Part Three

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

Chapter Nine

Emotional Development and Forgiveness in Children: Emerging Evidence

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Phillip's birthday is coming, and he's hoping for a new scooter, silver with red handles and a brake; it folds down so that he can carry it over his shoulder with a strap. He keeps telling his mom, "I want this scooter." He even showed a picture of it to his best friend since first grade, Juan. On his birthday, his mother surprised him with the scooter. She warned, "Just don't ride your scooter down the big hill." Phillip took the new scooter to show Juan. Juan thought the scooter was really cool, too. But then he said, "I want to go faster. I'm going down the big hill." Philip said, "No, my mom said not to." But Juan did it anyway; the scooter got out of control. He jumped off, so he was all right, but the scooter went flying and smashed into a tree, ruined.

Jameil loves roller coasters. The faster, the higher, the wilder, the better; he is never afraid. There's a new roller coaster at the park, called the Looney Loop; it has three loops and no floor. You go upside down three times, with your feet dangling, and you see everything below you. Jameil begged his dad to go to ride the Looney Loop together, and Dad promised. But when he got home the night before Opening Day, Dad said, "I've got some bad news. We can't go tomorrow. I'm going to have to work all day and Sunday, too, and I need the car, so mom can't take you. We can go to the park in a couple of weeks." (Neal & Caswell, 2002)

What will happen next in these scenarios? Will Philip blame Juan and end up not being best friends after all their time together? Will Jameil hold a grudge against his dad all summer long? Because people so frequently hurt each other, it is plausible that events requiring forgiveness occur in all types of relationships, even between childhood best friends or children and parents. One person unjustly offends the other,

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and the other person suffers. The victim then must choose how to respond, in terms of internal thoughts, feelings, and motivations, as well as external behaviors—to acknowledge the transgression but forgive the offender, or to refuse to forgive.

With these issues in mind, we have several goals in this chapter: (a) to outline the importance of forgiveness and offer a working definition for this phenomenon that can be used with children and their families; (b) to discuss ways in which forgiveness could be an important component of children's socioemotional competence; (c) to generate interest in the study of forgiveness and emotional development in children and youth by reporting on some very new research; and (d) to generate research questions that future scholars might address.

PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Why, though, might forgiveness be important? As Philip and Jameil probably found out, it isn't easy to forgive someone who treats your treasured possession irresponsibly or breaks promises. In fact, other people might even consider the forgiver a "pushover." So why bother?

Several reasons for going through what can be a difficult cognitive, affective, motivational, and often behavioral process include: (a) maintenance of close relationships, (b) lessening of violence, and (c) promotion of well-being. Forgiveness poses an option for repairing and maintaining relationships, which serve to nurture and protect people. Childhood peer relationships are especially important; they promote cooperation, conflict management, and self-esteem (Hartup, 1996). Furthermore, youth violence is an increasing concern in our society. An important element in these tragic situations seems to be inability to resolve conflict, which might deescalate if forgiveness were involved; many adolescents involved in violence say they were motivated by anger and revenge (Pfefferbaum & Wood, 1994). Forgiveness research may assist in developing interventions to improve peer relationships and deter negative long-term outcomes.

At the same time, psychology needs to understand not only psychopathology but also the capacity for positive, prosocial interactions. "Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage, it is also the study of strength and virtue" (Seligman, 1998, p. 1). Accordingly, it is important to note that forgiveness is psychologically beneficial for victim *and* offender, influencing physical, mental, and social health (Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001). It allows anger and resentment to dissipate (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Forgivers are more adjusted, securely attached, other-oriented, and unselfish; they also better understand the transgressor's perspective than do unforgivers (McCullough et al., 1998; Tangney, Boone, Fee, & Reinsmith, 1999). Studying forgiveness may allow us to understand not only factors associated with the developmental course of aggression and distress but also pathways toward health.

But what do these issues mean for children? Children—like adults—often get their feelings hurt when involved in conflicts with siblings, parents, or peers. Thus, forgiveness should be as important for children as it is for adults. Once we are con-

vinced that forgiveness is important, however, we are faced with a second thorny task—defining it.

WORKING TOWARD A DEFINITION FOR FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a construct in search of a comprehensive definition (Tangney et al., 1999). Until the crispest possible definition of forgiveness is depicted, both conceptual and methodological problems will proliferate. We have considered many definitions of forgiveness and found points of disagreement (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; McCullough, 2001; North, 1998; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Some explicitly cite behavior—or at least the motivation toward prosocial behavior—as part of forgiveness. Others emphasize the emotional transformations and/or the important motivational changes wrought by forgiveness. Still others focus on the cognitive reasoning involved in forgiveness decisions.

Judgments about emotional, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral elements of forgiveness—which are inherent in and correlates of forgiveness—are crucial. We use the following working definition of forgiveness:

> Forgiveness is a transformation of one's affect, cognitive judgments, and motivations toward an offender. The victim makes an assessment of the harm done and acknowledges the perpetrator's responsibility but voluntarily chooses to cancel the debt, giving up the need for revenge, punishments, or restitution. Importantly, one removes oneself from the negative emotions directly related to the transgression. Over time, there is a motivational transformation, including a reduction in negative motivations and an increase in constructive motivations toward the perpetrator. The forgiver may be motivated toward positive social behaviors toward the offender.

We consider the affective transformation of forgiveness to be of primary importance. Philip could be really mad at Juan but realize, "Wow, he's really going to be in trouble. I hate to think of my best friend getting that much heat from his parents, my parents, *and me*!" Empathy, along with the allied ability of perspective taking, are related to forgiveness and lack of blame (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000; Tangney et al. 1999; Worthington et al., 2000).

Shame, anger, and guilt have radically different forgiveness-related consequences. Anger and shame are often associated with unforgiveness in victims, whereas guilt may be seen as a precursor to some events of forgiveness. When transgressed against, anger- and shame-prone people often resort to defensive tactics, such as ruminating or seeking revenge, to escape the intolerable experience of shame and the force of their anger (Tangney, 1991). For guilt-prone individuals, guilt for one's part in the transaction,or one's own fallibility may accompany forgiving; the tension and regret associated with such guilt can motivate constructive changes.

Although realistic reasoning about the offender and about oneself as victim are important parts of forgiveness, solely cognitive forgiveness may be what Enright et al.

(1998) called *pseudoforgiveness* or what McCullough and Worthington (1994) referred to as *role-expected, expedient, detached*, or *limited forgiveness*. In contrast, the "true" forgiver's cognitive, affective, and motivational changes toward the wrongdoer are essential. Furthermore, behaviors such as reconciliation, pardoning, excusing, and altruism should be seen as *consequences of,* not *part of,* forgiveness. Similarly, revenge and restitution seeking can be *consequences of* but not *part of*, unforgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). Nonvindictive *behavior* toward the perpetrator could occur without cancellation of the emotional debt and arise from numerous personal and contextual attributes other than motivational change (e.g., inhibition, incomplete understanding).

However, we do need to examine behaviors linked to the cognitive, affective, and motivational changes wrought during forgiveness, because positive behaviors toward the transgressor and relationship repair are key advantages of forgiveness. Decisions concerning forgiveness are often followed by accommodation behaviors. The victim can choose to respond in a relationship-enhancing way instead of a relationship-destructive way (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Because much of children's inner lives are played out in "outer" behavior, relations between their forgiveness and social behavior merit close scrutiny.

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE ON CHILDREN AND FORGIVENESS

The inception and developmental course of forgiveness and its behavioral aftermaths need to be discerned. Forgiveness is likely a vital component of children's social competence, but where do we start to study forgiveness "from the beginning?"

Developmental Perspective on Forgiveness and Children's Emotional and Social Competence

Clearly, any investigation of the inception and developmental course of forgiveness must include emotional, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral elements, which allow us to examine forgiveness within a developmental perspective. Any given age has unique emotional, cognitive, and social tasks that determine a child's success in development. By zeroing in on these special tasks, we can pinpoint the nature of forgiveness during childhood and how it may change.

Young Children's Social-Emotional Developmental Tasks. Children moving into elementary school are becoming proficient with peers. Their interactions center on reducing negative affect and maintaining positive affect during play while resolving conflicts. They begin to understand moral rules and conventions, appreciate how intention, motives, and apology may mitigate a transgressor's actions, and experience

complex emotions, such as guilt, shame, and empathy. The essentials for forgiveness are in place. However, even though young children may learn that it is morally and socially important to forgive, they may not understand forgiveness conceptually or do it easily or well. They often fail in integrating social information sources, appreciating implications of social interactions, and canceling the emotional debt (Darby & Schlenker, 1982).

Older Children's Social-Emotional Developmental Tasks.   During middle childhood, new developments multiply determine the need for and emergence of forgiveness. The peer world is central to children of this age; the subtlety of social interaction grows exponentially (Denham, von Salisch, Olfhof, Kochanoff, & Caverly, 2002). Regulation of emotion in the service of smoother peer interaction matures, as does understanding of others' unique emotional viewpoints. Such complex peer interactions are complemented by increased social cognitive ability to identify, evaluate, and enact solutions for social problems (Crick & Dodge, 1994) and more sophisticated forgiveness reasoning (Enright, 1994). However, many children still act in ways that lead to the worst possible fate: social rejection. Reactive and relational aggression also emerge—some children react to provocations very unpleasantly; others use aggression to manipulate and hurt others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Dodge & Coie, 1987). So older children are equipped to forgive but also may more often require forgiveness and need to forgive others.

Along with the centrality of the larger peer group, dyadic friendships become key contexts in which lifelong social and emotional abilities may be fostered. Friendship has been described as a close, dyadic relationship of two people with shared history (Rose & Asher, 1999). It differs from larger peer-group relationships in that it is reciprocal, voluntary, interdependent, and acknowledged by both partners. Unlike roles in relationships with adults, childhood friends must negotiate, compromise, and share while remaining assertive (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Older children's friendships also become more intimate, providing self-validation and support. The development and maintenance of mature friendships underscore older children's forgiveness potential. Friends are more likely than distant peers to resolve conflicts positively (Rubin et al., 1998), and forgiveness can be part of such relationship-enhancing conflict resolution (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). Forgiveness-related social cognitive abilities, such as determining offenders' motives or intentionality and selecting prosocial goals and strategies, also are related to peer acceptance and friendship quality (Rose & Asher, 1999).

Thus, forgiveness is crucial to satisfactory social relationships. Adult research has shown that forgiveness more often occurs when apologies take place, victims empathize with the offender, and relationships are close and stable (McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington & Drinkard, 2000). These forgiveness mechanisms have been postulated but not explored empirically within childhood friendships. We must examine these children's conflict-resolution techniques, as well as their social cognitive goals and strategies, within a forgiveness framework.

Research Focusing Directly on Children's Forgiveness: Justice-Related Reasoning

So far, the sparse body of research has focused on forgiveness in children or adolescents from a cognitive developmental perspective (e.g., Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Park & Enright, 1997; Subkoviak et al., 1995). Enright and colleagues suggest that forgiveness occurs within the context of justice (i.e., when the victim believes justice has been served) and that forgiveness reasoning parallels that for justice. They have proposed a stage model of forgiveness development. The initial stage depicts forgiveness as contingent on a level of revenge equal to the hurt caused by the offender. In the second, reciprocal forgiveness stage, one will forgive if the offender makes restitution for the offense or if forgiving will relieve guilt. The third stage of forgiveness emphasizes the expectations of others. In the fourth stage of forgiveness, society's expectations and religion are paramount influences. Individuals at the fifth stage reason in ways that maintain social unity. In the final stage, forgiveness is an unconditional gift given in love by the victim. The victim sees the transgressor as worthy of forgiveness merely because he or she is a person and not because of regret or restitution for the offense.

After testing fourth, seventh, and tenth graders, college students, and adults with moral dilemmas, Enright et al. (1989) concluded that the understanding of forgiveness is related to age. Only a very few adults demonstrated the highest level of reasoning. Most adult descriptions of forgiveness centered on religious or lawful expectations. Adolescent forgiveness was strongly influenced by peers. For most children, forgiveness depended on reversing negative consequences. Enright et al.'s (1989) work warrants some criticism. First, the dilemmas involve adults in adult situations, which children may not comprehend. Second, the theory does not allow for the influence of modeled behaviors. Third, advancement through the stages requires logical, abstract thought.

Children no doubt make cognitive decisions whenever they need to forgive or be forgiven; such decisions may, however, require more practical reasoning and intuition than formal reasoning. Moreover, Enright's model does not allow for differentiating among transgressions. We would expect that children's attributions about varying dimensions of transgressions would impact their perceptions about the likelihood of forgiveness. For example, Darby and Schlenker (1982) found that older children accept increasingly elaborate apologies. They also found that children considered intention, motive, and apology in determining the fate of the offender. In fact, even preschoolers can make mature moral judgments concerning the severity of transgressions. Smetana, Schlagman, and Adams (1993) found that 3- and 4-year-olds rated moral transgressions as more offensive than social ones. If even young children have a better understanding of intentionally and the severity of moral errors than previously recognized, they are also likely to have a better understanding of forgiveness than previous research has indicated.

Research Emanating from our Working Definition

In programs of research on children's forgiveness at George Mason and Seattle Pacific Universities, we are examining such cognitive attributions that may contribute to children's decisions to forgive. Equally or more important are the links between children's forgiveness and empathy and prosocial motivations and behaviors (Scobie & Scobie, 2000; Worthington, in press); so we are focusing on emotions—children's empathy in response to characters' distress in children's movies; anger-, guilt-, and shame-proneness; and expectations of the victim's negative affect following offenses. We wish to see whether empathy, along with anger-, guilt-, and shame-proneness, play the same roles in children's forgiveness as in adults'.

To meet these goals, we needed a measure of children's forgiveness. Our goal was to create parallel scenario-based measures for children and parents, following our working definition of forgiveness and including cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects (Denham, Neal, Hamada, & Keyser, 2002). We first examined the Multidimensional Forgiveness Inventory (MFI) as a model for the tools we wished to create (Tangney et al., 1999).

Prior to measure construction, we interviewed parents, teachers, and children about situations calling for forgiveness in families and children's peer groups. Armed with this information, we created parallel scenarios appropriate for child-peer interactions and adult-adult interactions. The scenario-based questionnaire format allows us to assess forgiveness with fidelity via (a) developmentally appropriate and phenomenological scenarios, (b) specific aspects of the process, and (c) minimization of social desirability and error variance. The final dimensions in the Children's and Parents' Forgiveness Inventories (CFI and PFI) include cognitive dimensions (act severity, receiving punishment) and motivational/behavioral dimensions (e.g., the likelihood of forgiveness under certain circumstances—when the act was purposeful or an accident, when the transgressor felt bad, apologized, made an excuse, or said nothing—and the length of time before forgiveness takes place). The CFI also includes affective dimensions of how hurt, angry, and sad the victim would be (parents' reports on affect came from Tangney's MFI).

Each questionnaire consists of four scenarios naming the child as victim from whom another should seek forgiveness and four scenarios naming a perpetrator, who must seek forgiveness from the child (see Figure 9.1). Analyses of responses from 7- to 12-year-olds and their parents prove the measures highly reliable for children, mothers, and fathers (Mincic, Kalb, Bassett, & Denham, 2004). Pickering and Wilson (2003) have uncovered methodological and theoretical issues in using CFI with first graders. Children this young did not clearly understand the term *forgive* but did understand forgiveness in behavioral terms of accidents and apologies.

Early findings with the CFI show that overall propensity to forgive does not vary across age categories (Neal, Bassett, & Denham, 2004). Age may be related to increasingly abstract reasoning about forgiveness and conflict resolution, but it is not a strong predictor of forgiveness *motivation* (see also Park & Enright, 1997). Means for the pro-
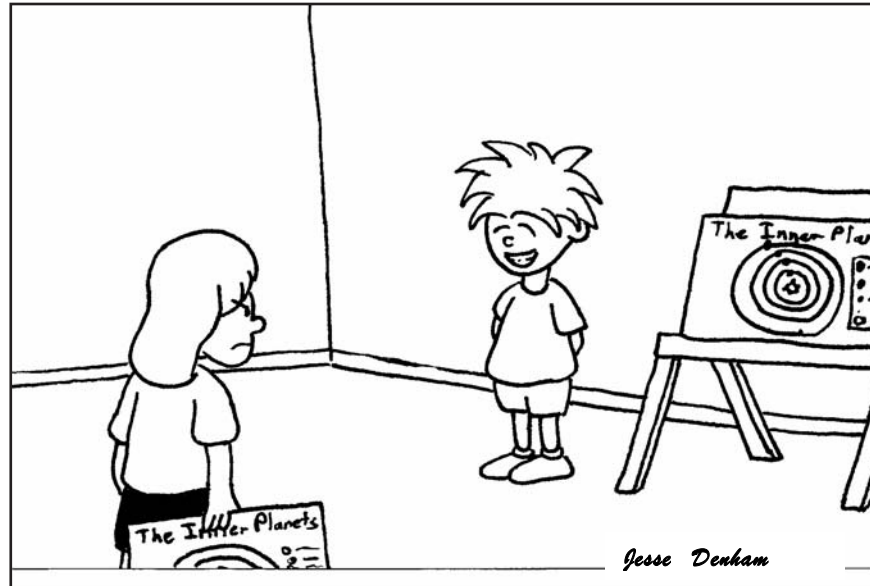
FIGURE 9.1.   CFI Item: Your best friend stole your project idea and got an "A" on it.

pensity to forgive or to expect forgiveness did differ across contexts (with items for self and other as transgressors aggregated). Specifically, forgiveness decisions differed according to offender behavior, perceived intent, and posttransgression affect. Children considered forgiveness most likely when the offense was accidental or when the offender apologized or felt really bad. Saying nothing, offending on purpose, or making excuses demonstrates lack of repentance or sincerity; children predicted forgiveness would be less likely in such contexts (Neal, Bassett, & Denham, 2004).

When a transgressor feels really bad, a child's beliefs about an offender's feelings may be the result of empathy, fueled by guilt after one's own transgressions. The child expects transgressors to have similar discomfort or for victims to empathize with the transgressor's situation. Though replication is needed, results so far support those with adults: first graders' empathy and forgiveness are related (Wilson, 2004). Analyses of children's empathic responses to and knowledge of movie characters' emotions are ongoing. Although both relate to peer evaluations of *prosocial behavior*, we await more finely grained analyses including forgiveness.

Considering "made an excuse" and "did it on purpose" responses together, children are less forgiving when offenses are committed with a lack of concern or with cruel intentions. Children were particularly judgmental about the "made an excuse" response. Excuses may be seen as insincere statements that get the offender "off the hook," as opposed to more empathy-evoking reasons. Again, children's evaluations point to moral reasoning based on intentionality and motivation.

The frequency of these less forgiving responses when an offense occurred "on purpose" was related to the children's emotions, again consistent with adult research. For example, shame- and anger-prone children reported a lower likelihood of forgiveness in this context (Denham, Neal, & Bassett, 2004; Neal, Bassett, & Denham, 2004). If the perpetrator made an excuse, children high on anger intensity also reported less likely forgiveness. Highly shame- and anger-prone children reported that it would take them longer to forgive than it would other children. In contrast, guilt-proneness was related to children's likelihood of forgiveness when the action was accidental.

We have begun to examine how forgiveness relates to children's social competence. CFI reports of forgiving accidents and apologetic transgressors are predictive of first graders' social competence (Pickering & Wilson, 2003). Forgiveness, peer status, and prosocial behavior are positively related, and forgiveness is negatively related to aggression and grudge holding (Pickering & Wilson, 2004). Denham and colleagues also are collecting reports of social competence, friendship quality, and conversations about transgressions between friends.

Pickering and Wilson (2003) considered the motivational side of forgiveness important to explore, because social motivations have been successfully measured in adults as a measure of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998) and in children in terms of revenge/aggression and prosocial social goals (Erdley & Asher, 1986). Such goals are correlated with children's social behavior, as well as number and quality of friendships (Erdley & Asher, 1986; Rose & Asher, 1999). Wilson and Pickering modified the CFI, asking children whether their goals after each scenario would be to enact revenge/aggression, avoid the matter, or talk things over and make things better. They also asked children to describe how they dealt with a friend disappointing or angering them, over time. Children endorsing revenge/aggressive goals or avoidance were less well liked by peers and seen as more aggressive (Pickering & Wilson, 2004). Children who had prosocial goals regarding a friend's transgressions were less likely to be seen as aggressive. Those who held grudges over time were the most aggressive; most children showed forbearing or forgiving stances. Assessing children's detailed motivations is a useful window on forgiveness.

Finally, children can be classified according to patterns of forgiveness in a person- rather than a variable-centered manner. For example, Bassett (2004) found groups that could be termed *forgivers, nonforgivers*, and *discerning forgivers* (i.e., less forgiving when the transgression was on purpose or the perpetrator said nothing but not different from other groups on forgiving when the act was an accident or the perpetrator felt bad or apologized). She found the discerning forgivers to be more fearful than either other group but less impulsive than nonforgivers. Finally, this study showed anger more via talking badly about others than did the forgiving group. It will be interesting to continue these person-centered analyses with larger samples.

Socialization and Children's Forgiveness

Thus, although data collection and analyses continue, researchers are beginning to isolate important aspects of children's forgiveness and their correlates in social behavior and emotion. If children *are* learning to forgive, *where* are they learning this vital quality? Parental socialization is a best bet, laying the foundation for a substrate of empathy, lessened anger and shame, appropriate guilt, needs-oriented forgiveness reasoning, and motivational and behavioral aspects of forgiveness. Parents in our study provide information on their forgiveness, proneness to anger, shame, and guilt, and empathy/perspective taking, along with ratings of conflict with spouses, religiosity, and parenting styles and practices. Children give opinions of parents' childrearing practices and conflict. In mothers but not fathers, forgiveness is correlated with children's forgiveness (Denham et al., 2004). Parent-child conversations about times when each offended the other also are being collected; these conversations are awaiting coding but appear to be rich sources of parents' and children's possibly bidirectional effect on each other's forgiveness.

Mothers' self-reported anger, especially self-aggression and fractious intentions when angry, were negatively associated with aspects of children's forgiveness (i.e., when the transgressor transgressed on purpose, gave an excuse, or felt bad); empathy in a fantasy situation was related to children's forgiveness (Denham et al., 2004). In contrast, fathers' *lack* of empathy (in either realistic or fantasy situations) and seething anger or outer-directed aggression when angry were *positively* associated with dimensions of their children's forgiveness. These counterintuitive findings with fathers make one wonder whether children are *reacting to* fathers' angry, nonempathic stances as they are *modeling* their mothers' forgiveness. Parental guilt- and shame-proneness so far make few contributions to children's CFI ratings.

Interparental conflict and its resolution may be important fodder for the development of forgiveness (Getman, 2004; Grych & Fincham, 1993). Generally, positive resolution to conflict is seen as important for child outcomes (Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993; Denham & Grout, 1992; see also Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994, on the value of apologies to children). In our work, however, children were more likely to forgive on a number of dimensions if they also reported feeling that they were triangulated within their parents' conflicts. Perhaps self-involvement may lead children to be more forgiving because they learn more resolution strategies within parents' conflicts. Alternatively, children may feel so bad in triangulated situations that they learn to avoid conflict by forgiving, even when others make excuses. Furthermore, children tended to forgive when the transgression was an accident or an apology was made and when parent-reported conflict was *more* frequent; perhaps these children were exposed to more resolutions accompanied by forgiveness strategies. In contrast, less constructive modes of conflict, such as physical aggression reported by mothers or fathers and avoidance or stonewalling by fathers, were related to children's lower forgiveness ratings. Finally, relations among parents' reports of conflict and PFI scores suggested an indirect effect—mothers who reported more cooperative conflict strategies had higher

PFI scores, whereas fathers' more frequent resolutions were positively associated and their avoidance strategies negatively associated with PFI scores.

Parents' childrearing practices and their children's evaluations of these same practices may contribute directly and in interaction to children's notions of forgiveness. Mincic et al. (2004) found that mothers who reported more negative parenting practices had children with lower propensities to forgive. In contrast, both mothers' and children's perceptions of positive childrearing practices were positively related to children's forgiveness. Over and above the direct contributions of mothers' and children's perceptions of childrearing practices, children who perceived their mothers' parenting practices less positively were particularly unforgiving overall when their mothers reported their own parenting practices as less positive, and children were most likely to forgive a perpetrator who felt bad when they perceived their mothers to use more positive parenting practices *and* mothers perceived their own parenting practices as less negative. Children's and mothers' perceptual agreements may facilitate a positive emotional environment, which could promote forgiveness in children. These results, although they bear replication, offer an interesting glimpse into parents' and children's behaviors, perceptions, and beliefs that may interact in the inception of forgiveness.

Parents' religion also should at least indirectly relate to children's forgiveness, given that forgiveness is given varying emphases in many major religions. Wyatt, Bassett, and Denham (2004) have found that existential aspects of religious experience are positively and extrinsic aspects negatively related to children's forgiveness. We hope to expand this inquiry greatly.

Our last suggestive area involving parents' promotion of forgiveness involves attachment. Paleari, Regalia, and Fincham (2003) found that adolescents' willingness to forgive parents was directly predicted by their benign responsibility attributions about their parents, their negative affective reactions, and their emotional empathy, and was indirectly predicted, via these constructs, by children's positive relationships with their parents. It is easy to imagine that feeling that one can find distress relief from an attachment figure and enjoy being near him or her—the essence of attachment—should at least indirectly support the development of forgiveness. In Denham's as-yet-unpublished research, we are assessing children's attachment via their family drawings; coding is ongoing.

New Research Directions Needed in the Area

The investigation of forgiveness as it relates to children's emotions, cognitions, motivations, behaviors, social relationships, and personal well-being is at an exciting point of embarkation. We have numerous questions to ask about the inception of developmental progression of children's forgiveness and its socialization, and we are eager to begin this effort.

- Is there individual continuity in forgiveness?
- Can we assume that socialization mechanisms are similar to those for other social behaviors (i.e., modeling, induction/reactions, open discussion of forgiveness)? What are the frequencies of these mechanisms? Do they differ with age? Might second grader Jameil (see initial vignettes) have different discussions about forgiveness with his parents than sixth grader Phillip?
- Can we assess the "forgiveness climate" in families rather than in individuals? For example, do Phillip and Jameil's families differ on such a dimension?
- To what degree do parents use forgiveness discussions during conflict resolution within different relationships (e.g., parent–child, spouse–spouse)? What if Jameil's parents got into a big fight about going to the amusement park? What would Jameil learn about forgiveness?
- How do children display forgiveness behaviors toward peers, toward parents, and toward self? How did Jameil end up feeling and acting toward his father?
- What is the role of extended family? Did Phillip get some sage advice from his grandmother?
- What forgiveness do siblings display toward each other in their relationships and conflicts? Maybe Jameil's sister helped him understand how exhausted Dad was and how he meant well.
- What about peers? Did another friend help Phillip process his righteous anger at Juan?
- How are religion, denomination, and church involvement related to children's forgiveness?
- Do teachers ever discuss forgiveness with children beyond stating, "Say you're sorry"?
- How often is forgiveness modeled in the media (e.g., TV shows, movies, kids' shows)?
- Do children learn more about forgiveness when the ecosystems in which they live are consistent in promoting it (e.g., both family and church promoting forgiveness similarly)?
- What are cultural differences in children's forgiveness?
- What do *children* believe forgiveness is? Young children may define forgiveness via reconciliatory behaviors; their notions, although not fully mature, deserve examination (Neal & Caswell, 2002; cf. Pickering & Wilson, 2004). Scobie and Scobie (2003) have found no difference in school children's and adults' understanding of forgiveness; either it is present earlier than predicted or, as a relational mechanism, it is common to children and adults. Denham's as-yet-unpublished data also suggest no differences between children and parents on any CFI/PFI dimensions except that parents feel less hurt and angry after transgressions. Maybe Phillip's father is less angry, but both he and Phillip may consider Juan's attitude as unworthy of forgiveness.

Relevance for Clinical and Applied Interventions

The theoretical stance and burgeoning research outlined here have the potential to spawn many useful applications. For example, parents and parent educators could benefit from evidence on childhood forgiveness to tailor parenting practices and programs that would maximize children's interpersonal and intrapersonal health. Child clinicians could make use of forgiveness research in developing individual and group prevention and intervention programs that could help children improve their peer relationships and deter negative long-term outcomes. Finally, public policy experts could use evidence of the positive outcomes of forgiveness in recommendations for curricula and other child-related regulations.

PERSONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Given our theoretical stance and reviewing promising research on childhood forgiveness, we agree with Worthington's (in press) theoretical assumptions about its development. We must come to understand the roots of children's *decisional* and *emotional* forgiveness (i.e., deciding to not seek revenge or avoid the transgressor vs. emotional replacement of negative, unforgiving emotions)—how these aspects of forgiveness emerge in development, what factors promote them, and how parents and teachers facilitate them. We need to explore not only cognitive underpinnings of forgiveness but also those related to temperament, attachment, emotion regulation and coping, parental emotion coaching, and the religious/spiritual environment of the home. Our theory of forgiveness can only become richer through these efforts.

CONCLUSION

We hope that other investigators will join us in studying cognitive, affective, and motivational elements of forgiveness and behavioral sequelae in children. Given the importance of peer and parent–child relationships, it would seem that knowing the answers to some of the questions noted above could be pivotal in interventions to lessen peer difficulties and in family therapy. Much work needs to be done before we can reach evidence-based applications of forgiveness for children, but we must start now.

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