



Claire Hughes
Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Cambridge

My PhD study of autistic children's executive function difficulties had a significant impact on the field, and led to postdoctoral work in Paris, exploring executive dysfunction among autistic children's parents and siblings. Moving back to the UK to join the new Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Research Centre (SGDPRC) in London, I focused on 'hard to manage' preschoolers and their social and cognitive difficulties. Returning to Cambridge, I conducted a 10-year study of toddlers at risk of developing conduct problems. My book about this study (Social Understanding Social Lives) received a BPS prize in 2013. My talk will include findings from the final (age 12) wave of this study of 'at risk' children, which suggest that maternal 'mind-mindedness' may play a buffering role in mitigating the risk of developing problems of disruptive behaviour. However, much of my talk will draw on analyses from two more recent longitudinal studies: the New Fathers and Mothers Study), which tracked 846 expectant first-time parents from the UK, Netherlands and USA to explore links between executive function development and early parent-child interaction quality and the Ready or Not Study of school readiness. This study involved 1000 families of children from the UK, Hong Kong and Mainland China, and enabled me to: (i) develop remote methods for testing children and observing parent-child interactions; and (ii) test the generalisability of the antecedents and sequelae for individual differences in children's cognitive skills. Findings from the first of these studies highlight the predictive utility of assessing mind-mindedness in expectant mothers and fathers – with obvious potential for intervention work to promote early positive parent-child interactions. Findings from the second study confirm the cross-cultural universality of associations between mind-mindedness and child executive function but also indicate site contrasts in mediating pathways. Other current studies include an investigation of Left-Behind children in China, and collaboration on a new longitudinal study of 1,000 NICU babies. Linking research to impact is important to me I'm regularly involved in policy

discussions around school readiness and special educational needs, and my school-readiness teacher questionnaire (the Brief Early Skills and Social Support Index) is widely used in intervention studies. I have also recently worked with Kettles Yard in Cambridge and the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham to design art-based workshops and resources to promote school readiness. I have also co-produced a new picture book 'How I Feel About My School' to support parent-child conversations about children's early school experiences.