



From Feelings to Actions: Emotion Understanding and Prosocial Behavior in Toddlers

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Background

- Early helping behavior relates to emotion-word comprehension and concern for a victim of harm (Newton et al 2014, Vaish et al 2009).
- Toddlers can interpret emotions before they can articulate them (Chiarella & Poulin-Dubois 2013, Vallotton 2008).
- **Does a non-verbal assessment of emotion understanding relate to prosocial behavior?**

Method

Participants

- 16 mos (n=45; $M_{age}=15.64$, $SD=.88$)
- 22 mos (n=13; $M_{age}=22.31$, $SD=2.36$)

Procedure

- 2 conditions (Happy, Sad)
- 4 video vignettes per condition conveying emotional situations
 - Trial 1 = Nonsocial (playing alone with ball/hurting finger)
 - Trials 2 – 4 = Social (hug/hit, share/steal, help/hinder)
- Looking time (LT) coded to happy/sad face on either side of computer after each vignette
- Instrumental helping task (coded 1 – 5 based on when child helped)

Results

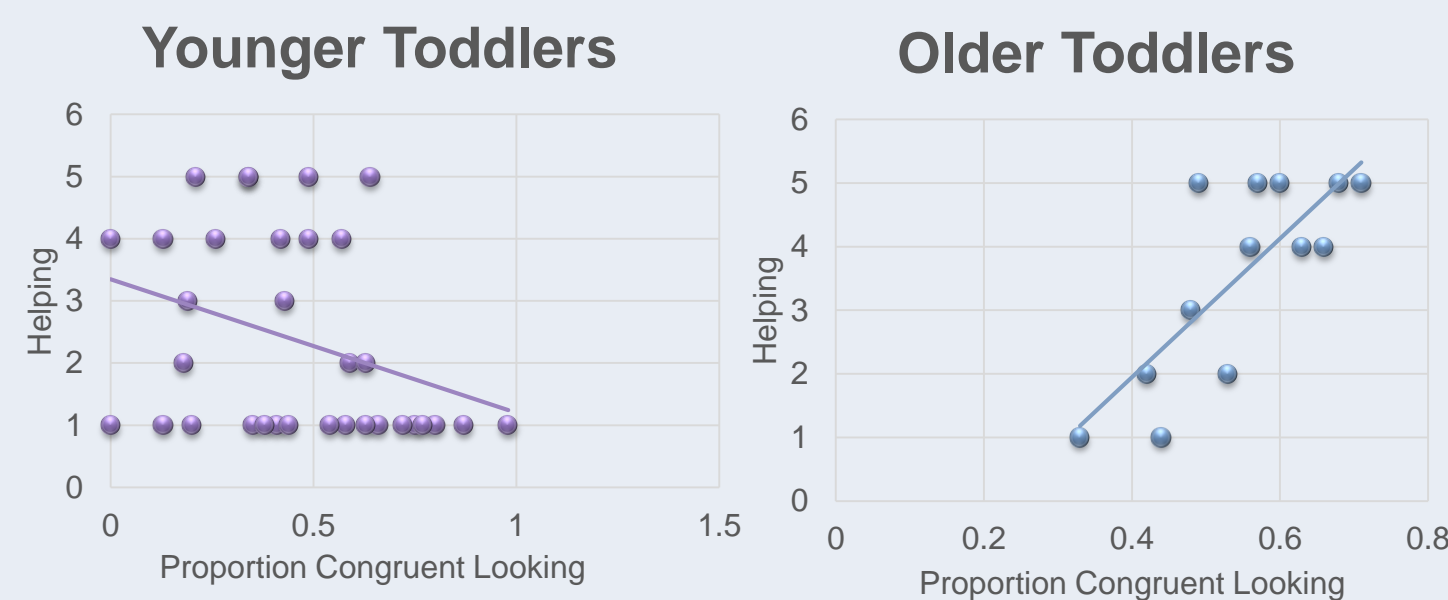
Age Differences

- Older toddlers helped more quickly than younger toddlers ($p=.052$)
- Younger toddlers looked more to sad face in both conditions ($p=.001$)
- Older toddlers looked at both faces equally in both conditions



Relations between Emotion Understanding & Helping

- Only for Nonsocial vignette
- Older toddlers who looked at faces congruent with happy/sad vignette helped more quickly ($r= .79$, $p=.001$)
- Younger toddlers who looked at faces congruent with happy/sad vignette helped more slowly ($r= -.33$, $p=.060$)



Conclusions

- Nonverbal emotion understanding relates to faster instrumental helping by the end of the second year
 - Older toddlers only & nonsocial vignettes only: social vignettes too complex?
- Younger toddlers' sad face LT preference consistent with negativity bias in infants (Vaish et al 2008)
- Future research: different types of prosocial behavior (e.g. comforting, sharing); further development of measures to assess early emotion understanding nonverbally

References

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