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Seven may be considered the age of reason, but kids don't reconcile what they believe with their actual behavior until they're 8, according to a study by the University of Michigan. For instance, until they're 8, children might believe they are good at math, even though they do poorly on tests. Researchers looked at 1,600 children ages 6 to 18. In one analysis, they asked children in southeast Michigan how well they did in math, and then looked at their actual math scores.

Until the children turned 8, there was no link between what they thought and how they actually performed. The findings can help parents, according to Pamela Kean-Davis, a psychologist at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

"Just saying to a child, 'You know this is wrong. Why do you keep doing it?' may not be an effective strategy before the age of 8," Kean-Davis said. "Younger children may know it's wrong, but they haven't associated that knowledge with their own behavior."

For younger children, timeouts for negative behavior and rewarding positive behavior might be a better approach. Encouraging children over 8 to think differently about their behavior might have more impact.