

# Giving makes young children happy, study suggests

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If it is indeed nobler to give than to receive, it may also make you happier – even if you're a toddler, according to a new study co-authored by three psychologists at the University of British Columbia.

The study, published in *PLoS One*, an on-line journal from the Public Library of Science, finds that toddlers under the age of two are happier when giving treats to others than receiving treats themselves.

Furthermore, [children](#) are happier when they give their own treats away than when they give an identical treat that doesn't belong to them.

These findings support recent research showing that adults feel good when they help others and may help explain why people act pro-socially, even when doing so involves personal cost. This is the first study to show that giving to others makes young children happy.

"People tend to assume that toddlers are naturally selfish," said Dr. Lara Aknin, who co-authored the study with UBC colleagues Profs. Kiley Hamlin and Elizabeth Dunn. "These findings show that children are actually happier giving than receiving."

During the study, each toddler received some treats, such as Goldfish crackers. A few minutes later, the [toddler](#) was asked to give one of these treats away to a puppet. In addition, the experimenter provided an extra treat and asked the child to give this to the puppet. The children's reactions were videotaped and later rated for happiness on a seven-point scale.

When toddlers shared their own treat with a puppet, they displayed greater happiness than when giving a treat provided by the researcher. This contrast underscores the role of personal sacrifice, and rather than finding it aversive, suggests that children find this behaviour emotionally rewarding.

"What's most exciting about these findings is that children are happiest when giving their own treats away," said Aknin, lead author of the study. "Forfeiting their own valuable resources for the benefit of others makes them happier than giving away just any treat."

These findings shed light on a long-standing puzzle: Why do humans help others, including people they've just met? Part of the answer, it seems, is that giving feels good. The fact that toddlers show the warm glow of giving suggests that the capacity to derive joy from helping others is deeply woven into human nature.

**More information:** Watch a video from the study, featuring one toddler participating with a puppet, at:

[http://cic.psych.ubc.ca/Example\\_Stimuli.html](http://cic.psych.ubc.ca/Example_Stimuli.html) See the study at <http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0039211>

Provided by University of British Columbia

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