Considering School-Based Forgiveness Programs: Learning from the Old Order Amish

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• Review forgiveness training/programs with children
• Review forgiveness benefits for children
• Discuss findings from a focused ethnographic study about forgiveness promotion in a Midwestern Old Order Amish Community
• Discuss opportunities for future forgiveness training programs for children using school-based strategies
What is Forgiveness?

1. Conflict, **transgression**, hurt
2. [Seeking forgiveness, **apologies**]
3. **Decision** to forgive
4. **Intrapersonal transformation**: Negative to positive psychological state
   - Let go of: anger, desire for revenge, resentment
5. **Interpersonal transformation**: Harmful conduct acknowledged by one or both partners, harmed extends mercy, both partners experience benefits
   - Relationship *may be* reconciled but not necessarily

**Note**: *Forgetting* is still not a definite component
- Forgiveness is not necessarily condoning
- Forgiveness is not justice
  (Lawler-Row et al. 2007; Luskin, 2002; Paul, 2012; Waldron & Kelly, 2007; Worthington, 2006)
Forgiveness Training with Children

- **Psychotherapy** (DiBlasio, Worthington, & Jennings, 2013; Kiefer et al., 2010)
  - With children who experienced abuse, anger

- **School Programs** (Enright & Knutson Enright, 2008; Enright et al., 2007; Freedman, 2008; Gambaro et al., 2008; Gassin, Enright, & Knutson, 2005)
  - Structured experimental groups, case studies

- **Forgiveness Interventions** (Lin, Enright, and Klatt, 2011; Nousse, 2007; Radhi, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010)
  - Family context
  - Forgiveness workshops
  - Directed readings, journaling
Benefits of Forgiveness

FORGIVENESS PROGRAMS
- Identify the hurt
- Focus on empathy for perpetrator
- Commit to forgiving
- Reduce anger
- Hold on to forgiveness

CHILDREN
- Decreased anger
- Well-being
- Emotional intelligence
- Improved academic performance

ADULTS
- Decreased stress response
- Lower levels of depression
- Lower heart rate and BP
- Self-reported wellness
- Longevity

DiBlasio, Worthington, & Jennings, 2013; Enright, 2012; Enright & Knutson Enright, 2008; Gambaro et al., 2008; Hannon et al., 2011; Lawler-Row et al., 2008; Lin, 2011; Luskin, 2002; Toussaint et al., 2008; Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010)
National Priorities

• **School Nurses** *(NASN, 2014)*
  – Promote healthy social and emotional development
  – Building healthy relationships and preventing violence

• **National Institute of Nursing Research** *(NINR, 2011)*
  – “Develop innovative behavioral interventions to promote health and prevent illness in diverse populations and across the lifespan” (p. 11)

• **Healthy People 2020:**
  – “Increase educational achievement of adolescents and young adults” [https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Adolescent-Health/objectives](https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Adolescent-Health/objectives)
Forgiveness in the Amish Community

- Amish are a Christian community, connected through spiritual practices in everyday life
  - There is a need to forgive each other in order for God to forgive them (instructed in the Bible, Lord’s Prayer)
- Forgiveness part of everyday spirituality:
  - Develop children with a readiness to practice forgiveness as adults.
  - Learn from parents, school

Methodology and Procedures

Gaining Entrée
Observations
Interviews
Analysis
Example Interview Questions

• Many church communities have forgiveness as part of their teachings or practices. Can you tell me more about how the Amish community teaches and practices forgiveness?
• How do you learn about forgiveness?
• How do your children learn about forgiveness?
• How do you see your role in your family related to forgiveness?
• How do you see your role in the community related to forgiveness?
• Please tell me about times that you know about someone who got hurt. Do you have any examples?
# Participating Community

- **Community**
  - Northern Midwest region
  - Swartzentruber Amish (conservative sect of Old Order Amish)
  - Six church districts, led by three bishops
  - 10 schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishops/Ministers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents (not including bishops)</td>
<td>5 (Male = 1; Female = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Teachers</td>
<td>1 Full-time, 2 Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Amish neighbors</td>
<td>4</td>
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Findings

• The Amish community focuses on teaching children about forgiveness as the foundation of having a community that is ready to forgive.

• One focused location for children to practice forgiveness is at schools:
  – Schools attended by Amish-only
  – Schools taught by Amish teacher
  – Books provided within the Amish community
  – Overall, learning is focused on training to become an Amish adult more so than educational advancement for the sake of knowledge.
Values Connected to Forgiveness

- Humility
- Cooperation (Farm Work)
- "Golden Rule"
- Discipline

 Forgiveness
School-Based System to Train Children

- Teachers who prioritize Amish Values
- Apology in front of classroom
- “What Teacher Says”: Golden Rule, Humility
- Discipline: “Settle it at School”
- Classroom Posters: “If we all obey the Golden Rule, I think we can have a happy school”
- Children’s Books: Stories about children forgiving
  - True Values
  - Lessons from the Clock
Conclusions and Implications: Considering Forgiveness in Schools

• Limitations of Ethnographic Study

• **Amish schools** teach the values that underlie forgiveness and practice forgiveness skills

• Robert Enright, Everett Worthington, Jr., and colleagues practice forgiveness programs with children in school settings with success
  – Long-term training > Short-term, one-time training

• **Future Research:** Rigorous experimental studies by nurses are needed to:
  a. Demonstrate age-appropriate classroom setting interventions
  b. Identify Long-term (health) benefits
Conclusions and Implications (contd.)

- School-Based Forgiveness Training for Children:
  - Thinking of others (empathy, “Golden Rule”)
  - Commitment, Decision to Forgive
  - Emotional development
  - Humility
  - Team work, engagement, cooperation
  - A sense of community
  - Discipline

DiBlasio, Worthington, & Jennings, 2013; Enright, 2012; Enright & Knutson Enright, 2008; Gambaro et al., 2008; Kraybill et al., 2007; Kueny & Cardenas, 2015; Luskin, 2002; Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010)
References


References (contd.)


