

Measuring Children's Forgiveness:
Development of the Children's Forgiveness Card Set

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Abstract

Interpersonal forgiveness has been identified as an important way of overcoming the hurts and offenses that often occur during social interaction, thereby helping to maintain valuable relationships. In adults, it has been associated with greater psychological and even physical health. Because children also experiences hurts and offenses in their social interactions, forgiveness is arguably as important for children as it is for adults. However, studies of children's forgiveness have not flourished to the extent that studies of adults' forgiveness have. This thesis proposes that one reason for the lack of research on children's forgiveness is the absence of appropriate measures of children's forgiveness. Existing measures of preadolescent children's forgiveness are argued to be potentially unsatisfactory for stand-alone use with preadolescent child samples for a variety of reasons, including limitations of self-report methodology, developmental difficulties for children in responding to self-report questionnaires and reporting on emotional responses, the need for child-focused research methods, and uncertainty over children's interpretation of the term 'forgive'. An initial study of children's everyday understandings of the term 'forgive' suggested that they tended to emphasise overt responses to apology and that single-item explicit measures may therefore be unsuitable to measure emotional forgiveness in preadolescent samples. However, children's descriptions of emotional and behavioural aspects of forgiving informed the development of a pictorial measure, the Children's Forgiveness Card Set, designed to overcome potential difficulties children may experience in responding to traditional questionnaire measures. A pilot study examining children's interpretation of Card Set illustrations in response to a hypothetical scenario suggested children generally interpreted illustrations as intended; some adjustments were, however, implemented for some illustrations. A second pilot study tested interpretability

by asking children to categorise illustrations as forgiving, unforgiving, or having nothing to do with forgiving. Children frequently categorised general emotional responses as having nothing to do with forgiving, possibly due to the omission of a hypothetical scenario. An experimental study therefore re-examined validity of the Card Set by assessing children's Card Set responses to a hypothetical scenario with manipulation of transgressor apology (apology vs. no apology). While Card Set responses correlated with an explicit measure, unexpectedly they were not predicted by apology nor correlated with perceived transgressor remorse. A final experimental study comprised a factor analysis and comparison of the Card Set with a latent questionnaire measure and an explicit measure. Following elimination of one card, Card Set responses were found to correlate with both the explicit and latent measure but again were not predicted by apology; however this was also true of emotion-based responses on the latent measure. Interactions were found between apology and participant age and between apology and the order of presentation of the Card Set. Overall, results suggest that the Children's Forgiveness Card Set may be a useful measure of children's underlying emotional forgiveness, as opposed to overt, deliberative or decisional forgiveness. This measure therefore contributes a potential way to assess differences in children's overt forgiveness and underlying emotional responses to transgression, including differential prediction of these types of forgiveness in children.

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