

# Children use incurred costs to predict emotion but not actions

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## Introduction



Can children see incurred costs as causes of other outcomes (like emotions)?

**Account 1:** Children do not see incurred costs as causal.

→ Do they 'tag' objects with incurred costs?

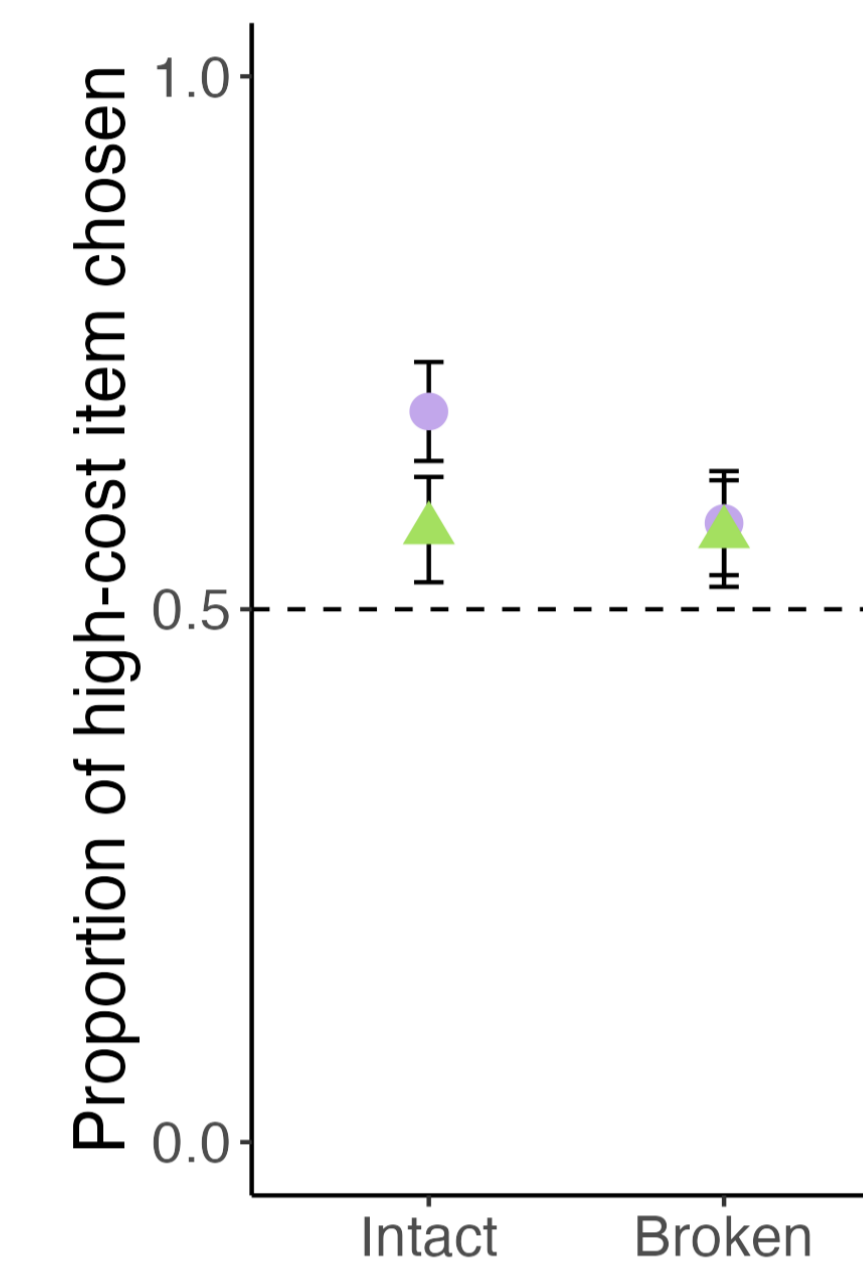
**Account 2:** Children do not see actions as recouping costs.

## Experiment 1b: Keep vs play with

**Sample:** 388 adults

**Keep:** The boy can keep the [broken] cars, but he will only keep one of them. **Which one is will he keep?**

**Play with:** The boy can play with the [broken cars], but he'll only play with one of them. **Which one will he play with?**



## Discussion



Children see incurred costs as causing emotion, but only later can people see incurred costs as causing actions.

**Account 1:** Children saw incurred costs as influencing emotion

→ Do they 'tag' objects with incurred costs? **Yes**

**Account 2:** Children do not see actions as recouping costs.

### Why?

Developmental differences in...

#### 1) Mental accounting:

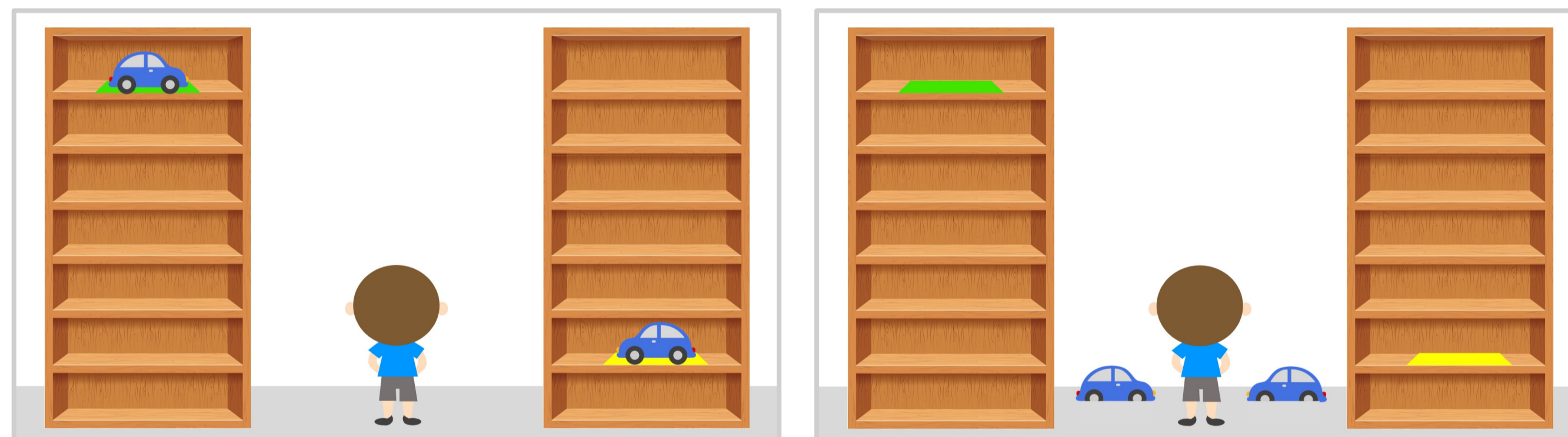
- Adults have separate internal balance sheets, with high-cost objects as having a greater loss. Actions serve as an opportunity to recoup the greater loss.
- Children track the costs associated with objects, but do not see actions as recouping losses.

#### 2) Reasoning about emotion:

- Adults see actions as a way to avoid negative emotion
- Children might not spontaneously consider emotion.

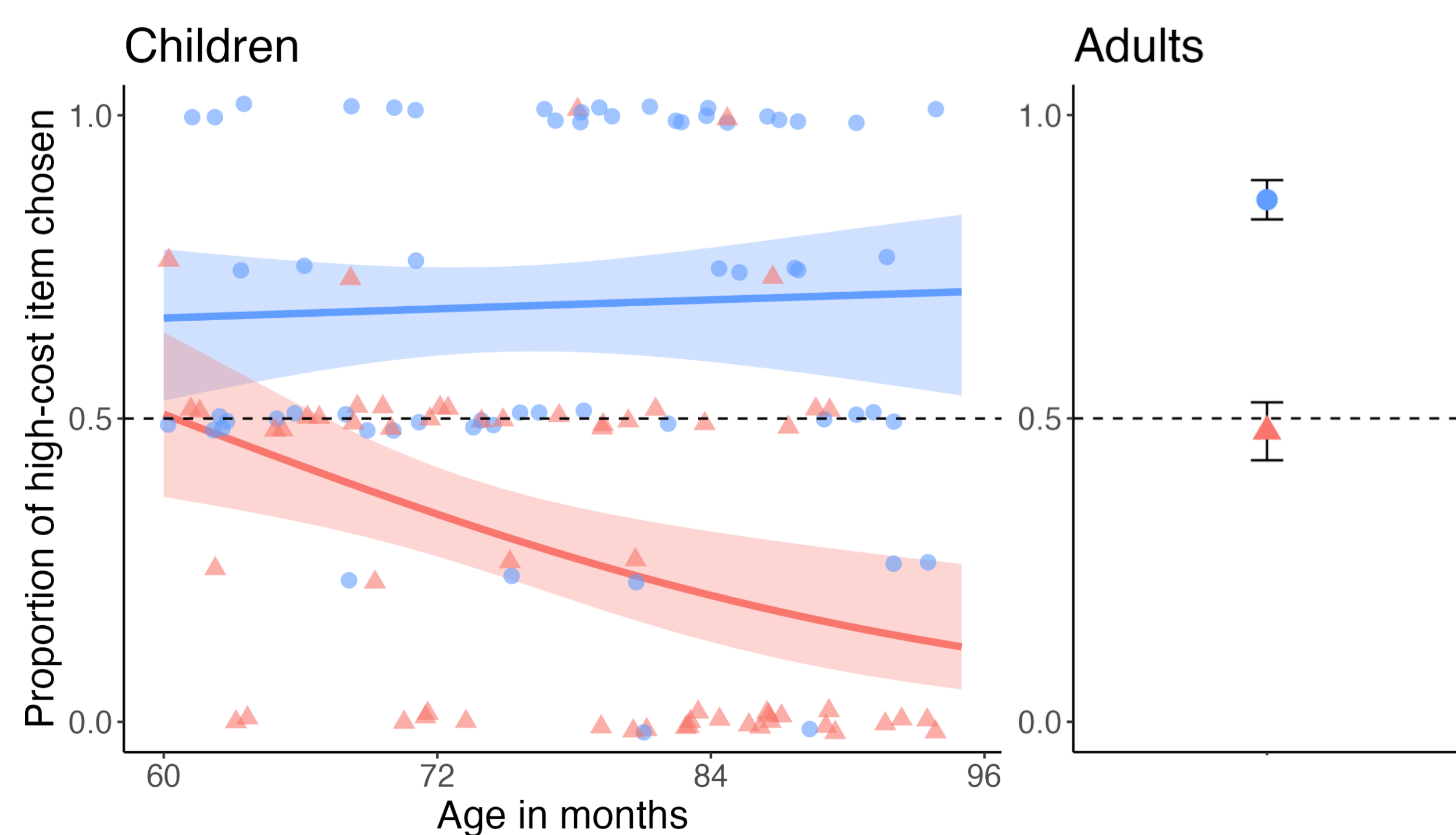
## Experiment 1: Sad vs Fix

**Sample:** 120 5-7-year-olds, 217 adults



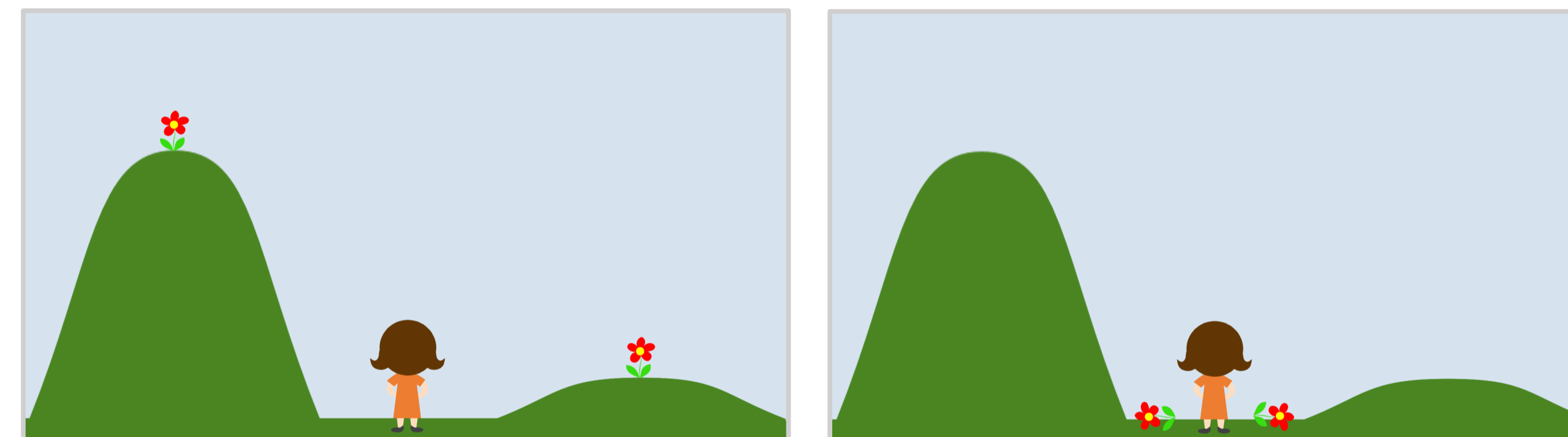
**Sad:** The boy is sad that the cars are broken, but he's more sad about one of them. **Which one is he more sad about?**

**Fix:** The boy can fix the broken cars, but he'll only fix one of them. **Which one will he fix?**



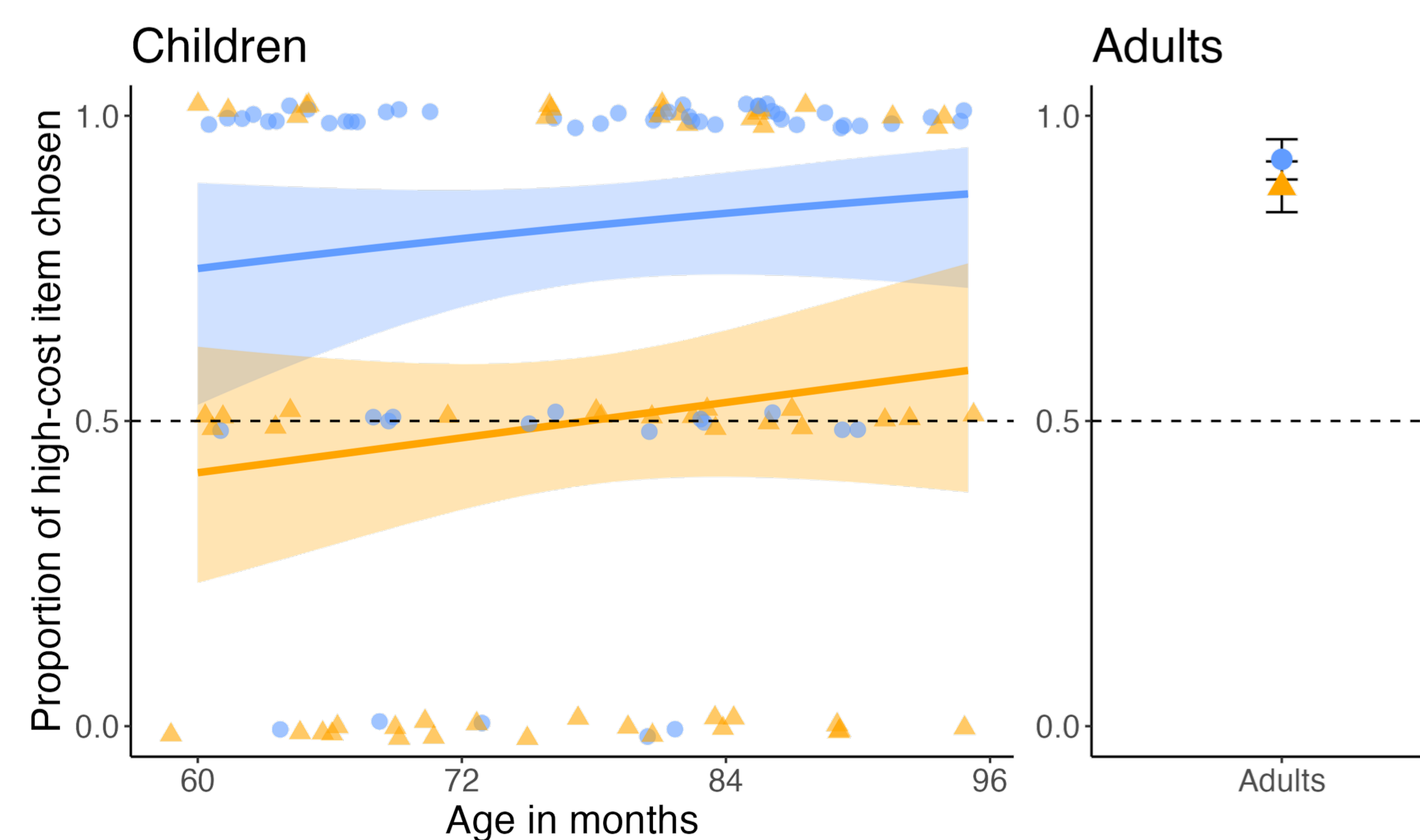
## Experiment 2: Sad vs Keep

**Sample:** 120 5-7-year-olds, 212 adults



**Sad:** The girl is sad she can't keep both of the flowers, but she's more sad about one of them. **Which one is she more sad about?**

**Keep:** The girl can't keep both of the flowers, but she can keep one of them. **Which one will she keep?**



## References & Acknowledgements

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- [4] Arkes, H. R., & Blumer, C. (1985). The psychology of sunk cost. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*



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