E.K. Shriver Center

The Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center has been a pioneer in research, education, and service for people with developmental disabilities and their families for over four decades.

Dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities, the Shriver Center conducts basic and applied research to determine the biological and environmental factors that influence typical and atypical development, and provides training and service programs that directly benefit people with developmental disabilities and their families.

In 2001, the Shriver Center joined the University of Massachusetts Medical School under the auspices of Commonwealth Medicine. The Shriver Center was designated one of the Medical School’s Centers of Excellence, which underscores our mission to pursue excellence in research, education, and service in the field of developmental disabilities.

For more information, please visit:  
http://shriver.umassmed.edu
Focus of Attention

What will my child do?

• Undergo a language test, and maybe developmental and diagnostic testing, including an IQ test
• Perform game-like matching tasks with pictures or symbols on a computer with a touchscreen
• May participate in eye-tracking sessions

Where and when will the study take place?

• The study visits will take place at your child’s school
• Visit times will be coordinated with your child’s teacher or school staff

Who can participate?

7-20 year olds:
• With Autism Spectrum Disorders
• With Down syndrome
• With other types of intellectual disabilities

Questions?

Research Coordinator:

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Why participate?

Dr. William V. Dube’s “Focus of Attention” study is a research project funded by NICHD (grant #HD062582, UMMS IRB docket #H-13761 and H-12531).

The project studies how children with autism and other intellectual/developmental disabilities pay attention to things like pictures, printed words, and faces.

We are most interested in a type of attention problem where an individual “over-focuses” on only one small part of a picture, printed word, face, etc. Over-focusing (also called stimulus overselectivity or overselective attention) can cause difficulties with important life skills like recognizing faces and reading. As examples, people who over-focus on isolated facial features may have difficulty recognizing emotional expressions or they may over-focus on individual letters and have trouble distinguishing similar printed words, like “cat” and “can.”

Your child’s participation in the “Focus of Attention” study will help to develop improved teaching techniques for special education classrooms to reduce this attention problem.