your child will sit in a car seat and will be shown some pictures and movie clips. While they are looking at the pictures, their eye movements and pupil diameters will be recorded. In addition, salivary samples will be taken from your child. Finally, a standardized intelligence assessment, and a standardized assessment of autism will be completed. The standardized intelligence assessment will consist of a variety of activities that your child will be asked to complete. The standardized assessment of autism will be completed while your child participates in free play with toys.
How long will these activities take?
Participation would require 1 session, that takes approximately 2 hours to complete. In addition, you will be asked to take salivary and sleep measures from your child on two additional days in your home-environment.

Will we be reimbursed for our time and travel?
YES! You will be given $50 for participation in this study. This will be given to you at the time of your testing session at our Lawrence laboratory.

How do I sign up for participation?
If you are interested in participating in this research project or if you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Christa Anderson or Kathryn Unruh at our Lawrence office at (785) 312-5345 (please leave a message if no one is available) or e-mail us at autismlab@ku.edu.

We hope that you will consider participation.

Sincerely,

Christa J. Anderson, PhD
University of Kansas
Schiefelbusch Life Span Institute
KU Early Cognition Lab/Autism Research Program
http://www2.ku.edu/~lsi/research/profiles/christa_anderson.shtml

Kathryn Unruh
Undergraduate Research Assistant
University of Kansas
Schiefelbusch Life Span Institute
KU Early Cognition Lab/Autism Research Program