

Year 8 update and move to online testing for SCALES!

Since September 2019 we have been visiting all the children involved in SCALES for their Year 8 follow-up assessments. We have visited around 200 children so far and have loved seeing them all again and finding out what life is like for them now that they are in secondary school.

Unfortunately, due to the current climate, our school visits and data collection have temporarily ceased. Whilst we are unsure whether we will be able to complete any more school visits this year, we are putting plans in place to allow us to continue our assessments online or in Year 9 instead. The online assessment would involve your child participating in a video conference at home with one of our trained researchers and would last approximately 2 hours.

If we have not yet seen your child in Year 8, we will be in contact in due course with more information.

We really appreciate all the support you have already given SCALES and hope you are able to continue to support the project as we adjust our methods of testing during these exceptional circumstances. Any extra information we can gather at this time will greatly benefit our understanding of children's language development and social, emotional and mental health.

Future Thinking and Memories

As part of the Year 8 SCALES assessments, your child completes lots of different tasks which help us to learn about how language skills develop and how specific language skills are linked to both social and emotional wellbeing in later life. Here are two of the tasks we have been asking them to complete in our recent visits:

Memories: One of our research questions this year is "how do language skills help adolescents to manage their emotions?" Previous studies have suggested that recalling details of positive memories can help young people cope better with difficult situations. Language is vital for storing and recalling these autobiographical memories. To measure children's recall of emotional memories, we are asking children to tell us about things that have happened to them that remind them of different emotion words such as "relaxed", "excited" and "lucky".



We know that focussing on positive memories can be really helpful in difficult times and when we are feeling down—something that we could all use now! Looking through old photos with your children or reminiscing about previous happy memories is a good place to start.

Future Thinking: As our children are getting older we have been thinking a lot about what the future holds for all of the SCALES children. One of the tasks that the children have been completing asks them to imagine they are 25 and write about their life at this time. We are interested to see what they think their futures hold whilst also using the task to assess written language skills. We have loved reading about the varied ambitions of all of the SCALES children and we hope that the children are able to fulfill these goals or find an equally interesting path to take in the future!



Below are some of the many themes and ideas that have come out of the future thinking task so far:



In light of our Future Thinking task, our researchers have been thinking about what career they wanted when they were younger and what led them to where they are now...



Laura: When I was younger I wanted to be either a teacher or a paramedic. I studied the sciences and Psychology at College, then went on to study a degree in Psychology and Criminology at University – still a little unsure what career path I wanted to take! Child Psychology was the module I enjoyed most and working with children was still at the forefront of my mind, which led me to where I am today in my Research Assistant role for SCALES. I really enjoy helping to discover how we can best support children to perform well at school and improve their long term social and emotional outcomes!

Gracie: When I was younger I wanted to be a police officer or a lawyer. However, I think this was more due to my love of watching crime dramas on TV rather than the real jobs. I then discovered I loved working with and supporting children so went on to study psychology and pursue a career in Educational Psychology, through working with children and their teachers in schools and supporting research projects such as SCALES!



Sarah: When I was 12 I loved animals and wanted to be a vet so I could be around them every day. This ambition quickly faded when I was asked to research my dream job and discovered all of the unpleasant jobs vets have to do. Once the idea of becoming a vet was off the table I decided that I would like to work with children. I went on to study child care and education at university and worked as a teaching assistant. After years caring for and educating children I developed an interest in psychology and returned to university with the goal of combining the two areas in the future. This job as a research assistant on SCALES is perfect as I get to work with children whilst also using the psychological knowledge I am gaining at university.

Other news...

Congratulations Dr Jo!

Our PhD student Jo Saul has been working hard for the past three years on a project which investigates speech development in minimally-verbal autistic children. Jo passed her PhD viva with flying colours and we are all very proud of her achievement!



Pictured: Jo Saul (C) with supervisors Professor Courtenay Norbury (L) and Dr John Swettenham.

Family Questionnaire Reminder:

As well as the one-to-one assessment with your child, we ask parents/carers to provide some extra information for us in our **Family questionnaire**. This is sent home with each child at the end of their SCALES assessment. If you have received your questionnaire, we would be very grateful for your responses which can add valuable information to our study. You will also receive a £15 Amazon voucher as a thank you for completing it.

If you know that your child has been seen in Year 8 but have not received your family questionnaire, please contact us to let us know. Email: pals.scales@ucl.ac.uk

Publication Highlights



The SCALES team have been busy collating and analysing some of the data that we collected during our primary school visits (Year 1– Year 6). We have lots of interesting research papers underway and we are pleased to announce that two of our papers about how language skills link to emotion recognition and emotion regulation have been accepted for publication (clickable links):

[Early language competence, but not general cognitive ability, predicts children's recognition of emotion from facial and vocal cues](#)

and

[Reliability and validity of a temporal distancing emotion regulation task in adolescence.](#)

To keep updated with our publications and other news from the SCALES team, don't forget to check our website: www.lilac-lab.org/SCALES

Words for wellbeing video launch

As part of Children's Mental Health Week 2020, we launched our new video "Words for Wellbeing– Why language is important for mental health" on YOUTUBE which presents some of the research findings from the Surrey Communication and Language in Education Study (SCALES) as well as considering the importance of

tailoring mental health services for those with language difficulties.

The response to the video has been better than we could have ever imagined and has been shared far and wide around the world! You can view the video by visiting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-orJLnCgGJw>



Many thanks to the talented @Paupanimation for his fantastic animation skills!

Here we explain how the video was made and why the information collected from SCALES has been invaluable to this project:

1

Teacher-reported outcomes on the Strengths and Difficulties

Questionnaire (SDQ) have been used to understand the links between early language skills and later social and emotional behaviours. This work has been led by Dr Shaun Goh who has visited the lab twice, all the way from Singapore! The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening tool which identifies (1) *emotional symptoms*, (2) *conduct problems*, (3) *hyperactivity / inattention*, (4) *peer relationship problems*, and (5) *prosocial behaviour*.



2

We also wanted to capture the **personal experiences** of someone with language difficulties. Juliet Wright (@julietwri) kindly offered to share her experiences (and voice) of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) for our video and we are very grateful for her invaluable input!

3

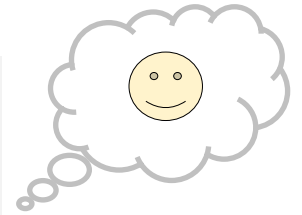
Last year, we visited some of the SCALES schools for our **SCALES Stars workshops** where we discussed what mental health means to our SCALES children and how language can play a role in both social and emotional wellbeing. We also explored the children's creative sides - they helped us to generate ideas for what the video should look like and which main messages should be portrayed.

**SCALES
STARS**

SCALES Worksheet

We know it's a tricky time for everyone at the moment. You might be busy getting used to doing your school work at home and you might be missing seeing your friends and family. If you find yourself struggling to think of things to do, why not give some of our tasks and games a go:

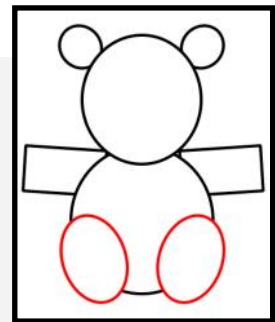
Task: How many different emotion words can you think of in 1 minute? Can you think of a memory that reminds you of each of these words?



Game: Write lots of different emotion words on some small cards. You have 2 minutes to describe as many of the emotions as you can to a partner whilst they guess which ones you are describing. You're not allowed to use the emotion word or any other emotion words in your descriptions and you're only allowed to pass once. Count up how many emotions your partner got right and see who is best at describing their feelings!



Game: Draw a line drawing or find one online. Sit back-to-back with someone and describe the drawing to your partner whilst they try to draw what you are describing — don't let them see what the picture is! Once you think they have finished, see whether their picture looks anything like the one you have described. Good communication skills are key for this task!



Task: See if you can unscramble these words that name feelings



Email: PALS.SCALES@UCL.AC.UK

1. apphy _____
2. ads _____
3. ebdro _____
4. dfeucsno _____
5. erscad _____
6. diret _____
7. owirder _____
8. agnry _____
9. rsicuo _____
10. esgidtsdu _____
11. iospsucsiu _____
12. csedhok _____
13. oth _____
14. oddl _____
15. ynrhgu _____
16. iyshttr _____

The SCALES team would love to hear from you—you will get your own personalised reply!

You could tell us about what fun things you have been doing at home. Maybe you could keep a short diary each day for a week, or write a poem - then send it to us!

Here's a few questions you could answer:

- How do you feel about staying at home?
- What activities would you like to do when you can go back outside?
- What does your new daily timetable look like?
- Which 3 words describe how you are feeling at the moment?

Do you have any questions you would like us to try to answer? They don't have to be about SCALES, or even about research. If we don't know the answer we will try our best to find it.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Please note, anything we do receive will remain strictly confidential and amongst the SCALES team and will NOT be used for research purposes or shared anywhere else online without your parent's permission.