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Young children's activation and inhibition processes in a visual search task.

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Abstract: Selective attention requires both the ability to inhibit irrelevant distractors, as well as the ability to activate and focus on relevant stimuli. Research in adults suggests that these are two separate processes that function together during efficient attentional selection. Less is known about how these two processes contribute to selective attention in early development. In this study, we presented young children with a visual search task that measured distractor inhibition and the target activation. Children searched for the same target among the same distractors for several trials. Immediately after, half of the children searched for a new target among the same distractors, providing a measure of inhibiting abilities, while the other half searched for the same target among new distractors, providing a measure of target activation abilities. Results point to the importance of these two processes for selective attention in early childhood.