

Teaching kids to share: Giving choices rather than rewards is better, study says

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CTV News:

When it comes to getting preschoolers to share their toys, a new study finds that giving them a choice to share, rather than a reward, helps them share more with others in the future.

In new evidence announced Monday, investigators from Cornell University in the U.S. conducted a series of experiments on 72 preschool-aged children, from three to five years old.

Findings suggest that sharing when given a difficult choice leads children to see themselves in a new, more beneficent light, researchers said.

“Perceiving themselves as people who like to share makes them more likely to act in a prosocial manner in the future,” they said.

Previous research has shown that this idea — as described by the over-justification effect — explains why rewarding children for sharing can backfire, the researchers said. Children come to perceive themselves as people who don’t like to share since they had to be rewarded for doing so.

Because they don’t view themselves as “sharers,” they are less likely to share in the future.

“Making difficult choices allows children to infer something important about themselves,” the researchers said. “In making choices that aren’t necessarily easy, children might be able to infer their own prosociality.”

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