

Doing Harm without meaning to

by Dr Sue Knight

Topic objectives

In this topic we aim to encourage students to think for themselves about the difference between meaning or intending to cause harm and causing harm 'accidentally' or without wanting to.

More particularly, in this topic we aim to encourage students to think for themselves about

- The idea of meaning to bring about a particular effect;
- Whether we can mean to bring about a good effect, but nevertheless cause harm;
- Whether such harmful side effects sometimes result from our own carelessness or thoughtlessness.

Background to the topic for teachers

In this topic, we move from asking whether Max should tell Isabel Mia's secret, to a question about Mia. Mia's decision to keep the details of her party from Isabel, but not from Max, has resulted in harm to Isabel and, to some extent, Max. But Isabel had no wish to upset either of her friends. Quite the opposite - she was planning a treat for them. She does not set out to make her friends unhappy, but this is an upshot or side effect of her decision to surprise Isabel (but not Max) with the party venue. Has Mia done anything wrong? This raises questions about the role that intention plays in moral evaluation. In this topic we invite children to begin to think about some of these questions.

Of course we do not use the term 'intention' but, instead, terms that are familiar to young children. It's not unusual to hear a young child (Zach, say) insist that he 'didn't mean to' hurt another child (Jen) or that he didn't do it 'on purpose'. And, in making such a claim, the child indicates that he understands not only that he has done something that has harmed Jen, but also that the way his action will be judged depends on whether or not he is seen to have meant (or intended) to harm her; whether he has done it 'on purpose', or whether it was an 'accident'.

And in this he is surely right. Commonsense morality has it that a person's intentions - what she is trying or planning to do, or what she is aiming at - have a bearing on how her actions should be judged. Suppose, for example, that Zach has played a practical joke on Jen - perhaps catching her unawares in an attempt to frighten her. But suppose he is so successful in this that Jen loses her balance, falls and sprains her ankle. Then we might rebuke him for not thinking carefully enough about the possible upshots of his action, but we will not consider him to be acting unkindly or nastily or cruelly. And our response will be very different if we know that Zach bears a grudge against Jen and has set out to cause her to fall and hurt herself. In this case we will see Zach's action as malicious and impermissible (or morally wrong).

On the whole, philosophers follow commonsense morality in taking a person's intentions to be morally relevant; that is, to have a bearing on how their actions should be judged.

However, there is ongoing debate about how much bearing intention has, and about what (if any) other factors we need to take into account in judging the moral worth of an action.

Are intentions the only things that count? Some philosophers argue that they are: that when someone acts, the moral worth of his action depends solely on whether or not his intentions derive from a sense of moral duty. On this view, duty plays a crucial role in shaping intention. Other philosophers disagree, arguing that other factors - consequences, for example - also need to be taken into account. But then how do we balance the different factors in order to come to moral judgments? These questions are

addressed in more detail in the Stage 2 topic, 'I didn't mean to do it': Intention

Here we pave the way for a discussion of the question of whether Mia might have acted differently, if she had thought more carefully about the obligations that friendships impose, that is, about her duty as a friend, and/or about the possible consequences of her actions. Discussion of this question proceeds in stages, and will be dealt with explicitly in the first lesson of Topic 4.

Topic Structure and Resources

Aim of lesson	Resources
<p>Lesson 1: Mia's secret</p> <p>This lesson encourages children to think about the difference between doing something on purpose – meaning to do it – and doing something 'by accident'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image 1 – Isabel • Image 2 - Max • Image 3 - Mia • Image 4 – Isabel looking sad • Image 5 – Max's invitation • Image 6 – Isabel's invitation
<p>Lesson 2: Doing things 'on purpose' or 'by accident'</p> <p>Children are encouraged to think about whether careless acts that cause harm deserve to be punished.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image 7 – Donkey and the farmer • Animal cards
<p>Lesson 3: Doing things 'on purpose' or 'by accident' (continued)</p> <p>Children are encouraged to think about whether careful forethought could have avoided harm, and therefore someone acting without thought deserves to be punished.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image 3 – Mia (from lesson 1) • Image 4 – Isabel looking sad (from lesson 1) • Image 8 - Tom • Image 9 – toy spider • Image 10 - moat • Image 11 – Jen and the frog

References

Lesson 2	<p>The story about the Donkey and the Little Dog is a retelling of Aesop's fable, The Ass and the Lapdog. See for example, The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Æsop for Children, by Æsop, with pictures by Milo Winter http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19994/19994-h/19994-h.htm#Page_79</p>
Lesson 3	<p>Image 8 of the farmer and the donkey is from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19994/19994-h/19994-h.htm#Page_79</p> <p>Scenarios: This type of question is commonly used in research studies of children's capacity to distinguish between the intended effects of an action and the action's side-effects. See for example, Sandra Pellizzoni, Michael Siegal and Luca Surian, 'Foreknowledge, Caring, and the Side-Effect Effect in Young Children', <i>Developmental Psychology</i> 2009 Vol. 45, No. 1, 289–295 Accessed online at: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.379.8815&rep=rep1&type=pdf</p>

Lesson 1: Mia's secret

For this lesson you will need

- Images 1 -6

Note: Images 5 & 6, the two invitations, should be folded vertically down the middle, so you can just show the animals initially, then later open it out to also show the writing.

Remember last lesson

7 minutes

At the end of our last lesson we were talking about Isabel and Max – and about Mia's secret.

Show Images 1, 2 and 3 of Isabel, Max and Mia. Then ask the following questions, reading out the segments of the previous story only if students need help remembering.



- ✎ Who can remember what Mia's secret is?
Story segment: Mia's secret is about her birthday party. She said 'We're going to the wildlife park!'
- ✎ Mia told her secret to Max but not to Isabel. Why didn't she tell Isabel?
Story segment: Mia said, 'Don't tell anyone, especially not Isabel. I want it to be a surprise.'
- ✎ Isabel knows that Mia told a secret to Max and not to her. How does that make her feel?
Story segment: Isabel looked upset – really upset..... Isabel looked as though she might cry.
- ✎ Do you think that Isabel may have been thinking that Mia didn't want to be her best friend anymore?
- ✎ Is that true that Mia doesn't want Isabel to be her best friend anymore? How do you know?
- ✎ Isabel wants Max to tell her Mia's secret, but Max won't tell. Why won't he tell Isabel?
Story segment: 'Because,' Max said, 'Mia told me not to tell anyone.'
- ✎ But Max can see how upset Isabel is. And now he doesn't know what to do. Last week we were talking about whether Max should tell Isabel.
 - Do you remember what we said about that?
 - Does anyone have any more ideas?

You've done a great job of remembering. Now we are going to play a memory game.

Memory game

10 minutes

Organise the children into pairs so they are still in the circle and everyone knows who their partner is.

Listen carefully. I would like you all to think about some of the animals we might see in a wildlife park, or in a zoo. You might think of animals with legs, wings or a tail. Talk to your partner and think of as many different kinds of animals as you can. Use your fingers to count how many different kinds you can come up with. I am going to give you 2 minutes to do this.

Walk around to each pair and make sure they understand the task. Allow around 2 minutes.

Put up your hand if you and your partner managed to come up with one animal.

Put your hand up if you and your partner came up with more than 5. More than 10?

Tell me one animal that you thought of. *If possible, go around the circle and ask one child from each pair to tell one animal they thought of (ask each child if there is time).*

Where there is duplication ask those responding if they can think of or did think of a different kind of animal. Allow thinking time when needed and remind students not to call out. You might need to remind children that it is hard to think when other people are being noisy.

If you have more than 15 students divide the class into two groups. The following instructions are for two groups. If you only have one group, omit the references to the listening group.

We are going to play another memory game. You might already know this one. Everyone will get a turn, so listen carefully to the instructions. This group will be the speaking group first and this is the listening group. Soon we will swap.

When we start, the first person will say something like, 'I went to the zoo and I saw a lion.' The next person will remember what the first person said and will say, 'I went to the zoo and saw a lion and a ...' that's when you need to think of another animal. So what do you think the third student will say?

That's right, each person repeats the animals that they have already heard and then adds their own, 'I went to the zoo and saw a lion, a giraffe and a ...'

Let's start, remember that the listening group needs to listen quietly. If you are in the listening group you need to put up your hand very quietly if you hear a mistake. If you are in the speaking group you will also have to listen very carefully and try to remember what the other players have said.

Start the game. Help any students who cannot remember by making the animal noise or action or asking another student to help. Once there are too many animals for the students (or you) to remember, ask the next student to start from the beginning again with a new animal. Swap groups (if you have two) and play again.

Max and Mia continued

13 minutes

We are going to hear some more of the story and see what happens to Max, Isabel and Mia.

 Max couldn't decide what to do - and so he did nothing. He didn't tell Isabel the secret. But he worried about Isabel all the time. And he felt sad - because things weren't the same.

Isabel wouldn't talk to him. She wouldn't talk to Mia either. And the three of them didn't play together any more.

Isabel felt sad too- really sad, because she thought she'd lost a best friend.

Show Image 4 – Isabel looking sad.



Mia was the only one who didn't seem to be upset. Max tried to talk to her, to tell her how upset Isabel was. But Mia was too busy thinking about her birthday and the animals they would see at the wildlife park, and she just said, 'Wait until Isabel gets her invitation - then she'll be really happy!'

It took Mia a long time to make the invitations. On Max's she drew an elephant and a zebra. Here's her drawing.

Show Image 5 - Max's invitation – just show the half with the animal drawings.



Mia drew different animals on Isabel's invitation. What do you think she drew? For Isabel, she drew a giraffe and a lion. They're Isabel's favourite animals. Here is Isabel's invitation.

Show Image 6 – Isabel's invitation - just show the half with the animal drawings.



After Mia had finished the drawing, her mum helped her with the writing. This is what they wrote on Isabel's invitation:

Open Image 6 – so students can see writing as well.

Let's read what it says. *Read slowly, pointing to each word as you go.*

Dear Isabel, SURPRISE!

We are going to the wildlife park for my birthday

- just you and Max and me and Oscar.

Love from Mia

👏 Do you think that the writing is the same on Max's invitation?

Read Isabel's out again, emphasising the 'SURPRISE!' Then look at Max's, read it out – it's the same, but the word 'SURPRISE' isn't there.

👏 Why didn't Mia write 'SURPRISE' on Max's invitation?

This question might not be necessary if the students have already answered why.

Mia took the invitations to school, and gave them to Isabel and Max. All three of them stood together and Mia and Max watched as Isabel opened her envelope. Mia read out the writing to Isabel.

👏 Who can remember what the writing said?

Then Max said quickly, 'That was the secret.'

And Mia said, 'I wanted it to be a big surprise. You've been wanting to go the wildlife park for ages.... Aren't you happy?'

But Isabel didn't look happy. She had a funny look on her face - like she didn't know what was happening. She looked at Max and then at Mia. And she said, 'But I thought.....' and then she stopped.

👏 What do you think she was going to say? 'But I thought.....',

If the students cannot answer this tell them to listen and find out.

Then Mia said again, 'But Isabel, I thought you'd be really happy. What's wrong?'

And Isabel said, 'I am - I am happy. But I thought you didn't want me as a best friend any more. And I was sad.'

And Mia said, 'Sorry, Isabel'. And she gave Isabel a hug.

👏 Mia said, 'Sorry Isabel'. Why did she say that?

👏 We've asked this question before, but let's think about it again. Did Mia mean to make Isabel feel sad?

👏 Have you ever said to your mum or dad, or your teacher, 'I didn't mean to do it'? (Hands up)

👏 Why did you say it? What was happening? Can anyone tell us?

Take a few responses here, then ask,

- Did you get into trouble?
- Did you think that was fair?
- Why do you say that? Why do you think it was/wasn't fair?
- Do you think you were being careless?

End the lesson

In our next lesson, we are going to have a break from thinking about Mia and Max and Isabel, and we'll read a funny 'Once upon a time' story.

Lesson 2: Doing things 'on purpose' or 'by accident'

For this lesson you will need

- Image 7
- Animal cards

Start with a game

7 minutes

This week we are going to start with a game. Listen carefully to how the game will work.

Choose one student. [Name] please come here and pull an animal card out of this box.

Now I want you to pretend to be that animal with noises and actions so the other students can guess what is on the card.

 Can anyone guess what animal this is?

When a student guesses the animal, that student can come up and choose a card and pretend to be the animal, and so on.

A new story

22 minutes

This week we are going to have a break from the story about Mia and Max and Isabel, and read a funny story. It's a 'Once upon a time' story.

 What do you know about 'Once upon a time' stories? If needed, ask: 'Do you think 'Once upon a time' stories are true?'

This 'Once upon a time' story will help us think some more about times when we say, 'I didn't mean to.....'

This story is about a donkey and a little dog. The little dog's name is just 'Little dog' and the donkey doesn't have a name at all. So we'll just call him 'Donkey'.

 Has anyone ever seen a donkey?

 Do you know how big donkeys are?

 Do you think the donkey in the story is bigger than Little dog? Or smaller?

In this story, the donkey is much bigger than Little Dog. It's called: 'The donkey and the little dog', and it's a very old story. Now let's read it.

 Once upon a time there was a farmer, who had a donkey. The donkey didn't have a name, so we'll just call him ('what will we call him?') - Donkey and a little dog, whose name was ('what was his name?') 'Little dog'. Donkey lived in a stable. Who knows what a stable looks like? *Take two responses only.*

Donkey had lots of oats to eat and clean straw to sleep on. But he had to work very hard. Sometimes he carried the big strong farmer and the farmer's big heavy axe – and Little dog – all the way to the great forest. Then the farmer would take his axe and cut branches from a tree – and then bundle all the branches together and tie them onto Donkey's back. And then Donkey had to carry those branches all the way home so that the farmer and Little dog could have a warm fire at night.

The farmer was kind to Donkey, but Little dog was his favourite. Whenever the farmer came to the stable to check on Donkey, Little dog came too. She would run around the farmer, dancing and playing and leaping up to lick his hand.

- 👉 Can you see Little dog in your mind – dancing and playing and jumping up at the farmer? Close your eyes and see if you can.

And every time Little dog did this, the farmer would put his hand in his pocket and give Little dog a treat - a piece of chicken or a biscuit. *Mime this action as you read.* But there was never a treat for Donkey. And at night Little dog lay by the fire in the farmer's house, and sat on the farmer's lap and licked the farmer's face.

Donkey was jealous. 'Why doesn't the farmer let me lie by the fire?' he wondered.

- 👉 Does anyone have any ideas about that? If you were the farmer would you let Donkey lie by the fire?

- 👉 Why/Why not?

'And why doesn't he let me sit on his lap and lick his face?' Donkey asked himself.

- 👉 Can anyone answer that question? If you were the farmer, would you let Donkey sit on your lap and lick your face?

- 👉 Why/Why not?

Donkey couldn't understand it.

And then he had an idea. 'I know what I must do', Donkey said to himself. 'I must do just what Little dog does. I must dance around and play.'

- 👉 Can you imagine what Donkey would look like, dancing around and playing? Close your eyes for a moment and see if you can.

And I must jump up onto the farmer's knee and lick his face.

- 👉 Can you imagine what it would be like to have a donkey jump on your knee - and lick your face? Again, close your eyes and try to imagine that.

That will certainly make the farmer happy, thought Donkey, for after all, I have a very fine tongue - much bigger and better than Little dog's.

And so Donkey ran from his stable - clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack

- 👉 Can you say it? clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack

He ran over to the farmer's house, and pushed the door open with his nose. There was the farmer sitting at the table, eating his dinner. And with a loud 'BRAAAAY EEE-AWW'

- 👉 Can you say it?..... 'BRAAAAY EEE-AWW'

Donkey danced around the table, kicking up his back feet.

But as he kicked, his feet hit the table, and it wobbled so much that the plates and glasses all fell onto the floor and smashed to pieces - CRASH! CRASH! CRASH!

- 👉 Can you say it? CRASH! CRASH! CRASH

...and then the table wobbled some more and fell down - BANG!-

- 👉 Can you say it?BANG!

But Donkey didn't stop. Instead, he stood up on his back legs and put his front feet on the farmer's knees, just as he'd seen Little dog do. And then he rolled out his tongue to lick the farmer's face, just like Little dog always did. But what do you think happened? Donkey was too heavy, and his weight upset the chair, and Donkey and the farmer rolled over together into the pile of broken dishes from the table.

Show Image 7.

Now the farmer was afraid of Donkey and he called for his servants. 'You clumsy donkey!' they cried. And they dragged Donkey back to the stable, and there they left him. And that night, Donkey went without his dinner.



- 👏 Did Donkey break the farmer's plates and glasses?
- 👏 Did Donkey mean to break them?
- 👏 Did Donkey knock over the farmer's table?
- 👏 Did Donkey do that on purpose, or was it an accident?
- 👏 Did Donkey upset the farmer's chair, and make him fall down onto the broken dishes?
- 👏 Did Donkey mean to do that?
- 👏 Have you ever broken something not on purpose but by accident? *Take two or three responses and ask these follow-up questions:*
 - How did it happen?
 - Did anyone call you 'clumsy' or maybe 'careless'? (If so) do you think you were?
 - Did you say 'sorry'?
 - Did you get into trouble? *Just 'yes' or 'no' here will do.*
 - How did you feel then?
- 👏 The servants called Donkey 'clumsy'. And he got into trouble and had to go without his dinner as a punishment. How do you think he felt?
- 👏 Do you think Donkey was careless?
- 👏 Do you think it was fair to make Donkey go without his dinner? Why/Why not?

End the lesson

Next lesson we are going to think some more about doing things on purpose and doing them by accident.

Lesson 3: Doing things 'on purpose' or 'by accident' (cont.)

For this lesson you will need

- Images 3 & 4, 8 - 11

Remember Mia, Max and Isabel?

5 minutes

Today we are going to hear more about Mia, Max and Isabel.

Hold up Image 6 – Isabel's invitation.

Who can remember what this is?

and, if necessary ask Whose invitation is it – Max's or Isabel's?

Now hold up Image 5 - Max's invitation.

Whose invitation is this?

Show Image 4 – Isabel looking sad. Can you remember from the picture how Isabel was feeling?

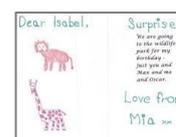
Why was Isabel feeling like that?

Why did Isabel think that?

Did Mia mean to make Isabel feel sad? Or was it an accident?

If students have trouble remembering the answers to these questions, you can prompt with the following:

- Was Isabel feeling sad?
- Was that because she thought Mia didn't want her as a best friend anymore?
- Maybe Isabel didn't understand what the invitation was about?
- Was Isabel sad because Mia didn't tell her the secret?



Scenarios

25 minutes

We are going to think some more about doing things on purpose and doing things accidentally.

There is a boy in Mia's class called Tom. Here he is. Show Image 8 - Tom.

Tom likes to play tricks on the other kids. He knows Mia is scared of spiders and yesterday he put a toy spider on Mia's desk. Show Image 9 – toy spider.

It looked just like a real one, and when she saw it, Mia was so frightened that she screamed. And the teacher got cross.

Use procedural questions to encourage discussion on the following questions, ensuring you ask for reasons (or 'Why do you say that?')

1. Did Tom mean to scare Mia?
2. Who do you think the teacher was cross with - Mia or Tom or both?
3. If both, who do you think is most to blame?



 Mia and Jen are both playing in the sandpit. It's almost the end of recess, and Jen has made a big freeway with roads crossing over each other. She's put cars on the roads - and traffic lights too. Can you imagine what Jen's freeway looked like? Close your eyes for a minute and see if you can - the roads crossing over each other, the cars and the traffic lights?

Jen had to dig out lots of sand to do that, and some of that sand has covered up Mia's spade. But Jen didn't notice. Nor did Mia. She was too busy decorating the castle she has made.

Mia has put a ghost on the top and horses around the bottom. Now she's making the moat. Who knows what a moat is? *Take a few answers and then Show image 10 – moat.*



Mia really wants to finish the moat before the recess bell goes. But she can't find her spade. 'Jen, have you seen my spade?' Mia asks.

'No' Jen says.

 Is Jen telling the truth? *If students don't know, re-read from the story above 'But Jen didn't notice. Nor did Mia' and ask again.*

Mia looks and looks. But she can't find it. And then the bell goes for the end of recess. Mia is very upset.

Use procedural questions to encourage discussion on the following questions, ensuring students give reasons for their answers.

1. Why is Mia upset?
2. Did Jen cover up Mia's spade on purpose, or was it an accident?
3. Did Jen mean to upset Mia?
4. If Mia found out what had happened, do you think she'd be cross with Jen?
5. Do you think Jen was careless?

 Tom - remember Tom? He's the boy in Mia's class who likes to play tricks on the other kids. Tom is cross with Max, because Max wouldn't play with him at recess time. So Tom has hidden Max's hat.

 What made him do that?

Now it's lunchtime, and Max is looking for his hat - and he can't find it anywhere. And that means he can't go out to play at lunch- time. Max is very upset.

 Did Tom mean to make Max upset?

Use your procedural questioning skills to facilitate discussion of the following questions, and then the following numbered questions.

1. Was that okay? Why or why not?

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed

- *What effect did having no hat have on Max?*
- *Did Tom have a good reason to hide Max's hat?*
- *Tom was cross with Max, is that a good reason to hide Max's hat?*

 Max is in his bedroom, playing a game with Watson. Watson is Max's dog. Max throws a ball high into the air and Watson jumps up and catches it. Watson can jump really high, and it's his favourite game. They're not allowed to play that game inside.

 Why do you think that is?

Use procedural questions to facilitate a discussion around the following question:

1. Do you think that's a good reason?

But today it's raining, and Watson really wants to play. All day long he's been coming up to Max with a ball in his mouth. So Max is trying to play really quietly so that his mum doesn't hear. And Watson is having a great time.

Then, suddenly, there is a loud CRASH!

👉 Can you guess what has happened?

Max has thrown the ball really hard and really high - and it has hit the light up on the ceiling and smashed it all to pieces. And then his mum came in.

👉 Can you guess what Max said then?

He said, 'Sorry mum- I didn't mean to break the light. It was an accident.'

2. Is Max telling the truth? What makes you say that?
3. What do you think his mum said to him then?
4. Do you think Max was careless?
5. Was there anything wrong with what Max did?

📖 There is a girl in Isabel's class who loves frogs. Her name is Jen. Jen has a green tree frog as a pet. Here's Jen, with her tree frog. *Show Image 11 - Jen with a green tree frog.*



👉 Who has seen a tree frog before?

Jen likes to take her tree frog with her wherever she goes. On Saturday Jen went to Isabel's place. Isabel hates frogs - she's scared of them. And Jen knows she is. But Jen really wanted to take her frog with her to Isabel's house and she did. And Isabel got upset.

1. Did Jen mean to make Isabel upset?
2. Did Jen know that Isabel would get upset when she saw the frog?
3. Do you think it was okay for Jen to take her frog to Isabel's? Why/why not?

Follow up question – ask if students haven't raised these important issues:

- Was it selfish of Jen to take the frog to Isabel's?
- Is that the sort of thing you should do to a friend?
- What effect did this have on Isabel?

End the lesson

That's the end of the lesson. I'd like you to keep thinking about doing things on purpose and doing things accidentally, and about Mia and Isabel and Max.

~~~END OF TOPIC~~~

©Primary Ethics Limited 2013. The materials in this booklet are protected by copyright in Australia. Except as provided by the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any process without the prior written permission of Primary Ethics Limited.