

## Cause and burn in development

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Many philosophers maintain that causation is to be explicated in terms of a kind of dependence between cause and effect. These “dependence” theories are opposed by “production” accounts which hold that there is a more fundamental connection between cause and effect, e.g., the transfer of energy. A wide range of experimental research on everyday judgments of causation seems to indicate that ordinary people operate primarily with a dependence-based notion of causation. For example, people tend to say that absences are causes, but absences don’t seem to have the requisite kind of production. We argue that the impression that commonsense causal discourse is largely dependence-based is the result of focusing on a very narrow class of causal verbs. Almost all of the vignette-based experimental work on causal judgment has been prosecuted using the word “cause”. But much ordinary causal discourse involves special causal verbs, such as “burn” and “crack”. In experiments with adults, we found that these verbs display a quite different pattern from the verb “cause” in scenarios involving absences. Recently, we have been investigating children’s judgments about these sorts of cases, and we find that they show a similar pattern. When considering absences, such as Suzy forgetting to put on sunscreen and getting a sunburn at the beach, we find that both children and adults are inclined to think the absence of sunscreen caused Suzy’s skin to burn but didn’t burn it. On top of all of this, we find that children and adults also distinguish making something happen and causing it to happen. That is, they make very different causal judgments when considering e.g., what “made” a fence break and what “caused” it to break.