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FAIRNESS, FORGIVENESS AND FAMILIES

Ian Evans, Tomoko Yamaguchi,
Juliana Raskauskas and Shane Harvey
Massey University, Palmerston North

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fairness is an easily recognised property of everyday interactions among family members. All parents will have heard their children complain that something is "just not fair!" Children are clearly sensitive to experiences of unfairness and react to them with negative emotions such as anger and sadness. It is possible – though not yet well-established – that repeated experiences of unfairness, particularly unfair punishment and unfair lack of deserved reward, may make children hostile and less likely to forgive.

In our previous research (Yamaguchi, 2005) we noted an interesting aspect of young children's response to unfairness, namely that they were more likely to forgive a parent than a sibling. This raised intriguing questions regarding factors possibly relating to forgiveness, in the sense of tolerance of parental mistakes. We wondered whether there were aspects of parent behaviour that might contribute to the development of these forgiving tendencies in children. Thus the purpose of the present study was to:

(a) replicate the observed relationship between unfairness and a tendency to retaliate against the perpetrator

(b) explore children's understanding of forgiveness (the opposite reaction to retaliation)

(c) assess whether aspects of parents' disciplinary style might relate to their children's willingness to forgive.

Primary schools from a variety of socio-economic regions in the central North Island of New Zealand agreed to be involved in supporting this research, provide time and space and circulate an invitation to families to participate. The participants selected for the study were 82 children in Year 4 (9-year-olds) and Year 6 (11-year-olds) of primary school, whose parents had consented to their involvement in the research. In addition, 53 of the parents of these children agreed to participate as well.

The testing of the children involved describing imaginary situations (scenarios). They were told a story, accompanied by pictures, of everyday incidents involving a child like them who had experienced unfairness, either from a parent or from a friend. The children were asked to judge the unfairness of the experience, how the child in the story might feel and how strongly. Subsequent to hearing the story, three tasks were given to the children, again in an imaginary form, in which the children could display caring, sharing and trust towards the perpetrator of the unfairness. The degree to which the children showed these characteristics was used as the index of their willingness to forgive an act of unfairness. Children were more willing to forgive a parent than a friend and provided many explanations of why this was so, typically around themes that parents (mothers in this case) did many nice things for children and, therefore, deserved forgiveness.

There were individual differences in the degree to which the children showed a forgiving tendency towards the perpetrator of unfairness and the influence of parental factors on this was examined. The parents were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil task in which they reported how they might construe the actions of children in the context of five common misbehaviours. Some parents attributed misbehaviour to negative characteristics of the children and some were more willing to excuse misbehaviour as being accidental or the child being too young to know any better. A second part of the assessment asked parents to describe exactly what they might do or say in response to the misbehaviour incidents and how they would alter their reactions if the child apologised. These reactions were rated according to the degree of punitiveness or forgiveness revealed. Generally, these parents reported using effective tactics for ensuring the child understood the nature of his or her misbehaviour, and teaching ways to avoid such behaviour in the future. A final part of the parental task was to comment on how they might advise their own child to respond if he or she reported an incident

of unfairness to them. Parents indicated that they were more likely to suggest a forgiveness approach than either getting one's own back (retaliation) or just ignoring it, although all three suggestions were endorsed to some extent.

When these parental characteristics were converted to numerical scores, none of them predicted their own child's level of forgiveness in the imaginary scenarios. It is likely that this is because the participating families tended to use positive disciplinary strategies and had children who showed minimal tendencies to use retaliatory tactics. In fact, most of the children in the study group were able to think of instances in which they had forgiven a friend or a parent and all understood that forgiveness, especially after an apology, was one strategy for maintaining positive relationships with parents and friends.

Both the parents in the study and the children themselves provided a rich and interesting commentary on the nature of fairness, the effects of apologising and how it might change one's feelings about misbehaviour and the nature of forgiveness. These qualitative features of the participants' understanding of fairness and forgiveness are illustrated in this report by recording and reporting their own words.

The research provided insight into the complexity of family interactions around the negative behaviours of both parents and children. Everyone makes mistakes and family functioning and children's friendships appear to benefit from forgiveness rather than retaliation. Nevertheless, there are contextual and emotional factors that will influence the tendency to forgive, the most important of which appear to be the principle of give-and-take (the reciprocity between parent and child), as well as the intensity of the feelings of sadness and anger that are induced by unfair experiences. For professionals working with family issues and encouraging positive parenting strategies, the findings of this study offered insights into an important but little studied aspect of everyday family experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Fairness and unfairness – overview

If you are a parent, how many times have you heard your children complain – perhaps whine would be a better word – “But that’s not fair!”? Children are acutely sensitive to the concept of fairness, particularly in family life. They closely monitor opportunities, rewards or advantages given to siblings to ensure that they receive the same treatment, and they seem extraordinarily able to remember past conditions and rules if they feel that parents have changed the standards. Children are also very aware of differences in what parents do and say and what they expect of their children. And at school, children pay close attention to teacher behaviour and to any hint that someone in a class is treated differently from others. Unfairness in life experiences, in families and in classrooms reduces children’s willingness to accept and live up to rules, standards and expectations. Although not as strongly demonstrated in child research, there is evidence in adults of a close link between feelings of unfairness and retaliation by withdrawal or attack (Miller, 2001). It is this relationship that makes the topic of fairness especially important.

Given the pervasiveness of this concept in children’s development, it is not surprising that child psychologists have paid scholarly attention to the issue. The pioneering Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, wrote extensively on justice and children’s understanding thereof in his work on moral judgement in children (Piaget, 1932). Ever since then there has been considerable research exploring how children form judgements regarding what is just. Valuable as this research has been, there is a certain abstraction about the concept of justice, with its basis in principles of equality, equity, need and the distribution of resources (distributive justice). Fairness, on the other hand, while perhaps merely a component of the broader topic of justice, is something that children encounter on a regular basis in their everyday lives. It is about the perception of just treatment and insofar as it relates directly to the individual concerned is something that evokes strong emotion. The feeling that one has been treated unfairly is a highly negative one, giving rise to anger and attempts to seek restitution or revenge. It is not for nothing that the TV programme ‘Fair Go’ has been one of the longest running and most successful television programmes in New Zealand. People want their day in court. Justice is for others; fairness is something the individual feels.

Some developmental psychologists have addressed fairness directly. One of the more systematic lines of work was carried out by Thorkildsen (1989), who examined children’s perceptions of fairness in classroom practices used by teachers. This is somewhat like the issue of procedural justice, which refers to the fairness of a method to determine outcomes, rather than the fairness of the outcome itself. There is less work on children’s perceptions of parental practices. However, in one important study, Konstantareas and Desbois (2001) examined Canadian pre-schoolers’ perceptions of maternal discipline tactics. These investigators described to the children five forms of discipline used by mothers that professionals would tend to judge as representing psychological abuse: excessive withdrawal of privileges; withdrawal of entertainment; differential treatment of siblings; threatening power assertion (threatening to spank the child next time); and public humiliation. Overall, these four- and five-year-olds rated differential treatment of siblings as the most unfair, followed by public humiliation. Girls and children from larger families were particularly likely to rate differential treatment as most unfair, whereas children from smaller families were more likely to consider a threatened spanking to be most unfair.

Differential reward (rewarding one individual and not another) is one of the more obvious areas where children are likely to experience unfairness in their everyday lives. In 1962, Sechrest obtained interview data from young children regarding their reaction to seeing other children rewarded when they themselves were not, despite having performed the same task. Sechrest called this “implicit reward” (Sechrest, 1962, 1963). In a study of 10- and 11-year-old Australian children, Sharpley (1987) presented scenarios in which one child was rewarded and another child not for the same amount of work. The children rated this situation as very unfair, particularly if the two children in the scenario were described as friends, as opposed to being strangers. Sharpley argued that these findings were relevant to situations that were becoming common in behaviour treatment programmes based on principles of applied behaviour analysis, in which certain children within a larger group were being reinforced for improvements in their behaviour as part of a treatment plan.

In the two contexts described above (unfair discipline practices and potentially fair practices differentially applied) it can be seen how relevant the issue of fairness is to common challenges faced by families, such as sibling rivalry. Differential maternal attention seems to relate to conflict and antagonism between siblings (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985). Kowal and Kramer (1997), however, have argued that parental differential treatment cannot automatically be assumed to have negative consequences. In their study, in which children were interviewed and asked to report on examples of such treatment in their own lives, these researchers found that children did not necessarily interpret differential treatment as unfair. The children were able to recognise that differential parental behaviour could be justified, based for example on the age of the sibling, on differing relationships with the parents, or on his/her temporary needs. Kowal and Kramer also pointed out that the concept that parents should strive to treat their children as equally as possible is a strong cultural value of North American families, but might well be different in other societies. The prevailing standard among New Zealand families or within Pākehā and Māori contexts is not immediately clear; however, the theme of differential treatment has recently been made very salient in New Zealand by virtue of such media examples as the book/film *Whale Rider*.

One of the complexities in studying children’s perceptions of fairness is that their feelings when encountering unfairness will depend on how they have judged the unfairness in the first place. This means that their understanding of fairness and unfairness and their cognitive ability to explain it must interact with their response to situations that would, on an objective basis, seem unfair to others. This issue is complicated by the fact that studies reporting a positive correlation between fairness judgements and cognitive (academic) ability or social competence, tend to assess fairness on the basis of higher-order moral reasoning, for example when distributing resources to a group one might use equity criteria, need or deservingness (eg Vandiver, 2001). When ensuring the fairness of games, children have to make estimates of probability; also if players have different probabilities of winning then the magnitude of the less probable reward needs to be increased. Children make these calculations in different ways, including issues of possibility, although the basic criterion for fairness is clear to most, for example:

> Interviewer: “What do you think we mean when we say that a game is fair?”
>
> Child (boy aged 13 years): “That the two players have the same chance of winning.”
>
> (Canizares, Batanero, Serrano and Ortiz, 1999, p. 5)

Another complexity in studying children is that the term ‘fair’ for children carries the more general connotation of appropriate, right, or just (Hatcher and Troyna, 1993). We can conclude from these different lines of research that it is important to ask children not only to judge fairness but to explain their judgement as well. In the research conducted by Evans and his colleagues we have typically asked children if something is fair or unfair, if unfair why and what could be done to make it more fair.

1.2 Background to the present study

It was in the context of classroom practices that the present line of research began. Working as part of a team in a school district in upstate New York (USA), Evans and his colleagues noticed that when children with significant disabilities were being included in regular classrooms, the teachers found it very difficult to treat them exactly as they would treat any other child in their classes. For example, a child with a severe disability might always be excused from a particular academic task or classroom activity. Furthermore, we observed that the children themselves did not treat those with a disability with the same degree of fairness as they would treat each other. For example, they might appear to be very helpful and push a peer's wheelchair, but would forget to first ask that child if he or she wanted to be moved somewhere else. The differential treatment was not necessarily unkind, but revealed a lack of appreciation of equal rights, as revealed, for example, by stroking the hair of a same-aged peer with severe intellectual disabilities.

The first study we conducted (Evans, Salisbury, Palombaro and Goldberg, 1994) explored primary school children's understanding of fairness when the 'victim' of unfairness was a child with a disability. The children were read stories, accompanied by pictures to make sure the story was easily understood. (These brief, stylised stories are often called 'scenarios'; the ones used in the present study will be described in more detail later in this report, since most of our research involves these hypothetical situations.) The unfair circumstances involved differential reward, being punished for something one did not do and being excluded from participation in an event (such as not being invited to a birthday party). Interestingly, some children commented that it was unfair that a child should have a disability in the first place. In general, however, the study revealed a very sophisticated understanding of the need for equitable treatment in an inclusive classroom. For example, in response to a situation in which a child with a disability receives the same reward (a biscuit) as the rest of the class, even though she was not required to do any work, one six-year-old child stated:

> I think it is unfair because one person doesn't have to work just because she is handicapped and the others [do] have to work. I'd give her an easy paper and tell her she has to do this paper before she gets a treat, and the other kids keep doing what they are learning (Evans et al, 1994, p. 331).

A second study (Goldberg, 1994) replicated the earlier study but was carried out in other schools, some of which did not have an inclusive educational programme so that children with disabilities in that district were taught in a segregated special education class. There were no significant differences between the two cohorts of children, except that those in the inclusive school were more likely to suggest policy changes that could make an inequitable situation fairer. We also asked how the child who was treated unfairly in the scenario would feel. All children participating in the study recognised that the child victim would feel bad in some way, however sometimes this was judged on the basis of the reward actually obtained or not obtained, rather than on being the victim of an unfair practice.

Our third study was conducted in New Zealand (Evans, Goldberg-Arnold and Dickson, 1998). This investigation involved family situations that might be considered unfair, such as a parent spending more time with one sibling than another, or one sibling having to do more family chores than another. In the scenarios, the child who was treated in a special way was described as a child with a disability. The children who participated in the study were of varying ages, but came from one of two types of family: a family in which there was a child with a disability and a matched family in which there were no children with a disability. One of the most interesting findings was that children who had a sibling with a disability were more likely to judge differential treatment at home as fair, often providing justifications based on the additional needs of the handicapped sibling. We hypothesised that this concept would have been instilled in the children by parents, who for a variety of medical and social reasons would have had to spend more time and more resources on their child with the disability. To illustrate this point, consider the comment made by one of the parents of the children in the study:

> I find it hard because I know that I can be inconsistent myself… But I think Tama (child without a disability) is old enough to understand… I mean he understands that Moana (sibling with a disability) is different. I've said to him, 'You know it's not fair; we don't like it that Moana is that way, but we can't do anything about it; that's just life and life isn't fair' (Evans et al, 1998, p. 145).

While there may be a variety of justifications for unequal treatment, we are nevertheless concerned that if children are exposed to unfair situations at home, which they have been told to accept (because 'life is unfair') they will nevertheless have feelings of anger and resentment towards those who benefited from unfair treatment (for example siblings) and those who perpetrated it (for example parents and teachers).

Our research group, therefore, began to pay closer attention to the way that children expected to feel when experiencing unfair treatment. Our next study (Evans, Galyer and Smith, 2001) concentrated on only one type of unfair situation: unfair reward or unfair punishment. We argued that there were essentially four dimensions to this circumstance:

(1) being punished for something one did not do

(2) not being punished for something wrong one did do

(3) being rewarded for something one did not do

(4) not being rewarded for something good one did do.

In examining any of these situations it can be seen that typically there could be two protagonists: the individual who benefited from the unfair consequence and the victim of the unfairness. Thus scenarios can be developed in which there are two children in each story, one of whom is the beneficiary (getting away with something or getting rewarded for nothing) and the other the victim (being punished for nothing or failing to receive a deserved reward).

The comparison between unfair reward and unfair punishment and how children would feel about them related to a somewhat different line of research on children. There is evidence to believe that some children are what is called 'reward dominant'. This means that they are more sensitive to and more influenced by rewards than they are influenced by punishment. The concept has considerable implications for how children might be disciplined – at home, at school and in juvenile justice/youth correctional programmes. Some of the developmental evidence suggests that children with serious conduct problems are more likely to be reward dominant, and yet these are the very children for whom punishment is a common occurrence. Evans' research group has carried out only one study directly on this topic (Wilson and Evans, 2002). We found that primary school pupils who were rated as presenting with difficult and disruptive behaviour in the classroom did indeed show reward dominance (on an artificial task where they could earn highly desirable prizes). However, there were many other children who were not judged as having behaviour problems who also showed reward dominance – in fact this characteristic was generally common in boys. Thus in the next fairness study we explored whether boys and girls differed in their reaction to unfair reward and punishment.

Based on our intuition, Evans et al (2001) hypothesised that one would feel most negative in response to being punished for something one did not do. In the study of 110 children attending primary schools in Hamilton (New Zealand) this was largely true for girls, in that unfair punishment and unfair reward were equally negative. But for boys we observed the opposite of our hypothesis. Boys tended to think that a child would feel less negative if they were punished for something they had not done than if they failed to receive an expected reward.

There are various ways in which we might link the concepts of reward dominance, fairness and children's conduct problems. One model has been proposed in Evans, Wilson and Galyer (2000) where Evans hypothesises that a child's repeated experience of unfairness, particularly the failure to receive promised or deserved rewards, will contribute to the development of hostile feelings towards those who perpetrate the unfairness, specifically parents and teachers. The model proposes that because authority figures such as parents and teachers control access to children's opportunities for rewards, unfair delivery of reward, and to a lesser extent unfair punishment, will generate hostility to authority.

This is a difficult model to test, since by definition hostility refers to feelings and attitudes rather than overt aggression or overt emotion, such as anger. However, one possible way to examine the relationship between unfair reward and punishment and hostile feelings, would be to see if unfairness leads to negative feelings such as mistrust, retaliation and lack of empathy for others. The first of our studies to examine this possibility was conducted by Yamaguchi (2005). She again used the same basic method that we have been using throughout the studies in which children are engaged in hearing an illustrated story (scenario) about an everyday situation where the child protagonist in the story is punished by his or her mother for something he or she did not do. We continued to assume that by having children judging this situation and explaining how the characters in the story would feel, we were giving the children the opportunity to project their own judgements and their own feelings onto the story situation.

For Yamaguchi's study (2005) we devised three situations that were extensions to the original story of unfairness. After the protagonist had been punished unfairly, the same child was involved in three test situations. In the first one of these (retaliation) the child had the opportunity to hand out sections of chocolate cake to family members, including the mother who had punished unfairly. The pieces of cake differed in size; hostility towards the mother in the form of retaliation could be inferred from the child giving the mother the smallest piece. The second test involved trust (would the mother be asked to look after a precious drawing the child had done at school?), and the third test involved caring/empathy (would the child run and get a plaster when the mother cut herself?). By adding up the degree of hostility shown in each of the three situations, an overall hostility score could be obtained.

To some extent the procedures we developed were successful. Children recognised the scenarios as unfair, could explain why and inferred that the victim of the unfairness would feel negative – younger children stated they would feel sad, but slightly older children stated they would feel mad (angry). Some children also expressed the sort of hostility we had anticipated, such as verbalising that the mother in the story did not deserve a large piece of cake, or deciding to look after their treasured drawing themselves rather than entrusting it to the mother's care. However, these were by no means universal reactions. We had included in the design of the study two scenarios – one in which the mother blamed the innocent child and punished him/her and the other in which a sibling was the one who blamed the innocent child, who then got punished. This difference in scenario produced dramatic differences in children's reactions. They were much more willing to retaliate against the sibling (showing hostility) than against the mother. The justification for this was around a broad concept of forgiveness, based on the fact that in general mothers do many positive things for their children and this one lapse in fair treatment was not sufficient to merit retaliation or hostility.

Subsequent to this study, we conducted a replication, using a different experimenter to work with 28 new participant children (Barry, 2006). One reason for this is that we wanted to make sure that there were no influences on the children's responses that were explicit to one individual adult researcher. The replication study yielded essentially the same findings. Boys and younger children rated the victim's negative emotions (sadness and anger) more intensely and also expressed more hostility towards the perpetrator of the unfairness. Both hostility and anger ratings were significantly more intense for the participants exposed to the scenario involving differential sibling treatment. It is likely that as girls tend to have socialisation experiences that emphasise the importance of maintaining social harmony and as older children have greater experience of the need for give and take in social relationships, girls and older children were more likely to use the concept of forgiveness – especially for interactions just between a mother and a child – to mitigate feelings of anger in an unfair situation. Clearly, however, there is a need for much further work on these relationships, especially understanding the role of forgiveness.

1.3 Forgiveness

In summary, our recent work has highlighted an additional dimension to the study of fairness and how children react to unfair experiences or treatment. A number of the children in the Yamaguchi (2005) and Barry (2006) studies explicitly stated that “Mums do a lot for kids and she deserves the big piece of cake, even though she was unfair” (paraphrased). This notion is somewhat similar to work that has been done in the context of marital therapy, where it has been noted that in successful relationships there is a ‘credit account’ of positive experiences and feelings that can be drawn on during the less common occasions of conflict or distress (Willis, Weiss and Patterson, 1974). Forgiveness occurs against a background of love and acceptance, thus serving to militate against the occasional failures and lapses of parents.

As a psychological construct, forgiveness has strong religious and philosophical connotations (Sells and Hargrave, 1998). North (1987, 1998), for example, explains that the philosophy of forgiveness is based on a victim’s gift-like gesture towards a wrongdoer. The victim is willing to offer something positive as the victim goes through his or her healing process. North calls this process “active psychological endeavour” and she discusses how negative feelings such as anger towards a person who was unjust would gradually be replaced by more positive feelings as the victim decides to forgive the wrongdoer. This process serves as the justification for the development of therapeutic treatments based on forgiveness (Enright and Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright, Freedman and Rique, 1998; McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen, 2000; McCullough, Worthington and Rachal, 1997).

There is less work on the role of forgiveness in families, although anecdotal observation suggests that this is a common, everyday occurrence and forgiveness has been recognised as an element of positive emotional expression in the family environment (Halberstadt, 1986). When children transgress, parents expect an apology, after which the parent will express some form of forgiveness. Guides to discipline generally advocate that after a child has been punished for undesirable behaviour the incident is forgotten and not used later in a punitive way and not brought up again in angry discussions. It may be somewhat less common for parents to ask their children for forgiveness, but it seems that in effective, democratic parenting styles a parent will be willing to apologise for something they have done that on reflection was inappropriate, hasty or revealed a poor decision. Parents may well express, after the apology, the hope that the child understands and can forgive them. If children find this difficult to do they will hold a grudge, which is not a desirable affective state towards parents. Children who can forgive, particularly errors, are likely to be able to nurture and retain positive relationships with peers more easily than those children who continue to bear a grudge or feelings of hostility. Forgiveness is one of the social skills that may be necessary for the development of meaningful friendships (Asher, Parker and Walker, 1996).

1.4 Conclusion and rationale for a new study

The concept of fairness is an important one when considering children’s development. While it may be thought of as part of a broader topic of justice and children’s moral reasoning, fairness is a more immediate issue for children and one they are likely to experience directly and have strong feelings about. In everyday life for children, the experience of fairness or unfairness is particularly tied to disciplinary practices and how rewards and punishments are delivered by parents and teachers. While most parents and teachers are hopefully prone to rely more on rewards than on punishments for managing behaviour, it is still nevertheless possible to administer rewards unfairly. If some children are particularly sensitive to rewards, or tend to experience few of them, the non-occurrence of a deserved reward might be a particularly negative experience. Either way, unfair rewards and punishments might generate feelings of hostility, thus making the issue one of considerable importance to the development of pro-social skills and attitudes.

Within families there are many opportunities for parents to engage in unfair practices. While our limited evidence for families in New Zealand suggests that Kiwi parents value fair treatment of children, there are clearly circumstances under which this does not happen, possibly related to age and gender differences among their children and the presence of special needs, as well as simple mistakes or, more insidiously, different attitudes towards individual children. If unfairness contributes to sibling conflict or possible hostility towards authority figures, there could be considerable implications for family life.

While children’s recognition that something is unfair is universally acknowledged and parents immediately see its relevance to their own experiences, there has nevertheless been very little research conducted on the topic, compared, say, with the more obvious issues of parental use of reward and punishment in discipline and in bringing up children.

However, there is an interesting element to fairness that our recent research has highlighted. While children can certainly express negative feelings about unfair treatment, there is nevertheless a role for forgiveness in determining the emotional implications of unfair treatment. As unfair treatment might often represent little more than an innocent mistake on the part of parents, it is helpful that negative feelings can be mitigated when children are willing to recognise that on balance parents are positive, rewarding and fair. We, therefore, designed the next major study in our sequence to allow for a consideration of fairness and forgiveness in family contexts and the remainder of this report will discuss this research, its findings and its novel implications for family functioning.

2. THE PRESENT STUDY: METHOD

2.1 Ethical considerations

The present study involved young children who were to be presented with hypothetical but realistic situations that could be similar to some of their own experiences. Responses required of the participants also involved expression of feelings and implicit attitudes towards their parents. Ethical issues were, therefore, particularly important.

The proposed project was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and was subject to full committee review. Initial feedback from the committee raised concerns about a number of possible issues: in particular the committee suggested that the children should sign a consent form. It was finally decided that this could be misleading to the children and it was agreed instead that they be provided with a detailed information sheet (see Appendix 2) and that parents who were giving consent on their behalf would be encouraged to fully discuss their participation with their children.

2.2 Participants

The children who participated in this study were all attending public primary schools in the greater Palmerston North region. Palmerston North is a mid-sized city community in the lower central North Island of New Zealand. Originally serving mostly an agricultural community, the city has a number of leading tertiary educational institutions and scientific research centres, and a growing commercial sector of light manufacturing industry, service organisations and retail businesses. Its demographic mix is similar to that for the country as a whole. The participating schools represent a range of socio-economic backgrounds, which is classified in the New Zealand educational system according to deciles, with decile 10 representing the most affluent segments of the population and decile 1 the poorest. The largest proportion of children in the study (35 percent) came from one decile 8 school and another large group (34 percent) came from a decile 5 school. Smaller numbers of children were recruited from schools of decile 3 (9 percent), decile 4 (8 percent), decile 9 (9 percent), and decile 10 (6 percent). These schools were selected in order to provide a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds; however, the sample mix was not fully representative of all New Zealand schools.

The participant group also reflected the cultural and ethnic mix of primary school children in the region. However, as the number of Māori, Pasifika and Asian students in the group was quite small and as there were no immediately noticeable differences related to cultural group, it was decided to make no formal analysis of the data according to cultural identity. No further analysis of cultural influences has been made, but it is likely that this could be an important variable for future research. At the moment it should be recognised as a caveat that the findings might not generalise beyond the predominantly Pākehā group that constituted the majority in the study.

The age range of the children selected was based on pilot work conducted in two schools. For the present study there was a need to explore children's understanding of the concept of forgiveness. Since this is an abstract concept we found that children younger than eight years of age (below Year 3) had some difficulty with verbally expressing their understanding of the construct. The decision was made to work with children older than those in past studies, and further pilot work was necessary to ensure that children up to the age of 11 (Year 6) would still be interested in the scenarios and not find the stories too juvenile. Thus, in the final cohort children were recruited from Year 4 and Year 6, and ranged in age between eight and 11 years old (*Mean age* = 9.5 years, *SD* = 1.0).

With respect to gender balance, more girls volunteered than boys. In the final cohort there were 29 boys and 53 girls, making a total of 82 children overall. The mean ages for the boys and the girls were the same.

2.2.1 Participant recruitment

The principals of the schools approached for participation were all extremely helpful and co-operative. The project was explained to them in the form of a general letter of introduction and an agreement to be a participating school (see Appendix 1). After giving us permission to recruit participants from their schools, a general information and consent form was prepared in the form of a brochure for the parents of all the children in the classrooms of the relevant age groups (see Appendix 2). The class teachers agreed to send this information packet home with the children and to collect up the returned consent forms, so as to avoid any invasion of privacy. Teachers obligingly agreed to help in the recruitment of participants in a purely administrative role. The consent form also requested that one of the parents in the family participate as well. A total of 82 parents signed and returned the consent form for their children, and of these 82 parents, 50 (49 mothers and one father) agreed to take part in the study as well. Three mothers signed up for two of their children and completed questionnaires for each child, thus a total of 53 parent-child pairs were available for the study.

Finally, we deemed it ethically important for the children to agree to participate in the study (to give their assent). All prospective participant children were provided with an information sheet that explained what would happen if they participated (see Appendix 3). When their time came to go through the experimental procedure, we again asked the children if they still wanted to participate and explained again that they could stop at any time. No child indicated any unwillingness to be in the study or asked to exit the procedure.

2.3 Materials and measures

2.3.1 The scenarios (stories) of unfairness

Four scenarios describing unfair situations were created for the purpose of the present study. The scenarios were designed to capture themes of unfairness that would be realistic to children in their daily lives. It was thought that children would find it easier to imagine a situation if it was close to their real-life experiences. The first scenario type, called the parent story, focused on an interaction between a mother and a child at home. Children are occasionally confronted with a situation where their parents reprimand them and punish them for something they did not do. This situation may happen to children when the parents have been busy with their work, or the parents are feeling tired from the pressures of domestic life.

The second story type, called the friend story, described an interaction between a child and his or her friend. Friends play an important role in children’s social life and children learn many aspects of social skills through friendship interactions. Unfairness, unfortunately, does happen between friends. Friends may shift their own responsibilities or they may try to blame their own transgressions on others. The main themes of the two scenarios were as follows (note that every story had a boy or girl version, depending on the gender of the child participant):

Parent story 1 (Scenario 1: Tidying up)

A child is watching TV in the living room after finishing all her homework. The child is behaving very well. Her mother is not having such a pleasant day, so she is distressed by the mess in the living room. The mother growls at the child to turn off the TV and to tidy up the mess although the child did not make it.

Parent story 2 (Scenario 2: Pudding)
A child is helping mum set the table while the mother is making some puddings for visitors. He helps a lot around the house and is being very good. The mother tells him not to touch the pudding as it is for the visitors. The child listens to his mother, but she herself does not follow her own instruction and instead eats some pudding before the visitors arrive.

Friend story 1 (Scenario 3: Making a mess)
A child and her friend are working on their own artwork. She is keeping things neat and tidy, but the friend makes a big mess. When their classroom teacher finds the mess she asks both children who made it. The friend quickly denies her own fault and blames the child. Both children are told that they are not allowed to go out to play until they clean up the mess.

Friend story 2 (Scenario 4: Secrets)
A child and his friend are talking about their secrets. They promise each other that they won't tell any of their secrets to anybody. The child keeps his secrets, but the friend tells his to other children, so now everybody knows them.

More than one story involving a parent or a friend was used in the design of the study. There were various reasons for this. Previous research has shown that the theme of the story often has slightly different implications for children and it is difficult to match the stories on all the possibly relevant parameters. For instance, in past research children have sometimes stated that what was happening in the story was unfair because the punishment (or reward) was disproportionate to the child's behaviour. While that is certainly one element of unfairness, the issue of interest was the fact that the punishment was not deserved at all. In the present study, story 1 with either mother or friend involves getting blamed for something one did not do (the standard theme in previous research). Story 2 involves a double standard – the perpetrator of the unfairness doing something that the child (victim) was not supposed to do and did not, in fact, do. Nevertheless, we recognise that each of these situations is a little different in terms of the dynamics among the characters and the violation of a fairness principle.

The full text of the scenarios as well as copies of the illustrations that accompanied the stories are provided in Appendix 4.

2.3.2 Rating the degree of fairness or unfairness

Children were asked, after hearing the story, to report the degree of fairness or unfairness evident in the scenario. A simple 10-point scale (anchored with descriptive words: 1 = 'not at all', 10 = 'very very', eg, very very unfair) was designed and printed in a large, easy-to-read format. Children were asked to point to a number to indicate how unfair they thought the situation described was.

Not every child described the scenarios as unfair. In this event they were questioned in a little more detail in case they had misunderstood the story. When working through the theme of the story again, some children changed their minds and acknowledged the unfairness. Those who did not were kept in the study and the procedure continued in the standard way; however, they automatically received a rating of 1 for how unfair they thought the situation was.

2.3.3 Rating the types and strength of feelings of unfairness

Children were asked in an open-ended format to describe how the child might be feeling after experiencing unfairness. The strength of that feeling was measured by asking them to point to a number on a simple 10-point scale (1 = 'not at all'; 10 = 'very very').

2.3.4 Three tasks to measure forgiveness (vs. retaliation/hostility)

Three tasks were designed to measure children's willingness to grant forgiveness or to retaliate against the perpetrator of unfairness. It was assumed that these represented an indirect way of measuring children's willingness to forgive a person who has treated them unfairly. To obtain an overall forgiveness score, the score on each task was summed (high score = high forgiveness; low score = high retaliation/hostility).

The first task was called 'sharing'. In this imaginary task, children were given pictures of three different sizes of chocolate cake. They were told that the child in the story has the right to decide who should receive a large piece, a medium piece or a small piece. Children were asked to give a piece of the cake to the mother and one piece of cake to the child. For the friend story, children decided which piece of chocolate cake would be given to the friend. If children decided to give a larger piece of cake to the mother or to the friend than to the child, this was considered an indication of children's willingness to forgive (score = 3). If the children assigned a smaller piece of cake to the mother or the friend, this was considered as indication of hostile attitude (score = 1). If the children decided to give the same piece of chocolate cake to the mother or friend as to the child in the story, this was considered a neutral response (score = 2).

The second task was called 'caring'. It was designed to observe children's willingness to show concern for the person who had been unfair to them. Children were given a description of an imaginary situation where the mother or the friend has dropped something and as a result might have hurt themselves. Children were asked to think about how the child in the story might react to this situation. In order to assist children's responses, three possible reactions were proposed: (a) the child does not care about the mother or friend and ignores the possible harm (score = 1); (b) the child thinks about what to do (score = 2); (c) the child runs over to check on the mother or the friend right away to make sure they are OK (score = 3). Children's willingness to forgive was assumed if they decided to help the mother or the friend right away in spite of unfair treatment that the child had received.

It might be noted that this task was a variant from an earlier situation we had used in previous studies in which the mother actually cut herself. The picture that accompanied this task had shown blood dripping from the mother's finger. This was a powerful stimulus to the children who almost invariably said they would run to fetch a plaster. The idea that someone might either ignore the injury or even laugh at the injured person (two of the options) was something that the vast majority of children thought was very wrong and showed a strong disinclination to rate these as their choice of reaction. What is interesting about this is that even if unfairness elicits some feelings of hostility, those feelings are not likely to be strong enough to override a much more compelling tendency to help an injured person. This demonstrates that our test situation measures need to be balanced against the harmfulness of the unfair experience. Conversely, however, there were some children in the earlier research who did indicate that they would not assist a mother who had cut her finger on the grounds that she had treated the child in the story unfairly and did not deserve any sympathy.

The third task was called 'trusting'. It was designed to observe children's willingness to subsequently trust a person who had been unfair. Children were told about a situation in which the mother or the friend asks the child for a favour despite previously treating the child unfairly. We presented a situation in which the child was asked to lend his or her favourite DVD or game to the mother or to the friend. There would be a risk that the DVD or game might then get damaged or lost. As similar to the caring task, children were given three choices: (a) the child would hide it somewhere private so that the mother or the friend would not take it (score = 1); (b) the child would think about it and consider it (score = 2); or (c) the child would lend it to the mother or the friend right away, so that they could enjoy it as well (score = 3). Children's tendency to grant forgiveness was assumed if they chose to lend their favourite DVD or game.

In order to assist children to carry out these tasks, pictures and props were used. These are illustrated in Appendix 5.

2.3.5 Children's understanding of forgiveness

At the very end of the session and after all tasks had been completed, the older children in the group were asked to explain what is meant by forgiving someone. We had found in earlier pilot work that the younger ages in the range we had selected found it difficult to explain this concept verbally, although they appeared to know what it meant in practice. In order to avoid pressuring any of the children, only some of the older boys and girls were asked this question. All children were given the opportunity to express their concept of forgiveness by being asked if the victim in the story would forgive the perpetrator and if so what would happen as a result. The advantage of this from an ethical point of view is that it ended the session on a more positive note, focusing on forgiveness rather than on the possibility of retaliation. Their answers were recorded verbatim.

2.3.6 Observations

In addition to the child participants doing ratings and responding to the three forgiveness/hostility tasks, the experimenter and her research assistant carefully observed the child and made notes at the time and afterwards, particularly of the things that the children spontaneously commented on throughout the procedure. All sessions were videotaped and the videotapes were later viewed to ensure that all of the information extracted from the ratings, the tasks and the verbatim comments was accurate.

2.3.7 Verbatim comments

All comments made by the children were recorded, either from notes or from the video and transcribed. The transcriptions were entered into NVivo 7, a powerful software program for the analysis of verbal material. For the purpose of this report, the major themes that appeared relevant to the questions were identified and broadly coded. All comments were categorised into smaller but more meaningful units based on the broad codes. In order to ensure all comments were reliably coded, three postgraduate students in the School of Psychology, Massey University, who were blind to the purpose of the preset research project, were given a number of the selected comments and lists of the broad codes. They were then asked to assign the most appropriate code to these selected comments.

2.3.8 Parent questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed specifically for this study to assess the relationship between the parents' approach to children's common misbehaviours, their strategies for dealing with children's misbehaviour, their expressed willingness to show forgiveness and the strategies they would use to help their child cope with experiences of unfairness. In the first part of the questionnaire there were five hypothetical situations describing simple incidents of child misbehaviour. The main themes of the five scenarios were as follows:

Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up
A mother asks her child to switch off the TV and to tidy up the mess as they need to go out for an appointment. However, the child is non-compliant with the mother's request.

Scenario 2: Deleting a project
A mother is working on a project on her computer. She asks her child to stay away from the computer as it is important to her. However, the child does not listen to the mother and loses mother's important project.

Scenario 3: Dropping a plate
A mother asks her child to help her set the table. When the child was carrying a plate of food, she/he drops it on the floor.

Scenario 4: Misuse of money
A mother gives her child $10 to get a few things from the shop. However, instead of buying all the items that the mother asked for, the child uses the money to buy her/his own things.

Scenario 5: Muddy footprints
A mother asks her child to take off all wet and muddy clothes before entering the house. However, the child does not listen to the mother and leaves muddy footprints all over the house.

This questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 6. Some of it had been developed in previous research (Evans and Scarduia, unpublished). Different sections of the questionnaire assessed the following dimensions:

(a) The first part was designed to gauge parental attributions about behaviour. (In this context, attributions are the thoughts or judgements that parents make regarding the causes of the child's actions.) Parents were asked to read the five hypothetical scenarios describing simple incidents of child misbehaviour and, for each hypothetical scenario, they were asked to judge the possible causes of this behaviour. Two items essentially excused the behaviour (it was an accident, the child was too young to know any better), and two items attributed negative characteristics to the child (she/he was naughty, she/he was trying to annoy me).

(b) The second and third parts used the same instances of misbehaviour and asked the parents how they would respond to it, immediately as well as after the child had apologised and shown that he or she was sorry. A forgiving response was possible immediately but could become more probable after the child had shown remorse.

(c) The fourth part was developed for this study and asked parents to indicate what strategies they might use to help their child get over negative feelings that arose from being treated unfairly. The purpose of this section was to see whether encouraging forgiveness was a strategy that some parents were likely to recommend to their children.

2.4 Procedure and design

A time to conduct interview sessions with the children was arranged with school principals approximately one week after children returned their consent forms. The parents' and children's rights during the time of the study were clearly communicated. Participating families were encouraged to contact the research team if they had any questions with regard to the study. Also, on the consent form, there was a place where parents were able to provide any comments, concerns or questions about the study. Our replies to these questions were given to the parents via email or letter.

All children who had returned their consent form were individually invited to attend a scenario-based experimental session during their regular school time. A quiet room was allocated by the school for the purpose. Upon arrival at the room, the child was introduced to the researcher and a second research assistant. Three different individuals served as second research assistant, depending on their availability and randomly allocated to the research sessions; all were female undergraduate students in the School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North. The role of the second research assistant was to read two scenario stories (one parent, one friend), record the children's responses, videotape the session, make sure the interview kept to the allocated timeframe and minimise any disturbance to the children's classroom study. Children were told briefly about the purpose of the study and were assured there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. If children seemed comfortable with the setting and understood what would happen to them in the interview, they were asked to give their assent to commence the scenario-based interview session.

Accompanying the story in each scenario were drawings that described the main theme of the scenario and these were shown to the children in keeping with the narration. The researcher pointed out the drawings while the second research assistant read the scenario. Once the story was read, the children were asked to describe what had happened to the principal character in the story, the child who was the victim of unfairness. If children looked unsure and wished to hear the story again, they were permitted to listen one more time.

After listening to the scenario, the researcher asked a series of standard questions about the story. These questions were:

(a) What happened to the child?

(b) Was what happened to the child in the story fair or unfair?

(c) How unfair was it for the child and why?

(d) How might the child be feeling?

(e) How strongly ('how much') does he/she feel this way?

(f) What would you do if you were in a similar situation?

After these questions, the children were asked to respond to the three tasks, which were designed to assess their willingness to share with, care for and trust a person who has unfairly treated the child in the story. Each task had three choices, one of which the children were able to select. Each choice was illustrated and that allowed children to express their idea or decision.

A second scenario, telling the story about a parent or friend depending on the theme of the first scenario, was then read to the children once they had completed all the tasks from first scenario. After completing the three tasks of the second scenario, children were thanked and given a sticker. The researcher and her assistant ensured the children enjoyed their participation in the study and that they were not upset in any way. The entire session took approximately 20 minutes. Observations from the pilot work revealed that this was long enough to keep young children's concentration and to complete two scenario stories with questions.

Each child, therefore, heard two scenarios, one parent and one friend, the order of which was determined by random assignment. Whether the child heard *Parent story 1: Tidying up or 2: Pudding and Friend story 1: Making a mess or 2: Secrets*, was also determined ahead of time by random assignment. Type of scenario (parent or friend) was, therefore, a within-subject variable.

The questionnaire to parents was posted to them once their children had completed the scenario-based experimental session. A free-post envelope was included, so that parents were encouraged to return it as soon as convenient. If the parents had not returned their questionnaire after three weeks from the date of posting, a duplicate questionnaire was sent to them as a reminder.

3. RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA

In this section we report the findings from the study, providing descriptive statistics for each measure used, followed by statistical analyses of possibly interesting differences or relationships among variables. We will first present the quantitative data and then present some qualitative data that captures the essence of some of the verbatim comments made by children or written by the parents.

3.1 Child measures

3.1.1 General observations

All the children appeared to enjoy their session in the study. They were well-behaved, listened attentively to the story and seemed relaxed in the presence of the researchers. They were fascinated by the idea of being videoed. No testing session had to be terminated because any child was giving indications of distress and all children assented to the procedure.

3.1.2 Children's basic judgement of fairness or unfairness.

Each scenario was designed to unambiguously describe an event involving unfairness. However, when asked if the situation in the story was fair or unfair, a small number of children reported that the events were in fact fair. The percentage of children who considered the situations described to be fair, were Scenario 1, 14 percent; Scenario 2, 0 percent; Scenario 3, 5 percent; Scenario 4, 0 percent. This indicated that the theme of unfairness was consistently identified in each scenario; however, the stories clearly differed in their significance to children.

Scenario 1 proved to be unclear as a stimulus context for children judging unfairness. This scenario involved a mother blaming her child for a messy room that the child did not create. In conversation with the children who considered this fair, the children explained that the mother was entitled not to want a room to be messy and that the child had a responsibility to tidy it up whether he or she had made the mess or not. This value of everyone in the household sharing in tasks and daily chores is very likely one that is instilled in children by parents and probably represents a somewhat higher-order level of judgement about responsibility. Similarly Scenario 3 contained an element of friends sharing a responsibility or duty to work together to make amends even if they differentially contributed to a situation.

3.1.3 Ratings of unfairness

All children were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale how unfair the experience in the scenario would be for the child in the story. The frequency distribution of these ratings for parent and friend scenarios is depicted in Figure 1 and the mean fairness ratings for each theme (blamed when innocent, or subjected to a double standard) are depicted in Figure 2. As children were exposed to four different possible combinations of story, the differences within and between scenario themes were analysed by t-tests. Within the two parent scenarios, the children who listened to Scenario 2 ($M = 7.7$, $SD = 2.1$) indicated a significantly higher degree of unfairness than the children who listened to Scenario 1 ($M = 6.5$, $SD = 2.9$), $t(74) = -2.0$, $p < .05$. The eta squared statistics (.05) indicated a small effect size. In the friend scenarios, the children who listened to Scenario 4 ($M = 8.7$, $SD = 1.9$) rated the degree of unfairness higher than the children who listened to Scenario 3 ($M = 6.8$, $SD = 2.9$), $t(77) = -3.5$, $p < .05$. The eta squared statistics (.13) indicated a moderate effect size.

To consider the impact of the major type of perpetrator in the scenarios (parent vs friend) on the children's ratings of unfairness, the mean rating of the parent scenarios ($M = 7.6$, $SD = 2.6$) and the mean rating of the friend scenarios ($M = 7.1$, $SD = 2.6$) were compared by means of a paired sample t-test. Although the parent scenarios were rated as more unfair, the difference between the two mean ratings was not significant, $t(72) = 1.2$, $p > .05$. We have already established, of course, that one of the parent scenarios did not seem very unfair – or even unfair at all – to these children.

Figure 1 **Frequency distribution of the ratings (grouped into five categories) of unfairness on both parent and friend scenarios**

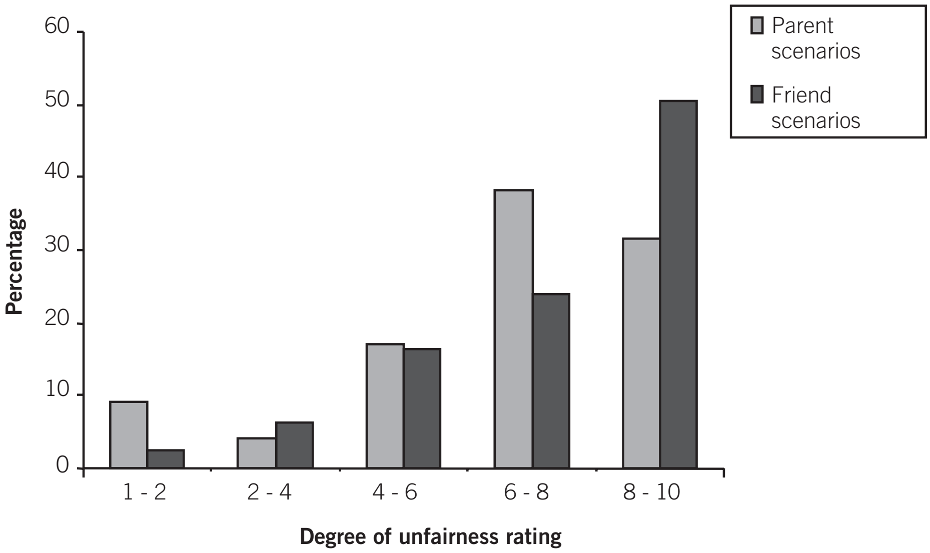
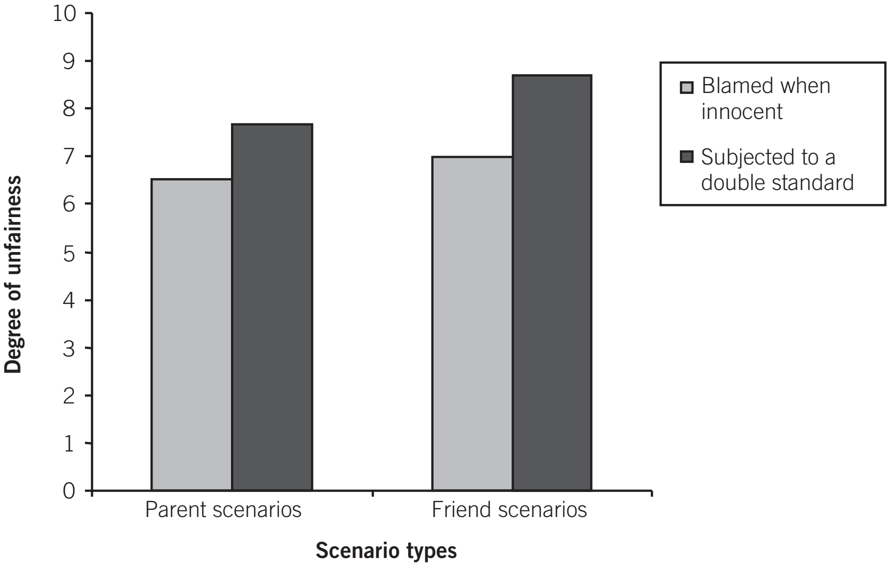


Figure 2 **Mean ratings of unfairness for the two different themes of the scenarios**



3.1.4 Nature and strength of feelings in response to unfairness

Children gave open-ended replies to the question on how the child in the scenarios might be feeling and how intensely they might be feeling that way. Children were able to associate as many feelings with each scenario as they wanted to. We classified their specific emotional terms into six possible categories, for example UNHAPPY included words like ‘hurt’, ‘upset’, ‘left out’. The OTHER category was used for words such as ‘confused’, ‘nervous’ and ‘betrayed’. Figure 3 illustrates the frequency with which each category was mentioned. SAD and UNHAPPY might logically be put together, but in any event the feeling of sadness was identified most frequently, compared to ANGRY and ANNOYED, which two might also be linked together.

It can be seen that anger was more likely to be expressed in the friend scenarios, and sadness in the parent scenarios. The OTHER category, which included concepts like betrayed, was particularly common in the friend scenarios, possibly because unfair treatment is something that children of this age do not expect from friends.

Children also reported how strongly they thought the child in the scenarios would be experiencing the feelings identified. Figure 4 shows the mean strengths of the four different types of negative feelings. Feelings were stronger in the friend scenarios than in the parent scenarios.

Figure 3 **Frequencies of the types of feelings associated with the experiences of unfairness**

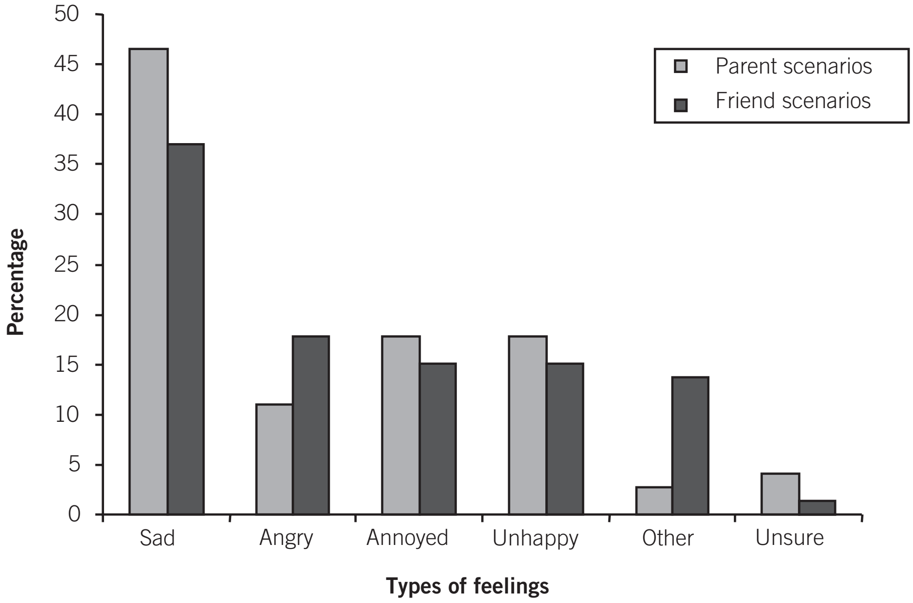
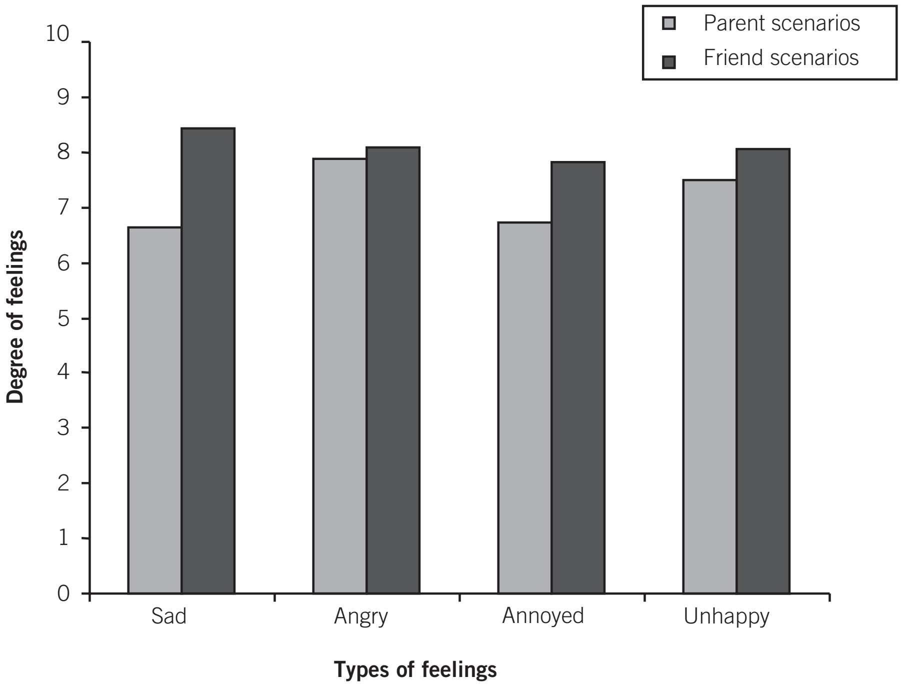


Figure 4 **The mean strength of four negative feelings**



3.1.5 Children's willingness to forgive

The total positive score on the three tasks assessing sharing, caring and trusting was considered to reflect children's willingness to offer forgiveness to the mother or the friend in the scenarios after the experience of unfairness. The relationships between each of these tasks' scores and the total score were examined by means of Pearson product moment correlation (see Table 1 and Table 2). The tasks did not correlate very highly with each other, suggesting that the three situations tapped different elements of negative affect (feeling states).

In the parent scenarios, a positive relationship was identified between Task 1 (sharing) and the total forgiveness scores, $r = .80$, $n = 73$, $p < .01$. Moderately strong relationships were observed between Task 2 (caring) and the total forgiveness scores, $r = .58$, $p < .01$, and between Task 3 (trusting) and the total forgiveness scores, $r = .54$, $p < .01$.

In the friend scenarios, a Pearson product moment correlation matrix indicated that the sharing tasks were less likely to be related to the caring and the trusting tasks. However, the caring task and trusting task had a positive and relatively strong relationship, $r = .50$, $n = 50$, $p < .01$. This may mean that caring and trusting situations share some common meaning for children in the context of their friendships. These three tasks were further correlated with children's total forgiveness scores. All three tasks consistently showed positive and moderately high relationships with children's total forgiveness scores: Task 1, $r = .73$, $p < .01$; Task 2, $r = .71$, $p < .01$, Task 3, $r = .73$, $p < .01$. These findings support the assumption that the sum of the scores on the three tasks provides a meaningful overall index of children's willingness to offer forgiveness and not to feel hostile, even though this willingness is made up of separable dimensions.

The mean of the total forgiveness scores for the parent scenarios was 7.3, whereas the mean of the total forgiveness scores for the friend scenarios was 6.6. A t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of that difference; it indicated that children were more willing to grant forgiveness to a parent than to a friend, $t(1, 72) = 3.8$, $p < .05$. The eta squared value (.17) indicated a moderately large effect size.

Table 1 Intercorrelations between three tasks and the total forgiveness scores in the parent scenarios

Tasks	1	2	3	4
1. Share	—	.23	.27	.80
2. Care		—	.23	.58
3. Trust			—	.54
4. Forgiveness				—

Table 2 Intercorrelations between three tasks and the total forgiveness scores in the friend scenarios

Tasks	1	2	3	4
1. Share	—	.19	.20	.73
2. Care		—	.50	.71
3. Trust			—	.73
4. Forgiveness				—

3.2 Parent measures

3.2.1 Parent attributions regarding children's common misbehaviour

Parents were able to rate the likelihood of their making each of the four possible attributional judgements (he/she is naughty, it was an accident, she/he is trying to annoy me, the child is too young to know any better). Ticking 'very unlikely' was given a score of 0, 'somewhat unlikely' a score of 1, 'somewhat likely' a score of 2 and 'very likely' a score of 3. Scores were then averaged for the behaviours described in the five scenarios (refusing to tidy up, deleting a project, dropping a plate, misuse of money, muddy footprints) and the resultant mean scores for the group for each attribution across each scenario are illustrated in Figure 5. Parents' attributions for the misbehaviours varied according to the behaviours and their contexts. Figure 6 further shows the mean score for each attributional judgement averaged over the five misbehaviours. It can be seen that in general these parents tended to make positive attributions (it was an accident, he/she didn't know what he/she was doing) rather than external, negative judgements (he/she was trying to annoy me, he/she is naughty).

Figure 5 **Parent attributions regarding children's common misbehaviours (mean likelihood scores)**

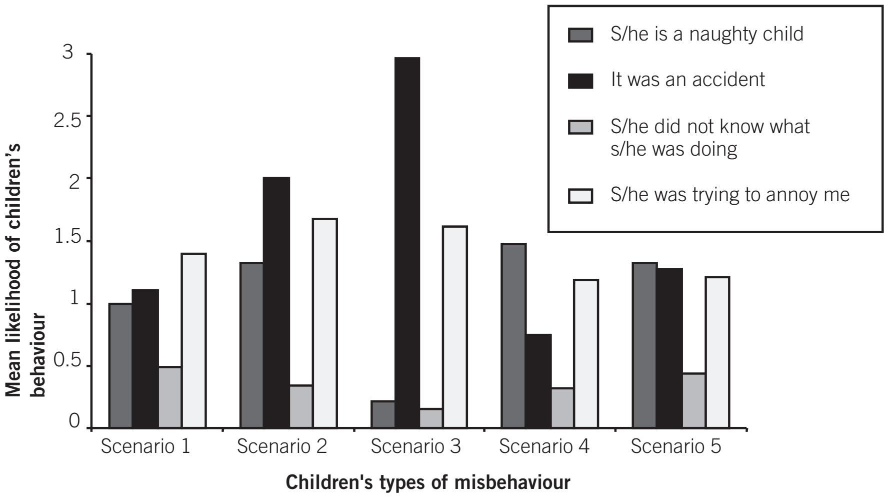
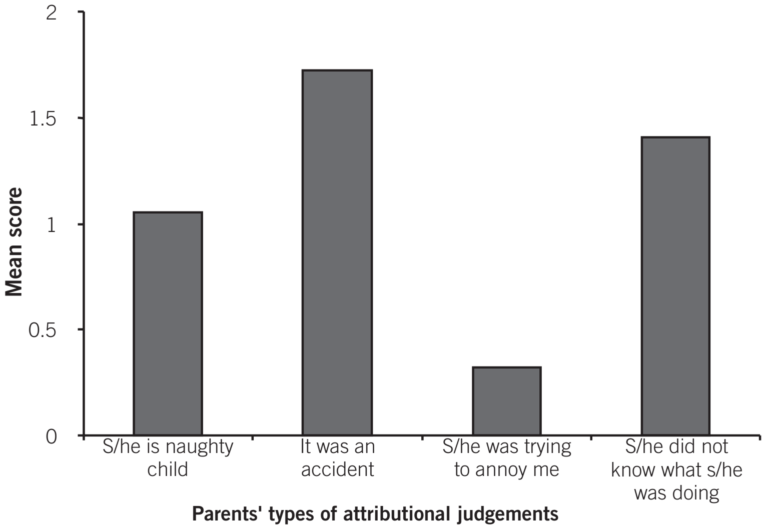


Figure 6 **Parental attributional judgements over children's five types of misbehaviour (mean likelihood scores)**



3.2.2 Parental descriptions of how they would respond to misbehaviour, before and after the child apologises

Parents were asked to specify how they would deal with (respond to) the five instances of a child's misbehaviour, both in the first instance, and after the child had apologised. There was a clear relationship between apologising and the act of forgiveness, and interest, therefore, potentially focuses on whether a parent who might initially have been punitive is less so after an apology. The next section summarises findings from a qualitative perspective and provides examples of these parental statements. For a quantitative analysis, we coded responses according to their level of punitiveness through to forgiveness. Parents were thus given a score on a 7-point scale as follows:

1 = punishment, including time-out and loss of privileges

2 = verbal reprimand, scolding

3 = threatened punishments or warnings not to do it again

4 = requiring child to put things back to rights, make amends

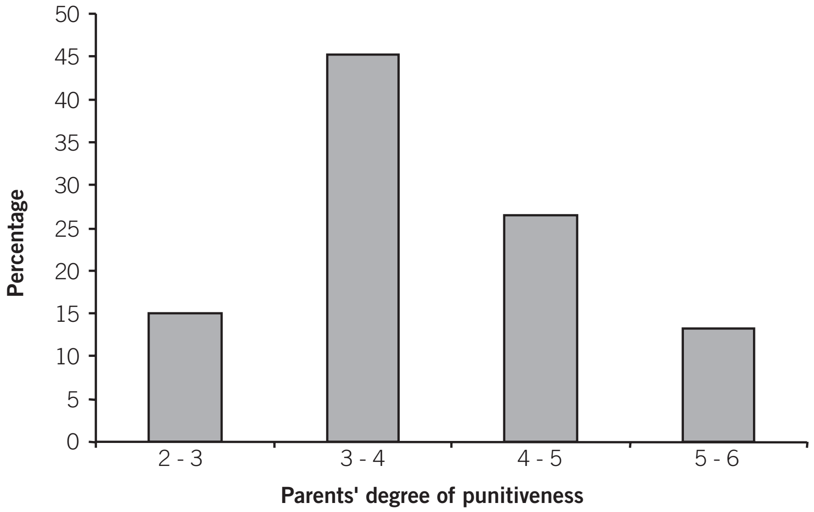
5 = listening to explanation or explaining why action was wrong (moral lecture)

6 = providing information about what should have been done (teach appropriate alternative action)

7 = dismiss behaviour as unimportant, forgotten, incident is over, no harm done (absolve of blame)

By averaging the rating given each of a parent's reactions to the five scenarios, it was possible to give each parent an aggregate score on this punitiveness dimension. The frequency distribution of these aggregated scores is shown in Figure 7 for four blocks of score (no aggregated score was less than 2 or greater than 6, with a mean of 3.8, *SD* = .8). As Figure 7 illustrates, the majority (45 percent) of the parents' 'punitiveness' fell in the moderate range of a threat of punishment and some sort of requirement to make amends, but a relatively large number of parents emphasised listening to their children's explanations and teaching alternatives.

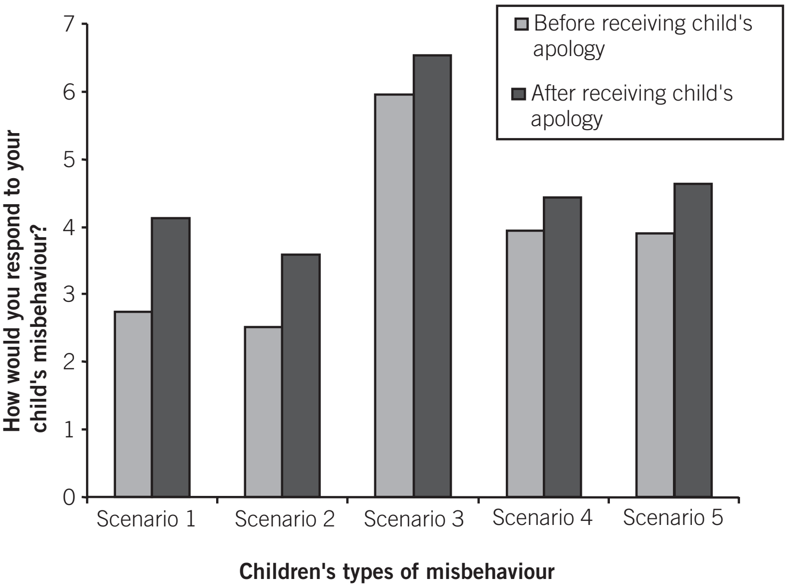
Figure 7 Parents' degree of punitiveness in responses to children's common misbehaviour



In addition to the 7-point scale described, an additional .5 of a point was given to parents who had mentioned how their emotional arousal might decrease after receiving an apology from their children. Parents' responses often included more than one of the behavioural reactions described in the above scale. It was also common for the parents to act exactly the same way to their children regardless of children's apologetic behaviour. However, what changed in these parents' reactions was their degree of emotional arousal. A number of parents commented how their emotions would 'soften', 'melt' or 'calm down' after receiving an apology from their children. Thus, parents' degrees of emotional arousal were taken into account as a part of the parents' responses to the children's apologies.

Figure 8 illustrates how punitively parents would respond to the five misbehaviours before and after receiving their children's apologies. Overall, parents reported that they would act less punitively toward their children if their children were apologetic (*M* = 4.7, *SD* = 1.1) rather than non-apologetic (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = 1.4). Parents were especially less punitive for a misbehaviour described in Scenario 3 – dropping a plate (before apology, *M* = 5.9, *SD* = 1.7; after apology, *M* = 6.5, *SD* = 1.0) than for the rest of the behaviours.

Figure 8 **Parents' responses to children's common misbehaviour before and after receiving their children's apologies (low scores indicate punitiveness, high scores indicate a willingness to forgive or use as a learning opportunity)**



3.2.3 Parents' strategies to deal with children's experience of negative emotions

Three options were presented to the parents in the questionnaire ('tell them to get over it', 'encourage them to get their own back', and 'encourage them to forgive') and they were asked to rate how often they might offer these suggestions (from never to always). The frequency with which each rating was given for the three options is illustrated in Figure 9. It can be seen that a little over 50 percent of the parents reported 'often' encouraging forgiveness, whereas a large percentage indicated they would 'sometimes' encourage the child just to get over it. While almost half the parents said they would 'never' encourage their child to get his/her own back, a few would do so 'often'.

Parents were asked to rate the likelihood of using each of the three strategies to help their children deal with unfairness experiences. Ticking 'very unlikely' was given a score of 0, 'somewhat unlikely' a score of 1, 'somewhat likely' a score of 2, and 'very likely' a score of 3. Figure 10 shows the mean scores for the three strategies. Overall, parents were more likely to encourage their children to forgive the other person who was unfair (*M* = 1.9, *SD* = .7) rather than encouraging them to get over it (*M* = 1.0, *SD* = .4) or encouraging them to get their own back (*M* = .6, *SD* = .6).

Figure 9 **Parents' frequencies of using three types of strategies to help their children's experiences of unfairness**

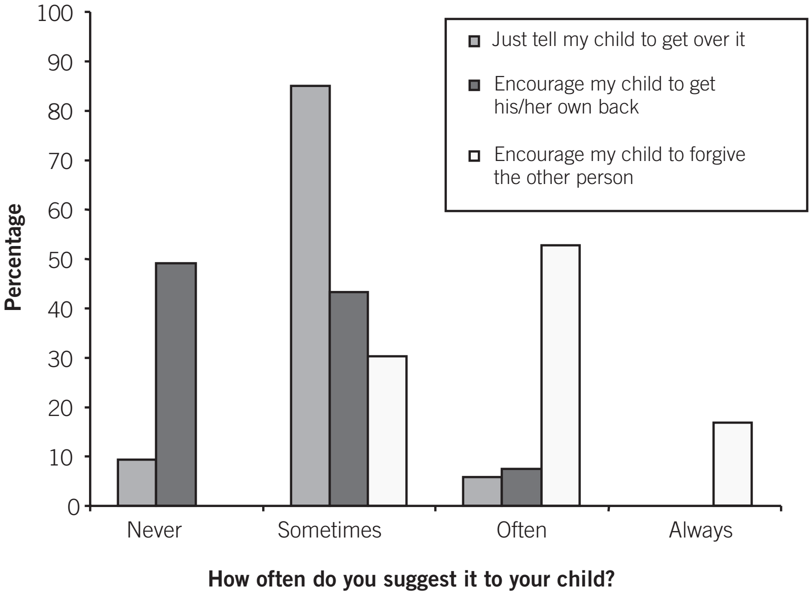
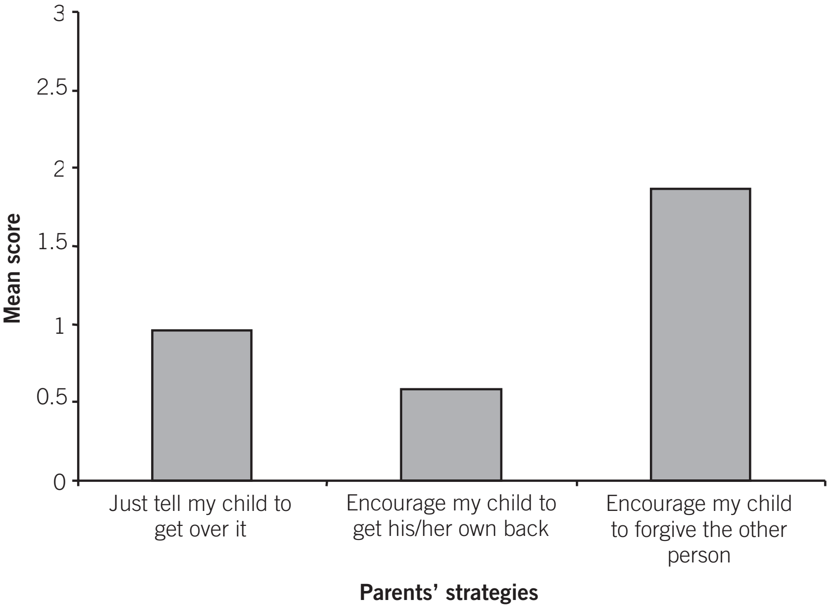


Figure 10 **Mean scores of the parents' use of the three strategies to help their children's feelings of unfairness**



Based on the parents' estimates of how frequently they use these suggestions, it is possible to give each parent a score on the degree to which they recommend forgiveness over other possible categories. Always encouraging their children to forgive earned a score of 6, 'often' 4, 'sometimes' 2, and 'never' 0. Always telling them to get over it earned a score of 4, 'often' 2, 'sometimes' 1, and 'never' 0. Never encouraging them to get their own back earned a score of 1, 'sometimes' 1, 'often' 2, 'always' 3. Adding together their three scores provided one overall index of the parent's self-perceived tendency to encourage forgiveness and avoid retaliation. The possible combined score thus varied from a low score of -3 to a maximum of 9. The mean score for the group of parents was 4.5 (*SD* = 1.9), which indicated that the majority of parents had moderate tendencies to suggest forgiveness to their children when they reported experiences of being treated unfairly by others.

3.2.4 The relationship between parents' willingness to grant forgiveness and children's forgiveness tendency

The data reduction strategies described so far provided four relevant scores relating to the adults' self-reported parenting practices (tendency to make negative attributions, punitiveness in response to transgressions, willingness to modify that reaction in response to the child apologising, and the tendency to encourage forgiveness). Would any of these characteristics of parenting style predict the way the children responded to the experience of unfairness (intensity of negative affect elicited by unfairness or, at the other end of the dimension, indication of a non-retaliatory, forgiving tendency) by parent and by friend? To investigate these possible relationships, these six variables were inter-correlated for the 53 parent-child pairs.

Prior to examining these relationships, however, certain modifications had to be made. First of all, as we have seen, the parents' responses before and after the child apologises did not differ greatly, so this variable was dropped from the analysis. Second, many researchers of attributional style will differentiate between 'external' (attributing to causes outside the individual) and 'internal' (attributing to causes inside the individual). As a slight variation to this distinction we assumed that parents could have a 'blaming' attributional style (attributing causes to deliberate or negative features of the child) as opposed to a more 'forgiving' attributional style (interpreting the causes as not the fault of the child). We inter-correlated the parents' four attributional scores in order to determine whether or not these variables could be reasonably grouped into these two distinctive and broader attributional types. A Pearson product moment correlation showed that there were significant relationships between attributions: the attributions A and C (she/he is naughty, she/he is trying to annoy me) were significantly related to each other, $r = .38$, $p < .01$, and the attributions B and D (it was an accident, the child is too young to know any better) were significantly related to each other $r = .37$, $p < .01$. These findings supported an assumption that these four attributions might be categorised into either positive/forgiving or negative/blaming attributional types, and it was the scores on these two dimensions that were entered into the final correlation matrix with the children's behaviour on our tasks.

Table 3 shows the intercorrelation between children's forgiveness tendency (children's level of forgiveness in the parent scenarios and children's level of forgiveness in the friend scenarios); their parents' tendency to make positive/forgiving and negative/blaming attributions; parents' reported punitiveness in response to children's transgressions; and parents' tendency to encourage forgiveness in response to reports of unfair treatment. The relationships between these variables were examined by means of a Pearson product moment correlation matrix. The analysis showed that there were significant relationships among parents between being less punitive and making positive attributions, $r = -.28$, $n = 53$, $p < .05$. But the four dimensions of parenting practices did not predict children's tendency towards forgiveness.

Table 3. Intercorrelations between parents' willingness to grant forgiveness and children's forgiveness tendency

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Children's levels of forgiveness toward the mother	—	.22	-.06	-.10	-.15	-.21
2. Children's levels of forgiveness toward the friend		—	-.06	-.09	-.15	.02
3. Parents' tendency to make positive attributions			—	-21	-.28*	-.01
4. Parents' tendency to make negative attributions				—	-.04	-.01
5. Parents' punitiveness (low score) vs. forgiveness (high score)					—	.25
6. Parents' tendency to encourage forgiveness						—

* = significance at $p < .05$

4. RESULTS: QUALITATIVE DATA

4.1 Children's verbatim responses

While engaged in the three test tasks (sharing, caring and trusting) the children openly talked about their decisions to respond in certain ways. In this section, their verbatim responses were analysed according to concepts that emerged as primary themes. Transcript extracts from the scenario-based interview sessions were used to provide definitions and exemplars for each theme. Words in square brackets have been added to elucidate the meaning when the child's spoken language syntax was sufficiently ungrammatical for the intended meaning not to be clear.

4.1.1 Children's awareness of their kin system

Children's perceptions of their own position in their family system tended to underlie their reason for doing something nice to the mother in the story. Children may be making excuses for their parent just because the parent has senior status. They may be willing to deal with some of the unfair behaviours of their parents or other adults just because they are the grown-ups who are in charge. Children are learning the boundaries between children and parents in any family system. These family hierarchies may be part of many status rules of which they are likely to receive constant reminders from parents and other grown-ups:

> Because she is older, deserves more. (Year 4 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> Because she is the oldest. (Year 6 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)

4.1.2 Children's willingness to give latitude to the mother

This theme related to how children balanced their negative emotional experience of unfairness and their positive feelings and attitudes toward the mother. Children's comments showed how actively they were judging seriousness (blameworthiness) of the parent's misbehaviour as well as the experiences of their parent's good behaviour in their daily lives:

> Because she is a grown-up, and could also mean repaying good things she has done for him. (Year 4 boy, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> Because her mum does lots of nice things for her, so she has to do some things for her. (Year 4 girl, *Task 2: Caring*)
>
> Because the mum has [not] been that good to deserve the bigger piece, but she has not been that cruel or mean and selfish to have the small one. So, that one (points to medium one). I think that in-between [one] because she is an adult and she should have a little bigger than kid, and she's also being OK. She is not being cruel or not making her cry or anything. She (Emily) has just been upset that she is not getting a piece of chocolate cake. (Year 6 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)

4.1.3 Being respectful of a parent

Children often stated how important it was for them to do good things for their parents. Family plays an important part in children's lives. They respect each member of the family and they care for each other. Perhaps parents are teaching children to respect the family as a unit, thus one individual's small mistake does not make any difference to how they treat each other:

> Because if she laughs, that wouldn't be very good because it's your mum and she would be looking after her just like she looks after you. (Year 4 girl, *Task 2: Caring*)

> Children should care for their parents as much as their parents care for their children. (Year 4 girl, *Task 2: Caring*)
>
> Because whatever your parents do, you should not be angry with them. (Year 6 girl, *Task 2: Caring*)

4.1.4 Children's strong sense of justice

Numerous children explained that their decision was based on their understanding of what was the right and wrong thing to do in a given situation. Children tended to express their strong sense of morality and equal justice, but often in phrases and language that they had probably heard from parents or teachers:

> Even though mum did something wrong, a wrong does not make it fine. He should not do something back to her. She could be hurt. (Year 4 boy, *Task 2: Caring*)
>
> Because it [is] not right to not help or to just think about it. Because two wrongs do not make a right. (Year 6 girl, *Task 2: Caring*)
>
> Because it would be fair, because his mum already had a piece, and if he had this little tiny piece, it wouldn't be fair, so he should get this big piece. And also he did [the] right thing in there, he should, kind of reward himself. (Year 4 boy, *Task 1: Sharing*)

Justice, however, can work two ways. Although a large number of children tended to give the mother the benefit of the doubt when she had treated the child unfairly, some children did express how upsetting it was for the child to experience such unfairness. As the experience of unfairness was associated with negative feelings, emotive factors seemed to motivate these children to act negatively toward the mother. The following two themes emerged clearly from the children's comments as they thought about the test tasks.

4.1.5 Punishment as justice

A number of children felt that the mother did deserve to be punished because that was the right thing to be done to her, and the child should be rewarded. Basic rules of justice are that one deserves to be punished for a crime one has committed and resources are distributed according to need. Children are well aware of these rules:

> Because the mum has already had some [pudding]. So Emily gets to eat the big one. So, [that will] make it the same. (Year 4 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> [The mother deserves] the medium one because her mum has done something bad, but then she (Emily) felt good about helping her. So she should give her medium piece. [The child deserves] the largest piece because she does not think her mum deserves that cake and she helped out mum. (Year 6 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> [The mother deserves the medium piece] because she has already had a little bit of cake and Emily hasn't. [The child deserves the largest piece] because Emily hasn't had a piece of the cake but her mum has. [Then] it won't be unfair. (Year 4 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)

4.1.6 Punishment as revenge

Some children were mad and angry at the mother who was unfair. These angry feelings seemed to influence how they decided to act toward the mother after the experience of unfairness:

> Because she is angry with her. (Year 4 girl, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> Because he is probably mad at her. (Year 4 boy, *Task 1: Sharing*)
>
> I think that she would probably hide it. Because this might be like ‘pay back’, like for not letting her have pudding. (Year 4 girl, *Task 3: Trusting*)

4.1.7 Weighing up the options

Being a recipient of unfairness is not pleasant for children and this emotional experience made children think about what would be the right thing to do for a person who was unfair and a person who was a victim of the unfairness. Many children took a moment to decide what the child in the story would do. Children were obviously thinking carefully about what would be the best decision regarding both the mother and the child. Children’s decision-making processes were observed from their comments:

> (On *Task 2: Caring*): She might think about it because I think that she might be thinking that she deserves that because her mum was being mean to her, so that she might be thinking whether she [mum] deserved to be helped or not. [She might have decided to help] because she might decide that her mum did not know, so she decides to forgive mum. (On *Task 3: Trusting*): She might think about it, because she might still remember what had happened. [She might give it to her] because she might decide that their mum might deserve something special. (Year 4 girl)
>
> Because this is her favourite DVD and she would like to think ‘Well, can I trust mum to look after it?’ (Year 4 girl, *Task 3: Trusting*)
>
> (On *Task 2: Caring*): I am not sure these two [helping or just thinking]. She might want to think about it because what her mum did was unfair. That one there [helping] is nice because she loves her mum and she could get things back from her mum, she could get a piece of the cake because she has been helpful to mum. (On *Task 3: Trusting*): Because her mum has been a bit rude and selfish, eating the cake and keeping it with herself. But I think that this one [giving mum DVD] is nice because she loves her daughter and her daughter loves her mum. And family should share things because when I go home I help her around the house, maybe help her tidy up lounge and dishes. Then I am going to get some pay back for doing that. (Year 6 girl)
>
> Because it wasn’t really his mum’s fault. His mum might have really important things that she needed to do. So John might think about it, ‘Well, it wasn’t really fair that she didn’t let me watch TV and she thinks that I made the mess. But it would be a nice thing to do to give her the DVD.’ (Year 6 boy, *Task 3: Trusting*)

4.2 Parents’ responses to children’s common misbehaviour

4.2.1 Punishment as feedback

When parents are confronted with their children’s misbehaviour, they tend to experience heightened negative emotions (eg anger, frustration). At the same time, they try to take charge of the situation and to discipline their children, so that their children will not make the same mistake again.

How parents struggle with their own emotional experiences and their role as a parent may be observed from this category. Parents proposed reprimanding their child so as to give them constructive feedback to modify future behaviour. Parents tended to suggest teaching about causes and consequences associated with misbehaviour. Feedback included expressing how disappointed mothers might be at their children's transgressions:

> Turn off the TV. Give clear and direct instructions to get him to the car. Tell him that the consequence of him not following instructions is that we are late. He will be required to tidy up when we return. That I understand he was distracted and maybe needs more time, but next time it is very important to listen and act. (Year 4 boy's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

> Scold her and explain the consequences of her disobedience. Deny her pudding after dinner. That might [serve] to demonstrate how her actions have consequences. Deny pudding, TV viewing, or some other thing she enjoys. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

> I explain what has happened, to make him aware of what was happening and what consequences have occurred due to his actions. I would then decide on a period of 'no computer time'. Usually they are much harder on themselves if you ask what they think a good timeframe would be. (Year 4 boy's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

> I would send him back to return what he bought and get what I wanted. I would ring the shop to explain before he got there. If he had eaten or used what he bought I would make him pay me back from his pocket money and send him back to buy me my goods. I would probably make him pay me back double as reparations. (Year 6 boy's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)

> Ask for why she didn't listen to me, help to get her muddy clothes in the wash and tell her she [must] help me clean the mud up on the floor. Explain to her it takes lots of time to clean up when we could be doing other things if she had listened. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 5: Muddy footprints*)

Some mothers are very aware of their own emotional experience. They are aware of how their own emotion may impact on their actions toward their children:

> I would tell her I am so angry she should go away from me 'till I cool down and she had no right to be on the computer when I asked her not to. When I calmed down, I would give her a cuddle and explain why I got so angry. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

> My first question would be 'Who has been on the computer?' as I have two children. I would let her know of my disappointment and repeat what the request had been (I would be relatively angry). I would have a more 'relaxed' talk about why I had made the request later that day, so she understands my disappointment and anger. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

> I HATE being late. Turn off the TV myself. Tell her to leave what she's doing. Get her in the car (I assume she's coming with me) and while driving, tell her how angry I am that I am now late – while I calm down; then tell her she needs to finish her task when we get home and more calmly remind her that if I ask her to do something I expect it to be done. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

> I would be very angry at her and send her to her room for time out while I calmed down. Later I would explain to her how important it is to do as she was told and

> then she would be given a consequence/punishment. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> First I am sure I would be extremely angry so I would need to calm down before addressing her. I would sit down and explain that I am disappointed with her, explain the amount of work it will take to reproduce. Some type of consequences would follow, possibly doing more housework so I have time to work on the computer. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

Parents' feedback was not only about cause and consequences, but some parents used this opportunity to teach their children the importance of considering the perspective of others:

> I'll tell him that I was not pleased and disappointed with his behaviour. How would he feel in a similar situation? (Year 6 boy's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)
>
> [I'd say] 'I asked [you] to take off all your dirty clothes and because you ignored me, I now have to clean up your mess. Do you think that's fair? Next time please listen to me when I ask you to do something and consider my feelings.' (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 5: Muddy footprints*)

All five instances in the questionnaire described children's common misbehaviour. However, the seriousness of each transgression may be perceived differently by parents. Certainly the parents' responses changed according to the actual incidents described. The most serious misbehaviour seemed to be that described in *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*, which involved a child who selfishly used money to buy his or her own stuff instead of buying things that his or her mother had asked for. Parents took the child's misbehaviour in this incident particularly seriously and their feedback included nurturing morality and virtue:

> Ask him to explain what has happened, then make it very clear about how important it is to be trustworthy. He will have to pay back the money he used. (Year 4 and Year 6 boys' mother)
>
> Explain that she has just stolen money to buy something for herself. Take away the thing she bought, she won't get it back. She has to pay the money back by [doing] jobs around the house. And [I'd] send her back to the shop – with a list – to get the things she'd forgotten. (Year 4 girl's mother)
>
> I would explain to her how annoying and inconvenient this was and how it was similar to stealing as the money was mine. (Year 6 girl's mother)

4.2.2 Positive responses such as giving children a second chance or a chance to explain

Perhaps harsher punishment would naturally follow when a transgression is serious. However, not all parents focused on punitive consequences and some provided possible approaches to misbehaviour – even for *Scenario 4: Misuse of money* – that seemed to have the potential to teach children principles of fairness and forgiveness:

> Okay, let's check the list – did you remember everything? Did they have everything? Did I give you enough money? What's this? What's that? Oh dear. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)
>
> Ask her why she didn't get everything and tell her next time when she goes to the shop if she gets everything on my list then she can have a small treat for herself – or get one from her pocket money. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)

> I would play it down: ‘Oops, never mind. Next time you need to use two hands’ or something like that. (Year 4 girl’s mother, *Scenario 3: Dropping a plate*)

> Smile and have a laugh and ask where the shops are. Make light of it as understandable behaviour. (Year 6 girl’s mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)

Some parents suggested ways to manage their child’s behaviour and the environment so that there would be less risk of the same mistake being made again:

> Give a consequence for not listening. ‘Next time you want to watch while we get ready the TV is off.’ I feel annoyed but also aware that it is natural for her to go with the option that suited her most. Consider my part too – get more organised! Let it go – move on to more positive stuff. Make sure she knows we’re OK. (Year 4 girl’s mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

> Tell child what they have done; explain how difficult it is to have information and the need to listen when I ask them not to do something. I would also learn to save information or protect my computer from child accessing it. (Year 6 girl’s mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

4.2.3 Forgiveness

Parents reported attitudes of forgiveness of their children’s mistakes when their children seemed to be sorry and apologetic for their misbehaviour. Some of the following comments were written in response to the added context in which the child apologised and showed that he/she was sorry:

> Inside me, I would soften: ‘I believe you X, [but] right now I feel very upset and a bit angry. I need to have ‘time out’, I need to go for a short walk – by myself.’ Then I’d go walk around the block to clear my feelings and head, and work out how to re-do the computer work, then go back to my child and do a bit of talking and listening and re-establish that she’s not to do THINGS when she’s been told NOT to do them. I would forgive her and I would say the words ‘I forgive you’, let’s start fresh.’ I MIGHT ask her to help restore my project. (Year 4 girl’s mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

> Thank him, and praise him for realising the importance of doing what is asked of him straight away. Surprise him with a treat or something later in the day for doing good. (Year 4 boy’s mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

Parents not only accept children’s misbehaviour to varying degrees, but also recognise their own role, responsibility or their own mistakes as well. If this recognition is expressed to the child it confirms an important principle of fairness in which everyone involved in some sort of incident takes some level of responsibility:

> ‘Thank you for that. I appreciate it. Next time TV will go off until you are ready.’ Admit my part, too: ‘Sorry, sorry’. Was it wise to give instructions and have TV on when I know how distracting that is? [Then] the feelings of annoyance would melt away. (Year 4 girl’s mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

> Probably, scream and yell for short duration – [but] also I would have to accept some responsibility because where was I when he was on the computer that I didn’t notice?! (Year 4 boy’s mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

Conversely, many of the parents would accept their children’s apology but conditionally and the majority of them asserted that it was important to follow through with the consequences that the children deserved. This was usually justified on the grounds of simply wishing to prevent the child making the same mistake again:

> 'You should have listened, I accept your apology, but that does not mean I accept your behaviour.' (Year 4 boy's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)
>
> Appreciate [the] apology, but [I'd] still make certain she realises [the] link between her decision to ignore my instructions and [the] resulting problem. Still [the] same consequence, but less aggression. Be very careful she knows I appreciate [her] apology and she is loved. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> In this case, I would thank her for apology, let be clear it's not OK what she did. Work out a consequence and then leave it at that. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)
>
> 'Thank you for your apology. I think it's important you realise that you made a mistake. Please listen to me next time as it's frustrating to me to have to do that work all over again.' (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> 'Thank you for apologising – next time just do what I ask [and] you won't need to say sorry. Sorry doesn't fix this.' (Year 6 boy's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)

Some parents reported how their emotional reaction might change as soon as they recognised how sorry their children were for their misbehaviour:

> 'It's not enough to say sorry now, the damage is done. Leave me alone for a while, I'm very cross and we'll talk about the consequences in a while when I've calmed down.' (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> I'm still annoyed, but instead of being angry I go quickly to calm and still explain about me asking her to do something, about [being] late and about her needing to finish her 'job' when we get home. I thank her for apologising. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 1: Refusing to tidy up*)
>
> I would still be angry but I would not growl [at] her as much. I'd still want my own space to calm down, then give her a cuddle and talk to her about it. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> I would do the same probably still irritated and grumpy, but a bit less so. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)

Some parents reported that they would determine the degree of punishment according to their estimate of how sorry their children might be:

> If they realise they have done something serious then it helps with dealing with it and they are usually very sorry. I would probably lessen the 'banned' timeframe. (Year 4 boy's mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> Sometimes children say they are sorry for something just to get out of being told off. I always say to my children that sorry is not just a word, but is a feeling. I would find out whether she was really sorry or not and discuss things with her. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 5: Muddy footprints*)

When children apologised and said they were sorry, some parents reported using such opportunities to remind their children of certain moral or ethical principles:

> Again, [I'd] accept the apology, but reiterate that there will still be a consequence because of the action so that he also has to make things right as well as say sorry. (Year 6 and Year 4 boys' mother, *Scenario 2: Deleting a project*)
>
> Accept her apology and ask her to explain to me why what she did was wrong. Ask her to suggest how she might make up for her wrong-doing. (Year 4 girl's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)
>
> [I'd still] reprimand her. Tell her treats for errand-running only come after the errand is fulfilled. Maybe explain the importance of the things that needed to be bought. Make her share the goodies with her sisters. (Year 6 girl's mother, *Scenario 4: Misuse of money*)

4.3 Children's reponses to apology

In the children's comments in response to a question about the likelihood and consequences of an apology by the perpetrator of unfairness, it was very easy to see the same sort of words used as they would have heard from their parents and perhaps teachers as well.

The children seemed disposed to offer forgiveness, but, like their mothers, they also requested the perpetrator not to make the same mistake again, even when considering a mother's mistake (being unfair):

> She might probably say: 'Thank you for realising what had happened; thanks for saying that, but please don't do it again.' (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> It's OK, people do [make] mistakes sometime. (Year 4 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> She might thank her mother. And tell her to do not do it again. Say 'that's all right' because she knows what she was doing. (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> Mum would say: 'Sorry I have eaten a big piece of the cake when you are not allowed to have one.' Emily might say: 'That's all right – as long as next time [you] need to be fair.' (Year 4 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)

Particularly in the case of the parent story, some children said that the child and the mother should do something nice, including helping out, after the mother apologised and the child accepted it:

> He would change to a little bit larger one. (TY: 'Why do you think so?') Because she's apologised and said sorry. (Year 4 boy, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> She would give her mum a hug and say 'I forgive you'. (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> Go and give her a hug and say I'm sorry also. (Year 4 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> If she said sorry, he would help her tidy up the mess. (Year 4 boy, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)

Children seemed to reveal a greater willingness to grant forgiveness if they had a pretext or were able to give the mother an excuse of not behaving appropriately. Again one can hear echoes of many parental excuses:

> It's OK, because she has done a right thing [when] her mum told her to tidy [the room] up, it probably might [have been] an emergency, like she [mum] might have to have a work interview, or special guests. (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)
>
> I think that she'll forgive her because she is her mum. (Year 4 girl, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)

The children did appear to expect to feel better if the mother accepted her mistake and apologised to the child about it in what seemed to be a genuine way. Some children described how the child might be feeling after receiving the apology:

> That would be a good thing because John would be happy, because that wasn't John's mess and she is sorry. That's good, so he could forgive her. (Year 6 boy, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)
>
> I think that she would say: 'I am sorry for what I have done, could [you] please forgive me for what I have done? I could just say sorry and I could take out for lunch or something.' (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 2: Pudding*)
>
> She would probably say: 'Sorry Emily, that wasn't your mess' [and] Emily might say: 'That's all right'. (Year 4 girl, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)

The majority of the children accepted the mother's apology and stated that they would forgive her. However, some children indicated that they would need to ensure the apology was genuine first, and a few children were not totally convinced by the mother's apology:

> He probably asks his mum if she really meant it – to apologise; might think about it for a while, and he might forgive her. (Year 6 boy, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)
>
> She might …she might say: 'That's OK', or she could start talking with her that it wasn't my mess. 'I was just doing what you told me to.' Maybe start to argue; some people do that. (Year 6 girl, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)
>
> He might forgive her or might not. (TY: 'Why might he not?') Because he does think that she was not really fair and she was not nice to him. (Year 6 boy, *Parent Scenario 1: Tidying up*)

There were obvious differences in how children expressed their expectations regarding responding to an apology from a mother as opposed to a friend. As peer relationships represent an important social task for older primary school children, it was not surprising that many children indicated a willingness to accept an apology for the purpose of maintaining a positive relationship and ensuring a new or renewed understanding between them:

> Probably forgave her, and [say]: 'Shall we start all over again? but not tell secrets about each other.' (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> She might say: 'I forgive you' and still be friends. (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)

> I think that he would probably say: ‘That’s OK, but I still [don’t] appreciate it, and still [feel] that was quite mean. I forgive you, but only this once.’ (Year 4 boy, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> He might say: ‘Oh, that’s all right. Just don’t do it next time. Because next time I might not forgive you.’ (Year 6 boy, *Friend Scenario 2: Making a mess*)
>
> That’s all right. Just next time don’t betray me, and be fair. (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 2: Secrets*)

Generally the children indicated a belief that saying sorry erases a mistake one has made. By apologising it is possible to smooth things out and be able to start all over again:

> She would say sorry and would [promise] not to tell any secrets again, and then she (Emily) would give her half of the cake. So they both have the same amount. (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> He would probably take the apology and then just start to be the good friend. (Year 4 boy, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)
>
> I think that she would not mind, [and would] forgive her friend, and the person [who] did not make the mess might help the person [who did]. (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)

Children, however, recognised that being sorry did not erase everything that had happened to them. They indicated feeling that the perpetrator needed to set things right:

> That’s OK, [but] instead of just blaming me you can tell the teacher: ‘I made the mess’. If he gets mad, then I would get more trouble. (Year 4 boy, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)
>
> I think that she might say: ‘Could you please go to the principal's office [and explain who is to blame], I will come with you. And other than that I forgive you.’ (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)

In the case of relatively minor transgressions and simple domestic, everyday errors of fairness such as those in the scenarios, children have probably heard grown-ups say things like ‘forgive and forget’. These children mentioned this frequently:

> He is going to forgive him, he’s annoyed about it, but he can do nothing about it. What’s happened has happened. Might as well go on. (Year 6 boy, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)
>
> He might just say: ‘It does not matter’ or something. (Year 6 boy, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> She would just say: ‘I forgive you [so let’s] forget about it.’ (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> Emily might say: ‘It’s OK, it is not the end of the world.’ (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)
>
> She might give the game to her, so that they might forget about [the incident]. (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 3: Making a mess*)

> She would probably say something like: ‘Don’t worry about it.’ (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)

To forgive and forget is sometimes a difficult thing to do, however, and there may be permanent damage to a relationship if trust is destroyed:

> I would not care because [a] promise is [a] promise, if you break it, that’s it! I would not care [about an apology]. (Year 4 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> I think that she would talk to her about how she would not be able to trust her anymore. Or maybe she would tell her how she felt. (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Secrets*)
>
> She would probably say: ‘Thanks for [the] apology, but I don't like being blamed. I do not know if I want to forgive you yet.’ (Year 6 girl, *Friend Scenario 4: Making a mess*)

4.4 Children’s experiences of granting forgiveness

At the end of the interviews, children were asked whether or not they ever had occasion to forgive their parents, other grown-ups or their friends for something bad they might have done to them by mistake. This question was not an easy one for the majority of children, as they needed to take a few minutes to recall incidents. However, a large number of children did enthusiastically recount some of the events involving forgiveness in their daily lives. The following are some of the incidents that children themselves described in which they had decided that they would forgive the other person.

4.4.1 Forgiveness in the family environment

A number of children talked about how their parents, sisters or brothers made some mistake and how they decided to forgive them:

> My mum said something, by mistake, not nice to me. But it was actually [an] accident because it was not actually mean to say it. (Year 4 girl)
>
> One of them happened yesterday. Me and my dad were trying to finish a game [when my brother came along] and he moved things around. Even though I was really upset, I said: ‘That’s all right. Just don't do it next time.’ [I] forgave him. We started a new game this morning. (Year 4 girl)
>
> I forgave my mother for dropping the hair brush [and breaking it]. I know it was [an] accident. I [also] forgave my nana, because it was on Saturday, she woke me up. I hate that. I told her not to wake me up. (Year 4 girl)
>
> When once my mum and dad grounded me because I was naughty. But I forgave them. (Year 4 girl)
>
> Sometime I forgive my parents because they accidentally break something of mine. I get very angry, but probably forgive them because they have paid for it. (Year 6 girl)
>
> At home, my sister, she was playing with my toys – this happened when I was about five – and she broken [one], but she said she didn’t. I had to clean up. But I forgave my sister. (Year 6 boy)
>
> I was doing some baking and mum said that she would get it out of the oven, but she forgot to open [the oven and take it out]. But I forgave mum. (Year 6 girl)

4.4.2 Forgiveness and the friendships

Children begin to spend more time with their peers during the middle childhood and it is important for them to build increasingly tolerant friendships. A large number of children talked about when and how they had decided to forgive their friends:

> I forgive my friend X. I was writing a letter to my friend but X ripped it up, but I forgave her because she wrote me a letter and gave me a lollipop. (Year 4 girl)
>
> I always forgive friends; because I do not want to lose friends. I just say, that's all right, we can still be friends. (Year 4 girl)
>
> Yes, I would of… It was a long time ago, I was playing netball in my team, and this kid tripped me over and said sorry. I forgave her because I knew that [it] was [an] accident. (Year 6 girl)
>
> My best friend [and I] sometimes have a fight. She takes my stuff. But I still forgive her for that. Because X and I are friends for several years now. It would be unfair for someone to, like give her a go. (TY: 'Is that like giving a second chance?') – yep. (Year 6 girl)

Children did report sometimes finding it difficult to fully forgive the person who may have hurt them. Depending on the seriousness of the incidents, children may take some time to let go negative feelings about what has happened to them:

> I forgave my brother, a couple of things. This year my brother was playing and hit me seriously. Bruised quite badly. [It took] a few weeks to forgive. (Year 6 girl)
>
> Today, morning tea time, we were playing on the field, my friend started to cry but she did not tell me why either. And the other friend told us that we blamed on her for something, but we did not do anything. A long time to forgive the friend. (Year 6 girl)

Being able to apologise for a wrongdoing is an important social skill. Children have leaned to 'say sorry' for their mistakes from an early age. Some children mentioned an apology-forgiveness rule in their interpersonal relationships:

> Today at lunch, my friend was hurting me. So I hurt him back. Then my friend apologised to me, so I apologised too. (Year 4 boy)
>
> One of my friends, yesterday, was quite mean. She told [a] new friend who she liked. I do not think I am quite [ready] to forgive her because she is not willing to say 'sorry'; other than that, I'd forgive her. (Year 6 girl)

4.5 Children’s understanding of forgiveness

Some younger children find it difficult to articulate what forgiveness means to them, even though they stated that they knew they had forgiven somebody before. In spite of some difficulties, a number of children tried to explain their understanding of the concept of forgiveness:

4.5.1 Forgiveness may mean to forget about an incident

> It means saying sorry and forgetting all about it. So that you go on with your own life. (Year 4 girl)
>
> Forgiveness means forget about something and try to get on[with] life and leave it in the past. (Year 6 girl)
>
> To me, it means to forget [the] past and move on. (Year 6 girl)
>
> If someone done something wrong to you, they gonna say sorry to you, then you kind of say: ‘That’s cool, let’s move on from now.’ What's happened has happened, really. (Year 6 boy)
>
> Forgiveness means someone says sorry. You forget about it and you are still friends. (Year 6 girl)

4.5.2 Forgiveness may involve emotional change

> It means when they do it they feel happy. (Year 6 girl)
>
> [It is] like you can change someone and make you feel a lot better as well. (Year 4 girl)
>
> Say sorry, want to be friend or to be with her. Hopefully, not feeling angry any more. (Year 4 boy)

4.5.3 Forgiveness may mean accepting an apology and giving a second chance

> When someone apologises to you and it should be [in] your best interest to accept it. (Year 6 girl)
>
> It means accepting apologies. (Year 6 girl)
>
> If someone makes mistake or does something to upset you, you just say, ‘That is all right,’ if they really really mean it. If they don’t mean it, just don’t be friend anymore. (Year 6 girl)
>
> Being able to like the person, listen to them and hear it from their [point of view]. Being able to give the second chance. (Year 6 girl)
>
> It means … being able to listen to other person's point, and being able to think whether or not they could have a second chance. (Year 6 girl)
>
> Forgiveness means… when someone broke something or something wrong and you forgive them and say: ‘I hope you do not do it again’, because if it happens again you won’t be the person to help the person. (Year 6 girl)
>
> Apologising and saying [I’ll] not do it again. Like if you did something wrong, just say ‘I’m sorry’ to the person who [you] did it to and say [you’ll] never do that again. (Year 6 boy)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Strengths and weaknesses

Justice, retribution, absolution – these highly abstract concepts are fundamental to moral philosophy and religious principles. Yet they have simple parallels in the everyday lives and experiences of New Zealand's children and families – fairness, getting even, forgiveness. Children's understanding of fairness and their reaction to the experience of it has received very little empirical analysis, perhaps because it seems such an obvious topic and so central to the daily management of family relationships. The present research has revealed that this is a topic rich in complexity and in significance for understanding family functioning.

The present investigation used experimental methodology. This has advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that the situations presented to the children (as well as to their parents) were hypothetical. For the children the procedure required that they engaged with a story, with words and pictures. A major assumption was that when children did so and discussed the story or adopted a role or took part in the story, they were revealing aspects of their own cognitions and emotions. In many ways we believe that this happened. The stories clearly had verisimilitude – a ring of truth, a connection with an experience that was familiar to them. The children listened attentively, were engaged with the stories and with the subsequent tasks and made comments that were unsolicited and revealed the ways they were feeling. Nevertheless, the experimental situation was artificial – it reflected experience rather than being experience itself.

Conversely, one of the major advantages was that consistent stimulus situations allowed comparisons between children and revealed the range of individual reactions to a common event. At the same time the different stimuli used revealed just how much context influenced children's and parents' reactions. Thus, for example, we often hear talk of parents' 'discipline methods' as though these are always uniform across contexts. However, in the present study it was very obvious that the way parents responded to their children's misbehaviour was very much dependent on how they construed the child's intent, and that in turn depended on the specifics of the behaviour and the circumstances under which it occurred. And from the children's point of view small differences in context, which seemed minor to us, resulted in considerable differences in judgement; for example one of the unfairness scenarios was actually judged fair by quite a significant number of the children, seemingly on the grounds that if two children played together and made a mess there should be a sense of shared responsibility, even though the specific mess was made by only one of the children. Whether this is an ethic imposed by countless parental pep talks about responsibility, or reflects some deeper sense of indirect responsibility for one's actions, we cannot say.

The importance of context, or the exact stimulus conditions, was revealed by the fact that the two types of unfairness experience produced slightly different estimates of the degree on unfairness. In keeping with previous studies from our research group, we were interested in unfair punishment, and so one scenario involved a mild degree of punishment (blame) for something the child did not actually do. The second scenario, however, was a new one not previously tried but suggested to us from previous comments by children: experiencing a double standard. In the present context, the latter situation was rated as more unfair than being wrongfully blamed. Situations involving a friend were rated as more unfair than those involving a parent, but the difference was not statistically significant.

5.2 Children’s feelings: Hostility

In general, therefore, the procedures used in this study seemed to ‘work’. Children participated, the material was not too juvenile for the older children, and a large amount of insightful comment and reflection by the children was generated. In particular the three tasks that were designed to be an implicit (ie indirect) measure of possible feelings of hostility in response to being treated unfairly did yield individual differences in children’s responses. These tasks or test situations were modifications of ones used previously and proved to be much more satisfactory. Willingness to show sharing, caring and trusting was influenced by the unfairness perpetrated on the child protagonists, although it must be recognised that we did not measure willingness levels before being exposed to the unfair experience. The inter-correlations of scores on the sharing, caring and trust tasks were significant but low, suggesting that the tasks did not represent exactly the same kind of unitary emotion but were nevertheless linked in some way, thus justifying aggregating scores across all three test tasks.

It was interesting that if the aggregated score on the three tasks was interpreted as indicative of a construct ranging from hostility (negative feelings, desire to get even or exact some kind of revenge) to willingness to forgive, there were striking individual differences, both in the children’s actual responses in the test situations and in the comments they made to justify the course of action they considered most appropriate. Willingness to forgive was justified on a variety of grounds. When a parent was involved it was based on such considerations as the parent being older (a grown-up), the generally good things mothers do, mums are busy and have other things on their mind so they make mistakes, because mothers and children love each other, and because it is a duty to share with one’s mother. Some of the explanations for not retaliating (and thus being willing to forgive) were sophisticated in terms of moral or ethical principles – one child said that two wrongs didn’t make a right; another said that families should share things. Some children, however, did clearly indicate that it would be likely that the child in the story would try to get his or her own back. It is possible that the wrongs depicted in the scenarios were not sufficiently serious or intense to arouse strong feelings of retaliation. As one 11-year-old girl said of the mother in the story: “She has not been **that** cruel or mean and selfish to [deserve only] the small piece of cake.”

It has to be remembered that our test situations were designed to give a score on the hostility/revenge versus forgiveness dimension and for ethical reasons it was not intended that very strong hostility reactions would be elicited. The fact that some reactions were elicited is indicative of the potential for this kind of measurement approach, which we believe is relatively uncontaminated by social desirability factors or by the fact that children know what the correct thing is to say. Again, it must be recognised that the children were not reporting their own feelings, only their suppositions about the feelings of the characters in the story. Our assumption that these would be projections of their own feelings must always be considered with some degree of caution.

The same sort of argument can be made with respect to the emotions that the children reported the characters in the story would feel and how strongly they would feel them. We allowed the children to provide an open-ended reply to what the ‘victim’ of unfairness would feel and this resulted in a wide array of different emotions or feeling states being identified. In keeping with previous research, the two most common emotions were anger (annoyed, mad) and sadness (which included terms like ‘hurt’ and ‘left out’). Generally, the children considered sadness to be the more likely response to parental unfairness, and anger to a friend’s unfairness. When considering the intensity of these negative feelings, however, the intensity of any feeling was considered greater in response to friends’ unfairness. This finding was consistent with the overall sense the children provided that parents could make mistakes for a variety of reasons and, therefore, the negative emotional reaction was muted, whereas friends should never do so and so the emotional consequences (some children described it as a feeling of betrayal) could be more severe.

5.3 Parents' responses

If some children seem more willing to forgive unfairness perpetrated against them, is it possible to account for these individual differences by better understanding the attitudes and strategies used by their parents? Not all the parents were willing to participate, but 53 parent-child pairs were available and it was mostly mothers who completed the questionnaire. Four parental characteristics were assessed by means of the questionnaire. The first of these was an attribution task in which parents rated the likelihood that a child's misbehaviour might be accidental or deliberate, or due to fixed aspects of the child (he or she is naughty) or to variable aspects (he or she is too young to know any better). The parents rated five different examples of misbehaviour and again we found that the specifics of the misconduct described had a strong influence on their judgement. Nevertheless, it was possible to aggregate the ratings and also meaningful to collapse two of them into a negative, blaming perspective and two of them into a positive, forgiving perspective. These attributional sets could have a very strong influence on how parents responded to misbehaviour, especially if parents tended to see the behaviour as wilful and designed to annoy.

The second task on the questionnaire that the parents were asked to do was to state how they would respond to their own child following each of the five misbehaviours. The parents provided open-ended answers that were quite complex and involved typically more than one reaction. For example, a mother might state that first she would need to calm down and control her distress; then tell the child he/she had done something wrong; then suggest some sort of consequence, which might involve setting matters to rights; and finally give a moral lecture about how not to repeat the behaviour in the future. Some parents reported ending the entire incident with a hug. Despite the complexity of the responses, it was possible to code them on a scale from the most punitive to the most forgiving. It should be stressed that while in general we might consider forgiving reactions to be the most positive, we are not really making a judgement about the appropriateness of parental behaviour. There may well be misbehaviours that require simple negative consequences and that this might be the best parenting strategy. In fact, there was a wide range of scores with most parents tending towards a somewhat punitive response.

How do parents respond if, after their child has behaved badly, he or she apologises right away and says he/she is sorry? The third task was designed to see whether apologies changed the parents' reactions – the same five behaviours were presented, but this time the parent was asked to explain what they would do or say if the child apologised immediately. It was clear that parents noticeably modified their reactions, usually softening their response. But they did not radically change the general strategy, which was to express displeasure at the behaviour and suggest ways the child might behave in the future. Apologies seemed to lower the anger or irritation level; however, a few parents commented that they would express appreciation for the child apologising but it would not really change the deserved punishment (consequences) for the child's actions. As a result, this particular measure did not reflect any strong influence of a child's apology on a parent's willingness to forgive. Those who might have been most influenced by an apology were already showing a willingness to make excuses for their child's misbehaviour.

The fourth task attempted to obtain an estimate of the parents' tendency to recommend forgiveness as a strategy when children reported feeling angry because someone had treated them unfairly. Only three options were given the parents to estimate their likelihood of advice to a child: (a) encourage them to get their own back; (b) tell them just to get over it; or (c) encourage them to forgive the other person. Some parents asserted that they would never encourage their child to retaliate, but many parents said they would occasionally use this strategy. The majority of parents favoured encouraging forgiveness.

None of these parent measures correlated significantly with the children's tendency to show forgiveness. There are a number of possible explanations. One is that children do not, in fact, learn their forgiveness tendencies from their parents, or, if they are influenced by their parents they will acquire these standards of behaviour from many other sources as well – peers, teachers, community groups, religious teaching and so on. Another possibility is that the self-selection of the parents who participated and the relatively high socio-economic profile of the schools the participants came from meant that we had a group of highly effective parents who had very forgiving children – the range of the different variables was simply not great enough to detect what might be a meaningful relationship. A third possibility is that neither the parent measures (based as they were on self-reporting), nor the children's measures (based on a hypothetical situation) were sufficiently robust to provide a valid measure of the phenomena of interest.

5.4 Understanding forgiveness

When asked what forgiveness meant to them, the children emphasised the importance of ignoring the past and 'getting over it'. They believed that forgiveness would have positive emotional consequences and allow one not to feel angry any more. Of considerable emphasis was their recognition that forgiveness was essential among friends and allowed someone who might have done something unkind to have a second chance. We noticed that when children were trying to explain a concept such as this and to justify its value, they would tend to use phrases that sounded very much like the sorts of things that a parent or a teacher would have said to them.

In previous studies we had noted that children were more likely to grant forgiveness to a mother than to a sibling, and in this study we confirmed that children were more likely to grant forgiveness to a mother than to a friend. The feelings associated with parental unfairness tended to be ones of sadness, whereas the feelings associated with a friend acting unfairly tended to be ones of anger. The study revealed a number of factors that seemed to contribute to parents being forgiven more easily – the children's sense of family and their role within it, the fact that parents are grown-ups and need to be respected and that mums do lots of nice things for children. It was delightful to see how many children accepted the need for reciprocal sharing, caring and trust: "Children should care for their parents as much as their parents care for their children", and "Because whatever your parents do, you should not be angry with them."

But not all children thought this way. Some thought that if the child was made angry, then he or she might seek 'pay back'. An angry child who experiences unfairness and does not have the sense of reciprocal love that typified many of our participants might well seek to retaliate in some way. A parent who senses this might then attribute all misbehaviour to deliberate efforts at 'pay back'. That in turn is likely to generate more instances of unfairness. It must be remembered that we only saw glimmers of this vicious circle at work, probably because the children and families who participated were ones who seemed to have a very good sense of understanding of the need to forgive and not to jump to conclusions about the origins of misbehaviour.

A particularly subtle feature of the experience of unfairness for children is that if the perpetrator of the unfairness – including if the perpetrator is a parent – acknowledges their error and apologises it is easier for the 'victim' of unfairness to forgive them and move on. Some children seemed to want to add a small moral lecture along the theme of "don't do that to me again". That same theme was very dominant in mothers' summaries of how they would deal with apologies from their children for misbehaviour. The most positive form of this was a teaching one, the message being what have you learned from this which will help you not perform the misbehaviour again in the future? A more neutral version came in the form of a warning: "Don't do that again", and the most punitive version came in the form of a threat: "Next time you do that there will be negative consequences." This relationship between apologising and forgiveness was one where it seemed the children were clearly learning their code for appropriate behaviour from their parents, often using quite grown-up words and phrases in their explanation of how they would behave.

5.5 Practical implications

For clinicians and educators involved in parenting programmes and attempting to teach positive disciplinary practices to parents, the present research offers a number of insights into family relationships. One of these is that it may be worth talking to parents about the relationship between how they construe their child's misbehaviour and how willing they are to then give their child the benefit of the doubt. These two variables were shown to be related in this study. Willingness to forgive does not necessarily mean that consequences should not follow misbehaviours. But if the behaviour is of doubtful origin and might be unintended, giving the child the benefit of the doubt has value since it appears to teach the child something about forgiveness that they can use in their own interactions. While the direct relationship between parental forgiveness and children's tendency to forgive was not confirmed, the children's ideas about forgiveness – as revealed in their own words – appeared to reflect the values that parents were expressing. Even if the behaviour is clearly negative in intent and needs to be addressed through consequences, the ability to get beyond the incident, forgive and move on, has the potential to offer children models of what they might do in their relationships with friends. If children appreciate the need for reciprocal tolerance in both family relationships and friendships, that would seem a promising way of breaking the link between experiencing unfairness, feeling anger and finally reacting in a hostile and unforgiving way.

Parents were candid about the difficulty of being forgiving when they were angry. The parents in this study often commented that they would need to calm down and be less angry before they could reasonably plan a response to a child's misbehaviour. Little lectures, trying to make the child see the consequences of his or her actions, encouraging them to find strategies so the behaviour would not re-occur and finally punishing with negative consequences were all things that these parents knew how to do and would use. But for all of them it seemed as if their strategies would be less likely to come across as fair to children if they emerged while the parent was still feeling strong negative emotion, such as anger. These are all features of everyday experiences of fairness, apologising and forgiveness that are a major part of everyday family life and which help professionals, as well as families themselves, understand a major element of family harmony. Everyone can make mistakes, whether parent or child.

There are still many features of these interactions that remain unclear or unknown. We did not, for example, consider the families' religious affiliations and yet the whole topic is replete with religious ideology around confession, forgiveness, absolution and vengeance. Neither have we been able to consider the role of ethnicity in the various judgements made by parents and children. We would assume that there are major cultural differences in the degree to which forgiveness is a conscious and acceptable strategy. We also might assume that other family factors, such as stress, could seriously influence the degree of negative emotion associated with a child's misbehaviour and could also make parents deal with their children in erratic and illogical ways, such as blaming them for things they did not do or were not truly responsible for, which then increased the child's experience of unfairness.

As a concluding observation, we would stress that we were extremely impressed by the general sense of fairness and tolerance that these ordinary New Zealand children revealed in their reasoning, in their sense of social give and take, and in the credit which they held for their parents in their emotional savings banks. The fact that this credit seemed so strongly present is surely due to the general tendency of their parents to trust, care for and love their children.

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APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Research project: Children's Understanding of Forgiveness

LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Date

Dear

My name is Tomoko Yamaguchi and I am a graduate student currently working on a series of research projects for my PhD in Psychology at Massey University. My supervisors are Professor Ian Evans, in the School of Psychology, and Dr Juilana Raskauskas, from the College of Education, at Massey University.

Thank you very much for agreeing to meet me so that I can explain my project to you. The purpose of this letter is to put my request in writing so that you can judge the suitability of my study for your school and decide whether you wish your school to participate.

This research project looks at forgiveness from the perspective of both **children** and their **parents**.

The first part of the present research project is a study of what forgiveness means to children. We are particularly interested in how children regulate their feelings when they are confronted with unfair/unjust situations and how this contributes to their behavioural display of forgiveness in their everyday lives. Attitudes of forgiveness and regulation of emotion are important in children's relationships with peers and others.

The second part of this research project looks at parents' perceptions and displays of forgiveness behaviour in their interactions with their children. We are especially interested in how parents respond to their children's common misbehaviour. Expressions of forgiveness may be one of the essential elements of positive parental behaviour.

In the study, we are inviting 70 children, 35 in Year 4 and 35 in Year 6, and their mothers. If your school participates in this research then I would meet with children individually and go through the following procedures:

FOR CHILDREN: Each child will listen to two scenarios about an unfair situation that has happened between a child of his/her age and that child's parent, or between friends. The scenario is make-believe. After the scenario story has been told, the child will be asked to respond to a series of questions about emotional experiences that the main character of a scenario has. The questions include how the events depicted would make the main character of the story feel, and how likely the main character of the story would be to forgive the person who was unfair. Each scenario is presented with simple and colourful drawings and an answer to each question can be pointed out on a pictorial scale. After this, children are given an opportunity to share their own experience of a time they forgave another's mistake.

The entire session will take about 20 minutes. To ensure the safety of your pupils, I will be accompanied by ________________________, a student in the School of Psychology, as a research assistant. She will be trained in her ethical responsibilities and her duties as a research assistant. She will video-record every session in order to obtain a really accurate record of the children' responses and also to ensure that this project will have no harmful or risk effects for your pupils. All records will be completely confidential. We will ensure that each child is willing to participate and will not be upset by the experience, as each child will be told that he or she is free to withdraw at any time.

FOR MOTHERS / GUARDIANS: They will be asked complete two small questionnaires. The first questionnaire is called "Parents' perceptions of children's common misbehaviour". In this questionnaire, there are five hypothetical scenarios describing everyday interaction between a parent and a child. Each hypothetical scenario has four possible reasons that they usually think of when their children do something naughty, bad, or exhibit other misbehaviour. They will be asked to tick the most suitable answer on a scale. The second questionnaire is called "Parents' responses to children's common misbehaviour". In this questionnaire, there are five hypothetical scenarios, which are identical to the first questionnaire. Mothers / Guardians will be asked to write down what sorts of things they typically do or say when your child misbehaves. The questionnaires should take less than 40 minutes to complete. The questionnaires will be posted to mothers' / guardians' homes once I have received a consent form from them. A freepost envelope will be provided to return them to me.

FOR THE SCHOOL AND THE TEACHERS: The role I would ask of you is that you discuss the project with your teaching staff and encourage them to assist by distributing the consent letters to children in class to take home to their parents. I would also ask you to assist me in finding a quiet location in your school where I can conduct a scenario story and an interview session, and record the children's responses.

At the conclusion of the study I will prepare a report of the findings, which discusses the implications they have for schools. I will prepare another version that can either be sent to the parents who participated or written up for your school newsletter, whichever you prefer.

By this letter, I am asking for your permission for your school and your students to be part of our study. The study of children's ability to forgive and regulate emotion in response to parent and peer actions is important as it can influence the children's behaviour with peers and their attitudes toward the world in general. For these reasons, I hope you will agree to your students being part of our study.

Approval from Ethics Committee:

This project has been reviewed and approved by Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 06/07. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 2383, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Researcher: Tomoko Yamaguchi, School of Psychology, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222,
Palmerston North, who can be contacted by phoning 3505799 extension 2516.
Alternatively you can email me at: Tomoko.Yamaguchi.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Professor Ian Evans, School of Psychology, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222,
Palmerston North, who can be contacted by phoning 3505799 extension 2070.

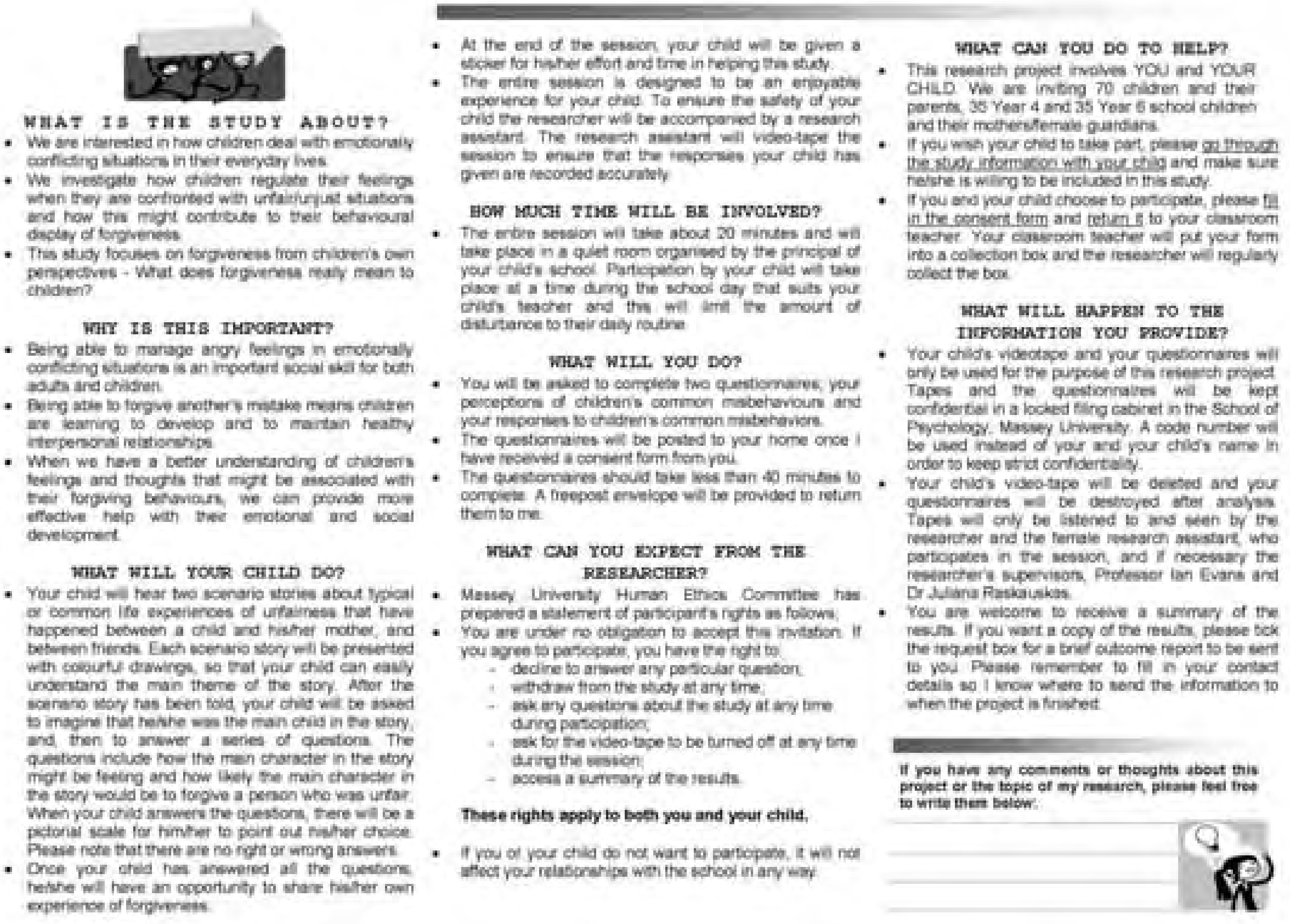
Co-supervisor: Dr Juliana Raskauskas, College of Education, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222,
Palmerston North, who can be contacted by phoning 3505799 extension 8621.

Thank you very much for considering our project. Your time and effort is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Tomoko Yamaguchi
Researcher

APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION AND CONSENT BROCHURE SENT TO PARENTS



WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?

- We are interested in how children deal with emotionally conflicting situations in their everyday lives.
- We investigate how children regulate their feelings when they are confronted with unfair/unjust situations and how this might contribute to their behavioural display of forgiveness.
- This study focuses on forgiveness from children's own perspectives - What does forgiveness really mean to children?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Being able to manage angry feelings in emotionally conflicting situations is an important social skill for both adults and children.
- Being able to forgive another's mistake means children are learning to develop and to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.
- When we have a better understanding of children's feelings and thoughts that might be associated with their forgiving behaviours, we can provide more effective help with their emotional and social development.

WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD DO?

- Your child will hear two scenario stories about typical or common life experiences of unfairness that have happened between a child and his/her mother, and between friends. Each scenario story will be presented with colourful drawings, so that your child can easily understand the main theme of the story. After the scenario story has been told, your child will be asked to imagine that he/she was the main child in the story, and, then to answer a series of questions. The questions include how the main character in the story might be feeling and how likely the main character in the story would be to forgive a person who was unfair. When your child answers the questions, there will be a pictorial scale for him/her to point out his/her choice. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Once your child has answered all the questions, he/she will have an opportunity to share his/her own experience of forgiveness.
- At the end of the session, your child will be given a sticker for his/her effort and time in helping this study.
- The entire session is designed to be an enjoyable experience for your child. To ensure the safety of your child the researcher will be accompanied by a research assistant. The research assistant will video-tape the session to ensure that the responses your child has given are recorded accurately.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL BE INVOLVED?

- The entire session will take about 20 minutes and will take place in a quiet room organised by the principal of your child's school. Participation by your child will take place at a time during the school day that suits your child's teacher and this will limit the amount of disturbance to their daily routine.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- You will be asked to complete two questionnaires; your perceptions of children's common misbehaviours and your responses to children's common misbehaviors.
- The questionnaires will be posted to your home once I have received a consent form from you.
- The questionnaires should take less than 40 minutes to complete. A freepost envelope will be provided to return them to me.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM THE RESEARCHER?

- Massey University Human Ethics Committee has prepared a statement of participant's rights as follows;
- You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you agree to participate, you have the right to:
  - decline to answer any particular question;
  - withdraw from the study at any time;
  - ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
  - ask for the video-tape to be turned off at any time during the session;
  - access a summary of the results.

These rights apply to both you and your child.

- If you or your child do not want to participate, it will not affect your relationships with the school in any way.

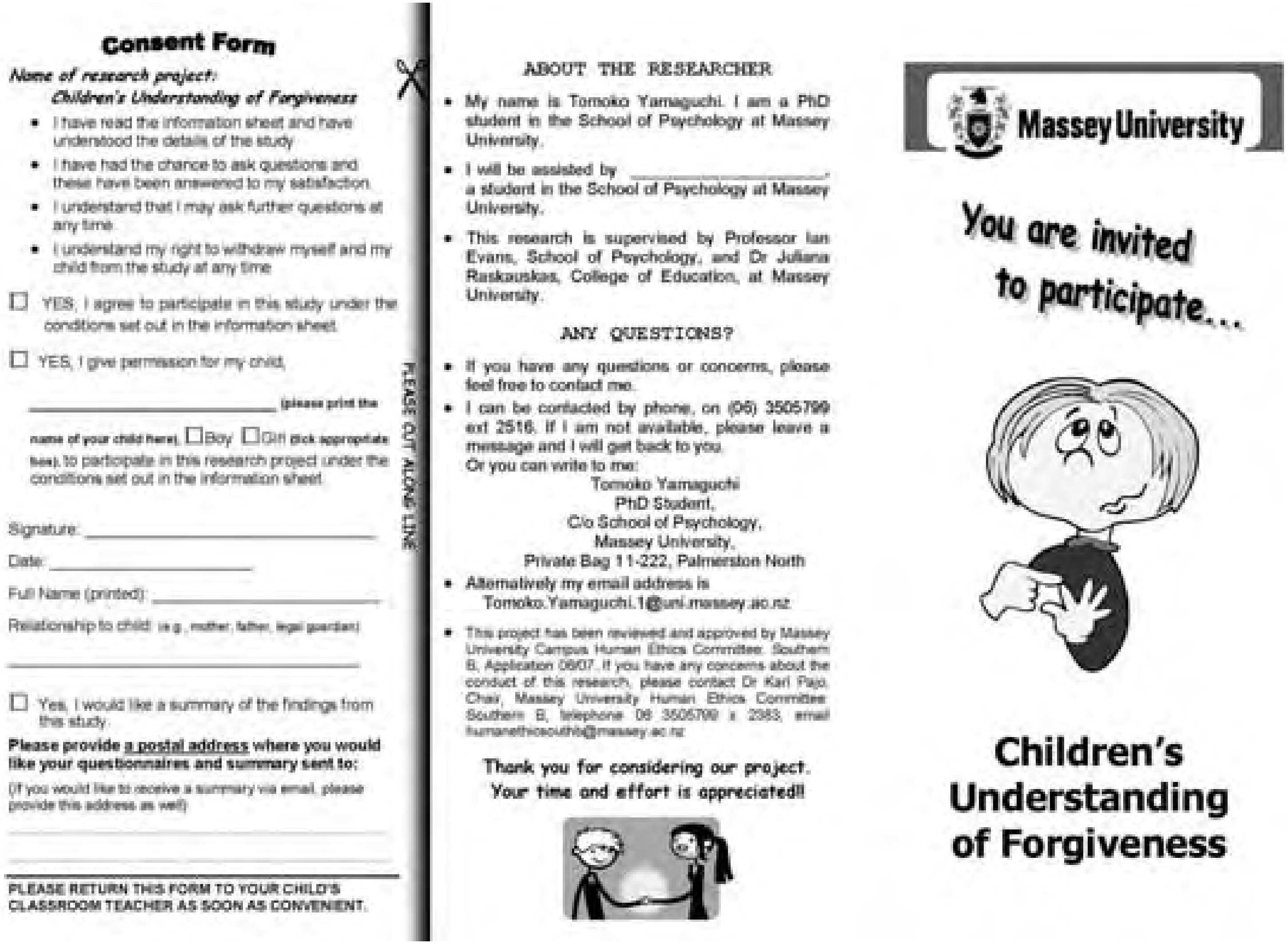
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- This research project involves YOU and YOUR CHILD. We are inviting 70 children and their parents, 35 Year 4 and 35 Year 6 school children and their mothers/female guardians.
- If you wish your child to take part, please go through the study information with your child and make sure he/she is willing to be included in this study.
- If you and your child choose to participate, please fill in the consent form and return it to your classroom teacher. Your classroom teacher will put your form into a collection box and the researcher will regularly collect the box.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE?

- Your child's videotape and your questionnaires will only be used for the purpose of this research project. Tapes and the questionnaires will be kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet in the School of Psychology, Massey University. A code number will be used instead of your and your child's name in order to keep strict confidentiality.
- Your child's video-tape will be deleted and your questionnaires will be destroyed after analysis. Tapes will only be listened to and seen by the researcher and the female research assistant, who participates in the session, and if necessary the researcher's supervisors, Professor Ian Evans and Dr Juliana Raskauskas.
- You are welcome to receive a summary of the results. If you want a copy of the results, please tick the request box for a brief outcome report to be sent to you. Please remember to fill in your contact details so I know where to send the information to when the project is finished.

If you have any comments or thoughts about this project or the topic of my research, please feel free to write them below.



Consent Form

Name of research project:

Children's Understanding of Forgiveness

- I have read the information sheet and have understood the details of the study
- I have had the chance to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction
- I understand that I may ask further questions at any time
- I understand my right to withdraw myself and my child from the study at any time

☐ YES, I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet

☐ YES, I give permission for my child,

________________________ **(please print the name of your child here),** ☐Boy ☐Girl **(tick appropriate box)**, to participate in this research project under the conditions set out in the information sheet

Signature: ________________________

Date: ________________

Full Name (printed): ________________________

Relationship to child: (e.g., mother, father, legal guardian)

____

☐ Yes, I would like a summary of the findings from this study

Please provide a postal address where you would like your questionnaires and summary sent to:

(If you would like to receive a summary via email, please provide this address as well)

____

____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO YOUR CHILD'S CLASSROOM TEACHER AS SOON AS CONVENIENT.

PLEASE CUT ALONG LINE

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

- My name is Tomoko Yamaguchi. I am a PhD student in the School of Psychology at Massey University.
- I will be assisted by ________________, a student in the School of Psychology at Massey University.
- This research is supervised by Professor Ian Evans, School of Psychology, and Dr Juliana Raskauskas, College of Education, at Massey University.

ANY QUESTIONS?

- If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.
- I can be contacted by phone, on (06) 3505799 ext 2516. If I am not available, please leave a message and I will get back to you.
  Or you can write to me:

  Tomoko Yamaguchi
  PhD Student,
  C/o School of Psychology,
  Massey University,
  Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North
- Alternatively my email address is
  Tomoko.Yamaguchi.1@uni.massey.ac.nz
- This project has been reviewed and approved by Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/07. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 3505799 x 2383, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for considering our project.
Your time and effort is appreciated!!

Massey University

You are invited to participate...

Children's Understanding of Forgiveness

APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN

Massey University

You are invited to join my research project ...

Children’s Understanding of Forgiveness

Information Sheet to Children

Hello!

My name is Tomoko. I am a student at Massey University. I will be visiting your school and meeting children in Year 4 and in Year 6 to do a research project.

My research project is about how children forgive their parents and peers. The word forgiveness is a big word and I find it difficult to explain. But, it might be something you feel, think, or do.

For my research project, I am hoping that you can help me to find out more about this.

When I visit your school, I will ask your school principal or your classroom teacher when might be a good time for us to meet and talk about forgiveness.

When we talk about forgiveness, I would like you to listen to two short stories about a child. I have some drawings that you can see while listening to these short stories. After the short story, I would like you to help me to answer some questions about the short story. You can point out your answers on my special scale.

Do not worry if you are not sure about the answers to my questions because there are NO RIGHT or WRONG answers!

After listing to the short stories, you can share with me your own story. When we finish our talk, you can have a sticker for your hard work and time.

I have a helping person________________. She is also a student at Massey University.

________________ will keep her eyes on the time so that you do not miss out too much of your class. She will videotape our talk so that I can write down what we talked about later.

During our talk, if you do not feel happy, if you want me to stop videotaping our talk, or if you want to go back to your class, you can tell me. That is not a problem!

If you have any questions about helping my project, you can talk to me about it or ask your parent about this. Your parent has my phone number.

I hope we can do this together. I am looking forward to meeting you and learning from you.

Many thanks, Tomoko ☺

APPENDIX 4: THE UNFAIRNESS SCENARIOS AND THE ACCOMPANYING PICTURES

Parent story (Scenario 1: Tidying up)

Just imagine this is a story about John.

He is 8/10 years old, just like you.

One day, John was quietly watching TV in the living room after finishing all his home work. John's mother always says to him,

"John, you have to finish your school work before you watch the TV."

So, John listened to his mother and did all the school work before coming to watch the TV. He was behaving very well.

Shortly after John's favourite TV programme had started, his mum came into the living room and saw a big mess. She said,

"Oh No! What a mess!!"

John was not sure whose mess it was. He certainly did not make the mess!

John's mother was unhappy.

She said to John,

"John, What a mess!! Tidy it up right now."

She then turned off the TV and said,

"You can't watch the TV until you tidy it up!!"

Parent story (Scenario 2: Pudding)

Just imagine this is a story about John.

He is 8/10 years old, just like you.

One day, John was helping his mother around the house. She said to John,

"John, there are some visitors coming, I want the house to be clean and tidy."

So, John helped his mother a lot to tidy up the house.

He was behaving very well.

John's mother was getting tea ready. She was also making some puddings.

They looked very yummy!

She said to John,

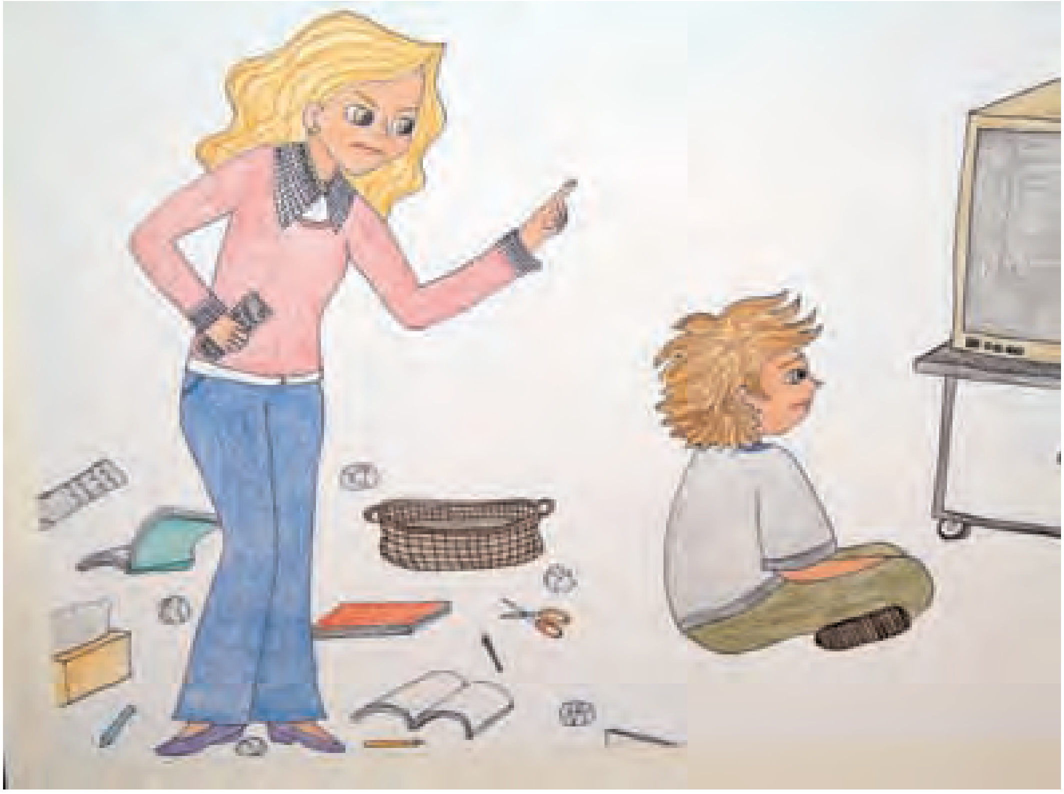
"John, I made some puddings for the visitors, but you cannot have any until tea time!"

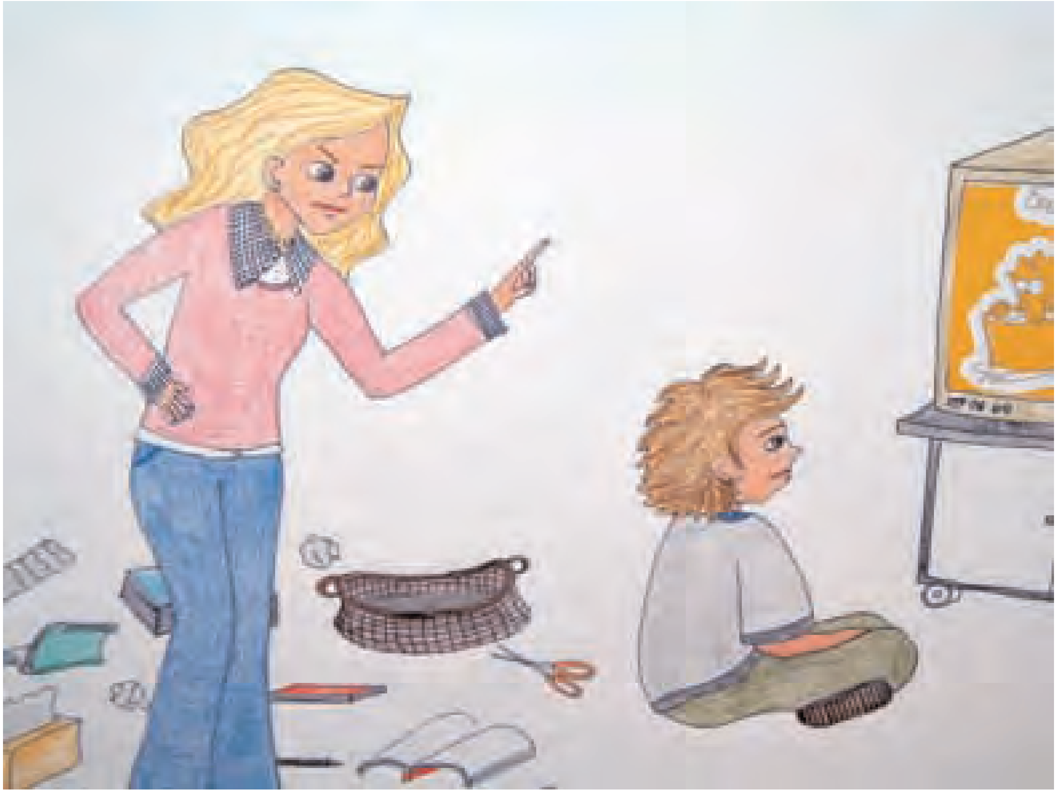
John listened to his mother's request. He did not touch the puddings.

When he went to the kitchen, he saw his mother had already tried some puddings! John's mother turned to John and said to him,

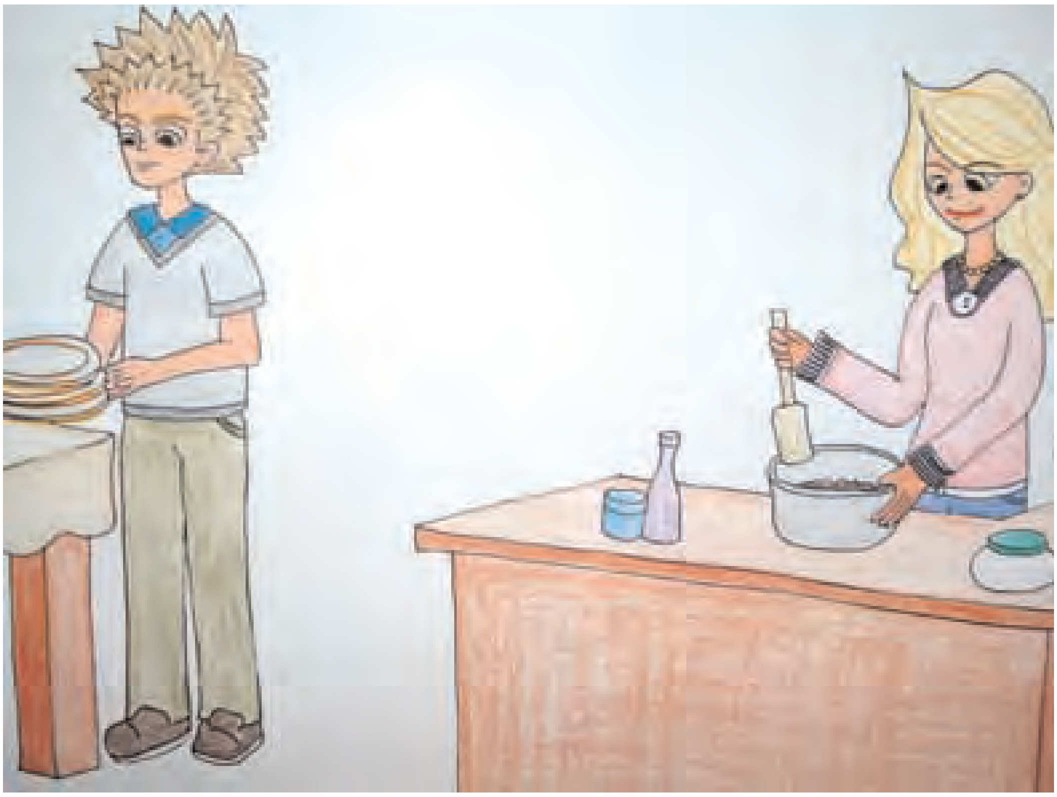
"John, you have to wait until the visitors come. Go to your room and stay there until I call you for tea!"

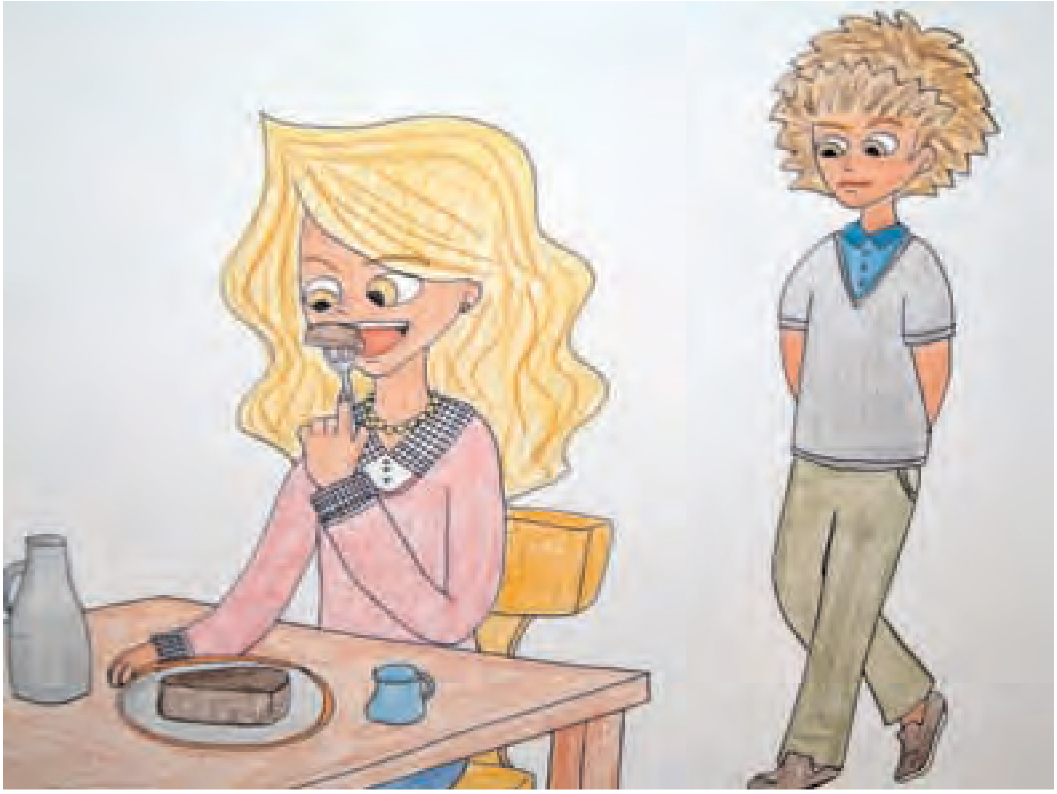
Pictures of the Parent story 1 (Scenario 1: Tidying up)





Pictures of the Parent story 2 (Scenario 2: Pudding)





Friend story 1 (Scenario 3: Making a mess)

Just imagine this is a story about John.

He is 8/10 years old, just like you.

John and Sam are good friends.

One day, John and Sam were working on their art work.

John was keeping his things neat and tidy. But Sam was not. Sam knocked over a few things and they spread over the floor. He made a big mess!!

Just then their classroom teacher, Mrs Smith, came into the room and saw a big mess on the floor.

She was not very impressed by the mess.

She said, "Oh, no. What is going on here?"

Sam quickly responded to Mrs Smith and said,

"I didn’t do it. John and I were playing and John knocked over these things."

Mrs Smith looked unhappy. She said to John and Sam,

"Well you guys, you have to tidy it up right now. Otherwise, you can’t go out to play during the next playtime!"

Friend story 2 (Scenario 4: Secrets)

Just imagine this is a story about John.

He is 8/10 years old, just like you.

John and Sam are very good friends.

One day, John and Sam were talking about each other’s secrets.

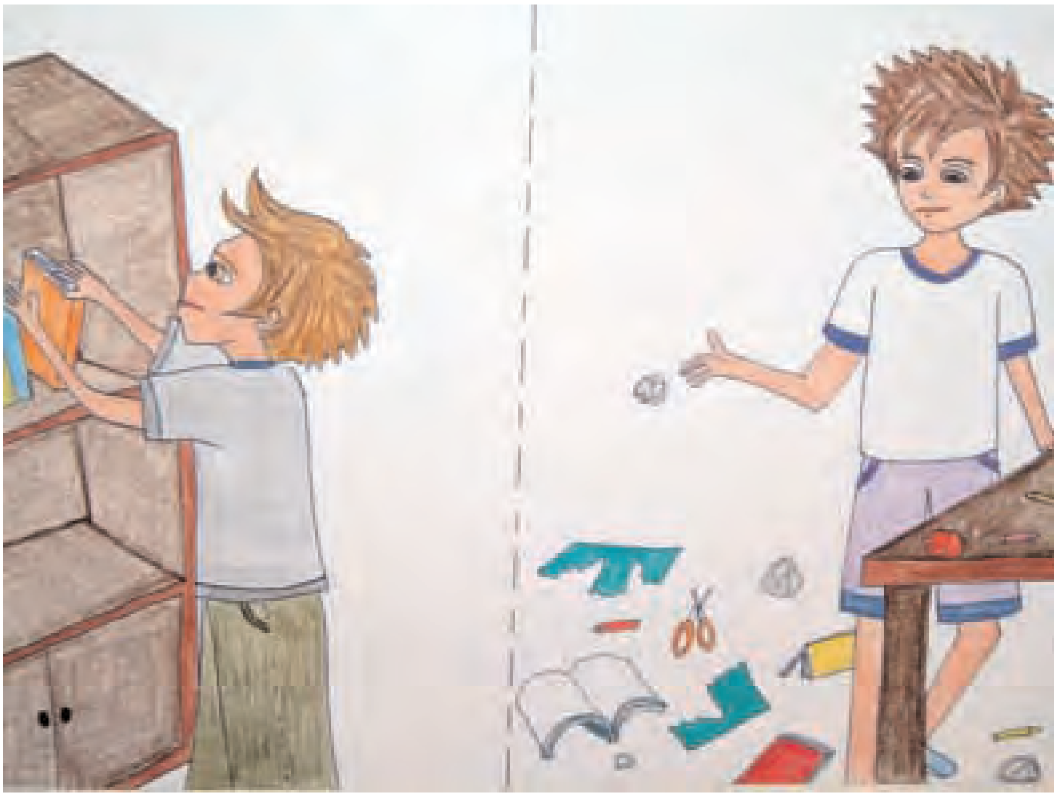
John and Sam both promised many many times that they wouldn’t tell anybody about their secret.

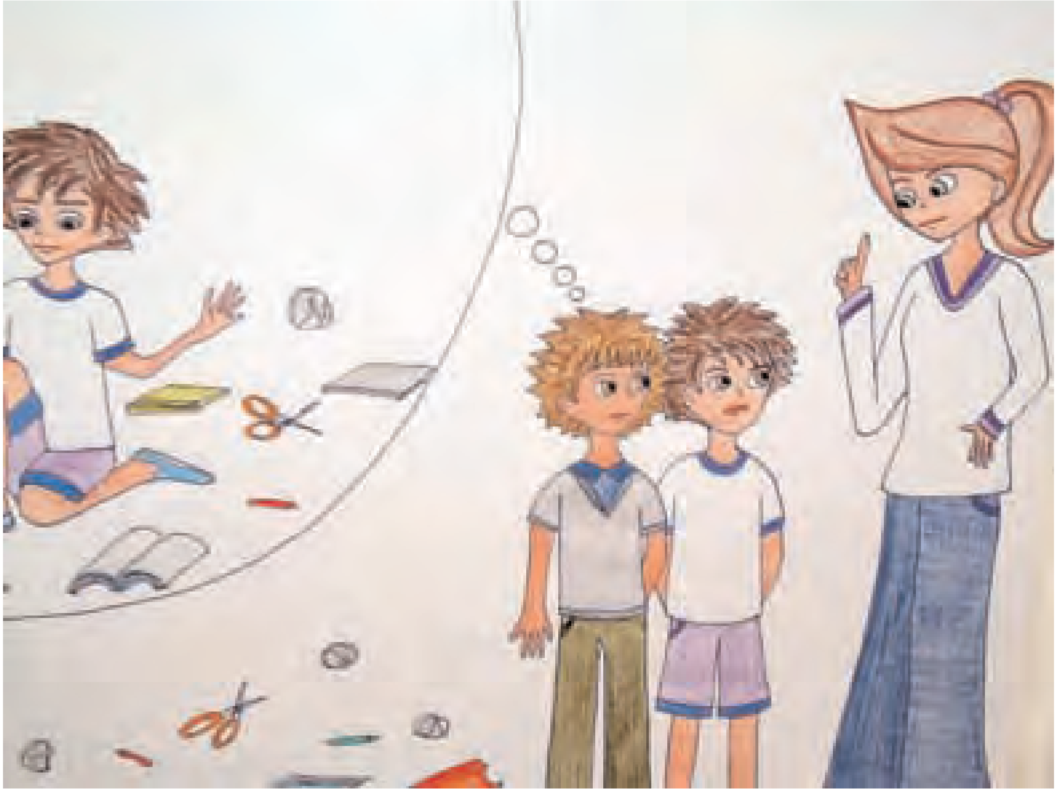
John did not tell anybody about Sam’s secrets. He was keeping his promise.

But one day, in school, John heard Sam talking with other children about their secrets.

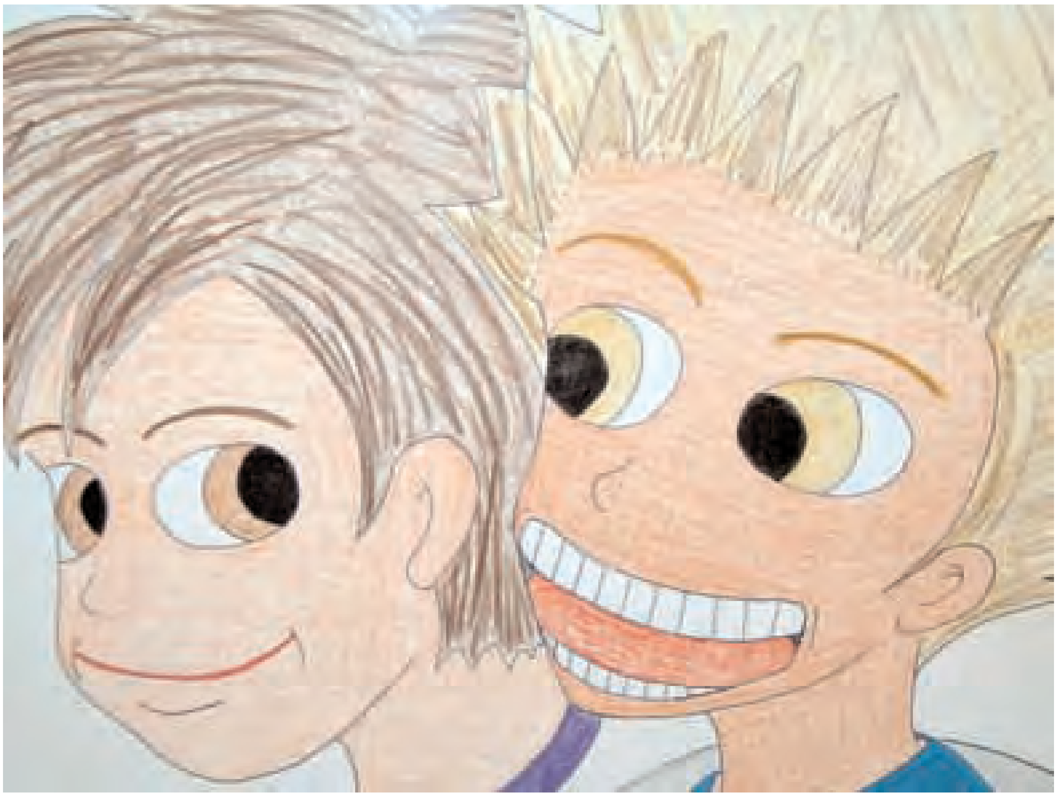
Now John knows that many of his classmates know his secret!

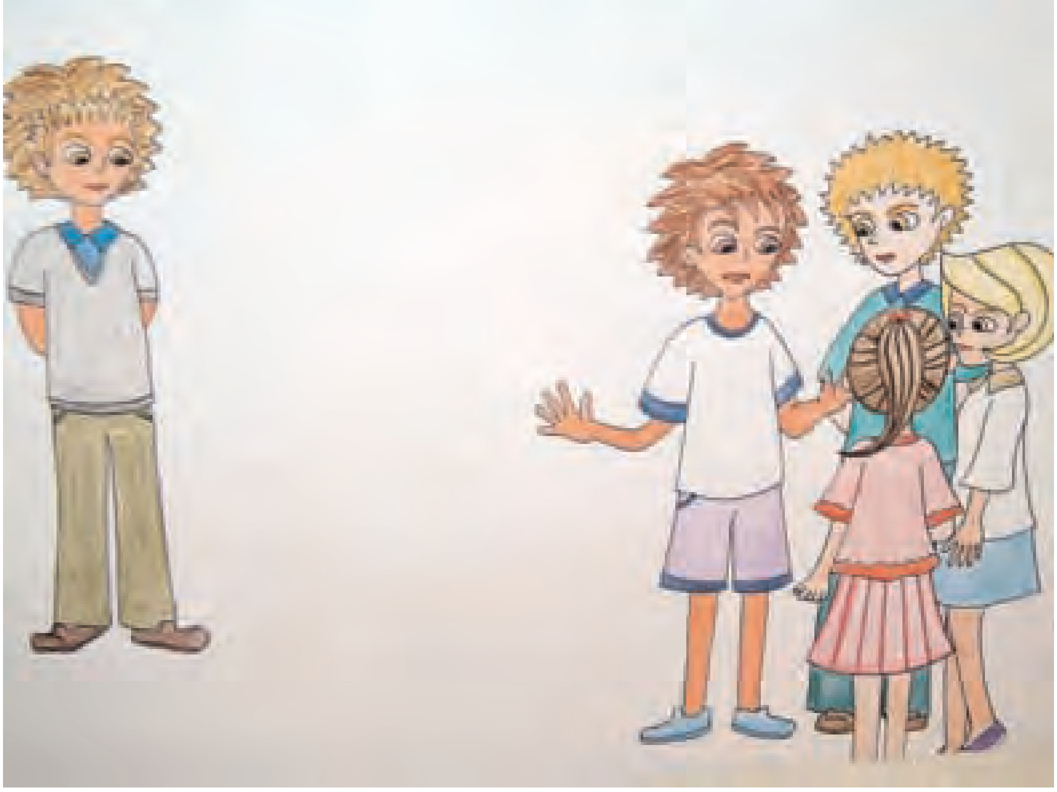
Pictures of the Friend story 1 (Scenario 3: Making a mess)





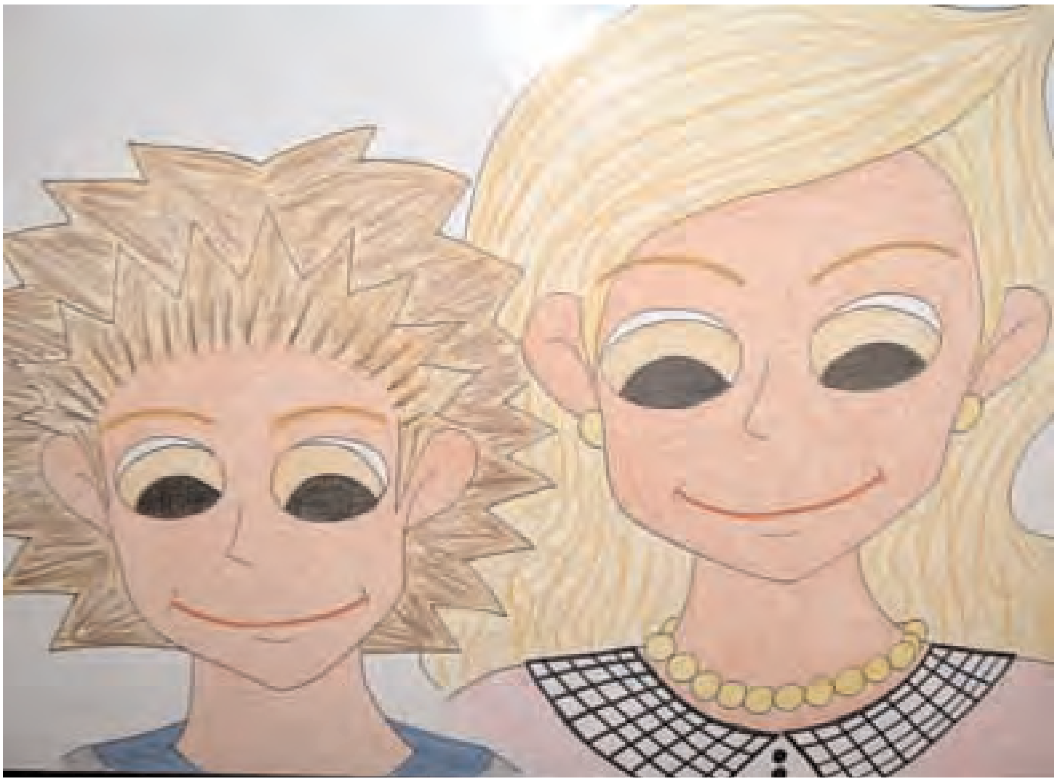
Pictures of the Friend story 2 (Scenario 4: Secrets)

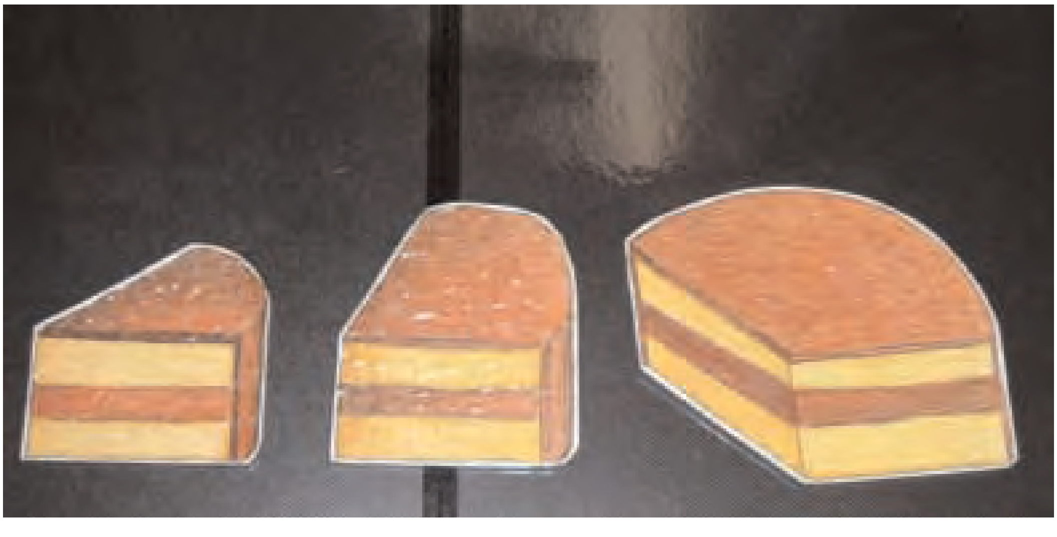




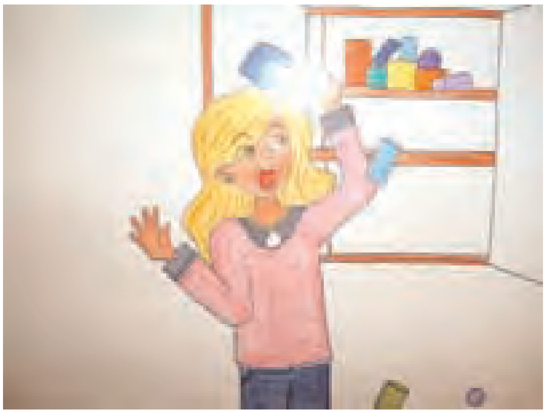
APPENDIX 5: TASKS TO ASSESS FORGIVENESS VS HOSTILITY

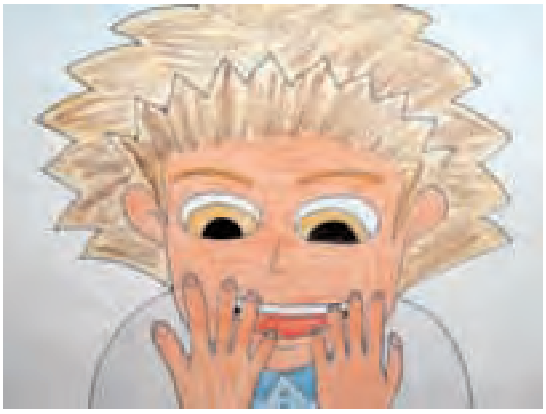
Parent story (Task 1: Sharing)

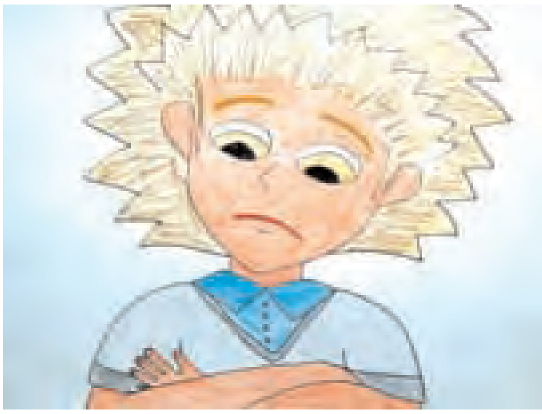


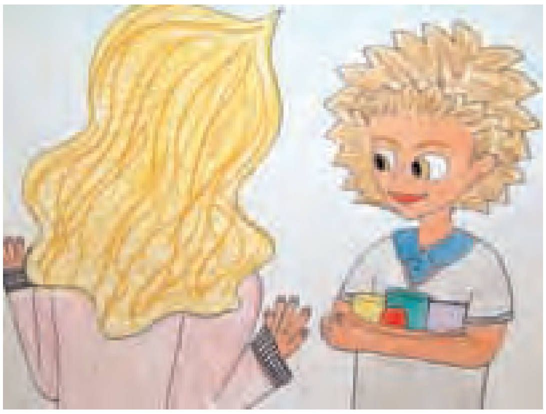


Parent story (Task 2: Caring)

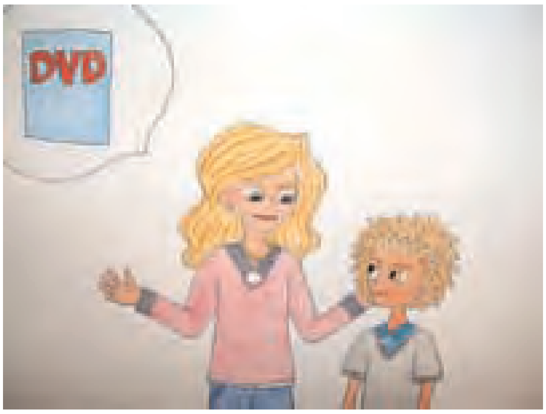


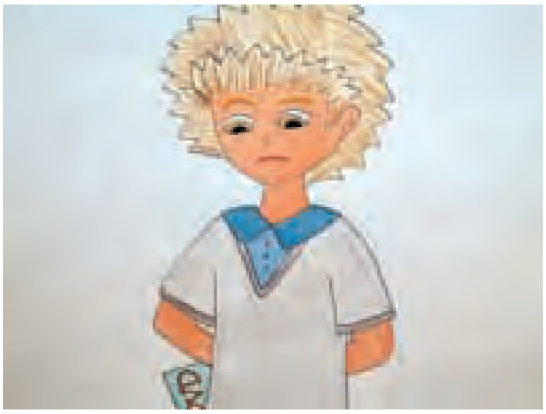


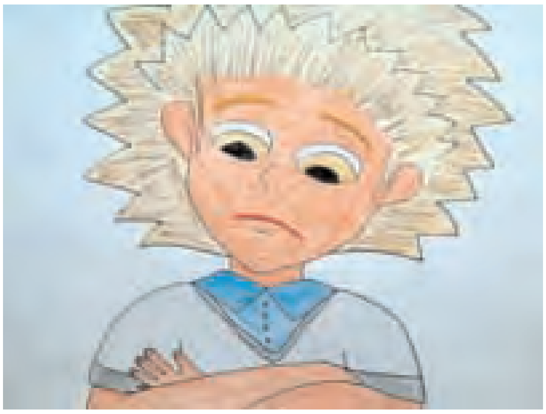


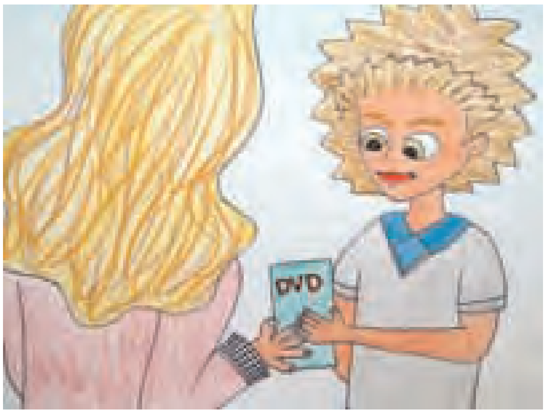


Parent story (Task 3: Trusting)

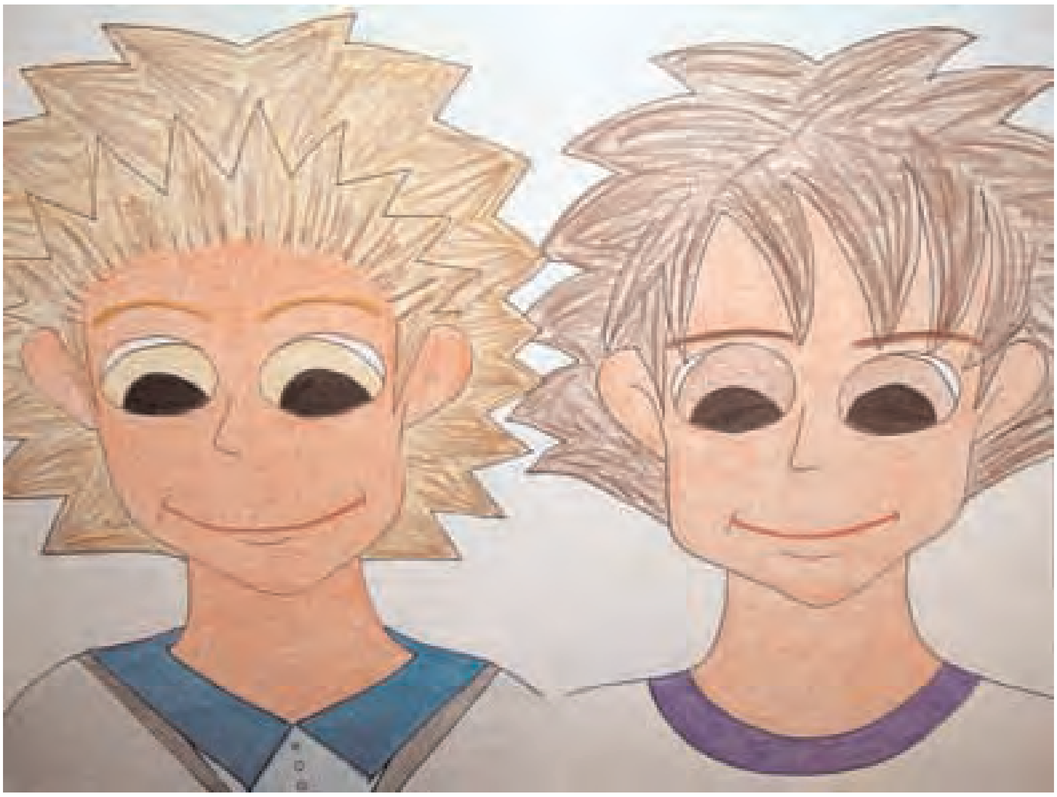


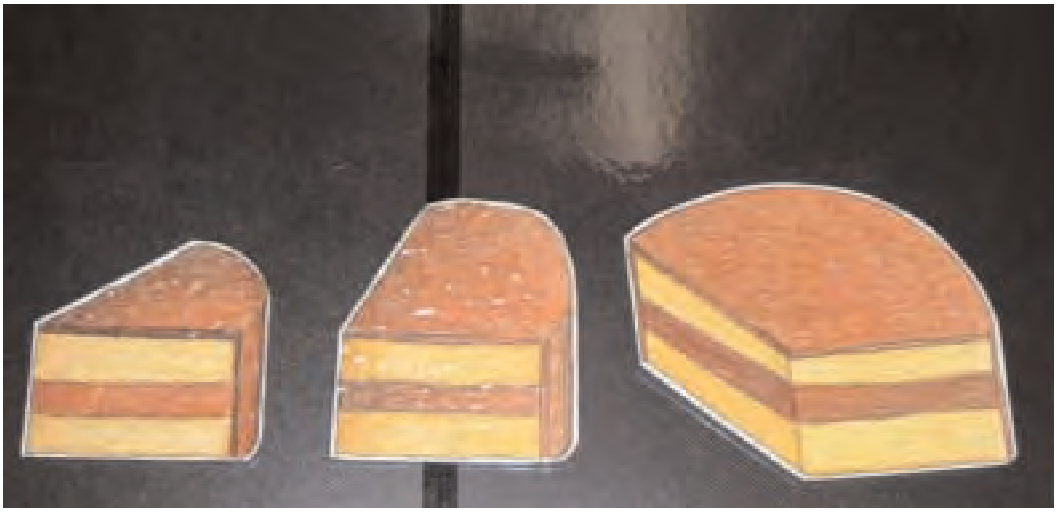




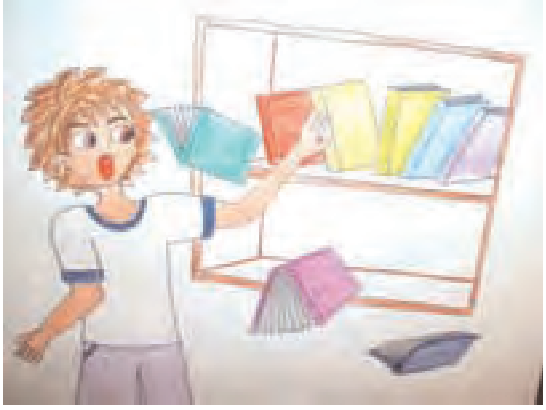


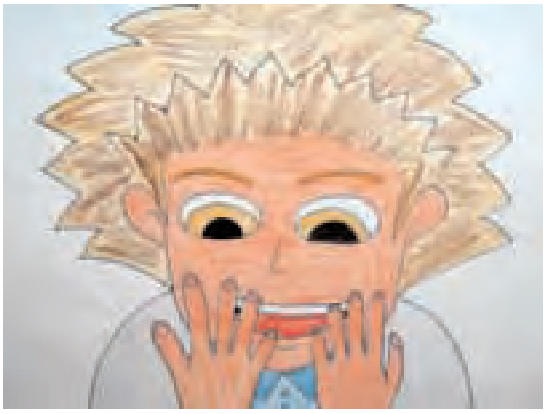
Friend story (Task1: Sharing)

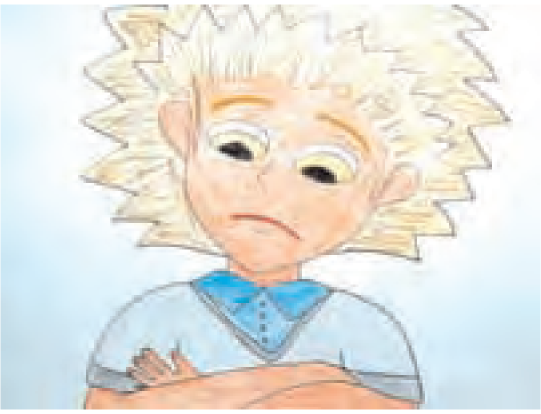


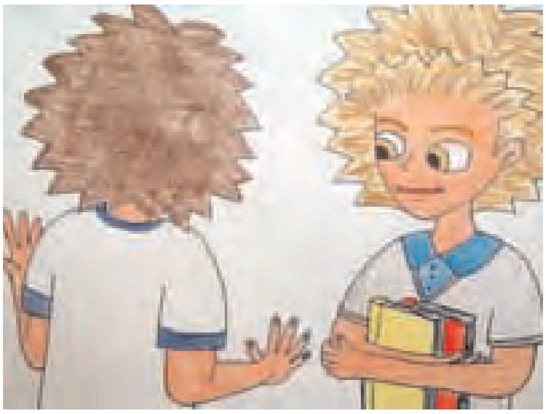


Friend story (Task 2: Caring)

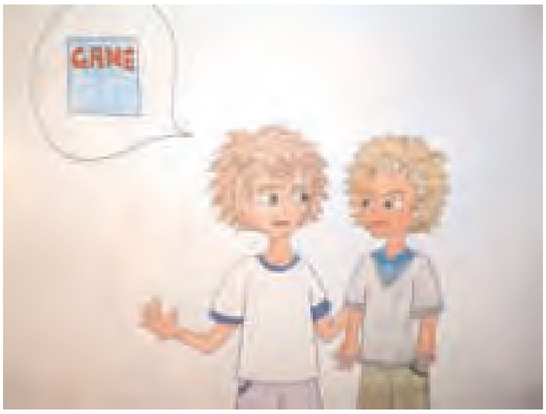


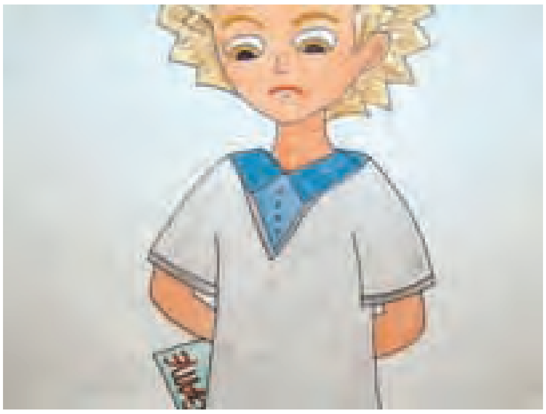


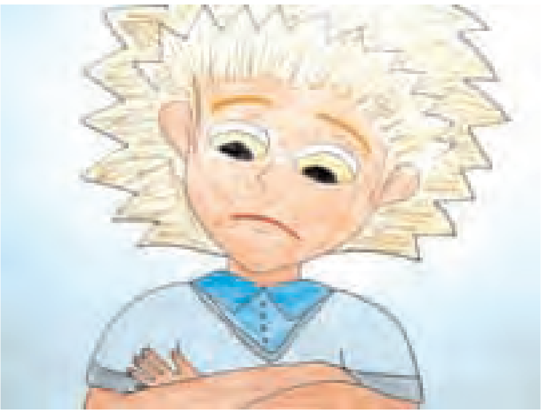


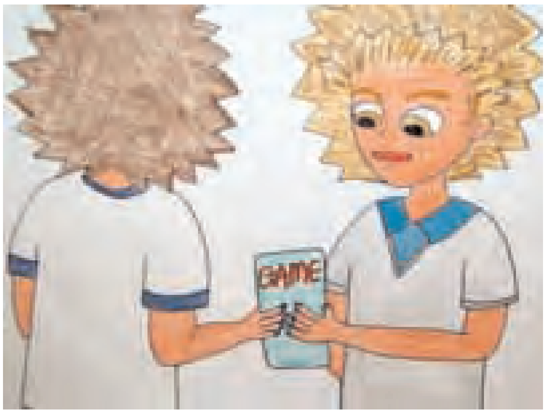


Friend story (Task 3: Trusting)









APPENDIX 6: PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

GENERAL INFORMATION

♣ Date: _______/________/ 2006 ♣ Your relationship to child: ______________

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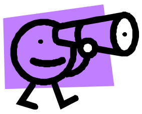
"Parents' Perceptions of Children's Common Misbehaviour"



INTRODUCTION

All children occasionally do things that you may consider as naughty, bad, or rude. When you encounter your child's misbehaviour, you might find yourself asking a question, "Why did he do something that he has been asked not to do?" or "Why did he fail to do something he has been told to do?" In this questionnaire I am interested in some of the possible reasons that **you** usually think of when your child does something naughty.

HOW TO DO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?

There are five hypothetical situations that might occur with a primary school aged child. The situation described in the scenarios might be familiar or unfamiliar to you. As you read each situation, try to imagine that it is **your child**, ____________________, even if he has never done these things. For each situation, there are four reasons parents might use to explain their child's behaviour. Please tick on the scale how likely each of the four reasons could explain your child's behaviour. The four reasons are given below. We would appreciate it if you rated ALL FOUR reasons.

Example: Situation X

A. **He is a naughty child**: He tends to misbehave most of the time, especially if he is tired; he always wants his own way; it is in his nature to be a bit naughty.

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	√

B. **It was an accident**: It was an unfortunate accident or a genuine mistake; perhaps he did not hear my request; it could happen by chance with any child.

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*	√	*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

C. **He was trying to annoy me**: he was trying to provoke me: he wanted to make me upset or get back at me in some way; he was deliberately irritating me.

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*	√	*Very Likely*	

D. **He did not know what he was doing**: he's still learning; he hasn't yet developed the skills, so he can't be expected to behave any better.

Very Unlikely	√	*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

REMINDER: There are NO RIGHT or WRONG ANSWERS. Everything you say in questionnaires in our project is strictly CONFIDENTIAL!

1. **Imagine you are in a hurry to go out. You ask your child to put his things away and turn off the TV quickly, but it seems to be taking a long time. He puts some away but keeps watching TV, so that the job is not getting done! You are now late for your appointment.**

A. He is a naughty child

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

B. It was an accident

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

C. He was trying to annoy me

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

D. He did not know what he was doing

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

2. **Imagine you are working on an important project on your computer. You ask your child to stay away from the computer. Later, you find out that your child has been playing with your computer and your work has been deleted. You now have to start it all over again.**

A. He is a naughty child

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

B. It was an accident

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

C. He was trying to annoy me

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

D. He did not know what he is doing

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

3. Imagine you ask your child to help you to set the table for tea. He picks up a plate of food you have just made and carries it to the table, but he drops it and it falls all over the floor.

A. He is a naughty child

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

B. It was an accident

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

C. He was trying to annoy me

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

D. He did not know what he is doing

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

4. Imagine you give your child $10 and ask him to get a few things from a shop. When he comes back from the shop, he had not bought everything you've asked him to buy. It looks as if he bought a thing for himself and he did not have enough money to buy every thing you've asked him to buy.

A. He is a naughty child

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

B. It was an accident

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

C. He was trying to annoy me

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

D. He did not know what he is doing

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

5. Imagine your child has just come back from outside. He is very wet and dirty. You tell him to take off wet and muddy clothes before

coming into the house. But, you find muddy footprints all over the house.

A. He is a naughty child

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

B. It was an accident

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

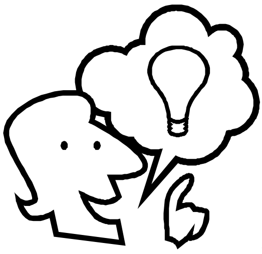
C. He was trying to annoy me

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

D. He did not know what he is doing

Very Unlikely		*Somewhat Unlikely*		*Somewhat Likely*		*Very Likely*	

If you have any comments or thoughts about this project or the topic of my research, please feel free to write them below:



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This is the end of the Questionnaire 1.

Please continue to do the Questionnaire 2. Thanks ☺

GENERAL INFORMATION

♣ Date: _______/________/ 2006 ♣ Your relationship to child: ……………………………………………………………………………………………………

"Parents' Responses to Children's Common Misbehaviour"

INTRODUCTION

Every parent has their own way to deal with their children's misbehaviour; some parents might punish, some parents might ignore, some parents might teach, and some parent might forgive. As parents we interact with children in a variety of ways.

In this survey we are interested in what sort of thing you typically do when your child misbehaves.

HOW TO DO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?

There are five hypothetical situations describing common behaviour that you might consider as naughty, bad, and rude. You already have seen these five hypothetical situations in the first questionnaire. When you answer the questions, please imagine that **you** and **your child**, ____________________, are in the presented situations.

There are two questions that you will be asked to WRITE DOWN BRIEFLY about your response to your child.

The first question will ask you to write down briefly about your reaction to a child. You can write down what you would **say** to your child and/or what you would **do**, or what you would **feel**.

The second question asks you to imagine as if you are responding to your child right after the situation described. **But, before you had a chance to say or do anything, your child seemed to be sorry, he apologised and said he wouldn't do it again**. If this happened, would you respond any differently to your child? You might not, but please write down if you would behave differently and what you would do. If you wouldn't do anything different, just say so!

REMINDER: Please note that, there are NO RIGHT or WRONG answers, so please write down your first opinion. Everything you say in questionnaires in our project is strictly CONFIDENTIAL!!

1. **Imagine you are in a hurry to go out. You ask your child to put his things away and turn off the TV quickly, but it seems to be taking a long time. He puts some away but keeps watching TV, so that the job is not getting done! You are now late for your appointment.**

   ♣ What would you DO/SAY?

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   ♣ Before you do something, your child apologises and shows he is sorry. What would you DO/SAY?

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2. **Imagine you are working on an important project on your computer. You ask your child to stay away from the computer. Later, you find out that your child has been playing with your computer and your work has been deleted. You now have to start it all over again.**

   ♣ What would you DO/SAY?

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   ♣ Before you do something, your child apologises and shows he is sorry. What would you DO/SAY?

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3. **Imagine you ask your child to help you to set the table for tea. He picks up a plate of food you have just made and carries it to the table, but he drops it and it falls all over the floor.**

♣ What would you DO/SAY?

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♣ Before you do something, your child apologises and shows he is sorry. What would you DO/SAY?

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4. **Imagine you give your child $10 and ask him to get a few things from a shop. When he comes back from the shop, he had not bought everything you've asked him to buy. It looks as if he bought a thing for himself and he did not have enough money to buy every thing you've asked her/him to buy.**

♣ What would you DO/SAY?

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♣ Before you do something, your child apologises and shows he is sorry. What would you DO/SAY?

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5. **Imagine your child has just come back from outside. He is very wet and dirty. You tell him to take off wet and muddy clothes before coming into the house. But, you find muddy footprints all over the house.**

♣ What would you DO/SAY?

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♣ Before you do something, your child apologises and shows he is sorry. What would you DO/SAY?

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Please help me answer the final question!
Children sometimes find it difficult to let go of their upset or angry feelings after someone had treated them unfairly or otherwise hurt their feelings. Parents tell us they use various strategies to help their children get over these experiences. Please rate how often you use each of the following strategies:

1. **Just tell them to get over it** (e.g., life is unfair; just forget about it)

Never		*Sometimes*		*Often*		*Always*	

2. **Encourage them to get their own back** (e.g., stand up for yourself)

Never		*Sometimes*		*Often*		*Always*	

3. **Encourage them to forgive the other person** (e.g., it might have been a mistake; try to see it from their point of view)

Never		*Sometimes*		*Often*		*Always*	

For the strategies that most often use, please state what you would actually do or say to your child?

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This is the end of all questionnaires!
Thank you very much for taking a part in this research project.

Blue Skies Research

1/06 *Les Familles et Whānau sans Frontières:* New Zealand and transnational family obligation, Neil Lunt with Mervyl McPherson and Julee Browning, March 2006.

2/06 Two Parents, Two Households: New Zealand data collections, language and complex parenting, Paul Calister and Stuart Birks, March 2006.

3/06 Grandfathers – Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions, Dr Virginia Wilton and Dr Judith A. Davey, March 2006.

4/06 Neighbourhood Environments that Support Families, Dr Karen Witten, Liane Penney, Fuafiva Faalau and Victoria Jensen, May 2006.

5/06 New Communication Technologies and Family Life, Dr Ann Weatherall and Annabel Ramsay, May 2006.

6/06 Families and Heavy Drinking: Impacts on children's wellbeing, Systematic Review, Melissa Girling, John Huakau, Sally Casswell and Kim Conway, June 2005.

7/06 Beyond Demography: History, ritual and families in the twenty-first century, Jan Pryor, June 2005.

8/06 Whānau is Whānau, Tai Walker, Ngāti Porou, July 2006.

9/06 Supervised Contact: The views of parents and staff at three Barnardos Contact Centres in the southern region of New Zealand, Anita Gibbs and Margaret McKenzie, August 2006.

10/06 New Zealanders' Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting, Jeremy Robertson, August 2006.

11/06 Korean Migrant Families in Christchurch: Expectations and experiences, Mrs Suzana Chang, Dr Carolyn Morris and Dr Richard Vokes, October 2006.

12/06 The Role of Whānau in the Lives of Māori with Physical Disabilities, Adelaide Collins and Huhana Hickey, September 2006.

13/06 New Spaces and Possibilities: The adjustment to parenthood for new migrant mothers, Ruth DeSouza, November 2006.

14/06 New Zealand Cultural Norms of Parenting and Childcare and How These Relate to Labour Force Participation Decisions and Requirements, Mervyl McPherson, November 2006.

15/06 Towards a Statistical Typology of New Zealand Households and Families: The efficacy of the family life cycle model and alternatives, Charles Crothers and Fiona McCormack, December 2006.

16/07 The Family Court, Families and the Public Gaze, Ursula Cheer, John Caldwell and Jim Tully, April 2007.

17/07 Fairness, Forgiveness and Families, Ian Evans, Tomoko Yamaguchi, Juliana Raskauskas and Shane Harvey, April 2007.

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