

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **New study reveals fathers' practices for preventing childhood injury**

Researchers propose new model for child safety campaigns

(Vancouver – June 13, 2011) – Child safety campaigns should reach out to fathers in addition to mothers, says a new study led by the Child & Family Research Institute at BC Children's Hospital that was published online in the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*.

Injuries are the leading cause of death and hospitalization for Canadian children. While most child safety campaigns have focused on mothers, today's fathers are increasingly involved parents who also guide their children's development.

"A lot of work that's been done in public health has focused on mothers, yet fathers are doing activities with their kids," says Dr. Mariana Brussoni, a scientist at the Child & Family Research Institute who led the research. "Fathers can be seen as an untapped resource for public health and injury prevention. We need to reach them in ways that make sense to them so they can keep their kids safe and balance that with making sure their children have experiences that enrich their lives."

To understand how fathers approach injury prevention with their children, Dr. Brussoni and Dr. Lise Olsen, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of British Columbia, interviewed 32 fathers of children from two and seven years of age between April and December 2009. The men were recruited from sporting groups and community centres in British Columbia. Most of them lived with their children's mothers.

Many fathers described a dilemma between allowing children to make mistakes while protecting them from injury. Of the men interviewed, 47 per cent had a child who'd experienced one or more medically-attended injuries during their lifetime, and 22 per cent reported multiple injuries among their children. Injuries included stitches, concussions, burns and broken bones. Their children hurt themselves falling off playground equipment, bike riding, ice skating, or jumping on furniture at home.

The researchers identified four types of fathers from the interviews:

- 1) The **prepared adventurer** values high risk and high protection. He introduces his children to age-appropriate risky activities while taking action to keep them children safe. Most of the fathers interviewed were prepared adventurers.
- 2) The **heightened protector** is low risk and high protection. He avoids risk and protecting his children is the defining characteristic of his decision-making.

- 3) The **less involved** father is low risk and low protection. He doesn't plan his children's activities nor does he actively protect them from injury.
- 4) The **inconsistent father** values high risk and low protection. His decisions are largely impulsive: sometimes he's protective of his children, and sometimes he encourages high risk activities.

Dr. Brussoni and Dr. Olsen say the prepared adventurer may be the most desirable parenting style for child development and child safety. They suggest that public health programs emphasize both injury prevention and the safe introduction of new experiences, which are important for children's physical and psychological development.

They note that more research is needed to validate the new model, examine its association with injuries, and to identify the ideal balance between encouraging healthy risk-taking while minimizing the potential for injuries.

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Dr. Brussoni is a scientist at the Child & Family Research Institute (CFRI) at BC Children's Hospital; an academic scientist at the BC Injury Research & Prevention Unit of the Provincial Health Services Authority; director, BC Children's Hospital Injury Reporting and Prevention Program; and assistant professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia (UBC). She is supported by a Scholar Award from the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research.

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