



# Helping Behavior in the Second Year: Actions versus Emotions

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## BACKGROUND

Prosocial responding emerges during the second year

- Empathic responses to mother's distress (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992)
- Helping parents with household tasks (Rheingold, 1982)
- Instrumental helping based on goal understanding (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006, 2007).

Possible underlying mechanisms of early helping behavior

- Understanding others' emotions and needs → empathy & altruistic motivation
- Understanding situation/action → social engagement
- Adult scaffolding/compliance

## Questions & Design

- What are the roles of internal state understanding, communicative support, and cost to self in early prosocial responsiveness?
- Do these change with development?
- Manipulated:
  1. Internal state understanding required
    - Action vs. Emotion
  2. Amount of information about the other's internal state
    - Explicitness of communication about state/need
  3. Cost of helping
    - Other's possession vs. child's own

## METHODS

### Participants

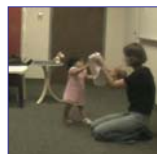
18-month-olds (N=20)

30-month-olds (N=21)



### PROCEDURE: "Unfortunate Events"

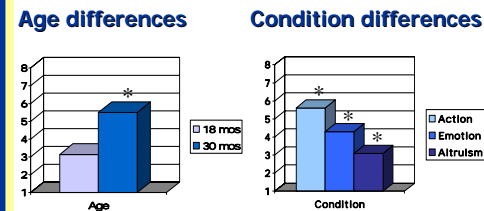
- **9 events:** for each one, E pretends to have a problem and needs an object to resolve it
  - The child can help by bringing the object to E
- **3 conditions:** manipulate the nature of the E's problem (3 tasks per condition)
  - **Action** (e.g., clipping, wrapping): E's goal-related action is interrupted because a needed object is out of reach (e.g., clothespin, wrapper)
  - **Emotion/internal state** (e.g., sadness, cold): E demonstrates a negative internal state that can be alleviated by getting the object (e.g., E's teddy bear; E's blanket)
  - **Altruism:** same as previous, but the object needed is the child's own
- **Communicative cues:** for each task, E produces a sequence of 8 progressively more explicit cues until the child helps
  - 5-7 secs per cue
- **Helping score:** cue level at which child helped



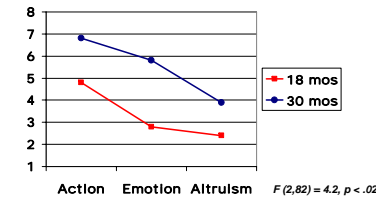
8. Facial/bodily expression
7. Naming action/internal state
6. Expressing need
5. Naming object
4. Alternating gaze object/child
3. Gesture (reaching/begging)
2. General request ("Can you help me?")
1. Specific request ("Can you bring me the...?")

## RESULTS

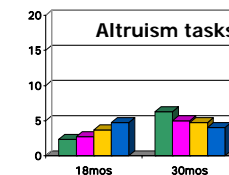
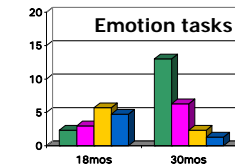
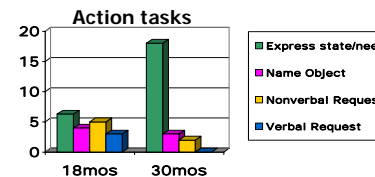
### Helping score



### Age x Condition Interaction



### Number of children who helped: Cue level x Condition



## CONCLUSIONS

- 30-month-olds help more than 18-month-olds
- With less communicative support
- Older children are better at inferring others' needs & knowing how to help
- Helping is easier in Action-related than Emotion-related tasks
- Inferring goals is less demanding than inferring internal states
- Altruistic helping is most difficult
- Prosocial motivation reduced when costly
- Mechanisms for helping behavior change with age
- 18-month-olds' helping responses are based more on action understanding than inferences about others' emotions or prosocial motivation
- 30-month-olds' responses are based on more complex social understanding and evaluation of cost to self
- *Prosocial responses develop from relying on action understanding and explicit communications to understanding others' internal states from subtle cues*

## References

- Rheingold, H. (1982). Little children's participation in the work of adults: a nascent prosocial behavior. *Child Development, 53*, 114-125.
- Warneken, F., & Tomasello, M. (2006). Altruistic helping in human infants and young chimpanzees. *Science, 311*, 1301-1303.
- Warneken, F., & Tomasello, M. (2007). Helping and cooperation at 14 months of age. *Infancy, 11*, 271-294.
- Zahn-Waxler, C., Radke-Yarrow, M., Wagner, E., & Chapman, M. (1992). Development of concern for others. *Developmental Psychology, 28*, 126-136.

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