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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 45(45)

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Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed

The association between types of caregiver mental state language and toddler perspective-taking

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Abstract

Research suggests that perspective-taking in children is associated with greater cognitive and emotion understanding as well as parent use of mental state language—words concerning inner mental states or feelings. However, prior research shows conflicting results on which categories of mental state language—cognition (e.g., think, know), emotion (e.g., happy), or desire (e.g., want)—facilitate children's perspective-taking. The current study examines the relationship between parent mental state language and children's perspective-taking.

We are coding parent mental state language categories from a wordless book task with two-year-old children and assessing children's perspective-taking using a card task (Flavell et al., 1981). Preliminary results (N=19, planned 41) show that, on average, parents use more cognition words per session than desire words and, on average, children score at chance on the perspective-taking task. Differences between mental state categories on children's perspective-taking skills as well as individual variability will be analyzed.