

# Kids weigh payoff when choosing whether to deal with the good and the bad

May 9 2017

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Five- and 6-year-olds won't pay a cost to deal with a do-gooder but—after thinking about it for a bit—are willing to turn down a better deal from a wrongdoer, according to a new Yale-led study published May 4 in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.

The new study, led by Yale graduate student Arber Tasimi in collaboration with Marcia K. Johnson and Karen Wynn, shows [children](#) struggle with some of the same [moral dilemmas](#) as adults: such as when to jettison self-interest in transactions with others of dubious moral character.

Most studies have shown that, all things being equal, children and adults prefer dealing with good individuals over bad ones.

"We wanted to see what happens when you introduce profit into the mix," Tasimi said. "When you think of everyday life, people not only want to do good, but they also want to do well.

The study randomly assigned 160 Connecticut elementary schoolchildren to two different groups. Children in one group were introduced to a character who was described as nice, as well as a neutral character who was described as simply wearing shoes. A second group was introduced to the same neutral character and another character who was described as mean.

When the nice character offered one sticker and the neutral character offered two stickers, a large percentage of children took the larger offering. However, more than two-thirds of the children took a single sticker from a neutral character rather than two stickers from a mean one. The members of this group also took significantly longer time to make up their minds, suggesting they struggled with the decision, note the researchers.

Tasimi said this suggests children are torn between self-interest and the desire to avoid dealing with wrongdoers.

"These findings suggest that children's decisions aren't guided by simple rules like 'always choose more' or 'always approach good people and

avoid bad ones," he said. "Rather, there seems to be a cost-benefit analysis going on."

**More information:** Arber Tasimi et al. Children's decision making: When self-interest and moral considerations conflict, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jecp.2017.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2017.03.008)

Provided by Yale University

Citation: Kids weigh payoff when choosing whether to deal with the good and the bad (2017, May 9) retrieved 22 April 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-kids-payoff-good-bad.html>

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