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

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 differences
- Condition differences

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

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

References

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