Medical Xpress

Kids who lack sympathy more likely to share with virtuous friends

March 2 2015

Children who sometimes lack sympathy for others are more likely to share resources with those friends if they respect their morals suggests a paper published today (March 2, 2015) in the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*.

The study, undertaken by Antonio Zuffianò and colleagues from the University of Toronto, sought to explore the reciprocal relations of sympathy and respect in promoting sharing among children and adolescents.

Antonio explained: "Previous research suggests that moral feelings may motivate children to help others. However, as much of this work has focused on the role of sympathy alone, we explored the combined role of children's respect for moral others and sympathy in relation to sharing."

Two groups of children aged seven years old (84) and 15 years old (62) participated in the dictator game. This involved each child having six chocolate coins that they could share or not share with an anonymous, hypothetical child of the same age and gender. Participants were also asked to indicate how much respect they felt towards hypothetical children portrayed in stories as being fair, prosocial, socially inclusive, and non-aggressive towards others.

The children were tested in a designated room while their caregiver completed a questionnaire regarding their child's ability to share with others and feel sympathy for those in need.

Analyses showed that children who demonstrated low levels of sympathy were more likely to share their resources with a hypothetical child when they felt respect towards moral peers.

Antonio said: "This appears to set the stage for a compensatory relationship in children's sharing of valuable resources. In other words, the present findings suggest that unique, positive feelings of respect towards moral others may compensate for a lack of sympathetic concern when sharing resources."

"Children and adolescents are routinely faced with an array of multifaceted social situations involving conflicting moral and amoral concerns. Providing them with an equally diverse toolbox of moral emotions, such as sympathy and feelings of respect, may help them navigate towards prosocial solutions, even in the event that sympathy for others is lacking."

More information: *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bjdp.12084

Provided by British Psychological Society

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