

How moms talk influences children's perspective-taking ability

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Young children whose mothers talk with them more frequently and in more detail about people's thoughts and feelings tend to be better at taking another's perspective than other children of the same age.

That's what researchers from the University of Western Australia found in a new [longitudinal study](#) published in the journal *Child Development*.

"[Parents](#) who frequently put themselves in someone else's shoes in conversations with their children make it more likely that their children will be able to do the same," according to Brad Farrant, postdoctoral fellow at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research at the University of Western Australia, the study's lead author.

To learn more about how we develop the ability to take another's perspective, researchers looked at the influence of the way parents interact with and talk to their children. The two-year study involved more than 120 Australian children between the ages of 4 and 6 at the start of the study, both [youngsters](#) with typically developing [language](#) and those who were delayed in their acquisition of language. The participants were part of a larger ongoing longitudinal research project.

The children completed tasks designed to assess their language skills, their ability to infer others' beliefs and use these to predict others' behavior, and their ability to flexibly shift between different perspectives. Mothers also reported on the types of language they used with their children.

Among children with typically developing language, the researchers found that [moms](#) who talked more often and in greater detail about people's thoughts and feelings—commenting on how another person might react to a particular situation as well as their own feelings about the topic at hand—had children with better [language skills](#) and better perspective-taking skills. This suggests that mothers' use of this type of language influences their children's language ability and cognitive flexibility, which in turn appears to influence their development of theory of mind, a key component in learning to take another's perspective.

Children with delayed language acquisition were delayed in their development of perspective-taking skills—though this wasn't necessarily due to moms' use of language. This highlights the role played by language as children develop the ability to take another's perspective.

"Solving the many challenges that the world faces today requires us all to get better at taking the perspective of other people," according to Farrant.

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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