

## Dolphins help one another

Dolphins often help one another, assistance occurring in a variety of contexts that range from babysitting another dolphin's calf to cooperative foraging to efforts to save another dolphin's life.

In this report, we describe the helpful efforts of a group of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and the possible role of the ailing animal's distress call in eliciting such behavior. Helpful behavior of this sort in cetaceans most typically involves forms of physical support provided to a distressed, injured, or dying animal. This support often keeps the distressed dolphin at or near the surface of the water, which enables it to breathe. Our analyses of underwater video and corresponding acoustic recordings revealed a distressed dolphin that frequently produced distress calls, which were often accompanied by the emission of long bubble streams.

The frequency of the distressed dolphin's whistle production was positively correlated with the frequency of the supporting behaviors she received from other dolphins, suggesting that her whistles signaled the need for help to other dolphins. These helping behaviors included raft formations in which dolphins would use their bodies as rafts to support the distressed dolphin, lifts, and stimulating pushes that were predominantly directed toward the upper third of the distressed dolphin's body. All of the helping behaviors assisted the distressed dolphin in either reaching or staying at the ocean's surface so that she could breathe. This is the first documented underwater account of multiple wild bottlenose dolphins providing such care to a distressed conspecific, and highlights the possible role of distress calls in such scenarios.

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### Publication

[Underwater observations of dolphin reactions to a distressed conspecific.](#)

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