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Letter to Members from SRCD President Ken Dodge

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Dear SRCD Members,

I hope you stay safe during these unprecedented times. My wish is that the mandate to keep physically distant from one another will ironically bring us closer together. Our very survival depends on our collective actions. This is not a “Chinese virus” but rather a challenge to come together as a world community.

I write to update you on important news from SRCD. But, first, I want to inspire us all to become active voices on behalf of children and families at this time. I find it disappointing that almost all media rhetoric is about commerce closing down. In the meantime, our children and families are in crisis!

I worry about prenatal care. Studies show that natural disasters increase risk for the in utero fetus. I recall a dissertation by a Duke University student showing that children’s third grade standardized test scores in

reading and math are significantly lower if the child had been in utero (the middle trimester) during a hurricane or snowstorm. Lack of access to prenatal care and increased maternal stress are probably the mechanisms leading to a biological impact on the developing child that is manifested in poorer cognitive outcomes. How can we make sure this tragedy does not recapitulate itself today?

And what about our children's friendships? They miss their friends! Is all the talk about limiting children's social media time suddenly to be replaced with calls for increased time? How should parents support their child's friendships during this time? What does our science say?

And, of course, we worry about our children's academic learning. Unlike adults who can recover from interruptions, children's trajectory of development might be altered by lapses, as we have learned from studies of academic achievement loss due to 'the summer slide.' How can we best support continued learning?

We know these events are particularly challenging for children living in poverty, who have fewer affordances to buffer them from stress. I worry that gaps in learning we have been trying so hard to close will be widened by this crisis. What to do?

I ask SRCD members to speak up. Tell the world what we know. Reach out to the media to provide your expert knowledge based in our developmental science. Now is the moment to share our science.

I realize SRCD members are confronted with other professional challenges, including how to keep your lab going. We are all at risk of getting depressed. Let's find ways to get energized and mobilized. Here are some initial thoughts. I know many of us are engaged in longitudinal studies that are at risk of interruption. But we can still interact with families virtually and electronically. This is a unique opportunity to study the impact of the crisis on children's development by immediately adding instruments, surveys, and other measures to ongoing longitudinal studies. We could study children's virtual interactions, stress, nutrition, and academic learning over time. We could also study impact on family interactions, coping mechanisms, and more. Go for it.

What does our developmental science suggest should be the highest priority for immediate public policy? I don't mean to declare answers, but I implore you, as the world's experts in developmental science, to think creatively and get engaged in public discourse.

Now to a few actions being taken by SRCD.

SRCD has decided to postpone our Special Topics meetings, including *Construction of the 'Other': Development, Consequences, and Applied Implications of Prejudice and Discrimination*, originally scheduled for May 4-6, 2020, in Puerto Rico. It will be rescheduled for fall of 2020. The *Learning through Play and Imagination* and the *Special Topic Workshops Meetings* to be held in St. Louis, will also be rescheduled as well. If you are currently registered for one of these meetings and plan to attend on the new dates, you can remain registered and need not take action with SRCD. If you prefer a full refund at this time, please email programoffice@srcd.org. These meetings are so valuable. I hope we are able to hold them when the crisis subsides, with overflow attendance.

We are providing updates on the SRCD website and via our social media channels (mainly Twitter and Facebook) as the situation evolves. I encourage members to visit these sites.

Early next week, we will launch a virtual forum called SRCD Commons to support the developmental science community during this crisis in numerous ways, including moving to online instruction and how to continue your research. We will announce additional opportunities and initiatives for scholarly engagement around the impacts of the coronavirus as they develop. These plans will give members specific ideas and grow community at the same time. Watch your inbox for details.

Finally, after my last letter to members, I received over 100 messages from members. It took a while, but I responded to every one of them. Again, I invite you to correspond with me. Let's communicate in our new virtual world. Please email me at dodge@duke.edu.

Thank you,

Ken Dodge
President of SRCD

P.S. I am reminded of my favorite parable. God is giving tours of heaven and hell. She brings a man to a room where inside there is a banquet table filled with fabulous food beyond belief. But the people at the table have three-foot-long forks tied to both hands so that when they pick up food they cannot bring it to their mouths to eat. They are crestfallen, yelling, stabbing each other with the forks, and crying. God and the man leave. They enter another room with an identical food-filled banquet table and people with three-foot-long

forks tied to their hands. But everyone is happy and satiated. Why? They feed each other.