INTRODUCTION

- Self-regulation is related to later life outcomes (Moffitt et al., 2011) and academic achievement (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013).
- Self-distancing (taking a distanced point of view) improves emotion regulation in adults (Kross & Ayduk, 2011) and improves executive function (EF) (White & Carlson, 2015) and persistence (White et al., 2017) in 5- to 6-year-old children.
- Previous research has found the effectiveness of self-distancing in children is related to age (White & Carlson, 2015; White et al., 2017) and theory of mind (White & Carlson, 2015).
- However, unknown how individual differences in EF, personality, temperament, and grit relate to the effectiveness of self-distancing.

Research Question

Do individual differences in EF, temperament, grit, and personality relate to the effectiveness of the self-distancing manipulation for preschoolers and early school-aged children during a frustrating task?

Hypotheses

H1: Children with low EF will benefit more from the self-distancing strategy.
H2: Children with low effortful control will benefit more from the self-distancing strategy.
H3: Children with less grit will benefit more from the self-distancing strategy.
H4: We had different hypotheses about the benefits of self-distancing based on the different Big 5 personality traits.

METHODS

Participants: 105 typically developing 4- and 6-year-olds: 55 4-year-olds (25 girls, M_age=47.84 months, SD=.57) and 50 6-year-olds (25 girls, M_age=71.66 months, SD=.52)
- Mostly Caucasian and upper middle-class
- Randomly assigned to 1 of 3 groups: self-immersed, third person, or exemplar

Procedure: Children visited the lab for a 60-min session
- Children completed frustrating task and control measures to assess theory of mind, baseline EF (NIH Toolbox DCCS and Flanker), and verbal ability
- Parents completed questionnaires about children’s personality, temperament, and grit

RESULTS

Effectiveness of Self-Distancing and Executive Function

- Significant self-distancing condition x initial EF level interaction
- Significant differences between high and low EF kids in the self-immersed and exemplar condition, t = 2.64, p = .01

Frustration Task Coding: All videos coded for total time on task and global frustration rating (1-3 score based on frequency of signs of frustration).

Effectiveness of Self-Distancing and Effortful Control

- Significant self-distancing condition x effortful control interaction, F (2,98) = 4.75, p = .01, controlling for task time.
- Children with low effortful control were significantly more frustrated in the self-immersed condition (M = 1.94, SD = .64) than in the third person (M = 1.33, SD = .59) and exemplar condition (M = 1.42, SD = .60).
- No significant condition differences for high effortful control children.

DISCUSSION

- Effectiveness of self-distancing depends on individual differences in EF, temperament and grit.
- Children with low EF, low effortful control and high grit benefited most from the self-distancing strategy such that they got less frustrated as the distance increased.
- Future research should focus on other individual differences in the efficacy of self-distancing to inform the creation of more effective and personalized interventions.

REFERENCES