

How do children with autism make predictions?



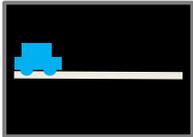
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Thank you to all the children, parents and schools who took part in 'Mr. Phantasm's Circus'!

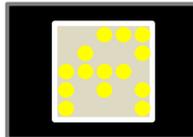
Background to the research

We make predictions everyday, for example to decide when to cross a road. To help us, we use things we've seen and heard before (like a car's speed or the colour of traffic lights). Some theories suggest that children on the autism spectrum have difficulties making predictions and perceiving the overall 'gist' of things. We were looking at this in our study.

What did my child do?



In the 'Magic Cars' game, children saw cars that became invisible and predicted when they would reach the end of the road. Children collected snacks for the circus for each level they passed!



In the 'Stage Lights' game, children were shown a set of stage lights that started to turn on, but then stopped. Children guessed when the lights would all be on, if they had been working properly.



In the memory game, children remembered lists of related words (e.g., bed, pillow, dream) and then did a memory test. In the memory test, we put in some 'trick' words that had not been heard before, but were closely related (e.g., sleep). People often report hearing these words because they remember the overall gist.

What did we find out?

The autistic children did very similarly to the children without autism in the Magic Cars and Stage Lights games, even when making difficult predictions. The children with and without autism also did similarly in the memory game. Our findings suggest that:

- ❖ Children with autism don't have difficulties making simple predictions using visual information.
- ❖ Both children with and without autism tend to remember the gist of things they have heard – and can be tricked into thinking they have heard something they haven't!

Our results are important as some theories say that all types of prediction are difficult for people with autism. We have shown that this is not the case. However, autistic children may have difficulties for more complex predictions, like those involved in social situations. This is a question for future research.

What next?

Furtuna has now finished her Masters degree and is applying to do a PhD in the States. We are in the process of getting our findings published in a scientific journal. Thanks for your help!



If you have any questions, please contact Dr Cathy Manning: 01865 271 442; catherine.manning@psy.ox.ac.uk.