

TODAY'S RESEARCH IN Living Laboratory®

Are children generous or selfish?

It is widely believed that children are selfish and have difficulty learning how to share, but is this always true? In this study, we look at children's willingness to share with a child they have never met, in order to find out more about how children learn to be generous.

In this study, children are given a set of stickers and told that they can keep all the stickers or share some with a child who will come the next day. Children divide the stickers into two envelopes: stickers to keep, and stickers to give to the



other child. We are interested in the factors that affect if, when, and how children share. We have many versions of our study that we run with children, each of which looks at a different aspect of this concept. For example, prior to dividing the stickers, children might pick out their favorite type of sticker, watch their caregiver be generous or selfish, or learn additional information about the child they are sharing with. In some cases, children's are asked to think about positive or negative memory before dividing the stickers. We are interested in whether factors such as these, along with others (such as age and number of siblings), affect if, when, and how children decide to share with others.

Our results thus far show that children become more likely to divide stickers equally as they approach six years old, but that children resist being more generous than that even after parents encourage them. We are now examining which factors increase how much children share (such as learning more about the other child), which decrease sharing (such as using more valuable stickers), and which make no difference.

This study will help us better understand what factors influence how and when children learn to be generous. These findings may help parents and teachers encourage sharing behavior in children.

This research is conducted at the Museum of Science, Boston by Peter Blake, Assistant Professor at Boston University (<http://www.bu.edu/sdll>).



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ACTIVITIES TO TRY IN THE DISCOVERY CENTER:

Too Busy Buzzing?

Watch your child as s/he pretends to be a honey bee at the Bee Hive in the Discovery Center. When playing, does your child share the nectar s/he collects from the flowers with other children? How much of the nectar does your child share, if any?



How does the type of relationship between people seem to affect your child's generosity? Does your child seem more willing to share nectar with you than with someone they've never met?

ACTIVITIES TO TRY AT HOME:

Who is nicer?

Put two dolls side by side and place eight stickers or checkers in front of one doll and two stickers or checkers in front of the other. Ask your child who they think is nicer.

Does your child favor the "wealthier" doll? What reasons do they give for thinking one doll is nicer than the other?

Are children selectively generous?

Create three stories with your child using six stickers and two dolls as props. Tell your child that the stickers belong to one doll and that the doll is going to share its stickers with the other doll. In one story have the two dolls be strangers, in another story say they are siblings, in a third say the dolls are friends. Have your child decide how many stickers the doll will share in each case.

Does your child have the doll share the same amount of stickers in each story? How does the type of relationship between the dolls affect your child's generosity?

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