

Moore, C. (2009). Fairness in children's resource allocation depends on the recipient. *Psychological Science, 20*(8), 944-948.

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This study examined sense of fairness among 4.5-6 year old children (the total sample consisted of 66 children). Children's prosocial and sharing behavior were tested in relation to specific individuals using a resource allocation task. Children were asked to make decisions regarding allocation of resources when the recipient was: 1) a friend, who was defined as someone in their class who they played with often, 2) a nonfriend, who was someone in their class who they did not like to play with, and 3) a stranger, who was represented by a picture of a same-sex child. Children drew pictures to represent the friend and nonfriend whom they identified. Stickers were used as the resource to be allocated across all conditions in this task. In the prosocial condition, children chose between one sticker for themselves right away versus one sticker for themselves and one for the other recipient later. The 'fair' choice (1,1) in this case involved a delay cost (in terms of waiting for the reward), but children received one sticker either way. The sharing condition involved children choosing between two items for themselves immediately versus one sticker for themselves and one for the other recipient later. The 'fair' choice (1,1) in this condition had both a delay as well as a material cost. Children were presented with the two conditions (prosocial, sharing) for each of the three recipients (friend, non-friend, stranger) for a total of 6 trials.

Results showed that children were more likely to choose the 'fair' alternative (1,1) in the prosocial trials when the recipient was a friend or stranger as compared to a nonfriend. There was no difference in fairness between friends and strangers in the prosocial condition. In the sharing trials children chose the 'fair' alternative (1,1) more often with friends than nonfriends or strangers. There was no difference in fairness between nonfriends and strangers in the sharing trials. Children were more likely to choose the 'fair' alternative with strangers when there was no cost to self, thus, children chose the 1,1 option more often in the prosocial as compared to sharing condition when the recipient was a stranger. Children were less likely to share with strangers and nonfriends, suggesting that there is a preference for equity within one's own in-group that does not extend to out-group members. When there is minimal cost associated with prosocial behavior, children will display prosocial tendencies even toward strangers, in fact, more so than toward nonfriends. Nonfriends were least likely to be the recipients of prosocial or sharing choices. The results were similar for boys and girls, meaning that they did not differ depending on the sex of the participant or recipient. Overall, these findings indicate that children as young as 4-5 years of age are willing to share even when there is a cost to themselves, particularly when sharing involves friends. And children are willing to extend prosocial behavior toward strangers as long as there is no cost to themselves.