

At what age do kids recognise fairness?

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Children have a strong propensity for fairness. Credit: University of Queensland

Children as young as seven have the same capacity as adults to make judgements on the anti-social behaviour of others.

A study led by University of Queensland School of Psychology researcher Matti Wilks found that older kids (aged 7–8), but not younger ones (aged 4–5), see [antisocial behaviour](#) as an important influence on their social groups.

"Once children reach the age of seven they are able to take multiple, and often competing factors into consideration when making judgements about groups of people," Ms Wilks said.

Researchers studied the older children and the younger children separately, and in each study the children were allocated to either the red group or the yellow group.

The children were shown a photo of the puppet 'Sally the Sheep', a non-group-affiliated puppet, and were told that they would see videos of people who Sally knew.

In the videos, various animal puppets (cat, leopard, cow, cockatoo, giraffe, or platypus) were depicted as belonging to either the red group or the yellow group, and behaved in either a prosocial or antisocial way toward Sally.

"When the [older children](#) saw members of their group behaving in an unfavourable way, they liked their group less and they no longer wanted to belong to that group," Ms Wilks said.

"Although there was an effect of antisocial behaviour on kids' judgments of their groups, it did not extend so far as to influence the kids to behave antisocially themselves.

"When we gave them stickers to distribute between two different groups they still did their best to allocate their resources as evenly as possible, regardless of the [social behaviour](#).

"This indicates that children have a strong propensity for fairness even though the children saw members of their own group not sharing."

Ms Wilks said that the evidence does not suggest that the younger [children](#) don't care about antisocial [behaviour](#).

"We suspect that they might just lack the ability to integrate all the different facets of information that are being presented to them."

Ms Wilks' research, conducted in collaboration with Associate Professor Mark Nielsen, is published in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.

More information: Matti Wilks et al. Children disassociate from antisocial in-group members, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jecp.2017.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2017.06.003)

Provided by University of Queensland

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