Prosocial Behaviour
Pro-Social Behaviour

Any behaviour that benefits others or has positive social consequences

To be considered truly prosocial, it must be:
• voluntary (not forced)
• intentional (not accidental)
• helpful to another person or group in our society (the primary aim is helping)
First, a true/false quiz
Quick Quiz

1. The probability of people helping others increases as the number of people available to help increases. True or false?

2. People are more likely to help others if those others are similar to them. True or false?

3. People are more likely to help others if they can sense or experience the emotional plight of others. True or false?
Quick Quiz

4. One’s competence to give help is not a factor in people’s deciding to help or not. True or false?

5. Studies of prosocial behaviour, since they involve positive behaviour, pose no or few ethical issues. True or false?

6. Feeling embarrassed may be one factor that influences people not to help. True or false?
Quick Quiz

7. If you stepped into a lift and dropped several coins, the other people in the lift would be more likely to help as the number of others decreased. True or false?

8. Humans are the only animals that are actually capable of acting from motives of empathy. True or false?
1. The probability of people helping others increases as the number of people available to help increases.  

True or false?

• Weird and counter-intuitive though it may seem, people help less the more other people are around.

• This is known as the “bystander effect” and is an insidiously dangerous aspect of social behaviour.
One or two people have been found to be more helpful, on average,... than individuals in larger groups.
Bystander Effect

In the presence of others, an individual may feel inhibited about taking action...
Bystander Effect

...whereas one person on his/her own may feel compelled to act.

I feel better now.
Bystander Effect

According to over 50 studies, 75% of people offer assistance when alone, but fewer than 53% do so when in a group.

Source: Plotnik and Kouyoumdjian (2008)
Bystander Effect

One explanation is that old problem, diffusion of responsibility. According to this theory, in the presence of others, individuals feel less personal responsibility and are less likely to take action in a situation where help is required.
Quick Quiz

2. People are more likely to help others if those others are similar to them. True or false?

True

Example: At an Australian Rules football game, more people from the side of the person collecting money were prepared to donate to a charity.
True Quiz

3. People are more likely to help others if they can sense or experience the emotional plight of others. True or false?

True

This is known as the **empathy-altruism hypothesis**. The more concern for another that one feels, the more likely one is to help for selfless reasons.
empathy, n. - the ability to imagine oneself in another’s place and understand the other’s feelings, desires, ideas and actions.
altruism, n. - disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others, as shown by selfless acts of kindness, charity, etc.
• By the way, “disinterested” doesn’t mean “uninterested”.

• It means that you act without any desire for gain. In fact, some altruistic acts might lead to loss on your part or even place you in danger.
Quick Quiz

4. One’s competence to give help is not a factor in people’s deciding to help or not. True or false?

False. Competence is a factor. For instance, a doctor or nurse is more likely to give aid in a medical emergency on the street than an ordinary person.
As with other experimental studies in the social psychology field, studies to see whether people will help in certain situations may involve a level of deception and leave people feeling used or tricked.

False

Quick Quiz

5. Studies of prosocial behaviour, since they involve positive behaviour, pose no or few ethical issues. True or false?

False
Quick Quiz

6. Feeling **embarrassed** may be one factor that influences people not to help. True or false?

The term for this is “audience inhibition”.

True
7. If you stepped into a lift and dropped several coins, the other people in the lift would be more likely to help as the number of others decreased. True or false?

True
Quick Quiz

8. Humans are the only animals that are actually capable of acting from motives of empathy. True or false?

False

Even the humble rat has shown signs of empathetic behaviour.
In a study at the University of Chicago in 2011, a rat was imprisoned in a tiny cage, while his free friend was able to learn how to open the cage.
The free rat was not interested in opening an empty cage, only the cage containing his fellow rat.

I sometimes think I have too much empathy...
Even when the free rat was given the potential distractor of a cage with chocolate in it as well...
...he typically opened both cages and shared the chocolate with the other rat.
Hmm, nothing like some chocolate to nibble after a long hard experiment...
Biological roots of empathically motivated helping behaviour
(study done at the University of Chicago by Bartal, Decety and Mason, 2011)

Watch this video on Youtube at this link:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jk0wYKBJEI&feature=watch_response
The Smoke-Filled Room
Latane and Darley - 1968
A silent, but strangely fascinating film...

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KE5YwN4NW5o
Factors influencing helping and reluctance to help

Factors influencing willingness to help
- Situational factors
  - Noticing the situation
  - Interpreting the situation
- Personal factors
  - Competence
  - Empathy
  - Mood
  - Altruism

Factors influencing reluctance to help
- Diffusion of responsibility
- Audience inhibition
- Cost-benefit analysis