

Do children inherently want to help others?

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Prosocial behavior is often defined in developmental science research as "voluntary behavior intended to benefit another." This can include behaviors like helping, sharing, comforting, or volunteering. Developmental scientists have discovered that although some forms of prosocial behavior emerge early in childhood, different prosocial

behaviors involve cognitive, social, and regulatory processes that mature at varying rates. A new special section of the journal *Child Development*, "The Motivational Foundations of Prosocial Behavior: A Developmental Perspective," extends this discussion to encourage researchers to explore how human beings' differing motivations can lead to variation in prosocial behavior and its development. Of many possible motivations, the Special Section highlights several, notably "empathy for a distressed other; concern about another's goal; desire to act in accordance with norms; and guilt."

The special section is a collection of ten empirical articles and one theoretical article focusing on the predictors, outcomes, and mechanisms related to the different motivations for prosocial actions. The collection of articles focuses on children's development broadly but begins with an introduction by Maayan Davidov and colleagues answering the question, "Why have humans evolved to act prosocially?" The special section also includes physiological studies, looking at the biological processes at play in prosocial action. A study by Miller and colleagues found, for example, that children's cardiac patterns, particularly the functioning of a specific nerve connecting the brain to the heart, predicted their empathy and kindness in response to another person's sadness.

Additional articles in the special section that may be of particular interest include:

- "Children's Sharing Behavior in Mini-Dictator Games: The Role of In-Group Favoritism"
- "Children's Sympathy, Guilt, and Moral Reasoning in Helping, Cooperation, and Sharing: A 6-Year Long Longitudinal Study"
- "Young Children Want to See Others Get the Help They Need"

Journalists interested in speaking with any of the editors of the special

section listed above or gaining access to the complete special section of Child Development should contact Hannah Klein.

SRCD was established in 1933 by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. The Society's goals are to advance interdisciplinary research in [child development](#) and to encourage applications of research findings. Its membership of more than 5,700 scientists is representative of the various disciplines and professions that contribute to knowledge of child development.

More information: Maayan Davidov et al, The Motivational Foundations of Prosocial Behavior From A Developmental Perspective- Evolutionary Roots and Key Psychological Mechanisms: Introduction to the Special Section, *Child Development* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12639](#)

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