A Parrot Passes the Marshmallow Test

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Slate:

Can your kid pass the "marshmallow test"? And what does it mean if he can't, but a parrot can?

The marshmallow test is pretty simple: Give a child a treat, such as a marshmallow, and promise that if he doesn't eat it right away, he'll soon be rewarded with a second one. The experiment was devised by Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel in the late 1960s as a measure of self-control. When he later checked back in with kids he had tested as preschoolers, those who had been able to wait for the second treat appeared to be doing better in life. They tended to have fewer behavioral or drug-abuse problems, for example, than those who had given in to temptation.

Most attempts to perform this experiment on animals haven't worked out so well. Many animals haven't been willing to wait at all. Dogs, primates, and some birds have done a bit better, managing to wait at least a couple of minutes before eating the first treat. The best any animal has managed has been 10 minutes—a record set earlier this year by a couple of crows.

Read the whole story: *Slate*