

Delay of gratification

The delay of gratification paradigm tests a child's ability to refrain from touching a gift that is placed in front of them, while the experimenter leaves the room.

This task aims to measure inhibitory control in the context of having to delay a dominant response.

During the delay of gratification task, children are seated at a table and a giftbag containing a gift is placed on the table in front of the child. They are told that the gift is for them, but that they cannot get the gift yet because the researcher supposedly forgot to put a sticker on the bag. The child is instructed to refrain from looking in the bag while the researcher leaves the room to collect the sticker. The researcher then leaves the room for three minutes, while the child is being videotaped. Upon return, the researcher praises the child and hands the gift to the child, irrespective of whether or not the child had touched the giftbag.

Factors complicating the delay of gratification procedure are whether or not the parent remains in the same room as the child. For younger children (<3 years), having the parent leave the room can be rather stressful. Alternatively, the parent can act as an external factor imposing delay of gratification when staying in the room. In our setup, the parent is placed behind the child so that there is no direct eye-contact. Furthermore, the parent is instructed to read a magazine and not interfere with the proceedings.