

What could they be doing? Studying children's 'failures' in counterfactual reasoning tasks

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The literature on cognitive development has, over the last 20ish years, provided evidence that children are unable to reliably engage in adult-like counterfactual reasoning until age 12, or age 8, or age 6, or age 4, depending on how counterfactual reasoning was tested. Compounding the issue, the individual findings have thus far proven to be reliable: If you use a counterfactual reasoning task that past evidence says kids will fail at until age 12, they generally will. I will discuss recent projects that provide some insight not into the question of *whether* children can engage in counterfactual reasoning by a given age, by *why* and *how* they fail (or in some cases appear to fail) at counterfactual reasoning in different tasks. Children's failures in these tasks are informative in and of themselves, and when examined carefully, give insights into subtleties of the development of counterfactual reasoning, as well as other (sometimes similarly complex) forms of reasoning that they might use instead when asked a counterfactual question.