

Toddlers value people who help, study shows

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According to a new study out of Queen's University, even very young children value people that help them and are motivated to return the favour. The study revealed that those children, when asked to pick one person to help, most often choose the person who was helpful to them.

"Children can identify helpful individuals and will be helpful toward those people," says study author Valerie Kuhlmeier ([Psychology](#)). "As early as the age of three, children already appear to be engaging in a variant of the golden rule: 'do unto others as they have done unto you.'"

In the study, children were presented with a puzzle that consisted of a picture covered in such a way as to allow only a small section to be seen. The children could not see what was in the picture but could interact with two puppets. Puppets are used in studies like this one because children treat them as peers.

One [puppet](#) announced that it knew what the picture was and proceeded to tell the child. The second puppet said that it also knew the picture, but was not going to tell. Both puppets spoke in happy, friendly tones, and looked alike; they only differed in their [willingness](#) to provide information.

Children were able to determine which puppet was helpful and, when the one puppet needed help reaching a far-way toy or solving a puzzle of their own, the children were quick to identify which puppet had helped them and returned the favour.

"There is a growing body of research demonstrating that [toddlers](#) spontaneously help others in many situations," says Dr. Kuhlmeier, director of the [Infant Cognition](#) Group at Queen's. "What we are also finding is that they pick out the helpers around them, even when the helpful act is as simple as teaching them something new about their world, and they return the favor with their own helpful acts."

The study appears in *PLOS ONE*.

More information: www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0061804

Provided by Queen's University

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