

## THE PROSOCIALITY OF INFANTS – THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS HELPING

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Prosocial behaviours encompass a range of helpful, affiliative, supporting behaviours that are aimed at benefiting others (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) playing a crucial role in human social interactions. They can foster reciprocity and cooperation, serving as a basis of later helping tendencies which can largely contribute to psychological well-being. These tendencies begin to emerge during infancy and increase in number and sophistication through toddlerhood. The aim of this research was to review the articles related to this issue from the last 20 years with special regard to its psychological correlates based on the available scientific databases (SAGE, EBSCO, Discovery Science, Science Direct, etc.) We carried out a systematic review of the literature on the prosocial tendencies of infants with special regard to its occurrence, basic psychological processes behind helping intentions, the contribution of family background and dynamics, etc. Based on the relevant research, we can state that even toddlers can imitate and emulate prosocial behaviours (helping, caring, comforting and sharing) if they perceive someone in need (evolving through empathic concern and perspective taking abilities) and they can use their capacity in social interactions fairly well. The propensity to act prosocially and to show empathic concern develop over the course of the second year of life. After self and other had been differentiated, the earlier forms of self-distress can be transformed into more constructive and other-oriented patterns such as comforting others (Hoffman, 2000). The decisive role of parents in facilitating these tendencies is evident (e.g. demonstrating caretaking behaviours, explaining or addressing others' distress, offering prosocial television contents to their children, etc.). Though children can learn new prosocial strategies from imitating a model's example to alleviate others' distress (Williamson et al, 2012), spontaneous prosocial responses become more important as children grow older. Based on the review we make recommendations to early childhood educators in order to offer them methods to foster infants' and toddlers' prosocial actions.