

Alexandra J. Neville



Biography

Alex is a Masters student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Calgary, under the mentorship of Dr. Melanie Noel. She earned her BA in Psychology from the University of Guelph. After graduating, she spent four years as a clinical research assistant at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children where she investigated the impact of childhood cancer diagnosis on children and their families. Alex has a particular interest in understanding the individual perspectives and experiences of children living with chronic pain and is committed to including the voices of patients and families in research. Her project aims to investigate the ways in which parents' mental health and behaviors influence children's chronic pain symptoms, which

may have important implications for informing family-based interventions to reduce children's pain. Her research takes place in the Alberta Children's Pain Research Lab, which is supported and located within the clinical milieu of the Vi Riddell Pain Rehabilitation Centre at the Alberta Children's Hospital.

Project Summary

Understanding the Roles of Parent Behaviours and Mental Health in Pediatric Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is prevalent in adolescence, is associated with high societal and economic costs and higher risk of mental health disorders into adulthood. High rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms have been found among youth with chronic pain and their parents. Moreover, among children with chronic pain and their parents, higher PTSD symptoms have been linked to worse child pain outcomes. It has been proposed that children's and parents' distress and mental health symptoms may influence how parents respond to their children's pain. Specifically, the ways in which parents talk to their children about pain may be a mechanism through which child and parent PTSD influences children's pain symptoms. The current research will investigate whether child and parent PTSD symptoms influence parent responses to their child's pain which, in turn, exacerbate children's pain. Using a prospective controlled design, youth with and without chronic

pain will participate in diagnostic interviews, a structured experimental pain and interaction task involving parents and a series of patient oriented self-report measures. Understanding the roles of parent behaviours and mental health in children's pain experience will inform the refinement and development of family-based interventions to reduce children's pain and improve their health outcomes into adulthood.