I don’t remember, do you?
Children’s emerging abilities to seek help with remembering
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Background
Do children prefer to trust their own memory or defer to someone else?
- Adults use other people as memory resources (transactive memory; Wegner, 1986), but it is not known whether children do this.
- The closest related research on parent-scaffolded reminiscing examines how parents prompt children to remember shared experiences (Fivush et al., 2006). However, we do not know whether children can actively seek assistance with remembering.
- Preschoolers do request help when they are uncertain in other domains (e.g., perceptual identification; Coughlin et al., 2014). But children under 6 years old may not understand the benefit of asking others for help with remembering (Kreutzer et al., 1975).
- We investigated whether children defer to someone else when that person’s memory is likely better than their own, but trust their own memory when that person’s memory is likely worse.

Participants
5-year-olds (N = 64, M = 65 mo) and 7-year-olds (N = 63, M = 89 mo) participated in one of four conditions:
- Easy-Item Baseline
- Easy-Item Helper
- Hard-Item Baseline
- Hard-Item Helper

Procedure

Video Exposure

Easy-Item Helper & Baseline
- 4/4 Easy items correct
- 0/4 Hard items correct

Hard-Item Helper & Baseline
- 0/4 Easy items correct
- 4/4 Hard items correct

Study Phase
10 easy items (animals) and 10 hard items (shapes)

Free Report Recognition Test
1) Presentation
- Old Item
- New Item

2) Decision
- Answer
- Skip
- Helper

3) Response
- Answer
- Pass

4) Confidence
- Really Sure
- Not So Sure

Results

Hard-Item Helper vs. Hard-Item Baseline
- Overall neither age group took advantage of the helper who was good at remembering hard items: They were not less likely to answer in the Hard-Item Helper condition.
- However, many of the 7-year-olds showed a pattern that was consistent with strategic use of the helper.

Easy-Item Helper vs. Easy-Item Baseline
- 7-year-olds avoided passing hard items to the helper who would be incorrect: They were more likely to answer in the Easy-Item Helper condition. The distribution of 5-year-old’s responses also showed some evidence of avoidance.

Conclusion
When deciding whether to seek help, children did consider the other person’s likelihood of remembering, but avoidance of someone with a bad memory was stronger than approach to someone with a good memory.

References

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