

Knowledge of Other People and Oneself

- “**naïve psychology**”: Children’s common-sense level of understanding of people.
- Three **psychological constructs** are at the center of naïve psychology, the ideas that people commonly use to understand human behavior:
 - Desires
 - Beliefs
 - Actions.

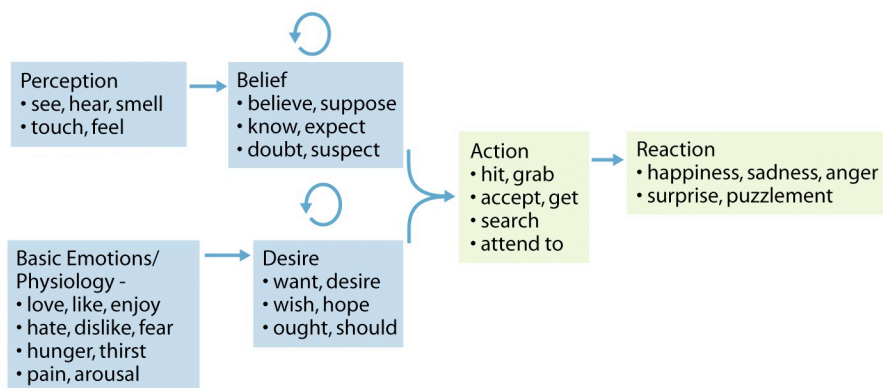
What do infants know about people?

- **Intentions**: the goal or desire to act in a certain way.
- **Self**: recognizing themselves.
(self video)

... beyond infancy?

- **Theory of mind** (2-5 years): the basic understanding of how the mind works and influences behavior.
- A theory of mind includes knowledge of:
 - Perceptions (see, hear, smell, touch, feel)
 - psychological states (emotions, desires, beliefs)
 - actions.

Wellman's model of preschoolers Theory of Mind



understanding the connections between **others'** desires and their actions.

Theory of Mind: False Belief Problems

False-belief problems test children's understanding that other people will act in accord with **their own** beliefs even if the child knows that those beliefs are incorrect.

(Smarties video)

Some findings in false-belief problems:

- 3-year-olds fail, cross-culturally.
- 3-year-olds more likely to succeed if they collaborate with experimenter to deceive another child
- 4-year-olds succeed

Information Processing on Theory of Mind

- What processes and representations are necessary to solve the task?
- Theory of mind improves due to the growth of general information-processing skills essential to understanding other people's minds, such as keeping track of conflicting information.

Socio-cultural Theories on Theory of Mind

- Theory of mind comes from interactions with people.
- Children with older siblings do better in false-belief task.

Core Knowledge Theories

- Child as product of evolution.
 - Focus on **innate knowledge** in areas that have been important to people through human history.
 - Specialized learning mechanisms - For example, language acquisition device.
 - **Children's informal theories**: Children *actively* organize their understanding into informal theories related to important domains like psychology, biology, and physics.
- Change occurs through:
 - ❖ *Specialized learning mechanisms*
 - ❖ *Actively organizing experiences into theories*

Core Knowledge on Theory of Mind

- There is a **Theory of Mind Module** (TOMM), a brain mechanism devoted to understanding others which matures over the first five years of life.

Children with Autism

- **Autism**: a syndrome that involves a variety of intellectual and emotional difficulties.
 - Rarely form close relationships.
 - Show greater interest in objects than people.
 - Engage in solitary repetitive behavior.
 - Lack normal language skills, specifically using verbs such as “know” or “think”
 - Most do not engage in pretend play
- Children with autism find tasks that test understanding of the knowledge of other people's minds particularly hard.
- Theories on the nature of autism?