

PACT Newsletter

Pre-school Autism Communication Trial



PACT 7-11 Follow-Up Study!

The PACT team are delighted to announce that we have been awarded funding to carry out a follow-up study of all the families who were involved in the PACT study. This is funding from the Medical Research Council. We will be in touch with you later this year to invite you to be involved!

We have called the follow-up study "PACT 7-11" because the children will be aged between 7 and 11 years when we see them again. We have lots of questions that we hope to answer with this next phase of the project....

- How are the PACT children getting on and how are they developing in areas such as: language and communication, how they get along with others, their play, behaviour and interests, and their emotional wellbeing?
- What factors in the pre-school years have affected how children are doing now?
- How is your family life and how is life for you as a parent of a child with autism?
- What services are accessed by children in this age-range?



In order to answer these questions well, we need to see as many of the original families as possible. We will carry out interviews with parents and assessments and observations with the children. These interviews and assessments will be similar to what you experienced in the first PACT study.

What did the original PACT study find out?

The findings of the original PACT study were sent out to all parents in a newsletter back in 2010. Here is a summary of what we found.

The study involved 152 families from Greater Manchester, North-East England and London. As you may remember, we met you on several occasions over 13 months and obtained a really detailed picture of how your child was developing and how things were going for your family. Some families, allocated at random, also attended additional PACT therapy sessions, in which the speech and language therapist coached the parent, using video feedback, in ways of communicating and playing with their child.

The study was an amazing success in that almost every family took part until the end. We found that, on average, children in both groups improved in their communication and interactions over the 13 months.

Parents who took part in the additional therapy sessions were in general successful at adapting their style of interacting with their child, showing greater levels of sensitivity and timing in their communication. In turn the child communicated more with the parent, using more speech and gestures when playing with their parent. However the intervention did not help children to interact better with adults outside the family, that is, the communication improvements did not seem to generalize.

We concluded that the PACT intervention does alter parent-child two-way communication in positive ways, but we need to develop ways to improve children's communication skills with other people and in wider contexts. We also need to find out whether the improvements in parent-child interaction bring about benefits further down the line and this is one thing we hope to find out in our follow-up!



What has happened since the original study?

- The main findings were published in 2010 in The Lancet. It has also been presented at conferences all over the world.
- We published an article in 2010 in the International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, emphasising the particular difficulties that some children have with the understanding of language. This is based in part on the long checklist you filled out for us about the words your child could understand and say.
- Our Health Economy colleagues published an article in 2011 in the Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders outlining the services that the families of children with autism receive based on the information the PACT families gave us.
- We have shared the findings of the study with clinical teams from all over the country. Some teams have received training in the PACT therapy and are incorporating this into their work with families.
- We are working with teams in India and Pakistan to carry out similar research and to adapt the PACT therapy to their local culture.
- You can access the abstracts of these articles on the PACT website under publications: <http://bbmh.manchester.ac.uk/pact> or you can get in touch with us and we can send you a copy of the full article.

Your local research team



You will remember me! I'm Kathy Leadbitter and I'm glad to be back working at PACT for the follow-up study. I'm really looking forward to meeting with you all again!



Hi I'm Hannah Tobin. I'm the new Research Assistant working on the PACT Study. I'm really excited about being involved in this project and meeting you all soon!

What will happen next?

In the next few months, your local research team will send you a letter by post to invite you formally to take part and to provide you with more detailed information of what's involved. We will then phone you to discuss the study with you and whether you would like to be involved.

Take a look at our website on: <http://bbmh.manchester.ac.uk/pact>

It would help us greatly if you could get in touch to tell us about any change of address or phone number. You are also very welcome to get in touch to find out more about the study. Our contact details are below.



Our contact details

Please contact Kathy or Hannah:

By phone: 0161 306 7964
(Please leave a message if we don't answer and we'll call you back)

By email: Kathy.leadbitter@manchester.ac.uk

We look forward to being in touch soon!

