

Rebecca Distefano

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Education and Training

University of Minnesota, Institute of Child Development, Minneapolis, MN

Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology, December 2019

Dissertation: Autonomy support in parents and young children experiencing homelessness: A mixed method approach

Co-advisors: Stephanie M. Carlson, Ph.D. & Ann S. Masten, Ph.D.

University of Minnesota, Institute of Child Development, Minneapolis, MN

M.A. in Child Psychology, November 2017

Master's Thesis: The cognitive effects of scarcity on autonomy-supportive parenting

Co-advisors: Stephanie M. Carlson, Ph.D. & Ann S. Masten, Ph.D.

University of California, Davis, Davis, CA

B.S. with Highest Honors in Psychology, June 2011

Honors Thesis: Intersensory perception in infancy: The role of pet experience

Advisor: Lisa M. Oakes, Ph.D.

Professional Positions

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology

Roger Williams University

Aug 2022–Present

Postdoctoral Research Scientist

National Center for Children and Families

Teachers College, Columbia University

Sept 2020–Aug 2022

Honors and Awards

Graduate Students in Education and Human Development Research Award

Dec 2018

University of Minnesota Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship

Apr 2018

Institute of Child Development Small Grant Award

April 2017

Society for Prevention Research Travel Award

April 2017

University of Minnesota Interdisciplinary Fellowship	Jan 2017
Society for Research in Child Development Travel Award	Jan 2017
Institute of Child Development Small Grant Award	Dec 2016
Center for Personalized Prevention Research Summer Fellowship	May 2016
Honorable Mention – NSF Graduate Research Fellowship	March 2016
Institute of Child Development Small Grant Award	May 2015
Katherine Miles-Durst Fellowship	Sept 2014
UC Davis President’s Undergraduate Fellowship	Dec 2010

Teaching Experience

Instruction

Roger Williams University

Child Development	Jan 2023–Present
Advanced Development (M.A.)	Jan 2023–Present
Experimental Psychology	Aug 2022–Dec 2022
Introduction to Psychology	Aug 2022–Dec 2022

Macalester College

Developmental Psychology	Jan 2020–May 2020
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University of Minnesota

Internship in Child Psychology (online)	Jan 2020–May 2020
Adolescent Psychology	Jan 2020–May 2020
Infant Development	Sept 2019–Dec 2019
Adolescent Psychology	Sept 2017–Dec 2017
Developmental Psychology	Jan 2017–May 2017

Invited Lectures

Teachers College, Columbia University

- Multisystemic Resilience – Development Across the Lifespan
- Multisystemic Resilience – Seminar of Life Course Development

University of Minnesota

- Family Socialization – Introduction to Child Psychology

Course Design

University of Minnesota

- Executive Function in Early Childhood (online)
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Peer-Reviewed Publications

*indicates current or former mentee

Labella, M. H., **Distefano, R.**, Merrick, J. S., Ramakrishnan, J. L., Thibodeau, E. L., & Masten, A. S. (2023). Parental affect profiles predict child emotion regulation and classroom adjustment in families experiencing homelessness. *Social Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12667>

Distefano, R., & Meuwissen, A. S. (2022). Parenting in context: A systematic review of the correlates of autonomy support. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, *14*(4), 571-592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12465>

Castelo, R. J., Meuwissen, A. S., **Distefano, R.**, McClelland, M. M., Galinsky, E., Zelazo, P. D., & Carlson, S. M. (2022). Parent provision of choice is a key component of autonomy support in predicting child executive function skills. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 773492. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.773492>

Distefano, R., *Nelson, K., & Masten, A. S. (2022). A qualitative analysis of autonomy-supportive parenting in families experiencing homelessness. *Family Relations*, *71*(1), 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12626>

Palmer, A. R., Foster, R. A., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2021). Physiological reactivity, emotional reactivity, and parenting skills in families experiencing homelessness. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *36*(4), 636-641. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000921>

Distefano, R., Grenell, A., Palmer, A. R. *Houlihan, K., Masten, A. S., & Carlson, S. M. (2021). Self-regulation as promotive for academic achievement in young children across risk contexts. *Cognitive Development*, *58*, 101050. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2021.101050>

Distefano, R., Masten, A. S., & Motti-Stefanidi, F. (2021). Autonomy-supportive parenting in immigrant and non-immigrant youth in early adolescence. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *30*(5), 1171-1183. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01943-1>

Distefano, R., Fiat, A. E., Merrick, J. S., Slotkin, J., Zelazo, P. D., Carlson, S. M., & Masten, A. S. (2021). NIH Toolbox executive function measures with developmental extensions: Reliability and validity with preschoolers in emergency housing. *Child Neuropsychology*, *27*(6), 709-717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09297049.2021.1888905>

Palmer, A. R., **Distefano, R.**, Leneman, K. B., & Berry, D. (2021). Reliability of the BodyGuard2 (FirstBeat) in the detection of heart rate variability. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, *46*, 251-258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10484-021-09510-6>

Distefano, R., Schubert, E. C., Finsaas, M. C., Desjardins, C. D., Helseth, C. K., Lister, M., Carlson, S. M., Zelazo, P. D., & Masten, A. S. (2020). Ready? Set. Go! A school readiness program designed to boost executive function skills in preschoolers experiencing homelessness

and high mobility. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 17(6), 877-894.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2020.1813103>

Piehler, T. F., **Distefano, R.**, Ausherbauer, K., Bloomquist, M., L., Almy, B., & August, G. J. (2020). Self-regulatory profiles of diversion-referred youth: Associations with conduct problem symptomatology. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 30, 372-388.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12530>

Berry, D., Palmer, A., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2019). Autonomic complexity and emotion (dys-)regulation in early childhood. *Development and Psychopathology*, 31(3), 1173-1190. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579419000683>

Distefano, R., Galinsky, E., McClelland, M. M., Zelazo, P. D., & Carlson, S. M. (2018). Autonomy-supportive parenting and associations with child and parent executive function. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 58, 77-85.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2018.04.007>

Carey, S., Shusterman, A., Haward, P., & **Distefano, R.** (2017). Do analog number representations underlie the meanings of children's first verbal numerals? *Cognition*, 168, 243-255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2017.06.022>

Book Chapters

Distefano, R., Galinsky, E., & Zelazo, P. D. (2020). The influence of neuroscience on early childhood education. In D. F. Gullo & B. Graue (Eds.), *The Sciences of Early Childhood Education: From Diverse Perspectives to Common Practices*.

Masten, A. S., & **Distefano, R.** (2016). Resilience science and applications to promoting positive development. In A. V. Makhnach & L. G. Dikaya (Eds.), *Resilience: Individual, Professional, and Social Aspects*. Moscow: Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Manuscripts in Progress

*indicates current or former mentee

Distefano, R., Palmer, A. R., Kalstabakken, A. W., Zelazo, P. D., Carlson, S. M., & Masten, A. S. (revision under review). Predictive validity of the NIH Toolbox executive function measures with developmental extensions: Moderation by sociodemographic characteristics. *Developmental Neuropsychology*.

Other Publications

Policy Briefs

Palmer, A. R., Kalstabakken, A. W., **Distefano, R.**, Hillyer, C. K., Seiwert, M. J., Carlson, S. M., Masten, A. S. (2022). Executive functioning assessments in early childhood screenings. [Minn-LInK Brief No. 50]. Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, University of Minnesota. Available at: https://cascw.umn.edu/portfolio_tags/minn-link/

Technical Reports

Anderson, J. E., Kalstabakken, A. W., Carlson, S. M., Zelazo, P. D., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2021). *Technical Report on the Developmental Extension of the NIH Flanker Task: E-Prime Version*. Minneapolis, MN.

Carlson, S. M., Zelazo, P. D., Anderson, J. E., Kalstabakken, A. W., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2021). *Technical Report on the Developmental Extension of the NIH Toolbox Dimensional Change Card Sort: E-Prime Version*. Minneapolis, MN.

Guest Blog Posts

Reflection Sciences

Support Executive Function: Parents' Executive Function Matters, Too!

<https://reflectionsociences.com/support-executive-function/>

Promoting Executive Function with "STEAM"

<https://reflectionsociences.com/promoting-executive-function-with-steam/>

Presentations

*indicates current or former mentee

Distefano, R., Gaumer, E., Goldstein, D., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2023, March). Evaluating the impacts of affordable housing on housing security and family functioning. In flash talk session *Programs and policies to support families experiencing challenge* at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Salt Lake City, UT.

Labella, M. H., **Distefano, R.**, Merrick, J. S., Ramakrishnan, J. L., Thibodeau, E. L., & Masten, A. S. (2023, March). Parental affect profiles predict child emotion regulation and classroom adjustment in families experiencing homelessness. In S. E. Freeman (Chair) symposium *Developmental pathways toward emotional risk and resilience: The role of parent characteristics* at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Salt Lake City, UT.

Banegas, J. M., Palmer, A. R., *Francis, K., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2023, March). Early childhood Child Protective Services involvement, school readiness, and academic achievement: A longitudinal community-based cohort. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Salt Lake City, UT.

Selman, S. B., **Distefano, R.**, Dilworth-Bart, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2022, October). Stability in routines during the preschool period and associations with child well-being. Paper presented at the European Academy of Paediatric Societies, Barcelona, Spain.

Distefano, R., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2022, April). Housing instability and academic skills: Exploring the value of a cumulative risk approach. In J. J. Cutuli (Chair) symposium *Students experiencing homelessness: Key findings for practice and policy decision-making*, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Distefano, R., Labella, M. H., Barnes, A. J., & Masten, A. S. (2021, April). Sleep, executive function, and parenting quality in parents experiencing homelessness. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.

Carlson, S. M., Castelo, R., Meuwissen, A. S., **Distefano, R.**, McClelland, M., Galinsky, E., & Zelazo, P. D. (2021, April). A closer examination of associations between autonomy-supportive parenting and executive function in early childhood. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.

Palmer, A., Foster, R., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2021, April). Physiological reactivity, emotional reactivity, and parenting skills in families experiencing homelessness. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.

Palmer, A., Berry, D., **Distefano, R.**, & Masten, A. S. (2019, September). Physiological and emotion regulation in early childhood. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Psychophysiological Research, Washington D.C.

Williams, C., Palmer, A., **Distefano, R.**, Masten, A. S., & Berry, D. (2019, September). The associations between incidents of homelessness, executive functioning, and respiratory sinus arrhythmia in preschool-aged children. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Psychophysiological Research, Washington D.C.

Distefano, R., Fiat, A. E., Merrick, J. S., Slotkin, J., Zelazo, P. D., Carlson, S. M., & Masten, A. S. (2019, March). NIH Toolbox executive function measures – developmental extension: Reliability and construct validity with disadvantaged preschoolers. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

Galinsky, E., **Distefano, R.**, Miao, A., McClelland, M. M., Zelazo, P. D., & Carlson, S. M. (2019, March). Mind in the Making, Vroom, and Circle-Time Games: Improving executive function, parenting, and classroom quality. In A. Semenov (Chair) symposium *Two-generation approaches to intervention in early childhood*, at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

Grenell, A., **Distefano, R.**, Palmer, A., & Carlson, S. M. (2019, March). Importance of executive function and emotion regulation for children's school success: Protective or promotive factors?

Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

*Knourek, K., **Distefano, R.**, Narayan, A., & Masten, A. S. (2019, March). Effects of parent stress and distress on parenting quality and child behavior. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

Labella, M. H., **Distefano, R.**, Barnes, A., & Masten, A. S. (2019, March). Sleep and self-regulation in young children experiencing homelessness. In M. H. Labella (Chair) symposium *Sleep in the context of risk and adversity: A lifespan perspective*, at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

*Whiting, A., **Distefano, R.**, *Nelson, K., & Masten, A. S. (2019, March). Impact of environmental chaos on self-regulation in young homeless and highly mobile children. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD.

Leneman, K.B., **Distefano, R.**, Palmer, A., Berry, D., & Grenell, A. (2018, October). Recovery matters: Investigating the full physiological response profile in relation to markers of psychopathology. Poster presented at the International Society for Developmental Psychobiology Meeting, San Diego, CA.

Palmer, A. R. **Distefano, R.**, Leneman, K. B., Grenell, A., Masten, A. S., & Berry, D. (2018, October). The relationship between sociodemographic risk, adversity, and homelessness on respiratory sinus arrhythmia. Paper presented at the International Society for Developmental Psychobiology Meeting, San Diego, CA.

Distefano, R., *Sellers, T., & Masten, A. S. (2018, May). Executive function, emotion regulation, and achievement in children experiencing homelessness. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Distefano, R., August, G. J., Barnes, A. J., Carlson, S. M., & Masten, A. S. (2018, April). Sleep quality and well-being in families experiencing homelessness. Poster presented at the annual University of Minnesota Doctoral Research Showcase, Minneapolis, MN.

Piehler, T. F., **Distefano, R.**, Ausherbauer, K., Bloomquist, M. L., Almy, B., & August, G. J. (2018, April). Executive functioning profiles of juvenile diversion-referred youth: Associations with conduct problems symptomatology. In T. Piehler (Chair) symposium *Person-centered approaches to identifying varying prevention and intervention needs among heterogeneous adolescent populations*, at the Society for Research on Adolescence, Minneapolis, MN.

Distefano, R. (2017, August). Measuring executive function: A foundation for learning and adaptation. Presentation given at the A+ Education Conference, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Distefano, R., Motti-Stefanidi, F., Masten, A. S. (2017, July). Supporting autonomy in adolescents during an economic recession. Poster presented at the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development workshop, Syros, Greece.

Distefano, R., Galinsky, E., McClelland, M., Zelazo, P., & Carlson, S. M. (2017, May). Mind in the Making-Vroom intervention: Improving parenting to support preschool executive function development. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Prevention Research, Washington D.C.

Distefano, R., Galinsky, E., McClelland, M., Zelazo, P., & Carlson, S. M. (2017, April). Minnesota executive function scale with adults: Test-retest reliability and associations with parenting and family demographics. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Austin, TX.

Distefano, R., *Hammond, K., & Weiler, L. (2017, April). Mentoring relationships and adolescent mothers' well-being. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Austin, TX.

Labella, M. H., **Distefano, R.,** Merrick, J. S., & Masten, A.S. (2017, April). Emotion reactivity and regulation among young homeless children: Associations with cumulative risk and classroom functioning. In K. Dickerson (Chair) symposium *Emotional competence in children's everyday lives: implications for positive development*, at the Society for Research in Child Development, Austin, TX.

Meuwissen, A. S., **Distefano R.,** Faber, J., Grenell, A., Perone S., Prager, E. O., Schubert, E. C., Semenov, A., Vaisarova, J., Zelazo, P. D., Carlson S. M., (2017, April). Psychometrics of the Minnesota Executive Function Scale. In P. Morris (Chair) symposium *Strengthening the measurement toolbox: development and validation of technology-based executive function and cognitive assessments*, at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Austin, TX.

Weiler, L. M. & **Distefano, R.** (2016, November). Feasibility and acceptability of a mentoring intervention for adolescent mothers. Poster presentation at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Distefano, R. & Masten, A. S. (2016, October). Autonomy supportive parenting in a high-risk context. Poster presented at the Second Annual Institute of Translational Research in Children's Mental Health Symposium, Minneapolis, MN.

Distefano, R., & Carlson, S. M., (2016, June). An examination of the individual and contextual factors that influence autonomy supportive parenting. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, Chicago, IL.

Professional Development

Research

Instats Mar 2023
Continuous Time Structural Equation Modeling
Three-day virtual seminar
Instructor: Christian Dormann, Ph.D.

Columbia University June 2021
Fragile Families Summer Data Workshop
One-week intensive course
Instructors: Columbia Population Research Center affiliates

University of Minnesota Aug 2019
Foundations and Applications of R: Tidying, Visualizing, Modeling
One-week intensive course
Instructors: Jeffrey Bye, Ph.D. & Ethan Brown, Ph.D.

Data Management Short Course Aug 2015
One-week intensive course
Instructor: Amy Riegelman, Ph.D.

Teaching

Society for Research in Child Development Mar 2023
Developmental Science Teaching Institute
One-day workshop

Racial Justice in Relation to Pedagogy and Child Development April 2021
One-day workshop

Service

Research-to-Policy Collaboration
Policymaker-Researcher Partnerships Apr-May 2019
Seven weekly online trainings
Instructor: Taylor Scott, Ph.D.

Academic and Professional Service

University Committees

Roger Williams University
Academic Integrity Appeals Committee 2023

Departmental Committees

Roger Williams University
Steering Committee 2022-Present

<i>University of Minnesota</i>	
Research Committee	2018–2019
Graduate Small Grants Committee	2017–2018
Colloquium & Visiting Scholars Committee	2016–2017
Special Events Committee	2015–2016
Colloquium & Visiting Scholars Committee	2014–2015

Departmental Service

<i>Roger Williams University</i>	
Psychology Club Faculty Advisor	2022-Present
Accepted Students Day	Apr 2023
Prospective Student Open House	Nov 2022

Professional Committees

<i>Society for Prevention Research</i>	
Early Career Prevention Network Steering Committee	2021–Present
Annual Meeting Program Committee	2022–2023
Annual Meeting Poster Contest Committee	2021–2022

Grant Review

<i>University of Minnesota</i>	
Council of Graduate Students Small Grant reviewer	Oct 2017

Ad hoc Journal Review

Applied Sciences; Child Development; Child Neuropsychology; Children; Children and Youth Services Review; Child Psychiatry and Human Development; Developmental Psychology; Developmental Review; Developmental Science; Early Childhood Research Quarterly; Family Relations; Frontiers in Psychology; Infant and Child Development; International Journal of Behavioral Development; International Journal of Psychology; Journal of Applied School Psychology; Journal of Child and Family Studies; Journal of Family Theory and Review; PLOS One

Other Service

<i>Application Statement Feedback Program</i>	
Editor	Oct 2021

Public Service

Outreach

<i>Understood For All Inc</i>	
Video demonstration of childhood executive function tasks https://www.understood.org/	Feb 2018

<i>Broken Places Film</i>	
Participated in documentary on resilience	Oct 2017

<https://brokenplacesfilm.com/>

Mind in the Making

Interview about autonomy-supportive parenting

June 2017

<https://www.mindinthemaking.org/>

Great River Montessori, St. Paul MN

Facilitated meeting about executive function skills for parents

Nov 2016

Volunteer

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, St. Paul MN

Interviewer for the Minnesota Homeless Study

2018

Perspectives, Inc., St. Louis Park MN

Parent coach for families involved with Child Protective Services

2015–2016

Horizons for Homeless Children, Roxbury MA

Playspace Activity Leader in emergency homeless shelter

2012–2014

Professional Memberships

Society for Prevention Research

Society for Research in Child Development
