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## **Led by example: fear transmission from parents to children via social fear learning pathways**

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# Propositions

1. Anxiety disorders run in families, and environmental pathways play a key role in the parent-child aggregation of anxiety. However, many aspects of how parents pass on their fears during interactions with their children in daily life remain poorly understood.
2. Even a single exposure to parents' anxious expressions regarding novel stimuli can contribute to infants' and children's fear and avoidance acquisition toward these stimuli. (Chapters 2, 3, 4)
3. Laboratory social referencing paradigms are valuable tools for examining social fear learning mechanisms of parent-to-child transmission of fears.
4. Experimental (lab) studies allow for stronger conclusions regarding the impact of parents' anxious expressions than cross-sectional (survey) studies. However, survey studies remain needed for investigating stimuli that are difficult or impossible to manipulate in the lab, such as the COVID-19 virus. (Chapter 5)
5. When parents communicate threat-related information about strangers to their adolescent offspring, it can affect adolescents' perceptions and fear beliefs about these strangers. (Chapter 4)
6. Although parents with clinical levels of anxiety tend to display more anxiety, the social fear learning pathways through which children acquire fears operate similarly across families - independent of parental anxiety levels. (Chapters 2, 3, 4)
7. Children with fearful temperaments exhibit enhanced fear acquisition to novel stimuli via social fear learning during infancy but not later during childhood. (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5)
8. A key challenge for future research is to assess social fear-learning pathways in more ecologically valid contexts while maintaining a high degree of standardization.
9. For the prevention of fear transmission, a crucial next step is to better understand how children can unlearn fears through the same associative strategies used in social fear learning.
10. Albert Einstein once said, "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." This certainly holds true for my PhD journey. If science thrives on unanswered questions, I will single-handedly keep science alive.