Cognitive flexibility in young children: the impact of arousal and temperament.

by

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of arousal on cognitive flexibility of young children. Participants were 119 6-year old children. A within-subjects repeated measures experimental design was used to evaluate differences in the effect of exposure to threat and neutral stimuli under low- and high-conflict conditions. On average, children responded more accurately to threat versus neutral stimuli. Moreover, children responded slower to threat stimuli relative to neutral stimuli under low-conflict conditions; however, in high-conflict conditions, differences in reaction time response to stimuli were not statistically detectible. Children’s self-reported fearfulness towards snakes and parent-report of children’s general propensity to fearfulness did not moderate response to threat on the cognitive flexibility task. Findings are discussed within the framework of the bidirectional model of EFs and the Yerkes-Dodson law.

Keywords: executive functions; arousal; young children; fearfulness; temperament