

## **Faculty Enhancement Grant**

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### ***Title:***

An investigation of early social communication skills in at-risk siblings of children with autism spectrum disorders.

### ***Abstract:***

This project investigates the social communication behaviors of infant siblings of children with autism (“at-risk siblings”) during infant/parent interactions in the home. The study will examine the interactions of infants and parents for six consecutive months (7 months to 12 months of age) and compare the social-communication behaviors demonstrated by the at-risk siblings, with the same behaviors of infant siblings of typically developing children (“non-risk siblings”). Because at-risk infant siblings demonstrate increased risk for being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or more general social and communication delays, we expect to find differences in the behaviors of this group as compared with non-risk infant siblings. We hypothesize that the at-risk siblings will demonstrate fewer social-communication initiations and responses and may demonstrate a reduced range of communicative functions (e.g., behavior regulation, social interaction, joint attention) as compared with non-risk siblings. We will also examine the average length of the infant/parent interaction (number of turns in the exchange), as well as the possible influence of interaction context (mealtime versus playtime) on performance. Results of the study may contribute to our understanding of diagnostic markers for early diagnosis of ASD and inform models of early intervention.