School of Psychology

Queen’s University Belfast

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*XXX*

Dear Parent/Guardian.

xxx Primary 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 wait for rewards that are delayed. 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.

I would like to stress that all information collected during the study will be anonymous and personal identification from any data files or subsequent reports will not be possible. The only personal details necessary from each child will be his/her date of birth and their gender. Your child will only be identifiable via a unique anonymised code. Prior to the study, your child will be asked to provide assent for their participation in the study. Your child can withdraw from the study at any time and their data can be removed from the analysis up to two months after the completion date of testing. The study will be held in your child’s school and will be conducted by Dr Patrick Burns, Dr Ruth Lee and Mr Paddy O’Connor, who are researchers in the School of Psychology, Queen’s University Belfast. Patrick, Ruth and Paddy have 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 us if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,



Teresa McCormack

Professor of Developmental Psychology

**Information Sheet**

**Can delayed gratification be enhanced in young children through encouraging future thinking?**

Your child is being asked to take part in a study looking at how children’s ability to imagine past and future events is related to 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 past and 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 in Primary 1 because we know that both thinking about the future, and the ability to delay gratification, improves within this age group. We also know that among adults, thinking about the future causes them to become better at delayed gratification. We suspect that once children can properly imagine the future they will also become better at delayed gratification.

**What will the study involve?**

Children will be asked to complete four short tasks. In the first task we will ask children to describe 3 events that either happened to them yesterday or will happen to them tomorrow (e.g. “Can you tell me about when you will play after lunch in a day’s time?”), or that usually happens to them at that time (e.g. “Can you tell me about what usually happens after lunchtime?”). The second task assesses children’s ability to delay gratification. Children will be given the choice between an immediate small reward and a delayed larger reward (e.g. 1 sweet now or 3 sweets tomorrow). Before they make their choice they will be reminded of the event details they reported in the first task. We are interested to see whether children who were asked to think about tomorrow’s events are more likely to delay gratification than children who were asked to think about yesterday’s events or usual events. In the finaltask, children will be asked to rate the niceness of certain things, as well as answering questions regarding who they would rather be (based on certain past or future events) and which of two characters would be happier or sadder (based on certain past or future events).

**What sort of rewards will children receive?**

Children will receive Percy Pig sweets, a stationery set, stickers and a novelty pencil. The Percy Pig sweets used will be vegetarian, and contain no artificial flavourings or colours. They contain the following ingredients: glucose syrup, sugar, maltodextrin, glucose-fructose syrup, apple juice concentrate (2.5%), acid: citric acid, gelling agent: pectin (from fruit), potato protein, flavourings, fruit and plant concentrates (elderberry, red grape, safflower, apple, spirulina), acidity regulator: E332, glazing agent: E901**.**

**Where will the study take place?**

The study will take place in your child’s school on a date agreed with your child’s teacher. The study will be conducted by Dr Patrick Burns, Dr Ruth Lee and Mr Paddy O’Connor, who are researchers in the School of Psychology, Queen’s University Belfast. Dr Burns, Dr Lee and Mr O’Connor have enhanced Access NI clearance. (This is the highest level of criminal record check provided by the Department of Justice NI, and is normally required when a researcher will be working closely with children). The study will be completed in two sessions across two consecutive days. The first session will take about 5 minutes and will be used to demonstrate the tasks to children as a group. The second session in which children complete the 2 previously mentioned tasks, 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. Once we have completed our study an anonymised copy of the data will be available to other scientists.

**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 enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact me:

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**Can delayed gratification be enhanced in young children through encouraging future thinking?**

Tick ONE set of options and please return to the school

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

I **confirm** that I have read the ingredients list for the sweets to

be used in the study.

I **consent** to the capture of audio recordings of my child.

I **understand** that I can withdraw my child from the

study without explanation and that I can request my child’s data

to be withdrawn for up to 2 months after they have participated.

OR

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

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

Your child’s date of birth:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_