



## Forgiveness

Sometimes, change is caused by what is called a deep transgression – when someone does or says something to someone else that jeopardizes an entire relationship and breaks down communication entirely. Such transgressions include infidelity, physical or psychological abuse, unethical behavior, bullying, discriminatory behavior, deception and lies. What makes these transgressions so dire is that they touch on and threaten our core values and morals. This makes them difficult to resolve, and often involve judgments that lead to a rejection of the behaviors and sometimes, of the entire relationship.

Whether you are dealing with a deep transgression, or a less dire circumstance where someone hurt your feelings, stole your work, walked all over you or did or said things to make you feel bad about or doubt yourself in any way, forgiveness is your path to healing if you don't want these feelings to impact your future happiness and success.

There is a lot of pain in this world, and subsequently, a lot of literature on forgiveness. Putting it together, I have come up with this guide.

### Key factors preventing you from forgiving someone:

- You or the other person does not desire truthfulness
- You want to protect yourself from further hurt, or from the pain of conflict
- You think forgiving your offender will not bring you or them your due justice
- You desire revenge, and forgiving the person will get in the way
- You are experiencing pressure from friends, family members, or co-workers to not forgive
- You equate forgiveness with giving in, being subordinate, not being powerful
- The offense was very serious
- You would give up your victim status if you forgive (and the resulting attention and care from others)

Because forgiveness is empowering and healing, and brings you closer to all that is good in you and others, I urge you to find ways to forgive. It can help you let it go, move on, move forward, and have the future you want.

Start with forgiving yourself. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. After all, while we understand we can't control others, we can and should be able to control ourselves, right? We should be able to make great even perfect decisions, deal with politics and disappointment with wisdom and benevolence, call upon our education and skills to have the life we want, right? Not really, not always. We're human in an imperfect world dealing with other humans and they trigger us and impact us. See yourself as a beautiful, human being doing your best to navigate this complex system we call our world. See yourself softly, warmly, kindly, as you would your own child. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to your child, gently guiding rather than sternly chastising or harshly berating. This is especially true if your standards for yourself are high... forgive yourself for any mistakes you've made, for any disappointment you've caused yourself, for the times you didn't live up to your ideas and goals. Forgive yourself, and you can forgive others. Chances are, others are there to show you how to forgive yourself, anyway. The only true relationship you have is with yourself – all others are simply mirrors of the one you have with yourself. As you forgive yourself, you will find it easier to forgive others, and you will more easily gain forgiveness from others for the things you might have done that could have hurt them.

### **Stage 1- Admit You Are Angry!**

Many of us have grown up trying to control our anger, judging it as wrong. The thing is – anger is a normal human reaction and emotion, and it doesn't go away just because we deny its existence. Further, anger is sometimes justified. (Even Jesus got angry at the moneymongers in the temple.) The trick is to acknowledge and feel the anger as a first step (don't let it fester and don't wallow in it.)

Try to recognize what you are angry about. It may not be the little things, but something that happened months ago. Look back in time to what might have triggered your anger and where your expression has been blocked. Bitterness is anger with no outlet to be heard or feeling that you cannot change anything. It is a form of helplessness. Try to discover what you are bitter about. Make a list of resentments. Don't hold back or edit your thoughts. Being honest with yourself is the first step in healing anger.

### **Stage 2- Acknowledge the Loss and Consequences**

Look at the true consequences of the event, honestly noting any changes. Were you physically injured? Were you emotionally hurt? Did you suffer financial loss? What other types of losses occurred? Was there harm to other relationships? It helps to write these down.

### **Stage 3 - Submit to a Feeling of Vulnerability**

Ah – this one is harder than it might seem. From youth, we learn to protect ourselves by denying we even have feelings, much less socially unacceptable emotions like anger. The next stage in forgiveness is to open yourself up to change and dissonance – in short, feeling awful. Obviously, this is not an easy step, and it is messy. Acknowledge that the feelings of anger in this situation are not working for you, that you don't like them, you don't want them in your life, and they are preventing you from being the happy, light, productive, charming person you were meant to be! This stage of forgiveness also requires you look at whether there was any responsibility on your part. In some cases there was none, in some cases, you may have taken action which contributed to the decision. In this case, it may be hard for you to admit that you caused part of your own suffering as it is easier to blame others than to take any responsibility. This stage requires an honest, fearless, kind and moral inventory of your own actions and behavior. Sometimes you may not like what you find, but facing your shadow can be one of the most powerful healing experiences. Important to know as you do this: these are emotions, and they cannot harm you if you let them go. Give into them, and they will pass through you and out of your life, leaving you free and light, open to all the good of life.

### **Stage 4 – Stop Punishing**

One of the common behaviors of people is to try to punish those who have harmed us. Most studies have shown that punishment rarely accomplishes anything other than to cause resentment of the person doing the punishing. Common punishments of this type are withholding companionship, the silent treatment, legal action, spreading negative gossip, or even damaging things that the other person prizes. In order to truly forgive, give up the expectation that the other person will be punished. You can ask that the other person make amends for their harm, but if they refuse or are unable to make amends, then releasing them from the idea of punishment frees you from lingering resentment. Try to practice compassion, work at developing a deeper understanding of how and why people behave.

### **Stage 5 – Identify Some Good in the Other Person**

This step, finding some good in the other person is probably the most crucial step in bringing about lasting forgiveness. It can also be the hardest depending on the severity of the event you are trying to forgive. According to Francis Bacon, the key to forgiveness is in “not expecting the other to change, to give love, to be kind and develop the ability to see that in everyone else’s eyes and heart there is some good.” In forgiving, you try not to think of yourself as being good and the other person bad. You can find it easier to forgive if you can understand that the other person has difficulties too, or was harmed in the past. Imagine a seed of goodness in their heart, and in prayer imagine that both you and God are watering it to make it grow stronger. Better yet is to imagine that each person already has this great flower of goodness in them already, and that it has been obscured from your view because of your anger. Learning to look for the good is a great skill to develop, and you can get good at it with practice. If you cannot find good in the other person, then at least pray for them.

### **Stage 6 – Develop Genuine Neutrality**

Hopefully in the process of forgiveness you will come to resolve any negative emotions and thoughts about yourself and the other person or organization. To do so requires that you do not expect or demand any payment or restitution after forgiveness. You must assume that there is no debt owed to you. Practice this daily. It is easy to slip into anger and resentment if you do not cultivate a practice of neutrality. Depending on the severity of the event, you may choose to not have any further contact with the person, but if you meet them by chance, you want to have a sense of neutrality and a sense of calmness instead of avoidance.

### **Stage 7 – Stay in the Present**

“Bury the hatchet” is a phrase you may have heard many times. There is wisdom to this phrase if you understand its original meaning. The phrase comes from spiritual traditions of North American Indians who would put all weapons out of site while smoking a peace pipe. For your own forgiveness work, stay in the present, leaving behind the past situation in which you were hurt. In the present, be objective about what happened, and try to experience it not as a fresh wound, but as a memory, something that can no longer harm you and over which you now have control. Balance your memory of the event with your memory of the forgiveness work you have done.