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Personality Set for Life By 1st Grade, Study Suggests

By LiveScience Staff

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Our personalities stay pretty much the same throughout our lives, from our early childhood years to after we're over the hill, according to a new study.

The results show personality traits observed in children as young as first graders are a strong predictor of adult behavior.

"We remain recognizably the same person," said study author Christopher Nave, a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Riverside. "This speaks to the importance of understanding personality because it does follow us wherever we go across time and contexts."

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The study will be published in an upcoming issue of the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science.

Tracking personalities

Using data from a 1960s study of approximately 2,400 ethnically diverse schoolchildren (grades 1 – 6) in Hawaii, researchers compared teacher personality ratings of the students with videotaped interviews of 144 of those individuals 40 years later.

They examined four personality attributes — talkativeness (called verbal fluency), adaptability (cope well with new situations), impulsiveness and self-minimizing behavior (essentially being humble to the

point of minimizing one's importance).

Among the findings:

Talkative youngsters tended to show interest in intellectual matters, speak fluently, try to control situations, and exhibit a high degree of intelligence as adults. Children who rated low in verbal fluency were observed as adults to seek advice, give up when faced with obstacles, and exhibit an awkward interpersonal style.

Children rated as highly adaptable tended, as middle-age adults, to behave cheerfully, speak fluently and show interest in intellectual matters. Those who rated low in adaptability as children were observed as adults to say negative things about themselves, seek advice and exhibit an awkward interpersonal style.

Students rated as impulsive were inclined to speak loudly, display a wide range of interests and be talkative as adults. Less impulsive kids tended to be fearful or timid, kept others at a distance and expressed insecurity as adults.

Children characterized as self-minimizing were likely to express guilt, seek reassurance, say negative things about themselves and express insecurity as adults. Those who were ranked low on a self-minimizing scale tended to speak loudly, show interest in intellectual matters and exhibit condescending behavior as adults.

Changing personality

Previous research has suggested that while our personalities can change, it's not an easy undertaking.

Personality is "a part of us, a part of our biology," Nave said. "Life events still influence our behaviors, yet we must acknowledge the power of personality in understanding future behavior as well."

Future research will "help us understand how personality is related to behavior as well as examine the extent to which we may be able to change our personality," Nave said.

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