

Theory of Mind

Psychology

Understanding that others have beliefs different from your own.

The ability to attribute mental states — beliefs, desires, intentions — to oneself and others, and to understand that others' beliefs may differ from reality and from one's own.

PASSED AT
~4 years

TEST
false belief

PRECURSOR
joint attention

- Sally-Anne task: where will Sally look for her marble?
- Typically passed at around four years old.
- Younger children answer where the marble actually is.
- Precursors appear earlier: joint attention, pretend play.
- Delayed in autism, though the picture is more complex than early accounts suggested.
- Related to language development.

LOOK FOR IT

A three-year-old says Sally will look in the new location, because they cannot separate their own knowledge from hers.

Non-verbal looking-time measures suggest some false-belief understanding much earlier, which is an active debate.