

Dr Sarah Beck

Dr Sarah Beck, of the School of Psychology at the University of Birmingham, describes, in 60 seconds, her research into how people use their imaginations to think about possibilities and solve problems.

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I'm Sarah Beck and I work in the School of Psychology. In my research I explore how people use their imaginations to think about possibilities and solve problems. One special way that adults use their imaginations is to speculate about the past. If you miss a train you might find yourself thinking "If only I'd left the house earlier."

These counterfactual thoughts are important because they help us to learn from our mistakes. The aim of my research is to understand how we manage this impressive imaginative feat and I do this by looking at children's development.

We visit schools and nurseries and run experiments with the children there. From the child's point of view the experiment is a fun game – they might hear a story and be asked questions about it or they might play a guessing game and win stickers.

My research has shown that despite being prolific imaginers from before their second birthday, children don't start thinking counterfactually until they are at least 5 years old and they don't experience counterfactual emotions, like regret and relief, in the same way as adults.

As well as investigating these abilities in healthy children and adults, I collaborate to explore problems with imaginative abilities in brain-damaged patients.

[Dr Sarah Beck's profile \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/psychology/people/profile.aspx?Referenceld=15092\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/psychology/people/profile.aspx?Referenceld=15092)

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