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**Research News**

# Altruistic babies? Study shows infants are willing to give up food, help others

## Study finds that children are altruistic



Study finds very young children are willing to offer food and help others.

[Credit and Larger Version \(/discoveries/disc\\_images.jsp?cntn\\_id=300019&org=NSF\)](#)

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New research by the [University of Washington \(/cgi-bin/good-bye?https://www.washington.edu/news/2020/02/04/altruistic-babies-study-shows-infants-are-willing-to-give-up-food-help-others/\)](#) Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences, or I-LABS, and funded [by the National Science Foundation, finds that altruism may begin in infancy.](#)

In a study of nearly 100 19-month-olds, researchers found that children, even when hungry, gave a tasty snack to an adult stranger in need. In addition, children with siblings and from certain cultural backgrounds were especially likely to help the adult. The findings not only show that infants engage in altruistic behavior, but also suggest that early social experiences can shape altruism.

The [study \(/cgi-bin/good-bye?https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-58645-9.epdf?author\\_access\\_token=uhyu8q18e2gjP6xFe8DTn9RgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0NAxBH6OyomJDuoqXSdP9dZLjEaRP3T4NGx8fEuYR-XapwswYXNi4yBeRBDlpaCFgUVVxax1AMzLRp\\_tE-SSAYaGKFuwaZ-egTV04PWJbF0eUfA%3D%3D\)](#) is published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

"We think altruism is important to study because it is one of the most distinctive aspects of being human. It is an important part of the moral fabric of society," said Rodolfo Cortes Barragan, a researcher at I-LABS and lead author of the study. "We adults help each other when we see another in need, and we do this even if there is a cost to the self. So we tested the roots of this in infants."

"Developmental psychology has long held that positive interactions in early childhood are important to promoting prosocial interactions across the lifespan," added Josie Welkom, a program director in NSF's Directorate for Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences/Office of Multidisciplinary Activities. "This research examines how specific everyday aspects of children's social experience can shape altruism. The findings promise to have impact on developmental theory as well as educational practice, and NSF is committed to supporting promising early career scientists."

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