own child began to cry (personal distress), expressed sorrow or concern for the other child (sympathy), or took aims to help (e.g., rushed over to see if the other child was alright). Figure 12.4 shows the developmental changes that occurred with regard to these reactions. Notice that feelings of personal distress declined in frequency during the second year of life but that feelings of sympathy and prosocial behaviors increased in frequency during this period. It is particularly noteworthy that the youngest children displayed prosocial behaviors less than 10 percent of the time, while the oldest children did so almost half of the time.

2. The Empathy–Altruism Hypothesis

As they age, people continue to experience feelings of personal distress and sympathy when they encounter another person in need of help. Moreover, both emotions are capable of motivating helping behavior. The motives for helping may differ, however. According to Batson (1987), when feelings of personal distress dominate, helping is egoistically motivated, driven by a desire to relieve one’s own discomfort rather than a desire to alleviate the other person’s suffering. In contrast, when sympathy dominates, helping is altruistic, driven by a genuine desire to relieve the other person’s distress rather than a desire to relieve one’s own distress.

To better understand these predictions, imagine that you are walking down the street and come upon a disheveled person slumped in a doorway. Your reaction might be either of two types. First, you might feel alarmed and uncomfortable. In this case, you might help to alleviate your own discomfort. Alternatively, you might feel sympathetic and compassionate. In this case, you might help primarily to relieve the other person’s distress. Of course, helping when you feel sympathy might also make you feel better, but making yourself feel better was not your primary aim.

What determines which emotion dominates? Batson believes that empathy is the key factor to consider. Empathy involves the capacity to take the perspective of another person; to put yourself in another person’s shoes and view the situation from his or her point of view. According to Batson, when people are being empathic, sympathy dominates over feelings of personal distress, and helping is altruistic (see the top row of Table 12.2). In contrast, when people are not being empathic, feelings of

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**FIGURE 12.4**

Developmental Changes in Helping Reactions

In response to seeing another person in distress, feelings of personal distress declined in frequency over the second year of life, while feelings of sympathy and prosocial behavior increased.