

Baby see, baby do? Study shows infants take cues from trusted sources, ignore unreliable cues

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Babies love to imitate. Ask any parent and they'll report how infants mimic sounds, facial expressions and actions they observe. Now new research from Concordia University, published in the journal *Infant Behavior and Development*, has found that infants can even differentiate between credible and un-credible sources. Simply put, most babies won't follow along if they have been previously tricked by an adult.

"Like older children, infants keep track of an individual's history of being accurate or inaccurate and use this information to guide their subsequent learning," says senior researcher Diane Poulin-Dubois, a professor in the Concordia Department of Psychology and member of the Centre for Research in Human Development. "Specifically, infants choose not to learn from someone who they perceive as unreliable."

A group of 60 infants, aged 13 to 16 months, were tested as part of this study. [Babies](#) were divided in two groups; with reliable or unreliable testers. In a first task, experimenters looked inside a container, while expressing excitement, and infants were invited to discover whether the box actually contained a toy or was empty. This task was designed to show the experimenter's [credibility](#) or lack thereof.

In a second imitation task, the same experimenter used her forehead instead of her hands to turn on a push-on light. The experimenter then observed whether infants would follow suit. The outcome? Only 34 per

cent of infants whose testers were unreliable followed this odd task. By contrast, 61 per cent of infants in the reliable group imitated the irrational behavior.

"This shows infants will imitate behaviour from a reliable adult," says second author Ivy Brooker, a PhD student in the Concordia Department of Psychology and member of the Centre for Research in Human Development. "In contrast, the same behaviour performed by an unreliable adult is interpreted as irrational or inefficient, therefore not worth imitating."

These results add to a growing body of research from the same laboratory that suggests that even [infants](#) are adept at detecting who's reliable and who is not.

More information: "Infants prefer to imitate a reliable person," *Infant Behavior and Development*, www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0163638311000221

Provided by Concordia University

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