

Running head: School-Based Forgiveness Counseling

Can School-Based Forgiveness Counseling Improve Conduct and Academic Achievement in
Academically At-Risk Adolescents?

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Keywords: forgiveness, anger, disruptive behavior, aggressive behavior, school performance

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Abstract

A study of forgiveness counseling (FC) with adolescents showing high Trait Anger is described. Twelve adolescents from ages 11 to 13 were randomly assigned to a fifteen-week school-based intervention in either FC or an alternative treatment control group using a client-centered format. Dependent variables were administered at pretest, post-test, and 4-month follow-up. FC was more effective than the alternative treatment control group in reducing school conduct problems by promoting forgiveness, self-reliance, academic achievement, and positive attitudes toward teachers and parents. Results held at 4-month follow-up. Aggregate effect sizes were strong for post-test and follow-up analyses. Implications for treating high anger and resentment in adolescents are discussed.

Can School-Based Forgiveness Counseling Improve Conduct and Academic Achievement in Academically At-Risk Adolescents?

Forgiveness counseling (FC) is described by a number of counselors and researchers as a promising new approach to anger-reduction and the restoration of emotional health (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Rye et al., 2005). To forgive is not the same as to condone or excuse, to forget, or to reconcile; the latter is an internal response by the one forgiving, whereas reconciliation is a negotiation toward greater trust and a coming together again by two or more people (Worthington, 2005).

In a recent issue of this journal our research group described a series of studies focused on forgiveness education in the schools of Belfast, Northern Ireland (Enright, Knutson Enright, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007). One of the major findings with both 6-7 and 8-9 year olds was that as the students learned about forgiveness, and applied that knowledge to someone who hurt them, there was a tendency to reduce negative emotions. A key point is that the anger was reduced *in general* and not necessarily only toward the person who needed to be forgiven. Other studies with adults have shown similar patterns: As participants in forgiveness counseling or therapy forgave, they tended to show a general improvement in emotional health (see for example, Freedman & Enright, 1996; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004; and Reed & Enright, 2006). Forgiveness counseling and education, regardless of the age group studied, seem to effect an improvement in emotional health that goes beyond the person who is forgiven.

This observation, that specific acts of forgiving a particular person for a particular injustice can have generally positive consequences for emotional regulation, may be explained by the nature of resentment, which is a key reaction to a deep injustice over time when

forgiveness does not occur (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Studies of forgiveness show that in the short-run resentment can take the form of negative affect toward the offending person (anger, for example), negative thoughts toward that person (a narrative or script that focuses predominantly on the person's negative qualities), and negative behavior (ignoring, aggression, revenge-seeking) (see, for example, Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Kaufman, 1984). Over time if the resentment is not resolved, the client can develop general negative affect and mood (high levels of anger, anxiety, and depression that are not centered on the offending person), negative cognition (including negative scripts that are focused not only on the perpetrator but also on the self in the form of low self-esteem), and dysregulated behavior (conduct disorder, for example, that is not centered on the perpetrator). For discussions of this generalized psychological pattern, see Hunter (1978), Fitzgibbons (1986), Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000).

Still unanswered is the extent to which forgiveness counseling can show *general* improvement in one's attitude toward a wide variety of important people in one's life. Might students who participate in forgiveness counseling show not only an improvement in their response to the perpetrator and the self but also to school, teachers, parents, and general interpersonal relationships? The findings on generalized improvement in affect, mood, and scripts or narratives toward self as well as the perpetrator suggest that this may be possible.

Still unanswered is the extent to which forgiveness counseling in school can show general behavioral improvement in the form of school conduct and academic achievement. Research on the relationships among resentment, emotional dysregulation, school conduct, and academic achievement, suggest that an affirmative hypothesis seems reasonable, as we will see in the following brief literature review on these topics.

Emotional Regulation, School Behavior, and Academic Achievement

Research suggests prior hurtful treatment from others may underlie both emotional or behavioral dysregulation and academic difficulty. Reviews of the literature find abused and neglected children have deficits in emotional adjustment and cognition (Ammerman, Cassisi, Hersen, & Van Hasselt 1986; Lamphear, 1985) that can lead to dysregulation and academic failure. Complimentary findings have been reported in studies of aggression; youth who have been victims of aggression (Dodge & Frame, 1982; Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer 2003) tend to also have difficulty controlling their own aggressive behavior.

An abundance of research demonstrates that youth who have difficulty regulating their emotions and behavior also tend to experience academic difficulty (Loveland, Lounsbury, Welsh, & Buboltz, 2007; Strauss, Frame, & Forehand, 1987; Wiesner & Windle, 2004). This relationship has been examined from multiple perspectives in the educational and psychological literatures. Although researchers approach this relationship from different theoretical foundations and with different research designs, there is considerable agreement that youth who demonstrate poor emotional and behavioral regulation are also likely to struggle academically.

Many types of emotional and behavioral dysregulation are associated with poor academic outcomes. Strauss et al. (1987) found that elementary school youth who were rated as anxious by their teachers also had significantly poorer academic ratings than a non-anxious comparison group. Tramontina et al. (2001) found conduct disorder was more common among children who dropped out of school than among the youth who did not dropout of school. This relationship held even after controlling for family and socioeconomic status variables. Difficulty controlling aggression was found to be associated with school dropout and lower grades (French & Conrad, 2001; Loveland et al., 2007).

The relationships among emotional and behavioral dysregulation and school performance are complex and not necessarily unidirectional. For example, Wiesner and Windle (2004) found that academic difficulty was among the factors that contributed to conduct problems, particularly delinquency. Poor academic performance also predicted recidivism in youth with conduct disorder (Bassarath, 2001). In a meta-analysis, Maguin and Loeber (1996) concluded low school achievement predicted delinquency; disciplinary action, such as suspension, in turn led to removal from the classroom and less opportunity for academic success.

Underlying deep anger or resentment may be a key to understanding the subtle interplay of emotional dysregulation, conduct problems, and academic failure. Forgiveness, which reduces the resentment, may be a way of reversing the downward spiral that too many students experience, as they get angry because of unjust treatment, become resentful, and then begin a pattern of behavioral disruption and academic failure in school. For instance, individuals with high Trait Anger have little anger control, react impulsively to criticism, and develop poor social bonds that lead to disruptive behaviors and poor transitions into adulthood (Ensminger & Juon, 1998). Some become so dysfunctional as to be incapable of self-support or satisfactory relationships (Rak & Patterson, 1996). This deep-rooted hostility can also manifest as underachievement in the school setting (Morrison, 1967, 1969).

Prior Interventions to Reduced Dysregulated Affect and Behavior in Schools

The prevalence of emotional, behavioral, and academic problems among youth (Lerner & Galambos, 1998) has created a great need for effective interventions; indeed, many school-based interventions have been developed. These interventions differ with respect to scope and focus. Some interventions address multiple contexts and are universal in scope (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group [CPPRG], 2004). Others target intraindividual factors such as

improving self-management skills (Mooney, Ryan, Uhing, Reid, & Epstein, 2005). Furthermore, some interventions target specific populations of students such as those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (DuPaul & Weyandt, 2006) while others focus on general populations such as every fifth grader in a school (Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007).

Scholars have identified at least four concerns with current school-based interventions: few achieve strong results, few use an experimental design, few measure both improvements in regulatory functioning and academic performance, and few address the underlying cause of the emotional or behavioral problem (CPPRG, 2004; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Hoagwood et al., 2007). A review of school-based interventions by Hoagwood et al. (2007) indicated that such interventions need to be tested using rigorous scientific methods. Hoagwood et al. identified over 2000 studies of school-based interventions between 1990 and 2006. Of these studies, only 64 met inclusion criteria which meant they were conducted in public schools, used prospective designs, and used either random assignment or a quasiexperimental control group. The current study addressed this issue by using a prospective design and randomly assigned youth to either an experimental or control condition.

Among well-executed studies in schools, most have been cognitive-behavioral (e.g., Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Kemper, 1996; Derzon, 2006). These behavioral and cognitive interventions are limited by their shared underlying assumption: that aggressive children need primarily to train and practice socially desirable skills, behaviors, and thought patterns. The anger and resentment that lead to the aggressive actions are too often left unaddressed (Derzon, 2006; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). By this perspective, there is concern that these methods primarily treat symptoms rather than the underlying causes of maladaptive behaviors. Thus, there

is the need to develop interventions with adolescents that target the roots of anger and resentment. Forgiveness provides a vehicle for addressing the underlying pain and anger.

The Current Study

This study investigated the effects of a school-based forgiveness intervention on the psychosocial functioning and academic performance of youth with high levels of Trait Anger (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983). Forgiveness is “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her” (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, p. 47). Spielberger et al. (1983) defined Trait Anger as frequent angry feelings, frustration, and a generalized belief that one is treated unfairly by others. Forgiveness is well suited to helping people regulate their feelings of anger because forgiveness can help them cope effectively with the unfair treatment that often underlies their anger and resentment (Enright, 2001). Although past research suggests forgiveness can improve psychological well-being among youth (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Freedman & Knupp, 2003), we do not know how a school-based forgiveness education programs affects academic performance. This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining the effects of a forgiveness education program on school outcomes.

Research Purposes and Hypotheses

The current study tested the effectiveness of a manualized education program designed to increase forgiveness toward an injurer, by teaching adolescents with high Trait-Anger about forgiveness. The forgiveness program allowed participants to work through an injustice from another person. The effects of this forgiveness program were compared to the effects of a support

group in which the students explored their psychological responses toward their offenders in a less structured, client-centered program where forgiveness was not discussed.

The following research hypotheses were tested: First, when compared with alternative-treatment participants, the experimental (forgiveness) group will show significant improvement from pretest to post-test in self-rated levels of forgiveness. Improvement will also be observed from pretest to follow-up. Second, when compared with alternative-treatment participants, the experimental group will show significant improvement from pretest to post-test and post-test to follow-up in self-rated levels of positive attitudes toward the self, school and teachers, relationships with parents, and interpersonal relationships. Third, when compared with alternative-treatment participants, the experimental group will show significant improvement in academic grade and discipline data. These changes will be observed from pretest to post-test and from pretest to follow-up.

Method

Participants

The study was proposed to and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the lead author's university. Participants were rural European-American early adolescents of low socioeconomic status randomized to either a forgiveness or a client-centered (control) condition. Potential participants were screened and selected in three ways. First, each participant had to show significant anger on a reliable and valid psychological instrument of trait anger. For this study, each participant's score had fall at or above a score of 60 on the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory- 2 (STAXI- 2, Spielberger et al., 1983) which is the recommended cut-off by Spielberger et al. for intervention. Second, teachers were asked to identify students who were at risk of academic failure if they did not receive effective treatment of some kind. Third, all had

to have a significant, deep hurt from another person to participate. Of the 12 participants, 9 identified a family member as the source of injustice. Specific offenses included a violent father, a brother who committed suicide, sexual assault, and repeated verbal abuse.

Participation was voluntary. The initial sample consisted of eight participants in each group. Attrition occurred because two students moved and two, at the recommendation of teachers because of failing grades, attended study sessions during the time the group met. Because the primary researcher had a prior affiliation with the participants, fidelity checks were conducted weekly.

The total number of participants in the final sample as stated above was 12 (5 experimental and 7 control), and consisted of the following: 2 male experimental participants ages 13 and 14; 3 female experimental participants, two at age 12 and one at age 13; 4 male alternative treatment control participants, two at age 12 and two at age 13; and 3 female alternative treatment control participants ages 12, 13, and 14. Four published studies based on the forgiveness process model were used to calculate appropriate sample sizes (see Al-Mabuk et al., 1995; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993). For a power of .80, with a significance level equal to or less than .05 for one-tailed tests, the total sample size should be equal to or greater than 10 (Kraemer & Thieman, 1987). Thus, this study design slightly exceeded the minimum sample size required to achieve cost-effective power.

Research Design and Testing Procedures

Final participants were yoked on age and gender, and the yoked pairs were randomly assigned to either an experimental or an alternative treatment (client-centered) control group. The same instruments were administered for the pretest, post-test, and a four-month follow-up. To increase reliability, all instruments were administered twice at one-week intervals, and scores

were averaged. Instruments were administered in random order. At pretest, instruments were administered 2 weeks prior to beginning the program, and again one week later. Post-testing was done one day after the program ended and again one week later. Follow-up testing was done four months after the program ended and again one week later.

Measures

Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C; Enright, 1993) is a 30-item Likert-type scale in which the child identifies a person who hurt him or her deeply and unfairly and answers questions regarding his or her cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses to the offender. The range of scores is between 30 and 120, with a high score representing higher forgiveness. Cronbach's alpha coefficient on the first set of pretest measures was .94, which is similar to other studies (Enright et al., 2007; Baskin & Enright, 2004). The EFI, on which the EFI-C is founded, has been validated using other measures of forgiveness (Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, & Gassin, 1995; Sarinopoulos, 2000). The EFI shows no relationship with the Crowne & Marlowe (1960) Social Desirability Scale.

State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory. The STAXI-2 was used to assess Trait Anger. This 10-item subscale was used as a screening device to identify youth for the study and as an outcome measure. The alpha coefficients of each subscale are stable and reliable (Spielberger et al., 1983). In this sample, the internal consistency was .79. Concurrent validity with the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (BDHI; Buss & Durkee, 1957) ranged from .66 to .73 with a mean of .69.

BASC. To assess the possibility of a generalized effect of improved cognitive scripts for self, school, teachers, parents, and general interpersonal relationships of the forgiveness intervention, the BASC rated Self-Reliance (a 7-item measure of confidence in one's ability to

solve problems; higher is better), Attitude to School (a 10-item measure of negative feelings towards school; lower is better), Attitude to Teachers (a 12-item measure of negative feelings towards teachers; lower is better), Relationship with Parents (an 8-item measure of positive regard towards parents; higher is better), and Interpersonal Relationship (a 16-item measure of positive relationships with peers; higher is better). The Self-Report of Personality form of the BASC was used in the current study. The reported internal consistencies of subscales averaged about .80 for both genders and for children and adolescents (Reynolds, & Kamphaus, 1992). In this sample, the internal consistency average was .81. Detailed validity information can be found in the BASC manual (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992).

School performance. In light of the literature review in this article that significant anger and resentment contributes both to underachievement in conduct and in academic performance in the school setting, two types of school performance data, grades and discipline, were included to test whether the intervention contributed to school adjustment. Grades in written English, math, and social studies were examined to see if they improved at post-test and at follow-up. It is important to note that the four-month follow-up period occurred after a summer so the adolescents were in a new grade and had different teachers. Grades were quantified on a 4-point scale where A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1 and F = 0. Discipline data were divided into four categories of increasing seriousness: detentions (D), 1-day in-school suspensions (ISS1), 1-day out-of-school suspensions (OSS1), and 3-day out-of-school suspensions (OSS3). For each of the discipline variables, data were gathered from school records over a nine-week period at three separate intervals: once prior to beginning the study, once just after the study ended, and once just prior to the follow-up period.

Interventions

The effectiveness of two 15-week programs was compared in this experiment. One used direct instruction in forgiveness (FC) and the other was an unstructured client-centered approach (CC). The choice of a group format over individual interventions is supported by Shechtman (2004). Martsch (2005) found that both leader-guided, highly structured formats (such as FC provides) and self-determined, interactive formats (such as CC provides) were effective in treating aggressive adolescent boys. Both interventions intended to produce lasting improvement in relationships, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. In FC participants had the opportunity to work through their anger using the structured forgiveness curriculum while CC participants, had a chance to identify hurtful events and the related anger in a supportive environment. Both groups met twice per week for fifteen weeks.

FC tested an educational manual by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1993). To illustrate the process of forgiveness, two story lines were followed at each session, each dealing with a protagonist who suffered from an injury and learned to forgive his or her offender. The FC group read the stories and discussed how they related to the individual injuries identified by each group member at the beginning the program.

The CC group was chosen because the therapist, who also provided FC, has almost two decades of experience using it. CC provides a supportive environment in which to express angry emotions and explore motivational, affective, and cognitive strategies to reduce anger. CC participants did not follow a specified curriculum. The goals of each session were allowed to emerge as discussions of hurtful events unfolded. Accordingly, forgiveness was not introduced by the counselor, but was allowed to be discussed if initiated by the students themselves. In a

typical meeting students discussed events, emotions, reflections and thoughts since the last meeting about their offenders and were given a chance to process their feelings.

Psychologist's Qualifications. The facilitator of both groups had 21 years of experience as a school psychologist, 19 were in the school district in which the intervention was given. She had studied the psychology of forgiveness for nine years and had conducted client-centered support groups for her entire career. In preparation for the forgiveness intervention, she did a 6-week pilot intervention with students of the same age.

Results

Analyses were conducted with two sets of gain scores: the first from pretest to post-test, and the second from pretest to follow-up. The EFI-C and BASC encompassed the self-reported measures of this study. Because there is a small sample size, and because the gain scores of the Forgiveness Counseling group were so much larger than the gain scores of the Client-centered group, a two-sample Wilcoxon test was performed on the individual gain scores for the EFI-C and the BASC. This allowed for a more conservative test because possible outliers from the zeal of a few students would not overly influence the results, as the Wilcoxon uses the ordering of results to measure significance.

For all school performance measures, because the gains scores were not as large, we use the one-tailed t-test, which has been the statistic of choice for our research group for over a decade. Because we had specific directional hypotheses for each variable, one-tailed tests were deemed appropriate for these analyses and are consistent with previous research (for example, see Enright et al., 2007). Gain scores were used for group comparisons on all variables because of the precedent set in earlier studies (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Enright et al., 2007; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Lin et al., 2004; Reed & Enright, 2006).

Means and standard deviations for the pretest, post-test, and follow-up measures are in Table 1. Gain score means and standard deviations are in Table 2. Increases in forgiveness scores on the EFI-C were significant from both pretest to post-test and from pretest to follow-up ($T_w = 50$, $p < .005$ for both cases), indicating a significant gain in forgiveness in the FC group relative to the CC group.

All five BASC sub-scale scores displayed significant gains favoring FC. Compared to CC, Self-Reliance scores in the FC group improved significantly both from pretest to post-test and from pretest to follow-up ($T_w = 50$, $p < .05$ in both cases). The same held true for Attitude to School scores ($T_w = 49$, $p < .05$ in both cases), Relationship with Parents scores ($T_w = 50$, $p < .05$ in both cases), and (general) Interpersonal Relationship scores ($T_w = 50$, $p < .05$ in both cases). Likewise, Attitude to Teachers scores of the FC group compared to CC improved significantly from pretest to post-test ($T_w = 48$, $p < .05$) and from pretest to follow-up ($T_w = 49$, $p < .05$).

For school performance, grades in written English, math, and social studies were examined at pretest, post-test, and follow-up intervals. One tailed t-test comparisons of FC vs. CC participants' gain scores in the period from pretest to post-test showed significant improvement in the FC group for written English ($t(10) = 3.1$, $p < .01$), math ($t(10) = 2.7$, $p < .05$), and social studies ($t(10) = 4.1$, $p = .001$). For gain scores from pretest to follow-up, all three academic areas showed significant improvement for FC ($t(10) = 3.9$, $p < .01$ for writing; $t(10) = 3.8$, $p < .01$ for math; and $t(10) = 4.0$, $p < .01$ for social studies). One-tailed t-test comparisons showed a significant decrease in the number of detentions for FC over CC from pretest to post-test, ($t(10) = -4.1$, $p < .01$) and from pretest to follow-up ($t(10) = -4.7$, $p = .001$). Significant improvements in the FC group relative to the CC group were noted in ISS1 for the

pretest to post-test ($t(10) = -3.7, p < .01$) and the pretest to follow-up comparisons ($t(10) = -3.0, p < .01$ from pretest to follow-up). No significant changes emerged for OSS1 and OSS3. The means (see Table 1) were near the floor for both OSS1 and OSS3 and the standard deviations were so small as to render the analyses unnecessary.

Hedges and Olkin's (1985) model for meta-analysis was used to calculate effect sizes. The formula ($g = (ME - MC)/SP$) was applied to the post-test scores for the forgiveness group (ME) and control group (MC). The standardized effect size d for each result was calculated by applying the formula $d = [1 - 3/(4N - 9)]g$. The aggregate effect size across all variables was 1.05 with a standard deviation of 0.20. The 95% confidence interval had a lower bound of 0.67 and an upper bound of 1.43. Further, at follow-up the aggregate effect size across all variables was 1.17 with a standard deviation of 0.20. The 95% confidence interval had a lower bound of 0.78 and an upper bound of 1.55. According to Lipsey (1990) both of these effect sizes are large. Across all 13 variables results were not homogenous ($Q = 68.1$ post-test, 62.7 follow-up, for $X^2 = 22.36$). So results can be considered strong, but not uniform to all outcomes.

Discussion

Results of the current study suggest that forgiveness counseling is a successful means of improving the psychosocial and academic functioning of high Trait-Anger adolescents. After an intervention designed for middle school students to forgive a significant person in their lives for a significant injustice, not only does forgiveness improve substantially but also we see improvements in perceptions of self, school, teachers, parents, and their interpersonal relationships in general. Following the forgiveness intervention these students, who were judged by the teachers to be at-risk for academic failure and who were diagnosed with excessive Trait anger, improved in their academic grades in three diverse subject areas and decreased their

numbers of detentions and school suspensions. These results were relative to a viable therapeutic control group from pretest to post-test and from pretest to a four-month follow-up.

Previous research demonstrates FC can improve adolescent psychological well-being (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Freedman & Knupp, 2003). This study demonstrates FC can generalize to a more positive attitude toward a variety of people and the school and have an effect on school performance. We can only begin to speculate on the cause of the results, with the generalized positive assessment of the perpetrator and the self, teachers, parents, and peers, along with transformed school performance in academics and social behavior. We surmise that a key feature to the forgiveness program and thus to the generalized outcomes is the cognitive development of understanding *inherent worth* which is emphasized in the forgiveness program. Inherent worth is the insight that all people are unconditionally valuable, an essence that is not earned by a person's success or others' praise and is not withdrawn by the person's failure or others' condemnation. In the stories within the forgiveness manual, the students are challenged to see beyond surface features, such as a person's rudeness or aggression, to see below that surface to the worth of the person, not because of his or her behavior, but in spite of it. As students gain in their cognitive abilities to see the inherent worth of story characters, they then begin to see such worth in their perpetrator and even in the self. This, then, generalizes to all people and thus we see improved attitudes across a wide spectrum of significant people in the students' lives on the BACS. As a student sees the inherent worth in a perpetrator who has caused considerable emotional unrest, the student may invest less energy on resentment and thus have more energy to concentrate on school work and more of a cognitive focus to be more successful. With reduced resentment, there is less of a need to act out in school, with the result of fewer detentions and suspensions.

Yet even with our speculation above, we must admit that the interplay among the insights of inherent worth, forgiving a perpetrator, attitude improvement toward a variety of people, and school performance is complex. How an improvement in one affects another, either directly or indirectly, is difficult to disentangle. As relationships with teachers and peers improve, attitudes toward teachers and school might improve. With this shift in attitudes, academic performance might improve. As evidenced by the concurrent increase in self-reliance, good grades and more harmonious relationships, youth appear to have a greater sense of autonomy and more consistent mastery of their environment. Improvements across multiple contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) may reinforce one another strengthening the individual effects and opening the possibility for a significant change in a person's developmental ecology.

Of particular interest are the data on detentions and in-school suspensions. School personnel who issued detentions and suspensions did not know that the participants were involved in either a forgiveness or a support-group study, thus there was no concern about bias at post-test and follow-up. The FC group went from an average of 9 detentions to less than one per student over the course of a semester, but CC group participants maintained approximately 5 detentions per person. A similar pattern emerged for one-day in-school suspensions; the disruptive behavioral pattern initially seen in all participants virtually ceased for FC participants, but remained the same for CC. Maguin and Loeber (1996) note that problem behavior, resulting in suspension, prevents students from attending class and diminishes their opportunities for success. The reductions in suspensions may have contributed to the increase observed in grades for the youth who participated in the FC group.

The implication for school counselors and teachers appears to be this: confronting emotional injury through structured forgiveness education can produce positive psychosocial and

academic changes in students with high Trait-Anger, who are at-risk for academic failure by teacher judgment. These results can be considered robust, as the large effect size seen at post-test was calculated across all measures. Thus, there are multiple constructs suggesting progress, rather than simply improvement in one area. Further, effect size results not only maintained but increased at follow-up across measures, pointing to the strength of the intervention. Since changes were seen across a variety of different reporters and observers (in participants' self-reports of forgiveness, in their self-perception and efficacy, in teachers' reports of academic performance, including new teachers at follow-up, and teachers' and principals' observations of student behavior through reported detentions and suspensions), the improvements were not limited to the perception of one person, or isolated to one point in time.

In their meta-analysis of school-based intervention programs on aggressive behavior, Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003) observed that quality of implementation is critical to program success. The structure of the FC model and its self-explanatory manual allows school psychologists or teachers to implement forgiveness education in their schools or classrooms. The forgiveness model introduces participants to an ordered forgiveness process which examines the negative effects of anger and aggression, nurtures empathy and compassion, and explores new meanings for past injuries. By guiding facilitators and participants step-by-step through the sequential process outlined in the forgiveness process model, the manual ensures that each milestone in the process receives sufficient attention.

Prior to this study, researchers questioned the cognitive ability of adolescents to understand forgiveness in sufficient depth to produce behavioral or affective changes (Hepp-Dax, 1996). The current findings demonstrate that adolescents do have the capability to understand forgiveness. In addition to the quantitative data, informal qualitative interviews with

participants since the final data collection period indicated awareness of a shift in perspective toward greater compassion and understanding of the offender upon completion of FC.

Because this is the first study of this kind and the sample size was small, the findings should not, at this point, be generalized beyond this group of participants. Although the sample size was sufficient to detect meaningful differences, the authors recommend replication.

Freedman and Enright's (1996) findings that adults maintain positive gains for at least 14 months suggest that, in replication studies, follow-up should be conducted after a longer period than was done in this study. The current study also holds a clear possibility that allegiance effects existed, and it is unclear the degree to which this may have been a factor in the results. Because students in both groups may have an allegiance to the counselor, however, this concern is diminished.

Future research in forgiveness interventions within school settings could benefit from an age analysis. For example, can children in elementary school, who are beginning to show signs of debilitating anger, be helped by developmentally-appropriate forgiveness interventions? Such knowledge and early intervention may be beneficial in preventing psychological difficulties in adolescence.

The published literature shows that youths who exemplify high Trait-Anger suffer psychologically, socially, and academically. Some cope with this pain by inflicting harm on themselves, their families, and in the larger society. There is considerable frustration among school psychologists, educators, parents, researchers, and policymakers with existing prevention and intervention strategies for the resulting behavior problems. The data from this study provide evidence that learning to forgive an offender has the potential to transform adolescents with high Trait-Anger from disruptive individuals at-risk for academic failure to successful students in positive social and family relationships.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Dependent Variables

	Forgiveness Group			Client-centered Group		
	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-up	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-up
EFI-C						
Forgiveness	44.5 (8.2)	114.8 (6.4)	116.1 (7.9)	43.6 (9.1)	46.7 (7.8)	45.1 (8.3)
BASC						
Self-Reliance	47.6 (9.3)	64.6 (8.9)	66.8 (10.1)	48.0 (3.9)	47.2 (4.3)	46.6 (5.6)
Attitude to School	56.2 (9.4)	44.0 (9.6)	43.0 (10.4)	56.7 (4.2)	56.1 (3.9)	56.1 (4.5)
Attitude to Teachers	54.1 (7.2)	39.3 (6.3)	39.1 (7.8)	54.3 (6.0)	51.4 (5.4)	53.7 (5.2)
Relationship with Parents	42.7 (3.4)	53.5 (3.1)	54.7 (3.3)	43.0 (10.7)	39.7 (12.2)	38.9 (15.2)
Interpersonal Relationships	44.2 (9.8)	56.9 (10.7)	57.2 (14.9)	43.9 (11.6)	41.6 (12.1)	39.8 (15.2)
Grades						
Writing	1.4 (.55)	2.6 (.55)	2.6 (.55)	1.6 (0.5)	1.4 (0.5)	1.3 (0.5)
Math	1.4 (.55)	2.4 (.55)	2.4 (.55)	1.6 (0.8)	1.7 (0.8)	1.3 (0.5)
Social Studies	1.6 (0.6)	3.0 (.00)	2.6 (0.6)	1.9 (0.7)	1.7 (0.5)	1.4 (0.5)
Discipline						
Detention	9.0 (4.6)	1.4 (1.3)	0.6 (1.0)	5.4 (3.6)	5.1 (2.1)	5.4 (2.7)
1-day in-school suspensions	3.4 (1.8)	0.2 (0.4)	0.2 (0.4)	1.9 (1.4)	1.4 (0.5)	1.3 (0.8)
1-day out-of-school suspensions	1.0 (1.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.8)	0.7 (0.8)	0.7 (0.8)
3-day out-of-school suspensions	0.2 (0.4)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.4 (0.5)	0.1 (0.4)	0.6 (0.5)

Table 2

Comparisons between the Groups

	Gains from Pretest to Post-test			Gains from Pretest to Follow-up		
	Forgiveness	Client -centered	<i>T_w</i>	Forgiveness	Client -centered	<i>T_w</i>
EFI-C			<i>T_w</i>			<i>T_w</i>
Forgiveness	70.3 (11.1)	3.1 (5.1)	50.0*	71.6 (10.4)	1.5 (5.7)	50.0*
BASC			<i>T_w</i>			<i>T_w</i>
Self-Reliance	17.0 (8.9)	-0.8 (4.2)	50.0*	19.2 (9.2)	-1.4 (4.4)	50.0*
Attitude to School	-12.2 (9.2)	-0.6 (3.6)	49.0*	-13.2 (9.9)	-0.6 (3.3)	49.5*
Attitude to Teachers	-14.8 (6.9)	-2.9 (5.9)	48.0*	-15.0 (8.5)	-0.6 (4.9)	49.0*
Relationship w/ Parents	10.8 (2.8)	-3.3 (14.2)	50.0*	12.0 (2.5)	-4.1 (12.6)	50.0*
Interpersonal Relations	12.7 (10.1)	-2.3 (13.9)	49.0*	13.0 (9.5)	-4.1 (16.3)	48.0*
Grades			<i>t-test</i>			<i>t-test</i>
Writing	1.2 (0.5)	-0.1 (0.9)	3.1**	1.2 (0.5)	-0.3 (0.8)	3.9**
Math	1.0 (0.7)	0.1 (0.4)	2.7*	1.0 (0.7)	-0.3 (0.5)	3.8**
Social Studies	1.4 (0.6)	-0.1 (0.7)	4.1**	1.0 (0.7)	-0.4 (0.5)	4.0**
Discipline			<i>t-test</i>			<i>t-test</i>
Detention	-7.6 (3.8)	-0.3 (2.4)	-4.1**	-8.4 (4.0)	0.0 (2.2)	-4.7***
ISS1	-3.2 (1.5)	-0.4 (1.1)	-3.7**	-3.2 (1.9)	-0.6 (1.1)	-3.0**
OSS1	-1.0 (1.0)	-0.3 (0.8)	-1.1	-1.0 (1.0)	-0.3 (0.8)	-1.4
OSS3	-0.2 (0.4)	-0.3 (0.5)	0.3	-0.2 (0.4)	0.1 (0.4)	-1.4

Note. ISS1 = 1-day in-school suspensions; OSS1 = 1-day out-of-school suspensions; OSS3 = 3-day out-of-school suspension

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (all Grades and Discipline measures used the one-tailed t-test)