



Children's Understanding of Resource Allocation

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Disputes over how to share toys fairly are one of the biggest causes of conflict in early childhood. Interestingly, adults must also weigh many considerations when deciding how to allocate resources. This process is difficult because there is often more than one way to divide resources fairly. Because of this, young children tend to be very focused on equality. The ability to consider other factors like need (how many resources someone has to begin with) or rights (how many resources someone is entitled to) develops with age. Our study investigated developmental changes in children's consideration of needs and rights when allocating resources.

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In this study, kindergartners and fifth graders decided how to divide up boxes of school supplies between groups of kids who had received a lot of school supplies in the past and groups of kids who had received few school supplies in the past. They also gave reasons for their decisions. We focused on school supplies because of their importance for child wellbeing, and because this context gave participants an opportunity to consider other children's needs and rights.