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Children express emotions multimodally before expressing them in speech

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Abstract

Children express some concepts in their gestures before expressing them in speech (Goldin-Meadow, 2015). This phenomenon has been shown in several domains that are rich in visuospatial information. One other domain that can benefit from gestures is emotion expression (Kelly & Tran, 2023). In this study, we explored monolingual Turkish speaking children (N=23, Mage=8.6) and adults (N=19, Mage=35.6) in emotion recall after watching a silent video demonstrating a range of emotions. We coded participants' emotion expression either in speech-alone or multimodally (speech plus head/body/hand gestures and/or facial expressions). Overall, children (M=13.8, SD=6.4) recalled significantly more emotions than adults (M=9.5, SD=3.8) (p=.014). They also recalled emotions significantly more multimodally (M=8, SD=7) compared to adults (M=4.9, SD=4) (p=.03). These results corroborate previous research on children's reliance on gestures, now also extending it to the domain of emotions and by incorporating facial expressions as an alternative expression channel.

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