**Information sheet for parents/guardians**

**The emergence of episodic future thinking and its links to delayed gratification.**

Your child is being asked to take part in a study looking at how children’s ability to imagine future events is related to the decisions that they make. Before you give your child permission to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further details.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The study will look at children’s ability to imagine the future. It will also look at what is commonly termed delayed gratification: specifically, the ability to reject an immediate small reward in favour of a larger delayed reward when presented with a choice between the two. We are studying this in children aged 3-5 years because we know that both thinking about the future and the ability to delay gratification improve across this age group and we suspect that once children can properly imagine the future they become better at delayed gratification.

**What will the study involve?**

Children will be asked to complete four short tasks. The first is a delay of gratification task, in which they will be offered a choice between a small immediate reward (e.g. one sticker now) and a delayed larger reward (five stickers tomorrow). In the second task, we will ask them to describe a typical event that may happen in the near future (e.g. “Can you tell me about what might happen the next time you visit a friend’s house?”). For the third task, children will be introduced to a board-game which they are told they will play the following day and which requires a special tool. They will then be asked to select an item they need to play the game the next day from a range of items. The final task will be a short test of vocabulary and spatial skills.

**Where will the study take place?**

The study will take place in your child’s school/nursery on a date agreed with their teacher. The study will be conducted by Dr Patrick Burns, who has an enhanced Access NI clearance. The study will be completed in three sessions across three consecutive days. The first session will take about 5 minutes and will be used to demonstrate the delay of gratification task to children as a group. Children will complete two of the tasks in the second session and the remaining two tasks in the third session. Each of these remaining sessions will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

**Will my child’s data be kept confidential?**

All data gathered will remain anonymous. As an assurance of this, each child’s data will be stored under a participant number rather than their own name.

**What if my child decides they do not want to complete the study?**

Your child has the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and we will explain this to your child. All data collected prior to withdrawal will be deleted. You can also decide to withdraw your child’s data from the study at any point up until two months after the date of testing.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact either of us:

Professor Teresa McCormack Dr Patrick Burns  
School of Psychology, School of Psychology,

Queen's University Belfast, Queen's University Belfast,  
Belfast, BT9 5BN Belfast, BT9 5BN

+44 (0)28 9097 4174 +44 (0)28 9097 4261

[t.mccormack@qub.ac.uk](mailto:t.mccormack@qub.ac.uk) [p.burns@qub.ac.uk](mailto:p.burns@qub.ac.uk)

Dr Patrick Burns

School of Psychology

Queen’s University Belfast

Belfast BT9 5BN

Telephone: 02890 974261

Email: [p.burns@qub.ac.uk](mailto:p.burns@qub.ac.uk)

*Date*

Dear Parent/Guardian.

Your child’s school has agreed to take part in a research project that is being carried out by the School of Psychology at Queen’s University. The study examines children’s ability to imagine future events and how this affects their decisions. We are writing to ask for your permission for your child to take part. Details of the study are given in the attached information sheet, and we also include a consent form that you can return to the school.

We should emphasise that the study is not concerned with finding out how a specific child responds to each task; rather, we aim to look how performance on the different tasks is related. Thus, no personal details about any child will be recorded except for his or her date of birth and gender. These personal details will be kept confidential and only summarised data from the study that does not identify individual children will be included in any written reports of the study. You will be able to withdraw your child and the associated data from the study at any point up to two months after the study has taken place. The research will be undertaken in your child’s school by me and my research assistant; we both have an enhanced Access NI clearance.

We would be really grateful if you would give permission for your child to take part in this study, and please do contact me if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Patrick Burns

**Consent form for parents/guardians**

**The emergence of episodic future thinking and its links to delayed gratification.**

Tick ONE option and please return to the school by *date month year*

I **give permission** for my child to take part in this study

OR

I **DO NOT give permission** for my child to take part in this study

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Your child’s name (in capitals): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Assent form for children**

**Participant name …………………………………………………**

**Date…………………………….**

**School…………………………..**



