



# What we do & Why it matters

## Human Development and Family Studies | [hdfs.illinois.edu](https://hdfs.illinois.edu)

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) is comprised of highly productive faculty committed to addressing challenges regarding human development, relationships, and families through cutting-edge research, award-winning instruction, and culturally sensitive outreach. HDFS faculty and student scholarship is always conducted with a view to relevant contextual issues and to practical implications be they for community or health professionals, families/parents, schools/teachers/ youth program leaders, or policymakers.

### **RAMONA FAITH OSWALD** (professor and head)

Dr. Oswald is advancing knowledge about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families living in smaller communities. Even though many LGBT families live outside of major cities, most research ignores this fact. She looks at what support these families need, and how their residential communities can provide it in ways that fit local culture.

### **ALLEN BARTON** (assistant professor and Extension specialist)

Dr. Barton is a prevention scientist whose research program focuses on identifying novel and effective ways to promote the health and well-being for individuals and families. His work examines risk and protective processes within families that affect individuals' health, substance use, and relational well-being. His applied research focuses on developing and evaluating family-centered prevention programs.

### **KELLY BOST** (professor)

Dr. Bost examines how families and parent-child attachment relationships impact children's socioemotional and health-related outcomes. Her work is advancing knowledge about the role of self-regulatory processes in the development of pediatric obesity, and cuts across disciplinary boundaries to examine complex interactions between biological and family factors to ultimately improve the health and well-being of children and families.

### **COURTNEY CUTHBERTSON** (assistant professor and Extension specialist)

Dr. Cuthbertson explores how traumatic societal- and community-level events and conditions are constructed as individual problems expressed through personal mental health and substance use outcomes. Their research and outreach efforts are currently about mental health and substance use among farmers; the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender identity with farm stress; community approaches to addressing substance use; and mental health literacy.

### **JACINDA DARIOTIS** (professor and director of the Family Resiliency Center)

Dr. Dariotis researches ways to facilitate greater alignment between one's intentions and behaviors to promote well-being. She investigates biosocial determinants of risk-taking, decision-making, stress responsivity and coping, and prevention and intervention programs (e.g., mindfulness-related). She addresses "wicked" problems through whole person research integrating theoretical and methodological approaches across many disciplines—public health, prevention science, biostatistics, evaluation and implementation sciences, behavioral endocrinology, and developmental psychopathology.

### **AARON EBATA** (associate professor and Extension specialist)

Dr. Ebata applies community-based Extension strategies and technological innovations in supporting families, including families with young children and those with children on the autism spectrum. He also investigates the impact of nature on family health and how family-based nature activities can promote strong family relationships.

### **JENNIFER HARDESTY** (professor and director of undergraduate programs)

Dr. Hardesty is advancing the understanding of intimate partner violence, separation/divorce, and parenting after separation. Through studying how different types of violence during marriage relate to different co-parenting experiences and health outcomes after separation, she will be able to inform prevention and intervention efforts with divorcing parents.

# What we do & Why it matters

## Human Development and Family Studies

### **CHELSEA HETHERINGTON** (research assistant professor)

Dr. Hetherington works to communicate and translate research findings so that parents, caregivers, and practitioners can use them. Her research and outreach efforts currently focus on identifying the supports parents and caregivers need in raising young children, and developing resources to disseminate research-based information.

### **ROBERT HUGHES, JR.** (professor)

Dr. Hughes studies divorce and its effects on children and their parents. He is particularly interested in developing educational programs that can help children and their parents develop healthy ways of dealing with changes and stresses in their families. He has worked with Sesame Street and many other groups to develop interesting and engaging activities for coping. He is also developing social media strategies to engage teens and young adults.

### **SUSAN SILVERBERG KOERNER** (professor)

Dr. Koerner focuses her research at the intersection of aging, families, and health. Her newest project will address challenges to aging-in-place for older adults living in rural and non-metropolitan communities. Dr. Koerner has also investigated the emotional and physical well-being of adults who provide care for elder family members who are frail, ill, or disabled (e.g., older parents or spouses) – with special attention to the unique experiences of Latinx caregiving families. Through her research, Dr. Koerner aims to inform policy, intervention, and culturally-relevant programs for aging families at risk.

### **KAREN KRAMER** (assistant professor)

Dr. Kramer is advancing the understanding of the relationship between the division of work and care in families, and career and family outcomes of individuals. She investigates how policies such as paid and unpaid parental leave affect the division of care between parents, future career outcomes of mothers and fathers, and the health and well-being of families.

### **CHRISTY LLERAS** (associate professor)

Dr. Lleras addresses some of the most critical problems of our time, including racial health disparities, educational inequality, and poverty, by examining how schools and neighborhoods affect child and adolescent health and development and maternal well-being. Her work examines how exposure to chronic social stressors including adverse childhood experiences, poverty, and crime affect mental health, immune functioning, and disease risk among communities of color.

### **BRENT MCBRIDE** (professor and director of the Child Development Laboratory)

Dr. McBride is one of the leading researchers in the area of father involvement in families of children with disabilities. His cutting-edge research provides critical insight on how to better support fathers struggling within this challenging parenting context, as well as early intervention personnel working with these families. Additionally, he studies the role of child care contexts in influencing children's obesity and inappropriate weight gain during the early childhood years.

### **NANCY MCELWAIN** (professor)

Dr. McElwain advances understanding of the dynamic early-life interactions between parents and children that shape children's developing abilities to regulate stress. She adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines neuroscience, psychophysiology, linguistics, and developmental psychology. Through investigating stress regulation during early development, she aims to promote healthy parent-child relationships and children's long-term social and emotional well-being.

### **BRIAN OGOLSKY** (associate professor and director of graduate programs)

Dr. Ogolsky examines how relational partners maintain healthy romantic relationships across the life course as well as the ways in which law and policy influence daily family life. His work has the potential to inform practitioners and promote policy initiatives designed to enhance family dynamics.

### **MERIN OLESCHUK** (assistant professor)

Dr. Oleschuk studies how people make decisions about how and what to eat given the complex physical, social, and environmental implications of those decisions. Her research advances knowledge about how intersecting social inequalities shape the food labor and consumption of vulnerable individuals and families, alongside their implications for health and wellbeing.

# What we do & Why it matters

---

## Human Development and Family Studies

### **SHARDÉ SMITH** (assistant professor)

Dr. Smith is finding ways to contribute to the reduction of mental health disparities for African Americans. She does this by examining racism, social support, and mental health in the family context. She also investigates the barriers to, and facilitators of, mental health treatment among African American youth and their families.

### **KELLY TU** (assistant professor)

Dr. Tu is advancing the understanding of adaptive stress responses among children and adolescents. She investigates children's physiological and behavioral responses to stress and parents' role in helping children navigate and manage challenges. Her work will inform broader efforts to promote positive youth development and well-being.