

Neuroscience and Novel Therapeutics Unit



Childhood Irritability Newsletter Spring 2021

Our mission

The goal of the Neuroscience and Novel Therapeutics Unit (NNT) is to develop brain-based treatments for children with serious psychiatric disorders. The research conducted in NNT is part of NIMH's mission to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure.

Check out our website

We are excited to share that we have launched a new website. Where we share our research findings. We have a "Talks and Multimedia" with some of our recent presentations. And, we have a page called "Patients and Families" which describes our current studies. We hope you find it helpful:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/nnt>

Get to Know Our Team

Our team is made up of clinicians, research assistants, and fellows who are passionate about improving the lives of children with irritability, and those affected by these difficulties.

Clinician: Cheri McNeil, PsyD



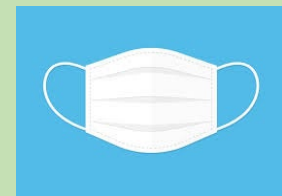
Dr. McNeil has been a clinician in our lab for 11 years. You may have met her on an in-person visit at NIH or talked with her over the phone about your child's mood. Dr. McNeil also heads-up the clinical training for new clinicians who join the lab, and for outside collaborators who are interested in learning about our lab's work.

Research Assistant: Christian Botz-Zapp



Christian worked in the lab for 3 years. You may have talked with him during a phone screen or during research tasks. He has had several research poster presentations and is also a talented basketball player who's skills have been put to use in our exposures for our exposure-based CBT treatment.

Health and Safety First COVID-19 Precautions

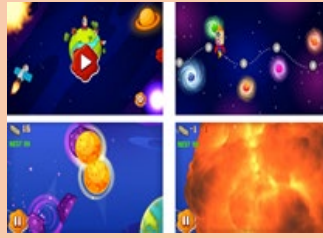


COVID-19 has affected all of us and the way in which we live our day-to-day lives. Here at NIH, we stand together to overcome these new obstacles and protect ourselves and each other. To ensure everyone's safety during your NIH visit, we have established the following precautions:

- ✓ Staff are screened daily for COVID-19.
- ✓ All are **required** to wear face masks.
- ✓ Visitors undergo a risk assessment screening before visiting the Clinical Center.
- ✓ Study participants will be contacted 24-48 hours before their visit to be asked whether they have experienced any symptoms of COVID-19 or had a known exposure as a safety precaution before coming onsite.
- ✓ All visitors will be provided masks and hand sanitizer by the NIH.
- ✓ All study participants should be accompanied by only **one parent**. No siblings should come onsite.
- ✓ Rooms and equipment are disinfected before and after each patient.

Research Updates: Technology

As we all know, kids love to play games on their phones and tablets. So, why not make a game that's not only fun but can help us learn about children?



We have developed a mobile application called "**CALM-IT.**"

Perhaps your child will be playing this game as part of one of our research studies.

CBT for Irritability, where are we now?



We are currently recruiting participants for a study applying a new **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** to target irritability in children and adolescents.

Therapists work with children and parents to create an "anger hierarchy" of situations that the child finds angering. They then practice "exposing" the child to these anger-provoking situations in the therapy sessions. For example, during the therapy session, a child might be asked to stop playing a fun video game while trying to tolerate the discomfort. We are not trying to completely erase children's frustration in this treatment, but instead to work with children and parents toward having shorter and less intense temper outbursts when frustrated.

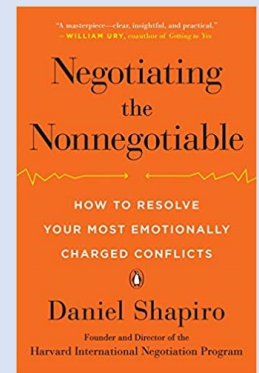
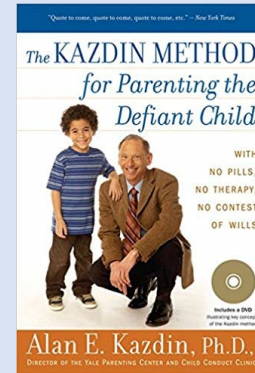
This treatment also includes a **parent management training (PMT)** component to help parents manage their children's behaviors. PMT has been shown to be helpful with children with behavioral difficulties.

When we previously piloted this treatment, we found that the treatment had an overall impact on the severity of behavioral outbursts many children have.

Resources

How do you know what works? The book, *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, by Dr. Alan Kazdin separates myths from truths on punishment, tantrums, and what works to help children with disruptive behaviors and teach parents how to practice specific techniques on their own.

Additionally, Dr. Daniel Shapiro's book, *Negotiating the nonnegotiable: How to resolve your most emotionally charged conflicts* is a family conflict resource that presents practical steps to reconcile contentious situations.



Fact vs. Fiction



- A) The COVID-19 virus can spread in both cold/dry AND hot/humid climates.
- B) Wearing a mask protects both you AND people near you from getting COVID-19.
- C) Even if you are asymptomatic, you can spread COVID-19 to your family and friends.

A: Fact, B: Fact, C: Fact

How to continue being involved?

Thank you for your time and helping us learn more about children and emotions. We are starting a new online survey component of our research to see how children's symptoms and feelings change as they grow up. The survey is brief (30 minutes), online, and can be completed at home on your own time. Surveys will be offered every 3 months. Your child will be compensated each time they complete the survey.

If you are interested, please contact us at **301-402-0239** or irritablekids@mail.nih.gov

[NNT Website:](#)

