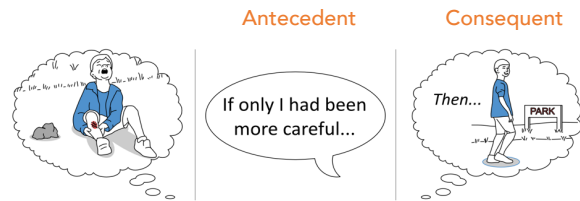


The Co-Construction of Counterfactual Worlds in Parent-Child Reminiscing

Counterfactual Thinking



- Counterfactual thinking involves pondering how past events could have happened differently.
- This skill shows protracted development between ages 4-10⁺.
- Adults spontaneously consider counterfactuals, particularly for **negative/unexpected** events².
- Little is known about *whether* and *when* children engage in **spontaneous counterfactual thinking**.
- Early spontaneous counterfactual thinking may appear in **parent-child conversations** about the past³.
- Co-constructing** alternatives could scaffold this skill.

Current Study

We aimed to answer:

- Do children engage in spontaneous counterfactual thinking during conversations? In which contexts?
- Do parent-child dyads co-construct counterfactuals?

- We predicted counterfactuals would present for **negative, unexpected events** over positive and routine ones.



Methods

Participants:

- N = 62 parent-child dyads
- Age = 4.7 years, range = 3.10 - 5.92



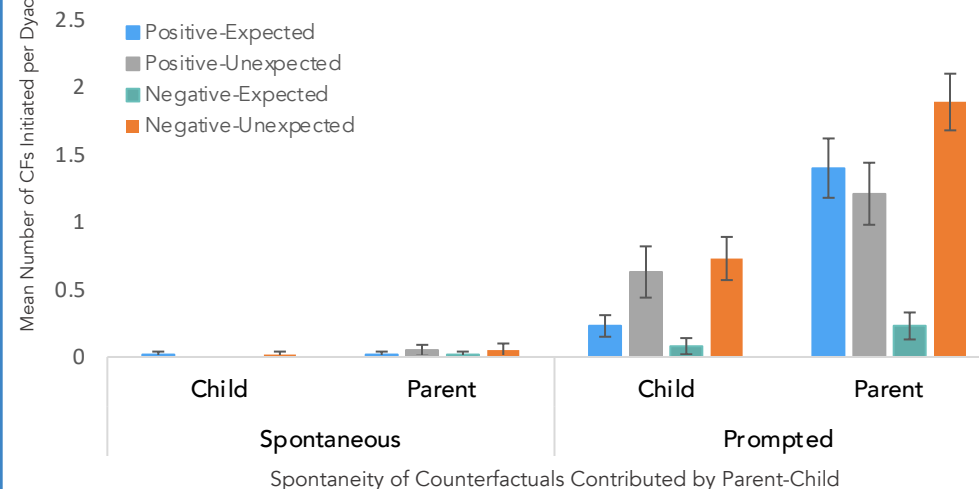
Phase 1: Spontaneous	Phase 2: Prompted
Dyads reminisced on one positive and one negative past event.	For each event, dyads were asked to discuss: <i>What could have happened differently?</i>

Transcripts were coded for:

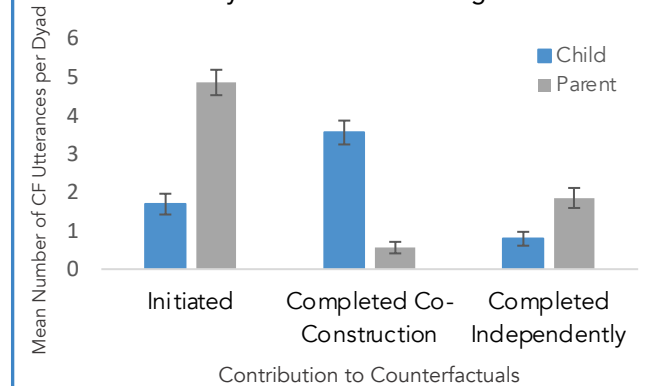
- Spontaneity:** Whether counterfactuals arose in the **Spontaneous** or **Prompted** phase.
- Contexts:** Types of events that evoked these - Positive/Negative; Expected/Unexpected.
- Dynamics:** Who initiated & completed each counterfactual (Child or Parent).

Results

Contexts of Spontaneous vs. Prompted Counterfactuals in Parent-Child Conversations



Parent-Child Dynamics in Constructing Counterfactuals



Conclusions

- Children generated few spontaneous counterfactuals.
- Dyads mainly expressed these **when prompted**.
- Negative, unexpected contexts evoked counterfactuals.**
- Positive events** were more influential than expected.
- Parent-child dyads co-constructed counterfactuals.**
- Parents initiated and children built on these.
- Children demonstrated an ability to independently construct counterfactuals.
- Future studies could assess the relation between parent-child counterfactual exchanges and early reasoning skills.

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