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Knowing who knows what best: Preschoolers selectively use others' past accuracy in causal learning

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Abstract: Knowing who knows what best: Preschoolers selectively use others' past accuracy in causal learning

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Preschoolers use a person's past accuracy labeling common objects as a cue to their "trustworthiness" when learning new words. These studies investigate how children use past accuracy to differentially trust people for causal learning. Across two studies, we found that children (Mean age = 4 years, 3 months; SD = 4 months) would differentially trust an accurate (versus inaccurate or ignorant) labeler for learning a novel causal function but not for learning a novel causal mechanism. However, when an accurate labeler was pitted against a causal expert, children trusted the expert with both causal mechanism and causal function. These studies demonstrate that children show selective trust of accurate labelers depending on the availability of sources with causal expertise. Thus, children are sensitive to domains of knowledge and can use them to request information from the most appropriate source.