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Intent Versus Intention- Leave Them Kids Alone

Last year, a study (1) showed that cues from adults -- like nodding, speaking and pointing -- cause babies to perform worse in a classic toy-hiding game.

Today's research (2) shows that babies age 10 months or younger are distracted by social cues -- they focus on adults' faces and gestures rather than paying attention to where an object is hidden.

The studies in question examine assumptions about location and function made by young people up to 10 months old. Before network 2 develops, we associate location strongly with function, so a place known as a 'hiding place' is associated with stuff being hidden.

When babies repeatedly see an object hidden in one spot, then see it being hidden somewhere else, they continue to search in the original hiding location. By age 1, network 2 is operational and spatial awareness is much more acute. Discovered by child psychologist Jean Piaget, this change in awareness is well known in developmental psychology courses and by interactive parents.

Only recently have researchers been able to examine how social cues influence performance on this task.

Social cues reduce the infants' performance because at this age biology rates input from adults as more important than external input, for reasons of survival. Our own sensory networks are not yet proficient at detecting and avoiding predators, which is why our matrix for survival at this stage is our parents or carers. Infants are consequently distracted rather than assisted by social cues in this hiding game.

In the paper published this Friday in *Science* (2), researchers show that when a computer model fails to focus on the hiding event because distracting social cues are prioritized, it shows the same behavior as infants.

At this age, people's attention and memory function much more efficiently if they're left to work things out via natural intent to discover, rather than being given 'hints' by others. The intention to assist youngsters by giving 'cues' or hints, rather than helping the learning process, is getting in the way of it. This brings to mind the wise old Pink Floyd quote, "Leave those kids alone!"

Sources

1 led by József Topál of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

2 University of Iowa and Indiana University; John Spencer, professor of psychology in the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and director of the UI Delta Center

<http://www.physorg.com/news173021113.html> published in *Science and in Medicine & Health / Psychology & Psychiatry*; September 24th, 2009

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