

Carnegie Mellon University
Children's School Research Policies
2024-2025

All faculty, research associates, and students who wish to conduct observations and/or research in the Children's School must follow these six steps.

Step 1: Becoming Research Eligible

The Carnegie Mellon Institutional Review Board stipulates that all individuals conducting research with human subjects must demonstrate completion of the education program on the use of human participants in research taken through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Specific instructions can be found on the IRB web site under Required Training (<https://www.cmu.edu/research-compliance/human-subjects-research/training.html>). Access the course at <https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/> and take Human Subjects Research course called Social - Behavioral - Educational Basic (if it's your first time) or Refresher (if you have taken it before). Present your completion certificate to Dr. Carver along with the other documents described below.

Researchers at the Children's School are also required to provide certificates demonstrating criminal record and child abuse clearance. Carnegie Mellon University now provides a service for getting clearances (see <https://www.cmu.edu/hr/career/new-employees/first-day/act-153.html>), but note that the Children's School only accepts clearances dated within a year prior to starting work at the Children's School.

Step 2: Obtaining Research Approval

Dr. Sharon Carver (8-1499) must approve all requests to make observations or conduct research at The Children's School. Research requests must be accompanied by an abstract describing the project, a copy of the Institutional Review Board form with stamp of approval, and a short study description appropriate for distribution to parents. Make sure the following questions are clearly addressed so that the costs and benefits of the study can be evaluated.

- What is the specific research question and its relevance?
- Exactly how will the study be conducted?
- Specifically, what wording of directions and tasks will be used with children?
- Will all of the children be observed or participating? If not, what are the criteria for selection?
- How often will each child be observed or asked to work with you?
- How long will each session take?

We require that sessions not exceed 20 minutes.

Dr. Carver will also evaluate the project for consistency with our philosophy (e.g., no competition, commercial characters, extrinsic rewards, etc.) and negotiate the rough time schedule for each project to assure adequate access to the children and research space without undue disruption (i.e., 4 studies run one week and none the next).

Step 3: Reviewing the Study with the Educators

Researchers who will be interacting with large numbers of children or doing longitudinal studies (i.e., as opposed to merely observing or doing a pilot study of a few children) typically attend a Friday afternoon staff meeting to describe the study and discuss ways to run it smoothly in the Children's School context. This meeting can be scheduled with Dr. Carver during the initial approval process.

Step 4: Establishing Rapport with the Children

Prior to beginning each study that will involve direct interaction with children (i.e., as opposed to pure observation), each researcher must schedule a time to **meet and interact with the children** (e.g., read a story to them, have lunch with them, etc.) **in each of the groups that will participate in the study**. It is important to establish rapport with the children so that they will behave as naturally as possible in the experimental situation.

- To **schedule familiarization sessions**, email Mrs. Stilinovich (8-2199) at kstilino@andrew.cmu.edu. The sessions are typically scheduled Monday through Thursday at the children's circle, lunch or journal times (see schedule below).

Familiarization Schedule 2024-2025

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS
AM Preschool				
3's circle	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am
3's lunch	12:15-12:40pm	12:15-12:40pm	12:15-12:40pm	12:15-12:40pm
4s circle	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am	9:30-10:00am
4s lunch	12:30–1:00pm	12:30–1:00pm	12:30–1:00pm	12:30–1:00pm
Kindergarten				
5's	9:45-10:15m (Circle) 1:30-2:05pm (Journal)			

- Plan to arrive at the Children's School at least 5 minutes before your scheduled familiarization time. You will need to **buzz at the entrance** to gain admittance to the school.

- When you enter the school, go to the office to **sign the log book** and **get your nametag**. You must always wear the nametag during your visit to the school.

- **Turn off your cell phone.** Cell phone use is not permitted in classrooms or labs. If you must make a call while in the office suite, please ask a staff member for an unobtrusive place to do so.
- **Wait in the office** until a Children's School staff person is available to walk you into the classroom. You may leave your belongings in the office.
- Plan to **spend about 20 minutes** talking with the children. For the 3's, and the 4's this will be circle time or lunch and for the Kindergarten it's circle time and journal time, try to spend a little time at each table and be actively involved with the children (without causing disruption) so that they will remember you when you come for your research sessions. The lunch/journal times are equally helpful for observing the teachers to learn effective ways to interact with young children.
- To engage young children in conversation, **use very specific topics** that are within their experience. During lunch, talk about foods (e.g., favorite foods, how foods are grown, colors and shapes of foods, etc.). Ask about the activities the child has done that day (e.g., Did you hear a story today? Tell me about it. OR Did you play in the red room today? Tell me what you played.). Once the child is sharing experiences, you can share yours and extend the conversation (e.g., I like to read stories about animals. What animals do you like? OR I like sand too, especially at the beach. Did you ever go to the beach?).
- When you are finished with your familiarization session, **return to the office.** When you are ready, ask a staff member to deactivate the alarm before you leave. Otherwise, the alarm will sound when you exit the school.

Step 5: Scheduling / Conducting Research Sessions

- To **schedule research sessions**, email Mrs. Kathie Stilinovich (8-2199) at kstilino@andrew.cmu.edu, **before noon** on the Friday before the week that you want to conduct the study. In your email, be sure to indicate the specific group of children you want as subjects and the particular time slot (see schedule below). The teachers are only responsible for having children available during the scheduled times that they are given on Friday afternoons for the following week. Students should be willing to flexibly adjust to the unavoidable fluctuations in the daily schedule.

General Guidelines for working with young children

- Please review and follow the attached guidelines.

General Guidelines for Individual or Small Group Testing

- Children can participate in **only one study each day.**

- During most of the following time blocks, the teacher will conduct one “circle time” that involves gathering all the children to discuss the school day. Since this time is both important and short, we ask that researchers refrain from taking children during that time. Kindergarten circle time typically begins at 9:45am, 4’s circle time at approximately 9:30am, and 3’s circle time about 9:30am. Feel free to ask the teacher about circle time plans when you enter the classroom to get a more precise estimate for that day.

RESEARCH SCHEDULE 2024-2025

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS
AM Preschool				
3	10:15am-12:15pm	10:15am-12:15pm	10:15am-12:15pm	10:15am-12:15pm
4	10:15am-12:15pm 1:00-2:20pm	10:15am-12:15pm 1:00-2:20pm	10:15am-12:15pm 1:00-2:20pm	10:15am-12:15pm 1:00-2:20pm
Kindergarten				
5	8:45 - 9:45am, 10:15-11:15am 1:15pm-2:20 pm			

Note: Research Groups that work well at the Children’s School may be offered additional timeslots for research, depending on availability.

- Follow the **same entry, sign-in, and exit procedures** as described in Step 4.
- **Select one or two subjects** from the Eligible Subjects Box in the office. **Check the participation list** to make sure that the child has not already been tested that day or is not reserved for a longitudinal study. **Do not test** a child whose photo card is not in the box or who already has a code written in the space beside his/her name for that day.
- Enter the preschool or kindergarten and **use the photo cards to identify the child** you wish to test. **Do not test** a child who is already wearing a participation sticker.
- **Be sensitive when choosing** a child to participate. Choose children who are at free play stations before those at stations with specified activities/products to be completed and those who can quickly bring closure to an activity rather than those who are far from finishing. Please don’t hover over the child as she finishes or rush her unnecessarily.
- **Use the phrase** "Name, it's your turn to play my _____ game now. Let me help you put the blocks away (or whatever closure seems reasonable) and then we'll go."
- **Place the photo card** for the subject on the Research Participation Board when you take the child from the classroom. If possible, inform a teacher when you take a child to participate in a study and then return the child to a teacher, so he or she knows the child is back in the classroom.

- Each child has the right to refuse to participate in the study. If the child says, “Maybe later”, try to ask one more time later in the session. If the child refuses again, the card then goes into the **Refusal** envelope, and then you will approach another child.
- On your way to the lab with a participant, **enter your code number** beside the name of the subject on the Research Participation List posted in the office.
- Always **keep the door open** while working with a child.
- At the end of the session, **put a "participation sticker"** on the child to alert the parents that the child has been in a study. The sticker should give the parents a clue for asking the child about the activity, such as, "Ask me about the lemonade stand game."
- Put the child’s name on a copy of your **Parent Experiment Description**. Have the child walk with you to his/her locker before returning to an activity so that you can **put a copy of your experiment description** in the child’s backpack. Sample descriptions are attached.
- When you return with the child to the classroom, move his or her picture from the Research Participation Board into the **envelope marked “Participation”**. The term “participation” applies even if the child did not complete the session.
- All participants receive the “participation sticker” and Parent Experiment Description, even if the child chooses to end the game early. If the child does not complete the session, use the red pen by the Research Participation List to **put an X next to the code number** that you entered for that child earlier.

NOTE: If the Fire Alarm rings while you are testing a child, take the child immediately to the nearest Reflection Garden exit to join their class along the fence. We will make every effort to avoid fire drills during testing sessions, so assume that an alarm is signaling a fire.

General Guidelines for Classroom Observation

- Any time, with the following understanding:
 - No more than two observers may enter the classroom at a time.
(Three can use the kindergarten observation window and eight can use the preschool observation room.)
 - Be as unobtrusive as possible.
 - Turn off your cell phone.
 - Watch from a distance, preferably in a sitting position. Do not interfere with children's activities.
 - Cooperate with the teachers and refrain from talking.
 - If a child approaches you for help (e.g., shoe tying) or conversation, keep the interaction as brief as politely possible.

Step 6: Reporting Results

After a study has been approved, Mrs. Stilinovich will post a description of it on the research bulletin board and include a copy in our weekly news. As soon as possible thereafter, the observer/researcher is responsible for submitting a report of the results to Dr. Carver, so that she can either post it along with the initial description or write a shorter version for the bulletin board and newsletter. The observer/researcher should also send copies of all papers written about the studies conducted at the Children's School to Dr. Carver. She will make them available to parents and teachers and/or may ask you to lead a discussion of your research at the school.

***** Hints for maintaining good relations with the Children's School Staff *****

- Speak, behave, and dress in a professional manner.
- **Make arrangements well ahead of time.**
- Keep your cell phone off while working at the Children's School
- Remember that you might want to conduct additional studies at the Children's School, so work on developing a good reputation here.

Special Considerations for Research at a Laboratory School

Prepared for Researchers at the Carnegie Mellon University Children's School
Dr. Sharon M. Carver

Because children in a laboratory school context participate in many studies each semester, everyone involved needs to collaborate to ensure that each research experience is positive and leaves the child interested in further participation. In addition, we must think beyond the ethics of any one study to consider the potential impact of studies on each other, the combined impact of studies, and the impact of the collective research endeavor on the school and classroom operations. Furthermore, because parents are signing the consent form prior to the study designs, we must take care to only approve studies that we are confident would pass the parents' scrutiny. All of these considerations require that the study review be in some ways more stringent than the standard Institutional Review Board process. At the same time, because it is all done by the laboratory school director, the process can also be timelier, access to a sizeable subject pool is ensured, and researchers can arrange for quick study modifications following pilot testing.

With that background in mind, here are some aspects of studies that will raise red flags in the review process at the Children's School.

- Studies with procedures inconsistent with Children's School philosophy, such as studies that induce competition between children or give extrinsic rewards for participation. We aim to help researchers design research tasks that the children will enjoy for their own sake, rather than because they can prove themselves better than others or because they get a reward. Note that the "participation sticker" is designed to help the parents know that the child played a game with a researcher, not as a reward for playing the game well. If, however, the task involves a creative activity with a product, the child may keep the artwork. Here again, it is not a reward but rather a direct result of the child's own effort.
- Studies that introduce topics or commercial characters to which some or all of our parents would prefer their children not be exposed. Such topics would include religion, sexuality, death, dark arts, monsters, zombies, etc. Since some of our families choose not to expose their children to television, even common children's characters from Sesame Street, Disney, etc. are not permitted as stimuli in research studies.
- Studies that might induce the negative characteristics that they are designed to investigate, such as gender stereotypes, peer pressure, guilt, etc. In these cases, approval will depend on whether researchers have included procedures to counter the potential induction effect (e.g., clearly state that both boys and girls can choose any career after asking children to rate whether men or women are more likely to have certain jobs). In all cases, researchers aim for children to leave the study in a positive mood with good feeling about themselves and their performance. The children have helped the researcher with his/her work, so they should understand that the researcher appreciates that help.

Sample Experiment Descriptions

Make sure the description includes a “game name” that will be memorable to the children, the researcher’s and professor’s names, and information about the purpose, design, procedure, and relevance of the study. Including pictures of sample stimuli often helps with the explanation. NOTE: Please use a 12pt font and double spacing.

• **The Sinking and Floating Game**

Holly Brosnahan, a senior psychology double major, is working with Dr. Carver and Mrs. Bird on a senior honors thesis. Holly is comparing the effects of different styles of teaching, including teacher directed instruction and guided discovery, on children’s concepts of why some objects sink and others float in water. Each of the Extended Morning 4’s and Kindergarten children will participate in the Sinking and Floating Game three times, once before Mrs. Bird begins her lessons on the topic, once after the first two lessons, and once after the 4th lesson. Each group of children will have two lessons taught using a guided discovery approach and two taught via direct instruction. During the Sinking and Floating Game, the child is simply asked to predict whether a given object will sink or float and to explain why. After placing the object in water, the child is asked to explain what happened. Some of the objects are ones that were discussed during Mrs. Bird’s lessons and others are novel. This study will help us to understand which teaching methods or combinations of teaching methods help young children to learn basic science concepts.

• **The Computer Shape Game**

Byron Kohut, a research assistant working with Dr. Marlene Behrmann, is investigating **how children integrate elements from a visual display into a coherent shape**. For example, how do adults and children see a square when the stimulus is four single lines? Moreover, do we still perceive a square when the lines are slightly disconnected? Byron first shows the children a pair of shapes on a computer screen and asks the children to decide whether the two shapes (for example, two squares or two crosses or a square and a cross) are the same or different. The children’s time to make this decision is recorded, as well as their accuracy in making the same/different judgement. What is critical is that before the pair of shapes appears, a square is presented briefly and the children are told to ignore it. If children are doing more than simply attending to the four lines of this briefly presented square, they will be faster if it precedes the pair of squares than if it precedes the pair of crosses, because they are able to extract the ‘squareness’ and use that to help speed their decision when the pair appears. This study will help us understand how perception develops in children and whether it differs in any way from that of adults.

• **The Growing Game**

Issandra Rodriguez, an undergraduate student working with Dr. Lisa Gershkoff-Stowe, is studying **how children use different types of information to make judgements about the characteristics of living things**. For instance, when learning about an animal they have never seen before, children will rely on its name, physical appearance, and previous knowledge to determine category membership. This study examines the particular cues that children use to decide about the properties of novel creatures, for example, whether they have the same kind of blood or wear the same kind of shoes. In particular, the child hears stories about a baby creature, its parent, and its friend and then answers a series of questions about whether the baby will be more similar to the parent or friend on a range of properties. These properties include both biological properties and behavioral properties (e.g., warm or cold blood vs. clothing preference). These studies of children’s early understanding of living things yields insight into children’s scientific intuitions, which has practical applications for the development of science education tools.

Children's School Guidelines

In addition to following the research procedures, it is essential that research methods students adhere to the following guidelines that apply to all participants in the laboratory school community.

Be Professional.

Keep confidential any discussions concerning the case of a specific child. The school staff trusts you to use such information and observations only to work more effectively with that child. Never discuss students with parents or in any situation other than with that child's teacher. **Please remember that you have signed a confidentiality agreement that is kept on file at the Children's School.**

Choose clothes that are professional and practical. Working with young children may mean stains, running, stretching, and bending, so clothes should be comfortable, modest and easily washable. Shoes should be close-toed and appropriate for outdoor activities.

Refrain from drinking or eating in the classroom except with a teacher's permission during the children's designated lunch times. Please leave coffee cups and other drink containers in the office.

Cell phones should not be used during classroom time. If there is a situation where you need to use your cell phone, please let the teacher know and leave the classroom.

Leave all bags/bookbags in the main office when you sign in.

Be a Model.

You are in our school as an adult model, not a playmate. If your behavior is calm and controlled and your tone of voice quiet and pleasant, the children's will be too. Provide a consistent, fair model of behavior for children even when they are moody. A pleasant word from you may often change the direction of a situation. Children depend on you to be helpful, courteous and sincere.

Be Responsible.

Sign the log book in the school office each day; arrive and leave the school promptly as scheduled; call 412-268-2199 if you need to cancel a research session.

Be Open.

Take your direction from the staff. Accept criticism as constructive, realizing that the staff members are trying to assist you in developing procedures and techniques for working with children

Working With Young Children

Ways With Children* - In Speech

1. Use your voice as a teaching tool (calm, moderate tones).
2. Use a tone of voice that will help the child feel confident and reassured, not afraid or guilty or ashamed.
3. Speak in a very matter of fact manner and **avoid baby talk with children**.
4. Make an effort to speak in simple sentences but in a regular tone of voice.
5. Make suggestions or state directions in a positive rather than a negative form.
Example: "Park your tricycle here." - rather than "No, don't do it that way."
6. Give children a choice only when you intend to leave the situation up to them; do not offer the child a choice when there is no choice. For example: "It's your turn to play this game" instead of "Do you want to play this game?".
7. Redirecting the child is likely to be most effective when it is consistent with the child's own motives or interests.
8. When young children are drawing, it is better to ask "Would you like to tell me something about your drawing?" than "What is it?" since children may not always know what it is themselves.
9. Avoid trying to motivate a child by making comparisons between the child and another or by encouraging competition.
10. If a child is tattling on another, respond with, "Thank you for telling me" and then deal with the situation as appropriate. That phrase is also helpful when a child is relating a story to you but you aren't sure you understand.

*Extracted from pages 313-331 of *The Nursery School* by Katherine Read, published by W. B. Saunders Co., Philadelphia, 1971. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher.