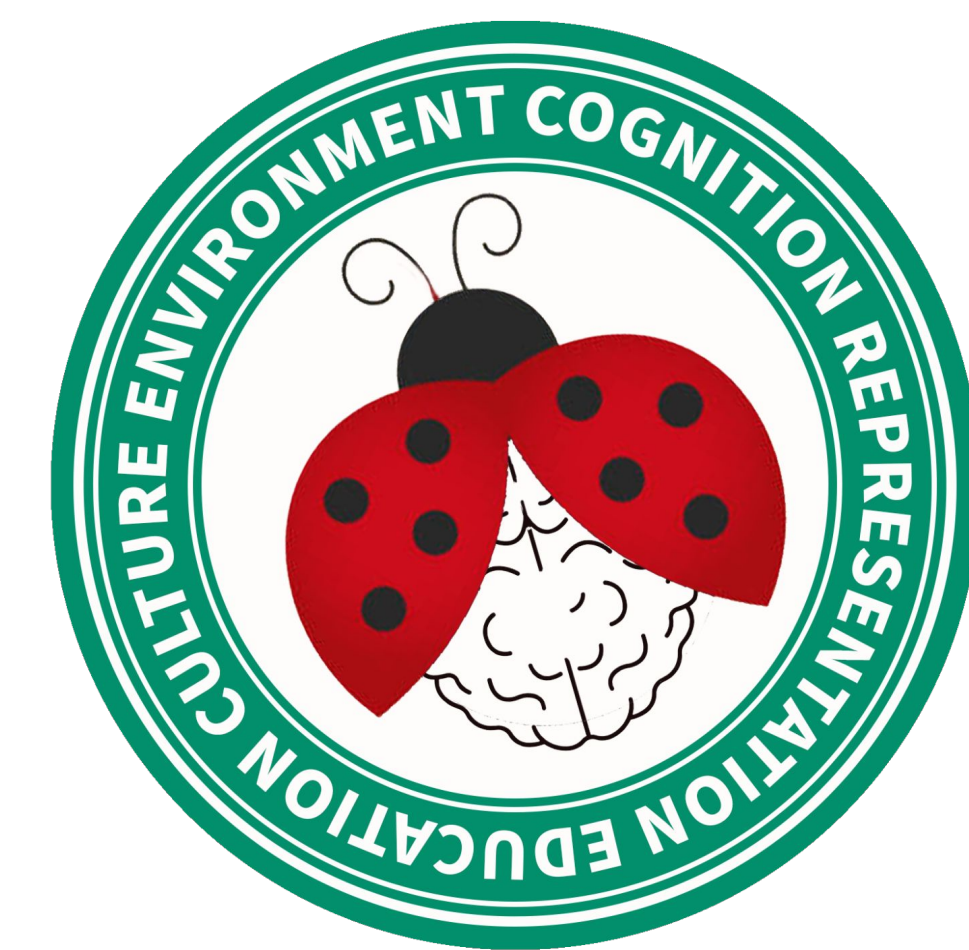




Children's Multiple Conceptions of Death: Biological, Spiritual, and Affective Understandings

Henrique Santos - hepereir@ucsc.edu
Henrique Santos & David Menendez

Department of Psychology | University of California - Santa Cruz



Background

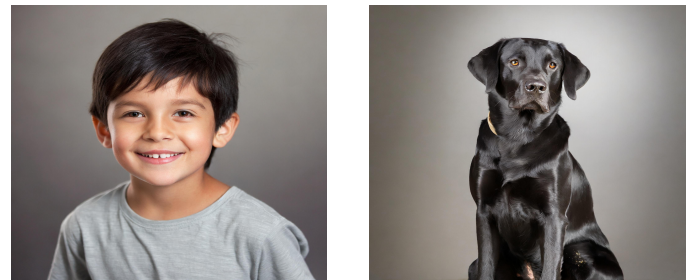
- Death is a common experience in childhood (Glass, 1991).
- Children understand Biological, Spiritual and Affective aspects of death (Menendez et al., 2020).
- Children start asking about death between the ages of 2 and 2.5 years old (Renaud et al., 2015).
- Several studies show considerable development in children's understanding of death after age 4 (Rosengren et al., 2014).

Research Questions

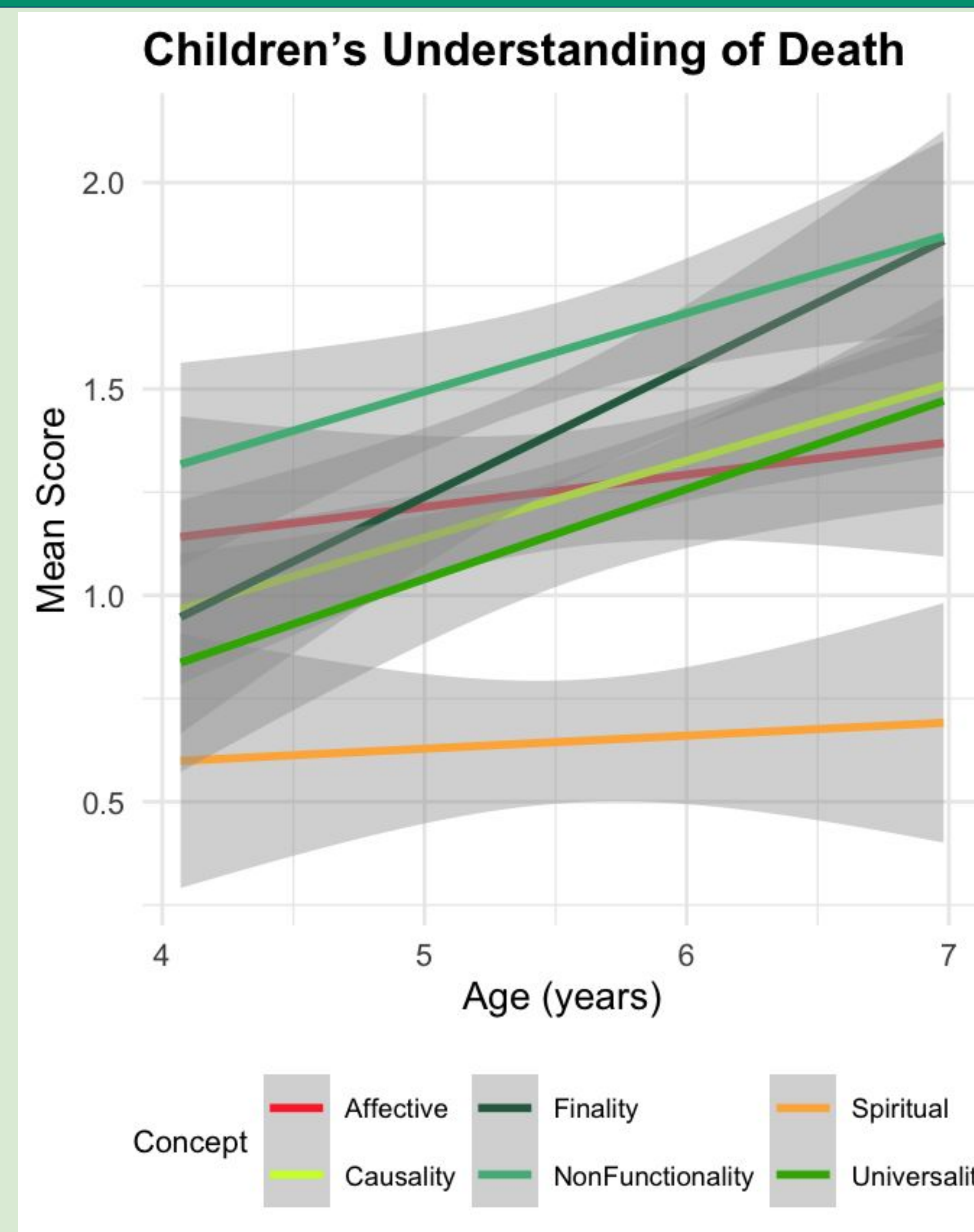
- How does children's different understanding of death develop?
- Do parents use an animated film as a tool to initiate conversations about death with their children? If so, what topics they discuss in these conversations?

Methods

- 68 children (36F, 31M, 1NB) ages 4-6.
- Each child was asked about subconcepts of death.
- Parents and children watched short animated films and talked about them.

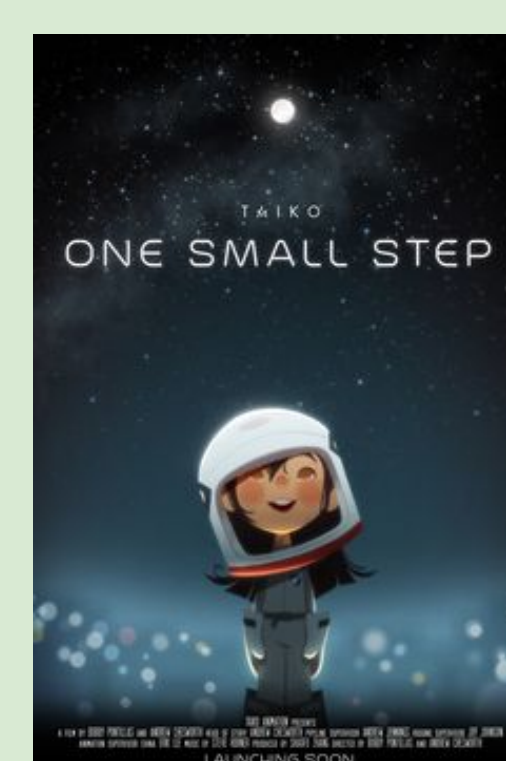
Subconcept	Example
	"Sam has a dog, but the dog died. I am going to ask you some questions about the dead dog." 
Universality	Do all dogs have to die?
Non Functionality	Now that the dog is dead, can it still eat?
Spiritual	Do you think a special part of this dog stayed after it died?
Affective	How do you think Sam feels about his dog's death?

How do children think about death?



- Six-year-olds demonstrated greater understanding of all four subconcepts compared to 4-year-olds. Finality $p = .001$; Universality $p = .01$; Non-Functionality $p = .02$; Causality $p < .001$
- Five-years-old demonstrated greater understanding of Causality compared to 4-years-old ($p = .005$)
- No significant age differences were found for Spiritual and Affective understanding (all $ps > .05$)

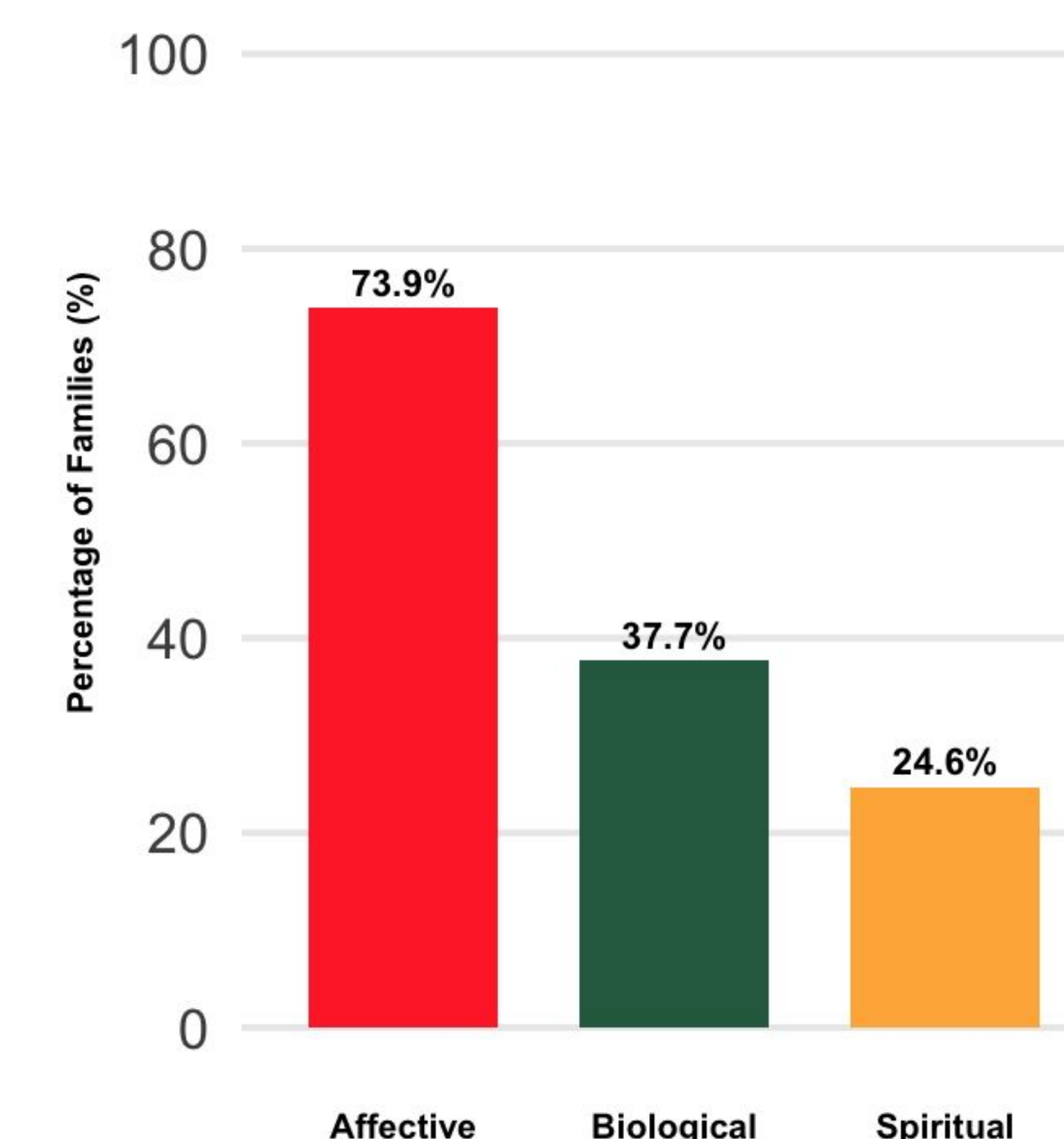
Parent-child interaction task



- What was the video about?
- What did Luna want?
- What happened to Luna's dad?
- How do you think Luna feels?

What do families talk about death?

Parent-Child Conversation Topics



- **88.2%** of families ($n = 60$) mentioned death.
- Only **20.3%** of utterances were coded as Death-Related conversation.
- Parents religion, education, and shielding behaviors did not significantly relate to the conversation volume (all $ps > .05$).

Discussion

- Older children have more accurate understandings of Biological aspects of death.
- Spiritual and Affective understandings are fairly stable.
- After watching a short animated film containing the death of a character, many of the conversations discussed Affective topics.

Implications: Animated films can be a tool for parent-child conversations about different aspects of death. These conversations tended to focus on Affective aspects, preparing children with socioemotional skills related to death.

Acknowledgements

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