About the Study: Information for Parents

**Study:** How Children Think about Fair Distributions of Rewards and Penalties  
**Researcher:** Craig E. Smith, University of Michigan Department of Psychology

Thanks for Participating!

With your permission, your child participated in a study that explored how children think about rewards and penalties. We are interested in whether children pay attention to the behavior of others when deciding how rewards and penalties should be handed out. For example, when one person works hard at a job and another person gives up to go play, how should rewards be divided up?

Previous studies indicate that very young children prefer to distribute rewards equally in this situation, and that older children prefer to give more to the harder worker. We are trying to probe this further by using scenarios that are simple and very familiar to children (in a classroom setting).

We are also looking at the flip side of rewards: penalties. When one person does more of a bad thing than another person, how should penalties be divided up between the two? While young children may indeed prefer to distribute rewards equally, regardless of the situation, we hypothesize that the same will not be true where punishments are concerned. We suspect that most children in the study won't like to see a relatively innocent person receive as much punishment as a guilty person.

We hope that this research will lead to a greater understanding of how children think about fairness. This research may have implications for how adults approach discipline with groups of children (e.g., teachers and students).

Try It At Home!

Young children may enjoy acting out various types of positive and negative behaviors with dolls, action figures, or stuffed animals. You could ask your child about who should be rewarded or penalized, and why. Older children might be interested in talking in more explicit terms about concepts of fairness. Why, for example, might all players on a sports team be told to run laps after one teammate misbehaves? Is this an effective way to teach right and wrong? These are rather open questions, and they're fascinating things to chat about with children!

Please visit us at umlivinglab.com for more information about our research and findings!

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact Craig Smith at: craigsm@umich.edu -or- 617-865-9469.

**If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu**