

The consistency of false suggestions moderates children's reports

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Participants (6- and 7-year-olds, N=130) participated in classroom activities four times. Children were interviewed about the final occurrence (target event) either 1 week or 4 weeks later, during which half of the event items were described inaccurately. Half of these suggestions were consistent with the theme of the detail across the occurrences (e.g., always sat on a kind of floor mat) or were inconsistent (e.g., sat on a chair). When memory for the target event was tested 1 day later, children falsely recognized fewer inconsistent suggestions than consistent suggestions, especially compared with a control group of children who experienced the event just one time. Furthermore, the longer delay reduced accuracy only for consistent suggestions. Source-monitoring ability was strongly and positively related to resistance to suggestions, and encouraging children to identify the source of false suggestions allowed them to retract a significant proportion of their reports of inconsistent suggestions but not of consistent suggestions. The results suggest that the gist consistency of suggestions determines whether event repetition increases or decreases suggestibility.

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