



How Do Parents Socialize Prosocial Behavior in Toddlers?

Celia A. Brownell, Stephanie Sivers, Sara R. Nichols, Margarita Svetlova
University of Pittsburgh



Introduction

Prosocial behavior emerges in the 2nd year, but developmental patterns & mechanisms are not yet fully understood (Hay & Cook, 2007)

Parental socialization may be an important contributor

- Sensitive responsiveness relates to toddlers' empathic concern (VanderMark, 2000)
- Parents begin to socialize standards for behavior in the 2nd year, including moral & prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, et al, 1992; Gralinski & Kopp, 1993)

Other socialization influences may also contribute

- Parents' talk about others' emotions may make emotions more salient and enhance children's awareness of others' needs & desires (Taumoepeau & Ruffman, 2006)

We examined how parent emotion talk & socialization of prosocial responding relates to sharing over the 2nd year

Procedures

PARTICIPANTS

18- & 24 -month olds (N = 66)



SHARING

• Child had many toys; adult playmate had none (6 tasks)

• Adult delivered a series of cues to communicate her need/desire



Sharing score: Cue at which sharing occurred (0 = no sharing; 5 = share immediately)

SOCIALIZATION OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Parents rated how often they encouraged prosocial behavior by modeling, requesting, thanking, praising, or rewarding it (0 = never; 4 = daily; 12 items; 0 – 48 possible)

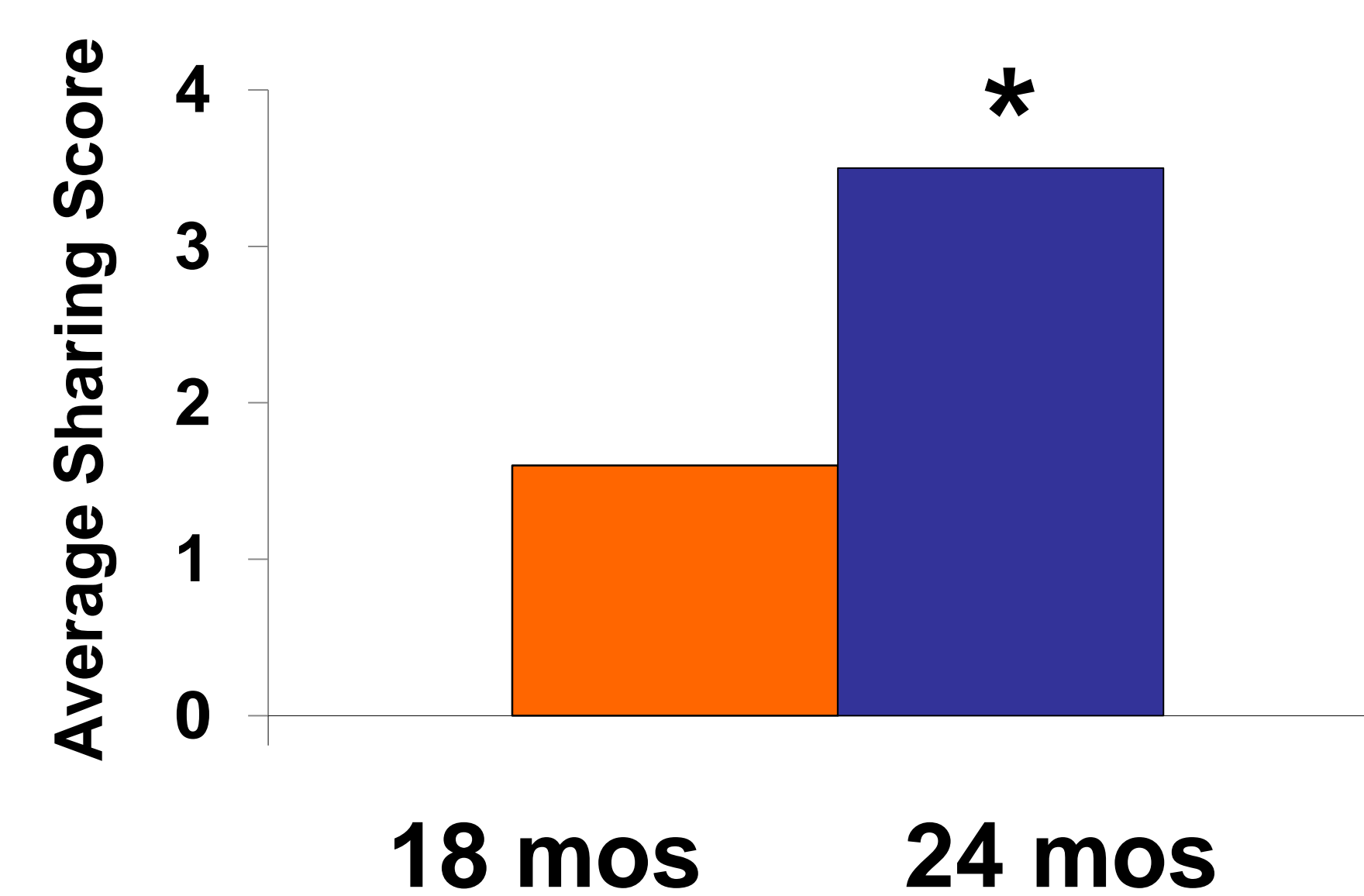
PARENT EMOTION TALK

Parents read 2 wordless picture books to children which portrayed people and animals in various contexts, some of which included emotions (e.g., boy drops ice cream cone & cries)

- **Emotion talk production:** # times parent labels or explains emotions
- **Emotion talk elicitation:** # times parent asks child to label or explain emotions (e.g., "Is he happy or sad?")

Results

Sharing: Age Differences



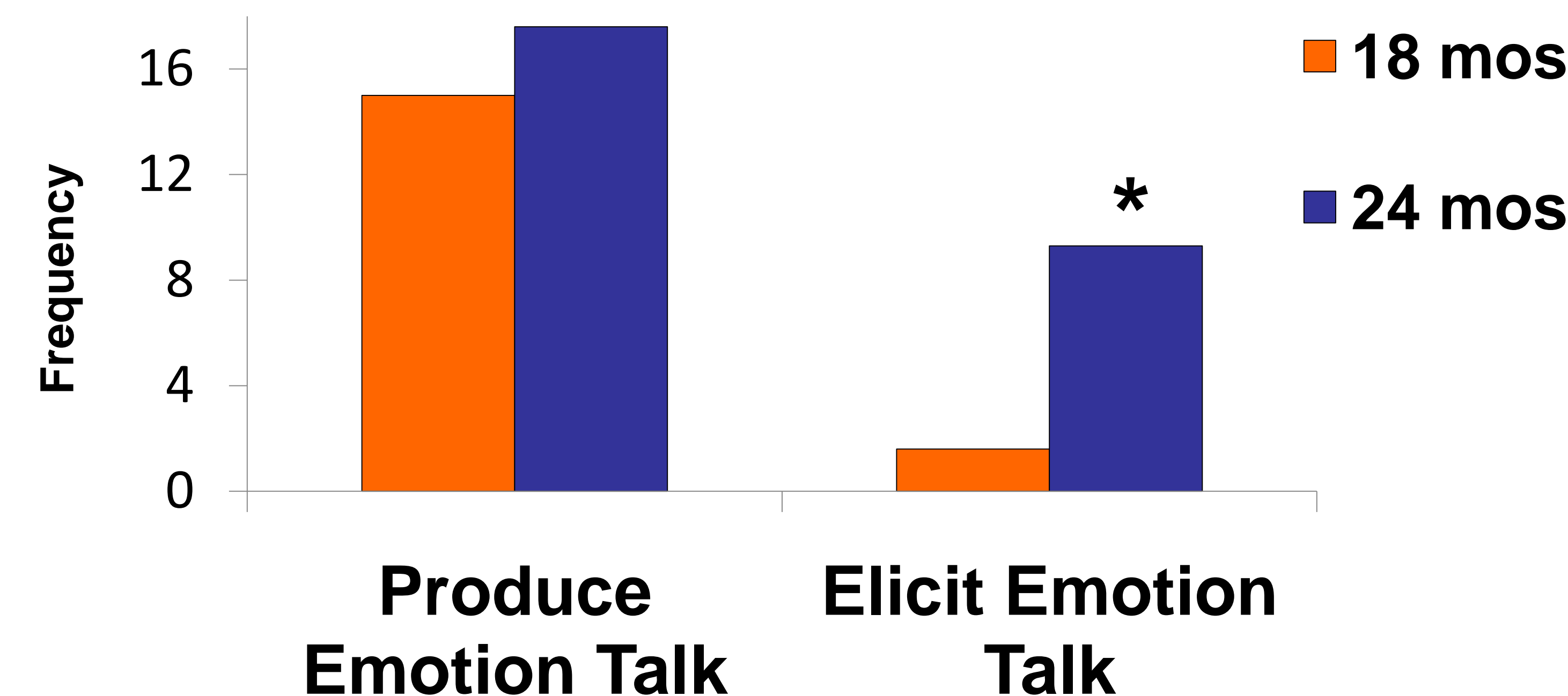
■ 2-yr olds shared most of the time, with fewer cues needed from adult playmate

Parental Socialization: Age Differences



■ Parents encourage prosocial behavior similarly for younger and older toddlers

Parental Emotion Talk: Age Differences



■ Parents of 2-year-olds elicited more emotion talk from their children during book reading than did parents of 1-year-olds

Sharing x Socialization

	Sharing Score (age controlled)
Socialization of Prosocial Behavior	.24* (.23+)
Elicit Emotion Talk	.39* (.25*)
Produce Emotion Talk	.20 (.18)

- Direct socialization of prosocial behavior and eliciting children's talk about others' emotions were both associated with children's sharing
- Producing emotion talk (and total amount of parent talk) was unrelated to sharing
- Parents who encouraged prosocial behavior also talked about emotions more often ($r = .32$, age controlled)

Conclusions

2-year-olds share more often and more readily than 1-year-olds, and need less adult support to behave prosocially

Parents socialize prosocial behavior as early as the 2nd year of life both directly, by encouraging and rewarding prosociality, and indirectly by asking children to reflect on and label others' emotions.

Moreover, because they are related, these influences may work in tandem.

We find similar patterns for socialization of early prosocial helping (Svetlova, et al, Symposium 3-008, Sat, 8:20 am, Room 516A)

Eisenberg, N., et al (1992). Parental values, reinforcement, and young children's prosocial behavior. *J of Genetic Psychology*, 153, 19 – 36.

Gralinski, H. & Kopp, C., (1993). Everyday rules of behavior: Mothers' requests to young children. *Dev Psychology*, 29, 573 – 584.

Hay, D. & Cook, K. (2007). The transformation of prosocial behavior from infancy to childhood. In C. Brownell & C. Kopp (Eds). *Socioemotional development in the toddler years: Transitions & Transformations*. Guilford Press.

Taumoepeau, M. & Ruffman, T. (2006). Mother and infant talk about mental states relates to desire language and emotion understanding. *Child Development*, 77, 465-481.

VanderMark, et al (2002). Empathy in girls during the 2d year: Associations with parenting, attachment, and temperament. *Social Dev*, 11, 451 – 468.