

# News Releases



## RNBC Research Identifies Three Key Factors in Avoiding Social Rejection

### Three Key Factors to Help Children Avoid Social Rejection Identified

*New Study May Help Develop Assessment Tests in Social-Emotional Learning*

(CHICAGO) – Neurobehavioral researchers at Rush University Medical Center have found three key factors in a child’s behavior that can lead to social rejection. The studies are a crucial step in developing scientifically sound screening tests and treatment planning for social-emotional learning difficulties. The results from the studies are published in the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*.

Findings from the pair of studies indicate that the ability to pick up on non-verbal cues and social cues in social interaction as well as recognize the meaning and respond appropriately to them are key to helping children develop skills to maintain friendships and avoid a host of problems in later life.

A child who experiences social rejection is more likely to suffer from academic failure, drop out of school, experience depression or anxiety, and experiment with drugs.

“Children’s ability to develop positive peer relationships is critical to their well-being,” said Dr. Clark McKown, study principal investigator and associate executive director and research director at the Rush NeuroBehavioral Center. “Compared to children who are accepted by their peers, socially rejected children are at substantially elevated risk for later adjustment troubles.”

Researchers observed two groups of children. One was a random sample of 158 children in the Chicago school system. The other group was a random sample of 126 clinic-referred children.

The studies indicate that some children have difficulty picking up on non-verbal or social cues.

According to McKown, “They simply don’t notice the way someone’s shoulders slump with disappointment, or hear the change in someone’s voice when they are excited, or take in whether a person’s face shows anger or sadness.”

A second major factor is that some children may pick up on non-verbal or social cues, but lack the ability to attach meaning to them. The third factor is the ability to reason about social problems.

“Some children may notice social cues and understand what is happening, but are unable to do the social problem solving to behave appropriately,” said McKown.

A child who can take in social cues, recognize their meaning and respond appropriately, and who is capable of “self– regulating,” or controlling behavior, is more likely to have successful relationships.

“The number of children who cannot negotiate all these steps, and who are at risk of social rejection, is startling,” said McKown.

Nearly 13 percent of the school age population, or roughly four million children nationwide, have social-emotional learning difficulties.

For some time, behavioral scientists have known the social costs associated with this problem. Illinois is one of a handful of states which require school districts to assess and monitor the social-emotional learning needs of its students.

“Because it was not known exactly which behaviors set a child up for failure, or how to measure these skills, it was difficult to provide support,” said McKown. “Now, it will be possible to pinpoint which abilities a child needs to develop and offer help.”

According to researchers at Rush, the results of the studies could potentially help develop tests to assess for social-emotional learning that are easy to administer and scientifically sound.

The study was funded by the Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock Foundation and the William T. Grant Foundation.

## **About Rush NeuroBehavioral Center**

Rush NeuroBehavioral Center (RNBC) serves the medical, psychological and educational needs of children with neurobehavioral issues with a special emphasis on social-emotional learning disorders. .These children have difficulty focusing, forming relationships, regulating behavior, or functioning effectively because of differences in the way their brains receive, process, and manage verbal and nonverbal information. Through research, clinical practice, and education, RNBC seeks to enhance the understanding of the needs of those with neurobehavioral disorders, build on their strengths, and help them achieve their full potential.

Since 1997, RNBC has treated more than 12,000 children with such problems as Tourette's Syndrome, Asperger's Syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and language-based and non-verbal learning disabilities

## **About Rush University Medical Center**

Rush University Medical Center is an academic medical center that encompasses the more than 600 staffed-bed hospital (including Rush Children's Hospital), the Johnston R. Bowman Health Center and Rush University. Rush University, with more than 1,730 students, is home to one of the first medical schools in the Midwest, and one of the nation's top-ranked nursing colleges. Rush University also offers graduate programs in allied health and the basic sciences. Rush is noted for bringing together clinical care and research to address major health problems, including arthritis and orthopedic disorders, cancer, heart disease, mental illness, neurological disorders and diseases associated with aging.

## **Additional Information**

For more information about Rush NeuroBehavioral Center's services and research initiatives please contact Jessica Eustice, RNBC Director of Development & Communications, via email to [jessica\\_eustice@rush.edu](mailto:jessica_eustice@rush.edu) or by calling 847.763.7935.