

Tots separate fact, fiction early

November 17 2006

Children may be savvier at a younger age when separating fact from fiction than their parents think, a University of Texas study said.

Children typically learn to separate what's real from what's pretend between the ages of 3 year and 5 years, the research said.

"These studies provide new insight into the development of children's ability to make the fantasy-reality distinction," Jacqueline Woolley, professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, said in a news release.

Woolley's team studied children ages 3 to 6 years by reading stories that were either imaginary or fact-based, then asking about whether words represented something real or something pretend.

As expected, younger subjects were the most likely to think all words were real, while older ones could distinguish real from fiction, researchers said.

But researchers learned something else -- differentiating between real and fantasy may be contextual as well as age-related. After hearing a factual story, the children expected more "real" words, not a mix of facts and fantasy, researchers said. After hearing imaginative stories, the children may have thought that some words in the word test were from an imaginary place.

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