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Dealing with distractions: The development of inhibitory control

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Lucy Cragg is an Assistant Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Nottingham where she has been since 2007, holding first an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship followed by an RCUK Academic Fellowship before taking up her current role. Lucy's research focuses on the development of executive functions, the set of processes that underlie the ability to control thoughts and actions. She has studied developmental changes in manipulating and selecting relevant information in working memory, ignoring distractions, suppressing inappropriate response tendencies, and flexibly shifting between different tasks. Lucy explores how these processes develop in typical school-age children, how they contribute to academic achievement, and why they go awry in neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and preterm birth. Lucy is also passionate about engaging the public with research, most notably running Summer Scientist Week, a research and public engagement event at the University of Nottingham attended by hundreds of 4-11-year-olds and their families each year.

Abstract

Improvements in inhibitory control, the suppression of impulsive or distracting thoughts and behaviours, play an important part in successful cognitive development. Inhibitory control has also been linked to development in a number of other domains including language, social processing and mathematical cognition. Some theoretical models propose a single inhibitory mechanism whereas others suggest that there may be multiple domain-specific inhibitory mechanisms that operate in parallel. In this talk I will present a number of studies that speak to this debate and discuss the implications for studying the role of inhibitory control in the development of other cognitive domains.