

# Autistic children are not good at covering up their lies: study

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Children with autism will tell white lies to protect other people's feelings and they are not very good at covering up their lies, according to a Queen's University study.

The study, conducted by psychology professor Beth Kelley and [developmental psychology](#) PhD student Annie Li, is one of the first scientific studies of lying and autism.

"The results are surprising because there is a notion that [children](#) with autism have difficulty appreciating the thoughts and feelings of other people, so we didn't expect them to lie to avoid saying things that may hurt others," says Dr. Kelley.

In one test, children with autism were told they were going to get a great gift, and were then handed a bar of soap. When asked if they liked their gift, most nodded or said yes instead of saying they were disappointed to get soap.

Researchers refer to this as pro-social lies told to maintain good relations with others.

In a second test, children were given audio clues and asked to guess a hidden object. Most guessed the easy clues, a chicken when they heard a chicken clucking — but an intentionally difficult clue (Christmas music and an Elmo doll) – was used as a test for lying.

After the Christmas music was played, the tester left the room. The tester returned and asked the children if they had peeked at the object. Both autistic and non- autistic children were equally likely to lie that they had not peeked. But when asked what they thought the object was, children without [autism](#) realized giving the correct answer would reveal they peeked so they were more likely to lie and say "Santa" or "Christmas tree."

**More information:** The study has been accepted for publication to *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

Provided by Queen's University

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