

## 幼児期におけるゆるしの理解

—Understanding of the Effects of Forgiveness on Transgressors among Preschoolers—

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Humans depend highly on cooperative relationships with others. Thus, when a transgression occurs through interpersonal interactions, forgiveness from victim is required to repair the ruptured relationship. In the last decade, researchers have focused on the development of forgiveness. Previous studies have shown that forgiveness can be seen as early as four years old and, as children develop, it becomes further sensible to various social information such as transgressor's apology and intention. However, although the knowledge regarding the development of forgiving evaluation and behavior in preschoolers has been accumulated, little is known about how young children in this age understand the effects of forgiveness.

Our prior work with preschoolers (Toda et al., 2023) revealed that the understanding of the functions of forgiveness –namely, to restore the damaged relationship between the transgressor and the victim and to bring positive changes in the victim's feelings toward the transgressor– is partly acquired at the age of four and become more sophisticated by the age of six. More precisely, 6-year-olds understood that the victim would restore cooperative relationship with the transgressor and develop a more positive feeling toward the transgressor when the forgiveness was granted by the victim. Conversely, when forgiveness from the victim is absent, they did not expect that such changes would be brought about. On the contrary, 4- and 5-year-olds failed to show their understanding that without forgiveness, the relationship will remain strained, and the victim will not experience positive emotional changes towards the transgressor. Taken together, our previous research indicates that children come to understand the two main functions of forgiveness during the preschool years and acquire more sophisticated understandings by the age of six.

Yet, it is still unknown if preschoolers understand the effects of forgiveness on the transgressor. We shed light on the following four aspects of the effects: (1) to make the transgressor feel more grateful and (2) guilty toward the victim, (3) to discourage the transgressor from repeating the offence, and (4) to increase transgressor's prosocial behavior toward the victim. Forty-five 4-year-olds (18 boys), forty-five 5-year-olds (22 boys), thirty-eight 6-year-olds (17 boys), and forty-five adults (26 males) in Japan read stories about a transgressor who is forgiven or rejected by the victim and were asked questions about the transgressor's emotion and future behavior.

About the transgressor's gratitude, both adults and 4- to 6-year-olds expected to feel more grateful when forgiven by the victim, but not when rejected. This result is in line with prior research demonstrating that 4-year-olds already gain a conceptual understanding of the definition of gratitude and the situations in which it can emerge. Their conceptual understanding of gratitude, combined with their firsthand experiences of being forgiven, may help children enhance their understanding of how forgiveness can influence the transgressor's sense of gratitude. In addition, 6-year-olds also expected the transgressor to feel greater level of gratitude than 4- and 5-year-olds expected. This age difference in expected levels of gratitude could be explained by the greater sensitivity of older children to the costs associated with internal conflict. Given that children typically develop an understanding of internal conflicts which arise when taking morally desirable actions during their preschool years, it is probable that 6-year-olds grasp

that forgiveness entails emotional conflicts. Consequently, they may have assessed the cost to the victim of granting forgiveness higher compared to younger children.

For transgressor's guilt, adults inferred that the transgressor would feel guilty both when the victim showed forgiveness and unforgiveness. Contrarily, children in all age group believed the transgressor would feel more guilty when forgiven than unforgiven. However, the impact of forgiveness (or lack thereof) was not substantial enough for children to significantly alter their expectations before and after forgiveness or rejection. One potential explanation for this lies in children's conceptual understanding of guilt. Previous research has indicated that 5- to 6-year-olds define guilt as an emotion that arises when they have caused harm to their peers (Berti et al., 2000). Consequently, children may have inferred that the transgressor would experience intense guilt immediately after the transgression, narrowing the difference between pre- and post-forgiveness or unforgiveness within a smaller range of the score.

Regarding the repetition of offence, adults inferred that the forgiven transgressor is less likely to reoffend than the rejected transgressor. On the other hand, children believed that the transgressor would not repeat the transgression both when the transgressor is forgiven and rejected. This may be explained by preschooler's positivity bias on people's traits. Positivity bias on traits is a tendency to hold optimistic perspectives toward one's own and others' traits (Boseovski, 2010; Mezulis et al., 2004). Research has shown that preschoolers with this bias tend to perceive positive traits as fixed and negative traits as malleable (Boseovski, 2010). Therefore, it is possible that the children in our study also speculated that the negative traits of the transgressor would not persist and believed that the transgressor would not engage in transgressions again. Later in development, children may be able to understand the impact of forgiveness and unforgiveness on the transgressor's likelihood of repeating transgression.

Lastly, 6-year-olds and adults expected that the transgressor would behave prosaically only when the victim granted forgiveness but not when the victim showed unforgiveness, while 4- and 5-year-olds expected the transgressor to act prosaically regardless of the forgiveness or rejection from the victim. A potential explanation for this developmental shift could be the emergence of sensitivity to reciprocity triggered by forgiveness during the preschool years. While young children typically exhibit prosocial behavior towards others, as they develop, their prosociality becomes more selective and strategic. Consequently, 6-year-olds may have recognized the significance of reciprocity induced by forgiveness as a crucial cue in their selective prosocial behavior, influencing their expectations regarding the transgressor's prosocial actions based on the victim's forgiveness or unforgiveness.

In sum, the effect of forgiveness on transgressor is partly understood at the age of four and, throughout preschool years, children gradually acquire the understanding similar to that of adults. Given that the understanding of the functions of forgiveness on the victim develop at around this age, their general understanding of the effects of forgiveness may be formed through their actual experiences of forgiving and being forgiven by others and become sophisticated as they get involved in complicated social interactions. By understanding not only what forgiveness brings about to the victim, but also how being forgiving influence the transgressor's emotion and behavior, children will become able to grasp the entire process in which our cooperative relationship is restored and maintained. (比較発達心理学)