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# Developmental Changes in Children's Categorization of Facial Cues of Emotion

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### Abstract

How do children learn to categorize the facial configurations classically believed to represent basic emotions? Many studies have examined when children are able to perceptually discriminate between emotional facial expressions and when children are able to verbally label these expressions. However, while these studies provide important information about the timeline of emotional development, they give less information about the nature of childrens category representations for different facial configurations. For instance, emotion concepts may emerge from childrens perceptions of facial configurations along the dimensions of valence and arousal. To evaluate how 3- to 7-year-old children categorize emotion concepts, we had them sort facial configurations on a grid based on whether the people were feeling the same kind of thing. We found that while both children and adults consistently sorted faces according to the dimensions of valence and arousal, sorting faces using discrete emotion categories emerged only gradually across development, with children not demonstrating consistent use of emotion categories until approximately 5- to 6- years of age.