

Younger children tend to make more informed decisions

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A new study from the University of Waterloo has found that in some ways, the older you get the worse your decision making becomes.

The study established that younger [children](#) seem to make slightly better decisions than older children. The older children get, the more they tend to ignore some of the information available to them when making judgements, which though efficient can also lead to mistakes.

"It is good for us to know that kids at different ages don't necessarily treat all information similarly when we set out to teach them new things," said Stephanie Denison, an associate professor in the Department of Psychology, who co-authored the study with Ph.D. student Samantha Gualtieri. "Children maybe aren't taking all the information we are giving them at face value. They may be thinking about it in their own way and using the data in the way they think makes the most sense, which is important for parents and teachers to understand," says Gualtieri.

"Our research shows that children around four-years-old are starting to use these shortcuts, but by six-years of age they're using them at levels as high as adults."

In two experiments, 288 children were assessed to determine whether they used numerical, social, or both types of information when making judgments. Ninety-five per cent of the six-year-olds depended on only the social information to make a judgement compared to 70 per cent of five-year-olds and 45 per cent of four-year-olds. The younger children were more likely to take both pieces of information into account.

The researchers do not deem [older children](#)'s overuse of social as negative, it simply shows how children weigh information when making decisions. Adults also tend to not use all the information at their disposal when making judgments, possibly because it is time-consuming and requires lots of mental energy.

"So, while using these shortcuts is actually very efficient, we need to be

aware that they can introduce errors," said Denison. "Therefore, sometimes we should be thinking harder and taking the time to put together all of the information.

"How much time you spend on processing [information](#) might depend on the importance of the judgement or the [decision](#) you're making. So, thinking about where you want to spend the time is really important."

The study, The development of the representativeness heuristic in young children, was published recently in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.

More information: Samantha Gualtieri et al, The development of the representativeness heuristic in young children, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jecp.2018.05.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2018.05.006)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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